

Children and Poverty

Voices of Children:

Experiences and Perceptions from Belarus,
Bolivia, India, Kenya and Sierra Leone

CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S FUND

Children and Poverty Series

PART II

Children and Poverty: Experiences and Perceptions from Belarus, Bolivia, India, Kenya & Sierra Leone

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In 2002, Christian Children's Fund (CCF) commissioned a comprehensive study on the experience and the impact of poverty on children. What resulted was a three-part series which offers a fascinating and thought-provoking summary of major issues concerning the entrapments and seemingly endless cycles of poverty. This series challenges many of the standard operating assumptions which may well be invalid. Even the role of children impacted by poverty may be quite different from the common understanding. This overview is offered as a second piece in the three-part series.

CCF offers this study to our community and colleagues as a contribution to our common effort to reduce poverty plaguing the world's children. There are controversial conclusions in this study document. We hope that you will find these collected insights as valuable and as challenging as we do.

All opinions expressed here are those of the writers and are not CCF policy.

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FOREWORD

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the ongoing work of organizations like Christian Children's Fund (CCF) have helped to give increasing weight to children and the condition of child poverty within global development agendas. But the challenge to "put children first" has not always been translated faithfully into practice. Much of the work targeting poverty globally has still been organized around adults and institutional requirements rather than the real lives of children. The result is that much of our terminology, indicators and practices remain irrelevant to the experiences of children themselves.

In this second of the three part series 'Children and Poverty', CCF has sought to listen to the voices of children themselves. Research has been undertaken in five countries (Sierra Leone, Kenya, Belarus, Bolivia and India) with the purpose of understanding more deeply how children experience poverty, what impoverishment means to them, and how their perceptions interact with those of local communities and the agendas of international agencies like CCF that seek to work alongside them. The result is further evidence that children are far more capable than once thought, with the cognitive, social and economic ability to not only shape their own development but to contribute to the development of society as a whole.

CCF hopes that this research will contribute to the valuable work being undertaken globally to combat poverty and to improve the lives of both adults and children around the world. Our gratitude goes to those who worked on this document and in particular the people in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Belarus, India and Bolivia who gave of their time and who shared their experiences so freely.

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The visits to the five case study countries involved a series of complex logistical and travel arrangements that were organized and overseen at the international level by Ceri Angood. We are grateful for the efficiency and calm Ceri displayed throughout, even when under considerable duress.

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCHING CHILD POVERTY

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Rationale

The mortality and suffering globally caused by poverty is overwhelming, and present trends do not augur well. The world's resource base is falling into critical disrepair. Many countries have populations that cannot adequately be sustained under current conditions. Many countries are affected by poor management of basic assets (primarily fertile land and the related resources of food, wood and water), which, together with the accumulated effects of global warming, are resulting in a growing frequency and intensity of environmental disasters. At the same time, over-consumption by the minority world continues to drive the economic expectations and planning of the majority world, with serious distortionary effects. Inequities of access to the key resources of modernity, capital and monetary income are becoming more pronounced. All of these processes combine to produce major disparities in wealth between and within countries and cause a major portion of the world's population to live in destitution.

Children are often far more gravely affected by poverty than other population groups. True, there have been major advances in state provision, scientific knowledge and technology in recent decades, and yet today one in four babies globally is born into extreme poverty and there are more destitute babies now than ever before in human history. In their study of child poverty in sub-Saharan Africa Harper and Marcus¹ outline four compelling reasons for focusing poverty reduction measures on children:

First, the disproportionate concentration of poverty among children compared to adults demands explanation and attention. Second, the fact that children comprise almost half of Africa's (and the world's) population makes them a signif-

icant population cohort. Third, unlike adults, children cannot necessarily overcome the effects of poverty, short periods of which can go on to affect the rest of their lives. Fourth, the costs of poverty are disproportionately absorbed by children due in part to their structural powerlessness. The implications of allowing poverty and failing to invest in children goes beyond individual children alone to affect the health, well-being and productivity of future generations and of society as a whole.

Whatever the causes, the effects of poverty are passed through a population and absorbed at different points, with children being particularly vulnerable. When livelihoods fail, children leave school, are neglected in health and nutrition and take up paid or unpaid labor to replace or supplement that of adults. Their relative lack of power means that they also absorb the psychological and social costs of poverty within the household and society, such as neglect due to abuse from parents as a result of alcoholism or poverty-induced depression and the absence of appropriate caregivers. The impact of poverty on children is also compounded by the nature of child development. Childhood is a once-and-for-all window of opportunity for physical, cognitive, psychological, emotional and social development. While an adult may be able to overcome a period of poverty, a child may grow into adulthood and never recoup the developmental losses of childhood.

Even though the problem of child poverty has attracted increasing attention in recent decades from international financial institutions, aid, human rights and government agencies throughout the world, there is still much that is not known and much to be done. For example, issues of child poverty are often subsumed within the larger picture of household poverty, or limited to health and education provision. The impacts of poverty on children are also frequently misunderstood, so that responses are based on stereotypic notions rather than real evi-

Whatever the causes, the effects of poverty are passed through a population and absorbed at different points, with children being particularly vulnerable.



¹Caroline Harper & Rachel Marcus, Child Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, The Save the Children Fund UK, 2002.

dence, as when agencies focus on special category groups, such as street children, to the neglect of other populations that may be far more disadvantaged.

To give attention to child poverty is not to argue that the multiple causes for poverty affecting adults — such as shortage of employment opportunities, limited access to land, poor governance, conflict, or resource degradation — do not also affect children. Nor is it to minimize the need of integrating all people within development planning. Rather, it is to point out that poverty is experienced differently by children and adults. How we understand this difference does matter, since it will ultimately form the basis of how we determine an appropriate response. Therefore, a clear understanding and definition of child poverty, how it is similar or dissimilar to adult poverty, and how we order multiple causes of poverty in relation to children, is critical in improving development practice.

This study is intended to contribute to this process of reflection. It attempts to address a number of critical substantive issues and employ a particular approach, summarized as follows:

- First and foremost, the study aims to capture the perspectives of populations that are directly affected by poverty. Inevitably, this means that some of the issues and topics that economists, development planners and other expert observers may consider extremely pertinent to the subject of poverty are touched upon only lightly and some are neglected altogether. In this sense, the study is not intended as a state of the art review of the causes, correlates and consequences of child poverty, but as an insight into how affected populations in selected communities and countries prioritize and think about these issues.
- Second, as far as possible, the study has tried to elicit children's views of poverty and to adopt a child-centered

perspective. This has resulted in an understanding of poverty that departs from many adult-centric ideas. Most of the child respondents included in the study are aged between 6 and 18 years of age. From the research it would seem that children in this age range experience and conceptualize poverty primarily in terms of its effects on their social world, or in other words, their relationships with peers, adults and family members. This is not to say that children are unaware of the economic dimension of poverty, or of the material and health impacts, but to highlight the importance of social meanings as opposed to mere physical states.

- Third, the study embodies an understanding of poverty as a dynamic and complex process with multiple causes, manifestations and effects at the micro, meso and macro levels. As such, it is researched not from the viewpoint of income-consumption poverty measures (such as per capita income) but as a multidimensional phenomenon of which income is only one part. Further, acknowledging that absolute shortage or lack of income and other resources is only one determinant of poverty, the impact of both relative and absolute poverty is taken into consideration.
- Fourth, recognizing children as social actors rather than passive recipients of experience, the study focuses not only on the deprivations and deficits associated with poverty but also on the assets and strategies used in confronting or overcoming poverty. These assets and strategies are taken to include both informal resources and systems of support and the more formal, institutionalized assistance mechanisms.
- Fifth, rather than simply highlighting the plight of groups perceived as especially vulnerable, the study analyzes the routes to vulnerability, including the impact of discrimination on the

basis of gender, birth order, ethnicity and other status determinants. Hence, the study conceptualizes childhood not as a homogenous category but as a highly diverse life phase, the point being that individual children experience poverty in different ways according to personal and collective vulnerabilities.

- Sixth, the study defines poverty as a form of adversity that affects children's survival, well-being and development in both the short and long term and also has the potential to undermine their adaptation in adulthood. In this sense, poverty is understood holistically to influence health, physical growth, cognition, social competencies, and psychological and emotional functioning.

1.1.2 Methodology and Methods

This study is based on three broad sets of data, described here in ascending order of importance. The first body of information is a review of contemporary international literature and thinking incorporating secondary sources and interviews with scholars, policy makers and practitioners with expertise in the issue of child poverty (see Feeny and Boyden 2003). The second is a postal questionnaire completed by 96 CCF staff members working in a number of countries at the international, regional and national levels. The third and most crucial data set draws on primary research with CCF stakeholders in five case study countries: Kenya, Sierra Leone, India, Belarus and Bolivia.

Respondents in the primary research included child beneficiaries of projects, their families, teachers, community leaders and other key informants from the communities in which they live, CCF staff at the local and national levels and staff of partner organizations. Children not involved in CCF programs were also interviewed as an informal control group and in India and Sierra Leone the team visited villages not partnering with CCF in programs. The children's groups were often mixed. In Belarus, for example, participants

were drawn from among CCF peer educators, other children not participating in the program (selected by teachers from particularly vulnerable families) and/or children who simply wanted to be part of the group. In each of the case study countries, the fieldwork began with meetings in the country CCF office, in which general trends of poverty in the country and the specifics of the different research sites were discussed. Further discussions were held with project staff upon arrival at each site, thus enhancing understanding of the specific context. Having explained the methodology and needs to local project staff, the research team then worked with them to compile a schedule for the visit. This involved identifying all the relevant stakeholder groups, addressing the practicalities of meeting with these groups and arranging visits to schools and other locations at times convenient to all concerned.

The main objective of the research was to capture stakeholder perspectives on the issues surrounding child poverty. It was decided that this objective would be best achieved by using participatory methodology and qualitative research methods, rather than researcher-directed, quantitative tools. Thus, both the questionnaire and the primary research were based on semi-structured instruments using open-ended questions that presented an infinite number of possibilities in terms of responses. The tools and methods used in the primary research included:

Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA)

tools, including social and mobility maps, Venn diagrams, issue matrices, household ranking exercises and timelines. These were used with adults and in adapted form with children.

Semi-structured focus groups of 8-12 people, separate sessions with adults and children/young people.

Home visits, where one or two (or more) family member(s) could be present.

Individual semi-structured interviews.

Children's activity sessions, particularly



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with younger children. These involved drawing and then discussing drawings either individually and/or as a group. Exercises undertaken with older children included listing their favorite and least favorite activities and these were used as a springboard for focused discussion.

Participant observation in and around the project sites.

Group and individual discussions were tape recorded and then transcribed verbatim to ensure maximum accuracy. Where necessary, local staff provided translation, usually directly from the local language to English. Short training sessions were held with translators to emphasize their crucial role in facilitating communication between the team and respondents. In some cases it was necessary to use triple translation, which normally had the effect of slowing down the pace of discussion and presented certain challenges in terms of accuracy of the information. Occasionally, translators had to be encouraged to translate what people said literally rather than provide their own interpretations.

The advantage of using qualitative methods is that they can be very effective at capturing local concepts, ideas and understandings and at portraying the complexities and nuances of people's experiences and views. The disadvantage is that this complexity and the contextualized nature of the findings makes quantification impossible in many cases, simply because the researchers are not aggregating or comparing like with like. For these reasons, and also because the questionnaire responses and case studies were not representative of CCF stakeholders as a whole, it would have been misleading to attempt quantification. In any case, lack of quantification was not felt by the team to be a problem since more important in a study of this nature are the ideas expressed rather than how many people expressed them. Indeed, one of the key findings from the review of literature on child poverty was that an obsession with quantification and the production of statistics in the field has in many

cases obscured rather than illuminated the actual experiences and views of children.

The findings are presented in the report in the form of quotations and visual materials resulting from a range of participatory exercises, and no attempt is made to quantify them precisely. The quotations selected for the report are primarily intended to illustrate issues raised and points made by respondents. For reasons of clarity and flow of argument, only a few quotes were selected to highlight each issue covered. Where it was thought important to convey a sense of incidence or numbers, so that the reader could grasp how common or important an issue was to respondents, phrases such as 'the majority of respondents stated that' or 'an issue that emerged across all the research sites' have been used.

1.1.3 Talking to Children

Learning about children's views on the issue of poverty was a major priority for the research, and a variety of methodological tools and approaches facilitated working with children of different age groups. For example, drawing exercises with younger children proved fruitful for discovering their perceptions of their environment and things of importance to them. With older children, household activity matrices, social maps, problem-solving diagrams and group discussions were some of the various means used to both facilitate interaction and gather data. It was always important for children to feel comfortable and relaxed during these sessions, as well as to understand the purpose of the research. No child was in any way obliged to participate. Rather, it was explained that although adults were also being interviewed, the team was particularly interested in children's perspectives.

Children usually responded positively and engaged freely with the activities, sometimes shyly, other times readily. While some were slightly surprised at the team's desire to listen to what children had to say, this was usually regarded in a positive light as some-

thing that should happen more often. In fact, it was the adults who were sometimes more reluctant about children taking part in the research. In many of the communities researched, children are expected to be obedient, and there were instances when adults tried to act as gatekeepers and control the children in ways that hampered the process. Such difficulties were usually overcome by explaining why the team wanted the children to feel at ease. In one case, the research was interrupted when younger children were sent by the adults to fetch their siblings for work, while in another instance, girls who had participated fully in the first round of discussions were withdrawn by their parents from the subsequent round. In fact, adult concerns about participation in the research tended to focus on girls in particular, especially in cases where CCF was not very well known locally.

Local staff also tended at times to act as gatekeepers to adult groups. This was almost always overwhelmingly beneficial, as in many cases a great deal of knowledge and trust had been built up between CCF staff and beneficiary communities. This enabled staff to bring to the forefront issues that would not otherwise have become apparent. Occasionally, however, the personal opinions of staff members did appear to influence what respondents said and differences of status or seniority between CCF staff and CCF beneficiaries sometimes constrained responses.

1.1.4 Sensitive Issues

Although the vast majority of respondents were willing and able to talk about a whole range of issues connected with poverty, there were certain topics that provoked some discomfort. Child sexual exploitation, abuse, trafficking and HIV/AIDS were particularly sensitive topics in many contexts. For example, in Kenya it is considered highly inappropriate to talk about issues connected with human sexuality and sexual behavior in public, especially in groups of mixed ages and genders. Thus, older men will not talk

with younger men about such things and if a young man brings up the topic this is considered extremely rude. While CCF staff were usually able to speak freely about these issues, most discussions of sex, sex work, reproductive health and related topics involved the use of metaphors, euphemism and innuendo.

SECTION TWO: OVERVIEW OF POVERTY IN THE RESEARCH SITES

As noted, the primary research was conducted in five case study countries, chosen by CCF not because they represent their program as a whole but because they typify the diversity of contexts within which CCF works globally.² In each country, research was carried out in two or three specific sites, each one consisting of a CCF project and the surrounding community. In most cases, sites were selected before the fieldwork commenced through discussion with national offices and e-mail exchanges. An attempt was made to balance urban and rural perspectives, although this was not always possible due to climactic and political constraints. It should be emphasized that this study does not claim to be representative of the views and perspectives of CCF stakeholders globally, since the case study countries were not randomly selected and were not chosen for that purpose.

1.2.1 Belarus

After seven decades as a constituent republic of the USSR, Belarus attained its independence in 1991. As a country in transition from a centralized state-controlled to a capitalist market economy it is experiencing many new forms of poverty and adversity. The population of Belarus is 10,335,382 (July 2002 est.) of which approx. 22% are 18 years or younger. It has an average life expectancy of 68 years, and a mix of ethnic groups: Belarusian 81.2%, Russian 11.4%, Polish, Ukrainian, and other 7.4%. 80% are Eastern Orthodox religion, with 20% Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim (1997 est.). 98% of the population are literate (defined as



Child sexual exploitation, abuse, trafficking and HIV/AIDS were particularly sensitive topics in many contexts.

²Background information on the case-study countries provided in this section is collated from various World Bank and UNDP sources, with statistics from the CIA World Factbook 2002.

those over the age of 15 who can read and write).

The terrain (of which 30% is arable) is generally flat with much marshland. Natural resources include forests, peat deposits, small quantities of oil and natural gas, granite, dolomitic limestone, marl, chalk, sand, gravel, clay. Current environmental problems include soil pollution from pesticide use, with the southern part of the country contaminated with fallout from the 1986 nuclear reactor accident at Chernobyl in northern Ukraine.

In the early 1990s, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita fell by nearly a third as the country suffered losses of trade with the former USSR³. Between 1990 and 1995 — in just five years — the incidence of poverty according to internal measures rose from less than 1% to 36% of the population⁴. One of the principle causes of this increase in real number in poverty was the falling purchasing power of the currency. By late 1996, the economic and social conditions in Belarus were characterized by a shrinking economy and falling incomes and growing poverty and inequality.⁵

Sierra Leone is an extremely poor nation with tremendous inequality in income distribution.

1.2.2 Sierra Leone

The population of Sierra Leone is 5,614,743 (July 2002 est.), of which approx. 47% are aged 18 years or younger, with an average life expectancy of 37 years.⁶ There is a large ethnic mix: 20 indigenous African tribes 90% (Temne 30%, Mende 30%, other 30%), Creole (Krio) 10% (descendants of freed Jamaican slaves who were settled in the Freetown area in the late-18th century), refugees from Liberia's recent civil war, small numbers of Europeans, Lebanese, Pakistanis, and Indians. 60% are Muslim, with 30% indigenous beliefs and 10% Christian.

Since 1991, civil war between the government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and the displacement of more than 2 million people (well over one-third of the

population) many of whom are now refugees in neighboring countries. After several setbacks, the end to the eleven-year conflict in Sierra Leone may finally be near at hand. With the support of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force and contributions from the World Bank and international community, demobilization and disarmament of the RUF and Civil Defense Forces (CDF) combatants has been completed. Reestablishment of government authority throughout the country is slowly proceeding and national elections took place in May 2002.

The terrain (of which 6% is arable) is varied, with a coastal belt of mangrove swamps, wooded hill country, upland plateau, and mountains in the east. Natural resources include diamonds, titanium ore, bauxite, iron ore, gold, chromite. Environmental problems include the rapid population growth pressuring the environment; over harvesting of timber, expansion of cattle grazing, and slash-and-burn agriculture have resulted in deforestation and soil exhaustion; civil war depleting natural resources; over-fishing.

Sierra Leone is an extremely poor nation with tremendous inequality in income distribution. It does have substantial mineral, agricultural, and fishery resources. However, the economic and social infrastructure is not well developed, and serious social disorders continue to hamper economic development, following a 10-year civil war. About two-thirds of the working-age population engages in subsistence agriculture. Manufacturing consists mainly of the processing of raw materials and of light manufacturing for the domestic market. There are plans to reopen bauxite and rutile mines shut down during the conflict. The major source of hard currency consists of the mining of diamonds. In 2002 Sierra Leone ranked bottom of the Human Development Index (HDI). Female literacy, for example, stood at only 18%.⁷ The fate of the economy and improvement of living conditions depends upon the maintenance of domestic peace and the continued receipt of substantial aid from abroad.

³World Bank (1996) Belarus: an assessment of poverty and prospects for improved living standards, page 7.

⁴Ibid. p16.

⁵Ibid. p7.

⁶Government of Sierra Leone Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Progress Report prepared for Consultative Group meeting, Paris 2002.

⁷Ibid. p6.

1.2.3 Bolivia

Bolivia has a long history of political instability, with a series of nearly 200 coups and counter-coups since it gained independence from Spanish rule in 1825. Comparatively democratic civilian rule was established in the 1980s, but leaders have faced difficult problems of deep-seated poverty, social unrest, and drug production. Current goals include attracting foreign investment, strengthening the educational system, continuing the privatization program, and waging an anti-corruption campaign.

The country is dominated by the Andean Mountain range, with a highland plateau (Altiplano), hills, and the lowland plains of the Amazon Basin. Although less than 2% of land is arable, the natural resources include tin, natural gas, petroleum, zinc, tungsten, antimony, silver, iron, lead, gold, timber and hydropower. Environmental concerns include the clearing of land for agricultural purposes and the international demand for tropical timber, both of which are contributing to deforestation. Soil erosion from overgrazing and poor cultivation methods (including slash-and-burn agriculture); desertification; loss of biodiversity; and industrial pollution of water supplies used for drinking and irrigation are also common.

The population of Bolivia is 8,445,134 (July 2002 est.) of which approx. 40% are 18 years of age or younger. It has an average life expectancy of 64 years, with a mix of ethnic groups: Quechua 30%, mestizo (mixed white and Amerindian ancestry) 30%, Aymara 25%, white 15%. 95% are Roman Catholic, with the remainder being Protestant (Evangelical Methodist). Many of those who practice Catholicism blend it with indigenous religious beliefs and practice, particularly in the rural areas.

Long one of the poorest and least developed Latin American countries, Bolivia has made considerable progress toward the development of a market-oriented economy. It has large reserves of natural gas, but the econo-

my was until the mid 1980s dependent on mineral extraction. Development relies heavily on foreign aid, and debt levels pose a significant challenge to the government. Distribution of income and wealth is extremely uneven. Per capita income is US\$1,012, but 48% national income accrues to the wealthiest 20% of the population, while the poorest 20% of the population receive only 3% of income. This situation of inequality can be seen as related to ethnic and class divisions, with a small white elite managing the majority of the country's resources and wealth. Over half of the population is categorized as poor (5 million) by poverty-line definitions. Half of the poor (2.5 million) are children.⁸

1.2.4 India

The Indus Valley civilization, one of the oldest in the world, goes back at least 5,000 years. By the 19th century, Britain had assumed political control of virtually all Indian land. Non-violent resistance to British colonialism under Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru eventually led to independence in 1947, when the subcontinent was divided into the secular state of India and the smaller Muslim state of Pakistan. A third war between the two countries in 1971 resulted in East Pakistan becoming the separate nation of Bangladesh. Fundamental concerns in India include the ongoing dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir, massive overpopulation, environmental degradation, extensive poverty, and ethnic and religious strife, all this despite impressive gains in economic investment and output.

The population of India is 1,045,845,226 (July 2002 est.), of which approx 40% are 18 years of age or younger. It has an average life expectancy of 63 years, with a mix of ethnic groups: Indo-Aryan 72%, Dravidian 25%, Mongoloid and other 3% (2000 est). The majority (81%) are Hindu, with Muslim 12%, Christian 2.3%, Sikh 1.9%, other groups including Buddhist, Jain, Parsi 2.5% (2000 est). Hindi is the national language and primary tongue of 30% of the people, but there

Fundamental concerns in India include the ongoing dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir, massive overpopulation, environmental degradation, extensive poverty, and ethnic and religious strife, all this despite impressive gains in economic investment and output.

⁸Muñoz, Carola 2002 Documento de diagnostico Base Para el Taller Nacional de Planificacion Estrategica del Viceministerio de Asuntos del Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes, Ministerio de Asuntos Campesinas e Indigenas, Genero y Generacionales, La Paz, November; U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs November 2002: Country Profile, Bolivia.

India's economy encompasses traditional village farming, modern agriculture, handicrafts, a wide range of modern industries, and a multitude of support services.



are 14 other official languages. 52% of the population are literate (over the age of 15 who can read and write).

The terrain is extremely varied, from upland plain (Deccan Plateau) in the south, flat to rolling plain along the Ganges, deserts in the west and the Himalayas in the north. Natural resources include coal (fourth-largest reserves in the world), iron ore, manganese, mica, bauxite, titanium ore, chromite, natural gas, diamonds, petroleum and limestone. Arable land is 54%. India is subject to regular droughts, flash floods, as well as widespread and destructive flooding from monsoon rains, severe thunderstorms and earthquakes. Environmental problems include deforestation; soil erosion; overgrazing; desertification; air pollution from industrial effluents and vehicle emissions; and water pollution from raw sewage and runoff of agricultural pesticides. Tap water is not potable throughout the country, and the huge and growing population is overstraining natural resources.

India's economy encompasses traditional village farming, modern agriculture, handicrafts, a wide range of modern industries, and a multitude of support services. Overpopulation severely handicaps the economy and about a quarter of the population is too poor to be able to afford an adequate diet. This has led to the situation where over one-third of its population live in poverty, as defined by the international standard of living on less than \$1 US a day. This means that it is home to some 300-400 million poor, the world's largest concentration of poor people.⁹

1.2.5 Kenya

The population of Kenya is 31,138,735 (July 2002), but this estimate explicitly takes into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS, which can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality and death rates, lower population and growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected. 2.2 million are living with

HIV/AIDS, with an adult prevalence rate of 13.5%. There is a large mix of ethnic groups, including Kikuyu 22%, Luhya 14%, Luo 13%, Kalenjin 12%, Kamba 11%, Kisii 6%, Meru 6%, other African 15%, non-African (Asian, European, and Arab) 1%. A large majority of Kenyans are Christian, but estimates for the percentage of the population that adheres to Islam or indigenous beliefs vary widely — approx. proportions are Protestant 45%, Roman Catholic 33%, indigenous beliefs 10%, Muslim 10%, other 2%. English and Swahili are the official languages, and 78% of the population are literate (over the age of 15 who can read or write).

7% of the land is arable, with natural resources that include gold, limestone, soda ash, salt barites, rubies, fluorspar, garnets and hydropower. Kenya suffers from recurring drought followed by flooding during rainy seasons, and environmental problems include water pollution from urban and industrial wastes; degradation of water quality from increased use of pesticides and fertilizers; water hyacinth infestation in Lake Victoria; deforestation; soil erosion; desertification and poaching.

Kenya, the regional hub for trade and finance in East Africa, is hampered by corruption and reliance upon several primary goods whose prices continue to decline. Absolute poverty was estimated at 47% in 1994, at the time of the government's second Welfare Monitoring Survey. By 2000, it became clear that poverty levels were rising,¹⁰ and despite strong economic growth in 1995 and 1996, Kenya's economy has stagnated, with GDP growth failing to keep up with the rate of population growth. In 1997, the IMF suspended Kenya's Enhanced Structural Adjustment Program due to the government's failure to maintain reforms and curb corruption. A severe drought from 1999 to 2000 compounded Kenya's problems, causing water and energy rationing and reducing agricultural output. As a result, GDP contracted by 0.3% in 2000. The IMF, which had resumed loans in 2000 to help Kenya through the drought, again halted

⁹Matthew Morris (n.d) Social Capital and Poverty In India, Working Paper 61, p. 3 Institute for Development Studies: Sussex.

¹⁰International Monetary Fund and Intentional Development Association, Assessment of Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, July 2000, pp. 1, 11.

lending in 2001 when the government failed to institute several anti-corruption measures. Despite the return of strong rains in 2001, weak commodity prices, endemic corruption, and low investment limited Kenya's economic growth to 1%, and Kenya is unlikely to see growth above 2% in 2002. Substantial IMF and other foreign support is essential to prevent a further decline in real per capita output.

CHAPTER 2 WHAT IS POVERTY?

SECTION ONE: WIDENING THE LENS

People (including children) experience poverty not simply as a lack of goods and resources, but through the complex interplay of material insufficiency, social marginalization, humiliation and distress. Poverty may be social, economic and/or political in nature, and as such is better understood in more holistic terms of living in conditions of adversity. The elements of this adversity that people choose to emphasize in defining poverty — such as inadequate food, a poor education, or community stigmatization — vary according to numerous factors, including age, gender, religion and location. Within even a single community and culture, there may exist numerous understandings of impoverishment between girls, boys, parents and grandparents. However, this diversity is usually only acknowledged in studies and programs targeted at adults; when it comes to the impoverishment of children, aid agencies and governments very rarely focus on any aspects other than survival, health and/or nutrition. This is in part because of the way people tend to place children within their own society or culture as materially and psychologically dependent on others.

Poverty is not seen as something a child could, would or should recognize, let alone conceptualize and act upon. The material emphasis is then underpinned by the continuing reverence aid and government organizations and research institutions hold for economic data, neo-classical economic the-

ory and macro-economic policy. In many cases, these foci serve only to further obscure the actual experiences and opinions of impoverished children and target them with strategies that may be altogether irrelevant to the way they live their lives.

Given the intricately inter-related nature of causes, impacts and manifestations of poverty, it is often difficult to isolate the question 'what is poverty?' from 'what causes poverty?' and 'what are the impacts of poverty?' For example, discrimination is simultaneously a cause, impact and manifestation of poverty, and is of dramatic significance in countries such as India and Bolivia. For the purposes of this chapter, the discussion remains focused on personal interpretations of what poverty means, rather than on the larger economic and social factors that evidently cause and exacerbate impoverishment (for a detailed analysis of these, see Chapter 5).

2.2.1 Poverty as an Economic Phenomenon

For decades, influential financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF, policy 'think tanks', research institutes and government bodies have conceptualized poverty as an economic problem, characterized chiefly by levels of income, production, assets and consumption. In other words, the more a person is perceived to own, earn, or spend, the less likely he or she is to be seen as 'poor'. Part of the reason for this focus on material matters is the use by poverty analysts of economic 'poverty lines' that divide people into various economic categories according to their purchasing power.

This economic emphasis then finds support in the traditional presentation of poverty by aid agencies through images of emaciated children without clothes or toys— implying impoverishment to be a purely material condition that can be rectified through monetary donations. Almost half of the CCF questionnaire respondents specified 'lack of money or material possessions' as being the prime

People (including children) experience poverty not simply as a lack of goods and resources, but through the complex interplay of material insufficiency, social marginalization, humiliation and distress.

...for a significant number of poor people across the case study countries, it was livelihood insecurity more than material scarcity that was the greatest anxiety.

indicator of poverty. Among affected populations the economic dimension also looms large, some of those interviewed for the study using extremely specific criteria to distinguish rich from poor. This suggests that for many people, economic poverty is underscored in specific localized terms of reference as evidence in “Defining Poverty in Wamunyu, Kenya” (below).

Defining Poverty in Wamunyu, Kenya

Q: How can you tell here in Wamunyu if someone is well off or if they are struggling with life?

A: A person is well to do if they have decent housing, manage to educate their children, invested in cattle, and is driving a car. A person who is in the middle, they have a few heads of cattle, like 4 cattle and maybe 10 goats. Two oxen for ploughing and two cows for milk. The house has an iron roof and is not grass. And he can maintain his farm well. A person who is struggling is landless, has no cattle, maybe he doesn't even have a wife, children are not educated, the homestead is dirty, they have ill health and maybe they don't have clothing. If they have land it is too small to do farming.

Q: What other signs of wealth are there?

A: Number of wives as a sign of wealth: The well-to-do prefer to have more than one wife and even the middle ones prefer to have more than one wife. But some people are well-to-do and prefer to have only one wife.

A: Number of children: in the past having many children was considered as a sign of wealth, but now this is changing. Now to have 2 or 3 children is considered good.

Q: Price of a cow in Wamunyu?

A: Ranges between 8000 — 12000 Shillings.

A: And it is not all of us who have those cows [laughter].

Q: Someone who has four cows and someone who has 48 000 Shillings - which one is better?

A: Definitely the one with four cows. Because the person with cash, the money can be spent any time.

Yet, for a significant number of poor people across the case study countries, it was livelihood insecurity more than material scarcity that was the greatest anxiety. Not only does this prevent impoverished families from being able to save or plan for the future, it also renders them far more vulnerable to the effects of economic and environmental crises:

For us to survive we need more money, we have no disposable cash for anything, it affects our food, education clothing, medicine... we are unable to do anything timely, in contrast to the people who have money.'

- 14-year-old boy, rural village, Bihar, India.

We don't know what will happen tomorrow. Before perestroika we knew we had enough to survive, housing, food etc. But since the Soviet Union split up there is instability... Nothing is clear in Belarus at the moment — we don't know how things will change again in the future."

- Male member of CCF Shelter staff, Smorgon, Belarus.

Even regular salaried employment does not necessarily guarantee security in practice. For example, factory workers in Cochabamba, Bolivia, reported that their companies are consistently late in paying salaries, sometimes by as much as three months. Even then, the wages are seldom sufficient to cover the most basic daily expenses for the average family, or the interest incurred from loans taken out in the interim. Late shifts at the factories also require many workers to take taxis home and because it is outside the hours of public

transport the drivers often charge exorbitant sums. Yet workers are seldom able to leave their jobs because they cannot risk losing the many months of wages owed to them.¹¹ It is this kind of entrapment, despair and distress that conventional economic analysis of poverty often fail to recognize.

In light of these kinds of issues, the economic emphasis in the poverty discourse has, over the last decade, come under heavy criticism from a number of scholars and agencies in the aid and social sectors. They suggest that to focus merely on material deficits is to deny the true consequences of poverty in terms of human suffering and hardship. Simple economic assessments cannot tell us whether people are able to meet their career aspirations, educate their children, withstand economic shocks and/or generally enjoy good quality of life. In other words, critics of conventional analysis hold that poverty cannot be thought of as exclusively or even primarily an economic phenomenon, but must be seen also as a highly political one that is fundamentally linked to issues of access and equity. It is no coincidence that the poorest people and the poorest countries in the world tend also to experience chronic discrimination, corruption and political instability, for their poverty is intricately tied up with these experiences. This points to the need to approach poverty as a very complex and dynamic process, with multiple and interacting causes, meanings and manifestations.¹²

2.1.2 The Social and Cultural Aspects of Poverty

Even though respondents in the CCF study highlighted many economic criteria in their definitions of poverty, political, social and cultural factors were also abundant. Particularly compelling is the evidence linking poverty with entrenched armed conflict, such as that experienced in Sierra Leone, one of the countries featured in the study. Globally, seven of the ten countries with the highest under-five death rates globally are exposed to conflict,¹³ while more children die of malnutrition or infection in war than from

exposure to weapons.¹⁴ In many places the havoc wreaked by this potent combination of poverty and conflict is exacerbated further by a close correlation with extremely high rates of HIV infection and AIDS.¹⁵ Therefore, what emerges from this kind of evidence is that, beyond more traditional strategies to improve livelihood security, poverty measures need also to incorporate dimensions that aim to increase peace and security, empower disenfranchised populations, reduce corruption and crime, and so on.

Use of phrases like 'quality of life' highlights another facet of the poverty discourse that requires critical review. Such terms reflect a growing recognition that there is no direct causal relationship between economic status and human gratification or happiness, and that wealth and well-being are not necessarily synonymous. By the same token, many poor people — while perhaps not entirely happy with their circumstances — learn to manage and approach their situation with a positive outlook.

Indeed, the idea that a direct and observable link exists between difficult or painful experiences and human suffering is increasingly challenged, for the relationship between life events and situations and responses to those events and situations is heavily mediated by cultural, social and other factors. Among other things, cultural values and life goals are a very important force in shaping human experience.

Poverty can undoubtedly cause immense hardship and have a very corrosive effect on social and human capital, but then, on the other hand, wealth is certainly no guarantee of well-being.¹⁶ In Britain, for example, psychosocial disorders in young people increased notably during the post World War II period, a time of almost unprecedented economic growth in that country.¹⁷

Concepts of poverty are thus shaped by a multitude of factors, many of which do not relate to 'objective' physical states such as

¹¹Focus group of mothers and community leaders, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

¹²The United Nations Development Programme has taken some important steps in this direction and its Human Development Index (HDI) includes indicators such as education, literacy, political representation and crime, as well as the more traditional economic ones. As such, it provides a far more meaningful way of gauging the nature of, and variations in, human experience in diverse settings and circumstances than do more conventional and narrowly defined poverty assessments that are based solely on economic models and instruments.

¹³The Machel Review 1996-2000, p20.

¹⁴The Machel Review 1996-2000, p20; The IRC found that in eastern Congo one third of deaths between August 1998 and May 2000 were of children under five, food shortages being one of the main causes.

¹⁵The Machel Review 1996-2000 estimates that of the 17 countries with over 100,000 children orphaned by AIDS, 13 are in conflict or on the brink of emergency and 13 are heavily indebted poor countries.

¹⁶The term 'capital' refers broadly to the resources available to a particular individual or group, and includes financial/material capital (money and assets), human capital (knowledge, health, nutrition etc.), social-cultural capital (social trust, social networks, individual attitudes and personality traits), social-political capital (caste, kin group, ethnicity, etc.) and environmental capital (natural resources). See Moore, K. (2001) Frameworks for Understanding the Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty and Well-Being in Developing Countries, Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper No.6, IDD, University of Birmingham.

¹⁷Rutter and Smith 1995 cited in Halpern, D. (1998). 'Social capital, exclusion and the quality of life: towards a causal model and policy implications.' Nexus Briefing Document, presented at Nexus Westminster seminar 29 April. Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Cambridge University.

This illustrates how, in many contexts, symbolic markers of wealth and poverty play a fundamental role in people's assessments of who is rich and who is poor.



destitution, homelessness, malnutrition, or hunger. In Bolivia and Sierra Leone, interviewees were particularly concerned about their political powerlessness in the face of widespread discrimination and government corruption — a sentiment that was also echoed by those struggling in the lower tiers of the caste system in India. Similarly, the significant disparity in the relative freedoms and respect accorded to boys and girls was a prominent issue of complaint for children in Belarus, while teenage boys in Kenya expressed despair that impoverishment was obstructing them from fulfilling their traditional rights of passage and acceptance as adults. These are but a few of the numerous examples of the social, cultural and political dimensions of poverty that arose from the study, and that economic perspectives generally ignore.¹⁸

In fact, the concept of relative poverty often seems of far greater importance than 'absolute poverty' in terms of its influence on subjective feelings, and can be vital in determining people's sense of well-being, particularly in the case of children. For example, while very poor children in some parts of rural Bolivia suggested that they were in fact generally satisfied with their lot, children interviewed in Belarus (who may be perceived as being better off than their Bolivian counterparts, at least in terms of services, accommodation and the like) are far from content. This is not surprising. Some rural Bolivian children live in more homogeneous communities and are less exposed to alternative and wealthier lifestyles, while in Belarus, the children of the poor live alongside the wealthy and also have greater possibilities of accessing luxury goods. Hence, children in Belarus are more likely to develop aspirations far beyond what is realistic given their economic circumstances. Relative poverty and deprivation can affect children's social world directly, since in Belarus certain material items, such as clothing, computers and music, are markers of status and are used by young people to exclude those who cannot afford them.

Symbolic markers of wealth and poverty play a fundamental role in people's assessments of who is rich and who is poor. In Belarus, because of an acute shortage of housing, both rich and poor live in the same districts and in the same types of accommodation (mostly dormitories) regardless of their income. However, people are increasingly choosing to 'mark' their status in regard to accommodation in terms of furnishings and the way they decorate internally. Commonly, the poor will have nothing but the basics, whereas the better-off will build a small bathroom into another room or purchase a new television. The kind of food eaten is also an important indicator of status.

Meat, and the quality of meat you eat. Maybe also some exotic fruits such as pineapple, maracuja. Maybe also cognac and good wine - if you have those this could be a sign of wealth. We have cheap wine but good wine is expensive. Maybe also a very good cake... Fish - many children never eat this, or don't even now what this is. Women say vegetables are expensive in winter and if you don't get them from the dacha or the villages you won't eat any at all. Amongst children, having money to buy chupachups [lollipops] is one of the signs of being poor or not - some children always seem to have money to buy these and others never have. Having money to go to the computer clubs or not is a possible option for the boys.

- Adult male, Minsk, Belarus.

However, these symbolic markers are often quite deceptive and bear little relation to actual economic status. In fact, they may actively conceal economic vulnerability, since even the most outwardly wealthy individual, family or community may be living on patronage, credit, borrowed, or remitted, resources. As one Kenyan parent put it:

The problem in the communities is that it is difficult to understand problems. You can find someone wearing a suit and tie but when it comes to lunchtime he doesn't take lunch, he doesn't go to the bar -

¹⁸For more on the social, political and cultural dimensions of poverty, see Chapter 5 'Causes and Contributing Factors'.

he may go to listen to the evangelist. It is not easy to know someone's problem. I can give an example of myself: when I walk I look very smart but I have many problems that others do not know. You can have 100 Shillings but you can't even afford a cup of tea.

- Adult woman, Nairobi, Kenya.

And, according to another respondent from Kenya:

[Y]ou can't really tell if someone is rich like that [material wealth]. Often people like these garbage collectors have these things in their house because they received them as gifts.

- Adult woman, Nairobi, Kenya.

Similarly, there are families in Minsk (Belarus) who own a car but are still forced to live together in a cramped single room: "Having a car doesn't mean that you are rich... because we used to have very, very cheap cars from eastern Europe and many people managed to get one during that time."¹⁹

The implications of these insights are that poverty measures can only improve well-being or quality of life if they take proper account of social concepts of poverty, which are frequently subjective, relative, and more closely allied to cultural goals and social meanings than to objective economic states.

2.1.3 Poverty as a Localized Phenomenon

According to conventional economic perspectives, poverty is a universal phenomenon demarcated by standardized criteria. National economies and populations are ranked against benchmarks such as GNP, GDP per capita, or an income-based poverty line.²⁰ The CCF study supported this view to an extent. There was a degree of uniformity across research sites, and certain criteria of poverty (such as livelihood insecurity, social injustice and the associated sense of exclusion) were cited by all social groups inter-

viewed. In addition, certain specific features, like the powerful symbolism of poverty and wealth (particularly physical appearance, clothing and material possessions) were common to all of the countries. Nevertheless, the meaning and significance of these and other poverty criteria varied greatly between stakeholder groups. Some stressed susceptibility to exploitation, while others were far more concerned about lack of livelihood security. In many cases, the criteria were unique to a particular group or setting. Thus, lack of privacy was an important measure of poverty in Belarus, but did not feature in any of the other countries. Such evidence brings into question conventional models that project a standardized image of poverty throughout the globe.

While many in the development and social sectors would argue that conventional economic standards assist measurement, planning and disbursement at the macro level, it is important to acknowledge that such tools still fail to capture the reality of poverty as experienced by most of the world's poor. The traditional benchmarks of poverty remain of dubious value even in terms of basic measurement. The poverty line, for example, excludes non-monetary inputs such as non-remunerated labor (which featured as an important resource in the CCF study, especially in Bolivia and Sierra Leone). Nor does it provide an accurate gauge of monetary income, since it excludes remitted income and informal sector employment. Again, both of these figured significantly in the CCF study. Perhaps most importantly for children is the fact that traditional economic perspectives do not take into account the inequities of intra-household resource allocation, which is often biased along lines of gender and age and which can lead to the impoverishment of certain members within what is otherwise a well-off household. Of course, conventional criteria such as unstable and low income, poor housing, lack of productive assets, particularly land, livestock and seed, certainly do play a significant part in poverty assessments. But less conventional economic factors such as

According to conventional economic perspectives, poverty is a universal phenomenon demarcated by standardized criteria.

¹⁹Interview with Victor, Minsk, Belarus, Dec 2002.

²⁰GNP = Gross National Product, GDP = Gross Domestic Product.

...poverty is differently defined at different times, in different societies and by different social groups.



extreme competition, lack of opportunity and marginal return to innovation are also very significant.

Recognizing the mediated nature of human experience and taking the concept of relative poverty seriously means challenging standardized definitions and benchmarks and emphasizing instead contextualized understandings. Thus, poverty is differently defined at different times, in different societies and by different social groups.²¹ The woodcarving and farming communities of Wamunyu in Kenya are a perfect example of this diversity. According to some assessments, the carvers are better off than the farmers due to the fact that carvers, unlike farmers, have potential access to cash on a daily basis when they sell their carvings in the evenings. The farmers normally have less cash than the carvers, although they do own property and have an assured income from their crops, which makes them less vulnerable to market fluctuations or unexpected hard times. While the carvers have significant amounts of cash in their pockets on a daily basis, this money tends to go directly to immediate survival (and 'entertainment' such as alcohol consumption) and is not substantial enough to begin saving. If a carver falls sick or prices in the market drop, there is nothing to fall back on, as it is necessary to carve all day just to make ends meet. This allows no time for other income-generating activities that could act as financial safety nets, and the wives and children of carvers are consequently very likely to have to work to pay for 'non-essential' expenses such as school uniforms and fees. Therefore, while the carvers and their families are not the poorest group locally in terms of levels of income and consumption, they undoubtedly are in terms of vulnerability and income insecurity.

When one takes into consideration the different ways in which these two groups see themselves and each other, the complexity of ascertaining what constitutes poverty in Wamunyu becomes apparent.

Community Perspectives on Poverty in

Wamunyu, Kenya

Q: Do the carvers consider themselves poor?

A: No, they think they are okay because they can make quick cash. They think they are the richest people around. The quick cash also leads to social excesses and social vices. This means they like to drink local beer and have lots of women. To the carvers, if their family goes without breakfast or they go without supper it is not an issue. It is normal to them.

Q: What are the attitudes towards carvers?

A: They are considered as low people, they are uneducated. They are people who work under the sun. People think that they are not responsible people - even if they have money today, tomorrow they have nothing. People don't like the way the carvers spend their money. They drink, they have too many women, they don't give money to their families. Some of them don't even go home at night. People think that the carvers are not organized, they work haphazardly. They are reckless. And they have lost all respect. If you go to the market you can find a young carver sitting next to an old carver and the kind of stories they are sharing - uh, you can't imagine! They are both talking in the same way, bragging about how many women they have had. There is no dignity and respect in the way they are.

Q: So measuring poverty in term of the amount of money people have does not seem to work in this area?

A: No, because the poorest families are those of the carvers. Their children are poor and their school fees are not paid although the carvers earn most money. The carvers don't give money to their wives to buy food or clothes. All the wives of the carvers need to have their own income generating activities in

²¹See Chapter 1, Section Two: 'Overview of Poverty in the Research Sites'.

order to help their household survive.

The evidence provided by the CCF study therefore implies a need for greater sophistication and disaggregation in the conceptualization, measurement and analysis of child poverty data to ensure that a true portrayal of the phenomenon emerges. Above all, it challenges analysts to understand and capture the local realities and contextual diversity of poverty.

2.1.4 The Dynamic Nature of Poverty

When examining the changing nature and severity of poverty over time, most analysts make the distinction between transient poverty and chronic poverty. Transient poverty entails a temporary period of deprivation, usually as the result of seasonal or random shocks such as the death of a breadwinner, a bad harvest or an environmental disaster. Chronic poverty is where deprivation is a general condition and spans a far greater period of time, in some cases the whole life of an individual or longer still.²² The balance in numbers of children within these two groups shows considerable variation around the world, not least because of widespread confusion in understanding exactly what 'transient' and 'chronic' actually mean, but also because making the distinction between the two requires data collection over long periods of time. In practice, this usually comes from household panel surveys, which currently exist in a number of developed countries but are less common in the developing world, particularly Africa.²³

Despite these limitations on data collection, the general picture built from existing evidence into chronic and transient poverty is one of a smaller core of chronically poor co-existing with movement into and out of poverty by the larger population.²⁴ For example, data from a study of six villages in India between 1975-1983 showed that 50% of the population was poor in a typical year but only 19% was poor in every year.²⁵ In the CCF questionnaire, when asked 'What makes some children poorer than others?'

the top response was 'parental impoverishment/being born into poverty'. In other words, the majority of respondents felt that poverty is to a large extent 'inherited' or cyclically transmitted through the generations, usually from older to younger individuals (notably from parents to their children). However, the concept is far more complex than this and raises a number of important questions. Is the 'private' transmission of poverty from individuals and families of one generation to another the sole channel, or can poverty be transmitted within, between or through 'public' spheres of community, state and market? Is poverty always transmitted from older to younger generations, or can it also move in the opposite direction? What is actually being transferred in this process? And perhaps most importantly, is this cycle of transmission relatively intractable and impervious to poverty reduction efforts, or are there specific 'entry points' where intergenerational processes can be affected by external interference?

Karen Moore's (2001) excellent study of intergenerational poverty argues that "individual livelihoods are both facilitated and constrained by relations within and between the institutions of household, community, state and market" (8). In other words, poverty-related capital may be transmitted to a child not merely from within the same household or extended family, but also from institutions such as schools, hospitals or care centers/foster homes, and from the state via benefits and legal protection. All of these are then further affected by the 'norms of entitlement' determining who has access to and control over resources in a particular society, drawn around considerations of gender, age, class, ethnicity and religion. In this way, certain institutional, social and cultural values and beliefs surrounding children may conspire to keep a child in poverty, while actually aspiring to the opposite.

Certainly it is the case that most of the world's poor people experience poverty as a chronic condition caused by monumental structural forces. Poverty tends not only to

When examining the changing nature and severity of poverty over time, most analysts make the distinction between transient poverty and chronic poverty.



²²Goodhand, J. (2001).

²³Moore, 2001; Grootaert et al, 1995.

²⁴Kanbur and Squire, 1999.

²⁵World Bank, 1990.

Poverty tends not only to span the life of the individual, but also to be transmitted through the generations.

span the life of the individual, but also to be transmitted through the generations. This is especially true of countries such as India, where population density and growth, inequitable distribution of natural resources, entrenched social hierarchy and discrimination, poor governance and the like, represent apparently overwhelming odds against the economic advancement of the poor.

Populations exposed to these kinds of structural forces often become caught up in long and apparently entrenched cycles of poverty, and this can lead to the false impression that poverty is a static state. However, the CCF study confirms the dynamic nature of poverty, finding it to be a highly volatile process subject to interacting and countervailing forces and trends. Even within populations of very poor people there can be individuals and families whose circumstances are very unstable and change radically over short periods of time. A close connection could thus be discerned between structural, seasonal and personal factors in the experience of poverty. A wealthy family, for example, may be plunged into debt and ruin by the poor financial management skills, ill health, economic misfortune, or death, of an individual member. In Belarus, poverty has a marked seasonal pattern. It has far graver impacts on children in the winter than in the summer, because during the cold weather children without proper means for keeping warm cannot venture outside their homes. This leaves them susceptible to varying forms of domestic discord and abuse. In addition, many city dwellers rely on a supply of fruit and vegetables from relatives in the rural areas and in winter this source of support may be seriously restricted.

For a significant minority of people, therefore, poverty is a transient experience, the result of random or incidental shocks such as family or personal loss, or a major societal crisis. Often chronic conditions of poverty are exacerbated by such abrupt and unplanned events. During the war in Sierra Leone many people who were already extremely poor lost everything—family, home, land, cattle, seed,

stored foods, savings, and jobs. In some cases, livelihoods, property and whole families were obliterated in a matter of mere minutes. The combination of long-term structural disadvantage with rapid and immediate loss may result in outright destitution, from which individuals, families or whole communities, may be unable to recover.

2.1.5 Poverty as a Frame of Mind

The perception that poverty is a long-term, static, state has given rise to a highly controversial notion of poverty as the expression of a particular frame of mind or inherited disposition afflicting certain kinds of people. Hence, quite a few respondents in the CCF questionnaire in particular highlighted how the gravest form of poverty is the poverty of care and social support. As one Brazilian respondent suggested: “There is...‘affective’ [emotional] poverty, where the individual does not receive care or attention, where the person is spiritually poor — he/she feels lonely and does not have any relationship with God”. Often the affective poverty of children in particular is attributed to the amount of time adults devote to work at the expense of time spent caring for and attending to the young:

Parents don’t give so much attention to their children. Because of the economic situation parents work really hard to get money and have less time for their children. The children try to become independent but it’s a challenge because they cannot prove themselves in life — they can’t get jobs. Parents are also very stressed and they take it out on the children. And the children have a lack of mercy towards each other. A lack of patience, tolerance - they don’t have a good attitude to their peers and they have a lot of conflict. They have become cruel.
- Male teacher, Minsk, Belarus.

Poverty is a state of not being blessed with...timely advice and guidance
- CCF staff member, Sri Lanka.
Some children are poorer than others for

they are growing up in not a well disciplined way.

- CCF staff member, Ethiopia

Some children are poorer than others because they don't have proper guidance

- CCF staff member, Sri Lanka.

Parents today are not able to or not prepared to raise children, and often just give up.

- Female shelter staff member, Smorgon, Belarus.

Poor families are thus identified by a perceived lack of discipline and guidance for children and by a decline in the quality of intra-familial relationships, rather than on the basis of income or material possessions. This was particularly true in Belarus, where adult, especially elderly, interviewees conceptualized poverty in terms of the larger spiritual and moral impoverishment of society as a whole. It was also true elsewhere, for example Sri Lanka:

Human qualities, good traditions, social, cultural and religious values are diminishing drastically in society and children are most vulnerable to these negative changes and are badly affected in terms of their thinking, physical and mental development.

- CCF staff member, Sri Lanka.

That said, other respondents from Sri Lanka pointed out that over-protective parents or parents who put too much pressure on their children could have equally problematic effect, asserting that "children are given unbearable targets by their parents to maintain their social status" (insisting that they become doctors for example).

Related to the poverty of affection are ideas about a 'poverty mentality' or 'culture of poverty'. A large proportion of the CCF questionnaire respondents who highlighted the inter-generational nature of poverty attributed this, in part at least, to a poverty mentality. It is their assertion that poverty is pri-

marily a condition of the mind, in which affected populations lack consciousness of viable solutions to their problems, or passively accept their circumstances.

Poverty is an issue of mental attitude. If the person considers him or herself poor or has poverty mental schemes, then these schemes will be repeated throughout his or her life. If a population considers they are poor, it will replicate through future generations.

- CCF staff member, Bolivia.

Fatalism is the main feature.

- CCF staff member, Indonesia.

They may be satisfied with the fate, faith and luck assigned to them by the divine powers... destined to be poor and subservient.

- CCF staff member, Sri Lanka.

Some people are poorer than others because they do not have aspirations of overcoming and are satisfied to the lamentable situation in which they live.

- CCF staff member, Honduras.

Of course, personal will-power is a very important factor.

- CCF staff member, Brazil.

Poverty is a psychological situation which can be addressed through community empowerment"

- CCF staff member, Sri Lanka.

Some observers go further, asserting that the poor are lazy, ungrateful or uncooperative.

The Defamation of the Poor

Some people resist being helped out of poverty. They don't want to be helped. They have their own way of doing things and they say, "Who are you to come and tell us what to do?" They have their ways of coping and they prefer to stay like that.

- Adult male CCF staff member, Marurui slum, Nairobi, Kenya.

Related to the poverty of affection are ideas about a 'poverty mentality' or 'culture of poverty'.

Undoubtedly, poverty is very much a product of social structure...and this can severely constrain efforts by individuals to escape their impoverishment.



Q: What makes some people drop down from one level of wealth or poverty to another, like from well-to-do to okay, and from okay to poor?

A: What brings about poverty is how active you are. If you are active you can move out of this state of poverty, but if you are idle you can't.

- Elderly man, Wamunyu, Kenya.

A: A poor person doesn't like to work hard. Poor people like being idle. When they go to the garden they only do a small bit and go home. They don't follow through. They like wasting time. She has not time to work in the garden but when she goes to their neighbors' place she will talk and talk and she has time for that.

- Male Project Family Educator (PFE), Wamunyu, Kenya.

A: Anybody who works hard will always be well off, but all these sub-castes, when they drink and go the wrong way, or they just spend their money like that, or otherwise they get into the poverty. There's a very old Hindi saying, that those who sleep lose everything, those that are awake get everything.

- Elderly male from Samalya Badhi village, Madhya Pradesh, India.

This argument places responsibility for poverty firmly within the hands of those who experience it, and implies that poverty is only 'necessary' in so far as poor people 'choose' to prolong it. It is crucial to point out here that such views come disproportionately from observers of the poor (rather than the poor themselves) and fail to take adequate account of the overwhelming political and economic factors that in many cases conspire to keep such populations poor. Certainly the CCF study confirmed that alcoholism and similar behaviors can contribute significantly to poverty, not least because they create dissent within the family, drain income and inhibit labor productivity. There is even anecdotal evidence suggesting a

correlation between poverty and raised levels of these kinds of behaviors. However, the perception that poor people are responsible for or passively accept their fate was not born out by the evidence from the case study countries. In the study, ideas about fatalism were revealed as an outsider's view that ignores the many creative measures devised by poor people for managing and ameliorating adversity.²⁶ Very few of the 'poor' people interviewed in case study countries actually spoke of themselves this way. As is shown in Chapter 6, poor people do make considerable efforts to overcome their circumstances. These may involve visiting the local astrologer for advice, sending children out to work, selling assets, migrating and many other strategies besides.

Arguments for a poverty 'mentality' or culture need therefore to be assessed in relation to the firmer evidence available on the very real institutional and environmental obstacles that most poor populations face. CCF respondents graphically described the realities of powerlessness arising from institutionalized discrimination and exclusion. For example, indigenous women in Cochabamba (Bolivia) commonly receive poor quality care from the doctor. Some described having walked out of clinics in frustration at the dismissive manner in which they have been treated: "they make you feel that... if you die you still don't like to say it in front of them".²⁷ Similarly, some men in India dislike working for higher caste employers because to do so would further their exploitation and subservience. Undoubtedly, poverty is very much a product of social structure — of racial hierarchies in Bolivia, domination by certain political and ethnic groups in Kenya, and caste and class divisions in India — and this can severely constrain efforts by individuals to escape their impoverishment. Lack of progress then becomes wrongly equated with lack of effort, and the ground becomes fertile for patronizing and inaccurate generalizations.

The 'culture of poverty' notion may even be propagated by those within aid organiza-

²⁶These strategies are described in Chapter 6 — 'Responding to Adversity'.

²⁷Focus Group Discussion with Mothers & Community Leaders, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

tions and government who have become frustrated with unsuccessful interventions. On closer analysis, the lack of enthusiasm for or success of aid projects and other initiatives is often born of a realistic assessment by the poor of the likely returns to the time and energy these measures require them to invest. Furthermore, there is a substantial difference between accepting one's position within a caste system such as that operating in India (which is seen to be pre-ordained by God) and the more general idea of fatalism, which suggests that people do not act upon their situation, or have given up. The poor are, more often than not, well aware of the reasons why they are poor and are extremely clear in their assessments of social inequity and injustice.

2.1.6 Poverty as Poor Health

As already discussed in the introduction to this chapter, child poverty is very often conceived by observers in terms of survival and health. The social, political and cultural dimensions are taken to be far less important than the physical, which lead to poverty alleviation strategies that are frequently almost exclusively based around the amelioration of health and nutrition. In the CCF questionnaires, poor health was the top answer among respondents when asked what the main problems were for children in their particular country. However, this focus provides only a partial view of child poverty. For example, indicators such as malnutrition and low birth weight largely confine 'poverty' to considerations of mortality, and marginalize other less visible yet very important physical health concerns while excluding mental health altogether.

Evidence from the field research suggests that in the case of India at least, poverty is defined more in terms of limited or no access to medical services, rather than the condition of poor health itself (which also afflicts the wealthy):

In our village, when someone falls sick and when the person has to be taken to

the hospital, we don't have proper roads. We don't have transport facilities and that person feels that he is helpless, because if for any treatment the person has to go to Katoria, which is the nearby town, which we are not able to go. So we think in that way, the person is poor. If that person is not accessible to medical facilities, we think that person is poor.

- Man in his 40s, rural village, Bihar, India.

For example, if a rich woman gets her immunizations done, she will have healthy children, she will not be weak. But for us, because we are poor we cannot pay for immunization, we will have weak children we do not even know whether they will survive or not; we become weak.

- Woman in her 30s, rural village, Bihar, India.

In the Altiplano and Andean areas of Bolivia (where there are few indoor bathrooms), hygiene is more important than in many other areas, particularly given the scarcity of water and the extreme coldness of the climate, both of which make regular bathing difficult. Young children frequently identified 'contamination' from dirty rivers or rubbish dumps as something they abhor:

"I don't like to get dirty, my clothes" (boy aged 8)

"I don't like to get my body dirty" (girl aged 10)

"I don't like to play in the dirt — but boys do that (girl aged 13) "²⁸

Evidence of this kind suggests that 'health' encompasses much more than mere mortality, and that poverty reduction strategies should align their responses more closely with The World Health Organization (WHO) Constitution, which defines health holistically as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.'²⁹ Granted, infectious diseases do have a disproportionate impact on children, with 25% of all

Child poverty is very often conceived by observers in terms of survival and health.

²⁸Focus group discussions with children from Cochabamba and rural village, Oruro state, Opoqueri, Bolivia.

²⁹See website www.who.org for details.



*What constitutes a
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is neither simple nor
unbiased.*



deaths occurring in early childhood. However, this emphasis on health as a physical issue has led to an overwhelming bias in researching only very young children (especially the under 5's), effectively ignoring older children and adolescents altogether. This may on the one hand stem from the fact that child health in developing countries — particularly in relation to the characteristically severe dimensions of child poverty found in the South — is often conceived in accordance with the Western cultural imperative to save lives. But, this priority is not necessarily shared by societies in the developing world, who may find the emphasis on child survival — without alleviating poverty and improving quality of life — misplaced. Children are not always a community or family's primary concern, with adult breadwinners often being given the greatest share of scarce resources before child dependents.

Furthermore, what constitutes a 'child health' issue worthy of address within a poverty reduction framework is neither simple nor unbiased. What the target populations themselves understand by the term 'healthy' is frequently context- and culture-specific, sometimes bearing little resemblance to Western notions. For example, a study of market women in Nigeria found that 71% of mothers believed that the diarrhea suffered by their child was caused by the normal teething process of childhood. As a consequence, they neither sought treatment for the condition nor looked to poor personal or environmental hygiene as contributing factors.³⁰ Moreover, results from participatory studies with children in the North and South suggest that although poverty is often measured through health, poor children actually appear to talk about it relatively little. Children experience numerous emotional and psychological consequences of poverty, and in many cases prioritize these over and above physical effects. They do not complain about their health to the extent that adults do, though they are often aware of not being 'fully up to strength'. In general, most are very attuned to the health implications of

their lifestyles — a trend that seems more apparent among children in the South than the North: "Our health will be threatened as long as we continue to live in these overcrowded conditions. We suffer from constant headaches, which also come from our daily problems and stress in our lives."³¹

2.1.7 Towards a CCF Definition of Poverty

In accordance with the above insights, it is apparent that an adequate and meaningful definition of poverty should be a holistic one that gives proper weight to social and political causes as well as to economic ones. Furthermore, such a definition must acknowledge both the dynamic and the mediated nature of human experience, in that the outcomes of exposure to economic hardship are neither predictable nor fixed and are often closely linked to subjective perceptions. Proper recognition must be given to the situated nature of poverty, which is defined differently in different social and cultural contexts and different historical periods. Multiple perceptions may even exist within a single community. Due account must also be taken not simply of the material or physical states induced by poverty, but also of the social suffering and the adverse emotional and psychological impacts in affected populations. Thus, taking all of these principles into account, CCF is moving towards defining poverty broadly as:

A multifaceted, dynamic and contextualized form of adversity in which material lack interacts with and is mediated and compounded by social exclusion, inequity and powerlessness, with multiple effects.

³⁰Ene-Obong et al, 2000 cited in Panter-Brick, forthcoming.

³¹Zimbabwean child, cited in Save the Children (2001) *Different Places, Same Stories — Children's Views of Poverty*, North and South, p18, London, Save the Children UK.

CHAPTER 3 CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY

Introduction

Ever since the inception of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), children — and the condition of child poverty in particular — have been increasingly pushed to the forefront of development agendas. Having been subsumed for so long within larger macro and meso poverty interventions, the impoverishment of children is now a distinctive and central concern of hundreds of agencies and academics alike around the world, as the ever-expanding body of literature proves. However, the rhetorical commitment in 'putting children first' has not always been translated faithfully into practice, and the research base still suffers from an overall tendency to prioritize adult perspectives that often bear little resemblance to the actual experiences of children, and may even serve to obscure the real dimensions of their poverty further. Many of the conclusions drawn around child poverty are the result of either 'guesstimates' derived from generalized statistics, or simplistic theoretical assumptions rife with cultural and conceptual biases.

Most worrisome of all — and perhaps most ironic — is the absence of children's voices in the literature on child poverty. There is still far too little understanding of how children *experience* poverty, what impoverishment means to them, or how their perceptions and priorities interact with those of local communities and the agendas of international agencies. This has perpetuated the overwhelming reluctance among both agencies and communities to acknowledge the resilience of young people as social and economic actors in the struggle against poverty.

This chapter focuses on children's experiences of poverty. It begins by considering how different definitions of childhood and different patterns of child development might influence the effects poverty has on

the young. It continues with an examination of children's own views of poverty and ends by showing how poverty affects their social worlds more generally.

SECTION ONE — UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN, CHILDHOOD AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

3.1.1 Conceptualizing Children and Childhood

No one definition of 'childhood' has universal acceptance. While the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) — which classifies all individuals under 18 as 'children' — has become standard in the policy arena, it is important to recognize that in many parts of the world this demarcation has no social meaning. Children are viewed by their parents, by their peers and by their societies at large, in a multitude of ways that do not always follow the criterion of age. This is because ideas about what is in children's best interests are extraordinarily diverse and are based on very different theories of child development. In some countries and cultures, childhood may be qualified in relation to such factors as the commencement of work, the onset of menarche, or betrothal and marriage.³² In the last fifty years or so, education has transformed definitions of childhood in many parts of the world. Commonly, children in school are defined as children for much longer than those who work. This is largely because schooling does not bring immediate economic returns to the family and keeps the young in a suspended state of dependence and minority. Education may bring diversity to definitions of childhood even within the same society, as in Bangladesh, where a working child leaves childhood much earlier than one that attends school and has no economic responsibilities.³³

The age at which childhood ends is also drawn upon lines of gender in many societies, with puberty being a critical threshold. This is because, unlike cognitive, social or physical development (which are recog-

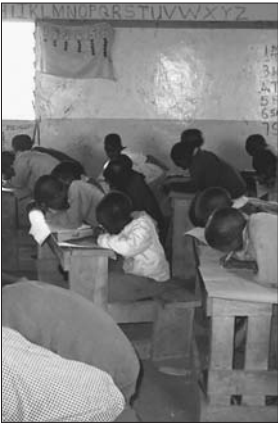
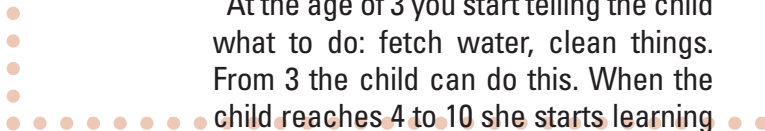
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³²Boyden and Levison, 2000.

³³Blanchet, 1996.

In countries like Sierra Leone that have been exposed to widespread conflict, the definition and meaning of childhood may be radically altered.



nized in most cultures as continuous and gradual processes), puberty commonly symbolizes an abrupt transition from the asexual child to the sexually mature youth or adult.³⁴ In the case of girls, this boundary is clearly marked by the onset of menarche, but for boys the transition is less distinct, and they are often consequently required to prove their maturity in other ways (for example, through employment) in order to be conferred adult status by their peers. The stages of childhood in Sierra Leone illustrates the complex and varied criteria used in one community in Sierra Leone to define the childhood and maturity of boys and girls.

The Stages of Childhood in Sierra Leone³⁵

“At the age of 3 you start telling the child what to do: fetch water, clean things. From 3 the child can do this. When the child reaches 4 to 10 she starts learning business: to count quantity and amounts of oranges or money. She knows what to bring home after the sales. When the child comes back I check the money and the sold items and I tell her what to do. So the child learns how to do business.

After 10 children should know that education is more important now. I force African child grows with the cane: I beat the child if she doesn’t listen. The girl child should stick by me at night — she cannot leave the house without me. If I go to bed she goes with me. She must stick by my side. This stops after the age of 14 when she gets a bit older. I know when the girl can marry — it is when she has her period. As soon as she has the period she can marry.

For boys, I look at the height. If the boy also starts chasing girls then I know he is old enough to marry. If there is a dance and he wants to go I know “Oh, my son wants a wife.” Then I make arrangements for him.”

As shown above, childhood is often conceived and demarcated through gender in terms of both physical changes in the body,

behavior and the tasks that young people are allowed or expected to perform. In Brazil’s cities, school attendance reaches its peak around the ages of 10, 11 and 12, following which expectations of absorption into the labor force — particularly for boys — cause employment rates to climb rapidly.³⁶ This is in contrast to parts of South Asia, where girls of this age form the majority of school dropouts as they begin to carry out the domestic tasks of an adult woman.³⁷

The perception of ‘appropriate’ roles for children in society does not simply shift with geography and culture, however, but may also be reconfigured in accordance with the varied demands of climate, environment, social class and especially poverty. In countries like Sierra Leone that have been exposed to widespread conflict, the definition and meaning of childhood may be radically altered. Significant numbers of adolescents and even younger children — mostly boys, but also girls — became embroiled in Sierra Leone’s lengthy civil war. Indeed, the RUF purposefully recruited children so as to break down community fabric by letting children decide the life and death of adults. Many of these children assumed ancillary roles such as cooking for and serving food to the troops. Others, however, became directly involved in the conflict as combatants, many participating in atrocities. Either way, adults in Sierra Leone have found it difficult to acknowledge the involvement of children in conflict because, quite apart from the actual violence perpetrated by the young, such involvement flouted accepted norms about appropriate behavior in childhood. Many adults have only been able to come to terms with children’s part in the atrocities by holding that they were drugged during this time and hence not fully conscious of what they were doing.

Anger and mistrust of former combatants is widespread in the country, as is jealousy at the attention and material assistance they are given by aid agencies so as to facilitate their social reintegration. Now that the fighting has ceased, young ex-combatants are

³⁴Boyden and Levison, 2000.
³⁵Interview with older woman in village near Makeni, Sierra Leone, Jan 2003.
³⁶Levison, 1991.
³⁷Johnson et al, 1995.

commonly prevented from returning home by their families and communities and experience great difficulties in obtaining accommodation and employment (see “Problems of Post-Conflict Reintegration in Sierra Leone,” below). As such, they are excluded by society from the category of childhood and denied all the benefits normally associated with that category.

Problems of Post-Conflict Reintegration in Sierra Leone

When I came back from the bush the relatives welcomed me because they knew that it was not my wish to go to the bush. But the younger ones were scared of me — they thought I was going to kill them...

- Adolescent girl ex-combatant, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

Some people get jealous of us because we get training and they don't. I overheard some people say “Look at them: after they killed so many people they are even getting bonuses out of it by being rewarded with training courses”. I told the person “Stop this kind of talk. You are creating problems in our country.”

- Adolescent girl ex-combatant, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

The name ‘ex-comb’ gives us a bad name. People won't give us work. People have no good for that name [ex-comb]. It means he was a fighter, he killed, he raped, he did bad. They won't give you a good marriage. If you see a woman and you want her, her people won't accept you. The name is provocation. We get blamed automatically and unnecessarily. As long as we are around people feel we are to be blamed for thefts and other bad things. When an ex-comb has a problem and it involves the police, the police make a big case. They will sentence you straight to jail. As long as you are an ex-comb there is no form of appeal. You get express service to prison.

- Adolescent boy ex-combatant, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

Childhood may even be strategically negotiated, as in the various apartheid regimes in South Africa, when young political activists were defined by the authorities as ‘youth’ to establish their legal culpability, while the activists referred to themselves as ‘children’ in order to avoid adult penalties. The capacities of a child may even be differently estimated and variously expressed within the smallest communities, all of which means that ‘childhood’ is best understood not so much as a unitary phenomenon, but more of a culturally and contextually diverse social construction that demands continuous analysis.³⁸

This is not to say that the norms enshrined in the CRC are irrelevant outside the Western cultures in which they were conceived, but rather that caution and restraint is needed in applying these norms to interventions in different contexts. Any child-focused research or development assistance is inevitably built upon a set of cultural assumptions about the ‘proper’ role and lifestyle of a child. These assumptions may or may not resemble those of the particular children targeted, and it is the lack of preliminary investigation into this potential discrepancy that has led to the difficulties or ultimate failure often encountered through implementation. As regards child poverty, the ideological stance taken towards children is key to determining how far the task of poverty alleviation/eradication is seen to be one of ‘rescue and rehabilitation’ around a preconceived model of what childhood should be, or one of supporting and empowering children and communities towards more locally meaningful futures.

Despite increasing acknowledgement of childhood diversity within the literature, the vast majority of those writing are still relatively blind to the assumptions and pre-conceptions that drive their research. Very few question the orthodox model of child development that lies at the heart, whereby human competence is essentially a function of age, and childhood a linear transformation from an immature to mature adult, simple to complex, irrational to rational behaviors and

...the ideological stance taken towards children is key to determining how far the task of poverty alleviation/eradication is seen to be one of ‘rescue and rehabilitation’ around a preconceived model of what childhood should be, or one of supporting and empowering children and communities towards more locally meaningful futures.



³⁸Boyden and Levison, 2000.

...child development and well-being are holistic concepts incorporating not only physical dimensions such as survival, health, co-ordination, strength and nutrition, but also a range of other domains.



dependent childhood to autonomous adulthood.³⁹ When this research then becomes the basis of intervention, it can have serious consequences for the children supported, in many cases leaving them in a worse situation than they were in before.

A good example of this are the now well-publicized cases of children 'saved' from working in garment factories in Bangladesh and Morocco in response to Western righteous conceptions of childhood as necessarily 'labor-free'. These interventions did not take account of the important familial responsibilities held by the children in question and are now recognized to have effectively increased their poverty and vulnerability by forcing them to seek jobs far more hazardous than those they held originally.⁴⁰ Interestingly, in most of the CCF communities interviewed for this study, children expressed fulfillment from their work, as it allowed them to develop social skills and abilities as well as contribute to their family's survival.

3.1.2 The Impact of Poverty on Child Development

In order to appreciate how children are affected by poverty, we need to understand what contributes to and detracts from their well-being, adaptation and development. First, it should be stressed that child development and well-being are holistic concepts incorporating not only physical dimensions such as survival, health, coordination, strength and nutrition, but also a range of other domains, as follows:

Cognitive development including literacy, numeracy, basic cultural knowledge, vocational skills, and other competencies required for effective participation in society;

Emotional development including adequate self-esteem, family attachment, feelings of love, acceptance and effectiveness necessary to establish and maintain family ties as an adult;

Social and moral development including concern for others, sharing, sense of belonging, ability to co-operate with others, distinction of right from wrong, respect for laws and for the property and persons of others, resourcefulness, planning, independence, leadership and other capacities needed to live successfully within a social context.

Certain effects of poverty on children's development and well-being are undoubtedly well known and well documented. For example, in conditions of impoverishment it is very rare that children, or indeed adults, receive either the quality or quantity of food and liquids they need to remain fit and healthy. Under-nutrition and inadequate fluid intake combined with dirty and unhygienic environments are a major cause of infectious and diarrhoeal diseases. In the very young in particular malnutrition, combined with poor hygiene and sanitation, is especially liable to undermine health, as these examples from India and Belarus show:

A combination of various reasons: unhygienic conditions; sanitary conditions are poor; then food spoils, or is not hygienic; and then unsafe water... All these things can give worm infestation. People who eat food leftover from last night the next morning — that can also cause stomach problems. Normally people who do not have enough fuel to cook two times, instead of cooking twice, they will cook once and use that food for the second meal also. But that is not a healthy thing, it affects the health of the children.

- Male CCF staff member, Mukti Niketan, India.

Health problems among children: many teachers report that children would faint frequently and are malnourished because they do not eat fresh fruit or juices. They eat only potatoes, porridge and soups and they lack vitamins and proper nutrition.

- Male CCF staff member, Minsk, Belarus.

³⁹Boyden and Levison, 2000.

⁴⁰Zalami, 1998; Myers and Boyden, 1998.

Nevertheless, while poor nutrition and similar material threats may have fairly direct and obvious consequences for children's physical health and development, an automatic connection between exposure to hazards and developmental damage in children is far from obvious. Indeed, the effects of poverty on other aspects or domains of child development are often far less predictable. As Myers and Boyden (1998) argue, "although a small minority of children are undoubtedly impaired emotionally or psychologically by traumatic experiences, there is little scientific indication that the majority of children are necessarily harmed for life by such adversity" (32). Schaffer (1992) similarly remarks that "whatever stresses an individual may have encountered in early years, he or she need not forever more be at the mercy of the past... children's resilience must be acknowledged every bit as much as their vulnerability" (47). Others have suggested that some children may exhibit greater personal resilience than adults (Palmer, 1983), with adversity even comprising a potential source of strength (Leyens and Mahjoub, 1992; Dawes, 1992; Zwi et al, 1992).

Second, the relationship between the different domains of child development is highly synergistic and the deprivations and stresses associated with poverty can have multiple and interacting effects simultaneously in several or all domains. For example, malnutrition adversely affects the growth and development of the brain and energy levels, this in turn having detrimental cognitive and physical consequences. By the same token, psychological or emotional distress caused by exposure to poverty can impair the ability of the body's immune system to function properly, which can in turn lead to diseases of the upper respiratory tract, allergies, hypertension and other disorders.⁴¹ Interventions to alleviate poverty need to be sensitive to this synergy and to take all the domains of children's development into account if they are going to have a positive influence on well-being.

Third, children have multiple capacities and

multiple developmental requirements that need to be fostered if they are to be healthy and strong, and these capacities and requirements are heavily mediated by environmental and other forces. Clearly basic physical needs, such as food, water, sleep and exercise, are universally applicable, certain standards being essential to survival and growth in all children. But other developmental domains tend to be far more malleable and far more subject to environmental influences. Different societies present very different demands and opportunities for children's development, and the way in which children are raised is critical to the competencies and frailties they develop, to their future success in wider society and their acceptance by the community as respected members.

Children are fast learners, but cultural traditions and social mores can be highly complex, particularly as they are often gender-differentiated. Some cultures have formal initiation ceremonies (such as the Moran rite of passage among the Maasai) and/or schools (such as Madrassahs) where children are explicitly taught their expected roles and social conduct. Elsewhere, socialization is based on more informal means, and involves observation and participation in routine family, school and social activities. Thus, activities (to do with eating, sleeping, grooming, possessing objects, distributing resources and so on) that are particularly valued for specific genders and ages are repeated more frequently than those that are not, building in children the associated competencies that are prized socially. Diverse techniques, including suggestions, prompts, threats, accusations and explanations, are used to provide positive reinforcement for approved behavior and to scold or express anger or disappointment over a transgression.⁴² These mechanisms of socialization are patterned differently in different cultures and social groups and for different categories of children, in line with age, gender and so on, and the variation in these patterns has a marked influence on what children learn and how they behave.

...children have multiple capacities and multiple developmental requirements that need to be fostered if they are to be healthy and strong...



⁴¹Boyden etc 56.

⁴²Dawes 1999; Woodhead.

...children are not passive recipients of experience but actively involved in their own learning and growth.

Fourth, while adults undoubtedly play a major role in children's socialization and development, it is nevertheless important to highlight that children are not passive recipients of experience but actively involved in their own learning and growth. Children's own contributions to their development are of central importance in terms of both well-being and outcomes. For example, in many situations children who are adept at lateral thinking and problem solving can enhance their coping by identifying alternative options to their current circumstances and devising creative solutions. In fact, research in recent decades has shown that children can be highly adaptable in the context of adversity, this potentially being a source of strength, not merely of risk. Further, as indicated in Chapter 6, children's strengths and the practical contributions they make to family life can be a major factor in household and family survival during times of difficulty.

Fifth, as children enter middle childhood the influence of adults in their development and well-being gradually diminishes as they become increasingly orientated towards siblings and peers. Support by, friendship with and social approval from peers are absolutely critical to resilience and adaptation in children, as the findings from the CCF study continuously emphasize. Hence, the impact poverty has on children and how they respond to it is deeply affected by the effects it has on their social world and particularly their relationships with those their own age.

All of this points to the fact that the social arrangements, child development goals and child rearing practices of the communities in which children live play a fundamental part in determining the different capabilities and susceptibilities that children develop. The 'developmental appropriateness' of children's experiences, the 'harmfulness' or 'benefits' of their environment cannot be — and should not be — separated from the cultural context in which they are developing, the values and goals that inform their lives and their prior experiences of learning skills and ways of thinking. Children grow and

flourish in a whole host of different environments and under a whole variety of circumstances, and what is adaptive in child development is very much a product of these specific settings.

3.1.3 Risk, Resilience and Coping

The insight that children play an active part in their own development and in the welfare of their families and communities has important implications for understanding how they respond to poverty. Children may in fact initiate many survival strategies of their own during times of adversity, as Chapter 6 reveals. Rachel Hinton's (2000) study of Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal found that children were actually very adept at helping to alleviate crisis, and were also responsible for considerable positive impacts on the psychological and emotional worlds of adults. Thus, Arati, a girl of 13, admitted that: 'Sometimes I play at being a child — I am grown up now but my mother likes to have babies and it makes her happy when I sit on her lap and she gives [spoon feeds] me food.'⁴³ Meanwhile, in eastern Uganda, it was found that young people who had fought as child soldiers during the war were regularly putting on and performing plays about their lives during the conflict, informing the local community of what they had been through. Most interestingly, they chose to do it using comedy so that the audience's laughter eventually overcame their bitterness towards these children. This was understood to be a conscious survival strategy of children facilitating their reintegration into the community (De Berry and Boyden, 2000).

There are also numerous examples of children making independent choices about their own care: unaccompanied children who had been evacuated from Peru's insurgent Ayacucho region chose to live on the streets rather than use local relief facilities. The latter would have entailed registration and subsequent identification as Ayacuchanos which, in carrying the risk of reprisals, the children judged too dangerous (Boyden, 2000). Similarly, street boys in

⁴³Hinton (2000), p17.

Uganda living in army camps refused to leave when offered assistance by the government, for the soldiers provided them with numerous benefits (including food, clothes and companionship), which they had not experienced previously nor expected to obtain through demobilization (ibid).

However, even if we think of children as social actors as opposed to passive victims, knowing how precisely to build on children's competencies and coping strategies while also protecting them against hazard and supporting the most vulnerable remains a major challenge. This may be especially true in countries like Sierra Leone where children have been exposed to the terrible atrocities of war. The psychological and physical impacts of this kind of conflict on children are clear from the account of this mother, who describes the perpetual insecurity and confusion of trying against the odds to maintain routine activities and a sense of normality:

This is the way the children used to hold us during the war because they were so frightened [demonstrates example of child clinging tightly to the dress of a mother]. We went to the farm during the harvest and we'd just done the work and we hear a gunshot. The children were not going to school any longer — they stayed at home. We had to run from the farm to the town. And when you come you will not see your children. And then you start to look for them and you go from one place to the other calling "Papayo, papayo!" — looking for them everywhere. The children run to the bush when they hear the gunshots. For you to see your children those days - hey! It was so difficult.

- Woman in her 30s, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Some practitioners employ a model of intervention based on the concepts of "risk" and "resilience" as a means of acknowledging both liability to harm and ability to overcome adversity. "Risk" refers to variables that increase an individual's susceptibility to neg-

ative developmental outcomes or becoming overwhelmed by adverse circumstances. A number of risks are found internally; they result from the unique combination of characteristics that make-up an individual, such as temperament or neurological structure. Other risks are external; that is they result from environmental factors, including poverty and war, which inhibit an individual's healthy development.

Not all children exposed to risks develop problems later. These children are often deemed "resilient". The term resilience refers to an individual's capacity to adapt and remain strong in the face of adversity. Resilience depends on both individual and group strengths, and is highly influenced by supportive elements in the wider environment. These positive reinforcements in children's lives are often described as "protective factors" or "protective processes". While it is understood that risk and resilience are not constructed the same way in all societies, it is generally accepted that the interaction of risk and protective factors plays an important role in the development of all children.

Several processes or mechanisms at the individual, family and wider environmental levels have a significant influence on risk and resilience in children. For example, a healthy, strong child is likely to be more resilient emotionally and psychologically than one that is physically weak or sick. Gender, age, temperament, sense of humor, memory, reasoning, perceptual competencies and sense of purpose, have all been found to have a significant impact on resilience. Children who have experienced approval, acceptance and opportunities for mastery are far more likely to be resilient than those who have been subjected to humiliation, rejection, or failure. These protective factors shape to a large extent the strategies that children use to manage stressful situations and to defend themselves against painful experiences or low self-esteem.

*Not all children
exposed to risks
develop problems
later.*

Children...are part of a collective culture that is informed by the public concerns of adults, as much as by peer pressure and by private preoccupations.



Variations in patterns of resilience and coping are also a function of cultural beliefs about childhood and child development. We have seen that particular societies have their own ideas about the capacities and vulnerabilities of children, the ways in which they learn and develop, and those things that are good and bad for them. These ideas affect approaches to child socialization, learning, discipline and protection, and hence to a significant degree, circumscribe children's adaptation, resilience and coping. Hence, in areas where children undertake paid work, especially where they are self-employed, it is to be expected that they will develop enhanced competencies in financial management, communication, negotiation and so on.

In some communities, child protection strategies involve presenting children with practical challenges so that they can learn how to manage adversity. Inuit children, for example, learn about the dangerous environment in which they live through exposure to real situations and settings that entail moderate risk. In this way, they learn how to navigate hazardous rivers and gauge what to expect from the weather or if it is safe to traverse ice flows or snow covered slopes. Similarly, boys in pastoral societies are commonly required to prove their ability to become adults by tending herds of cattle in the bush. In this role, they may spend months alone, surviving through hunting and gathering. Elsewhere, children (especially girls) are confined for much of the time to their homes for their own protection. While in this kind of setting they may play an important role in household maintenance they are unlikely to develop many of the skills necessary for paid employment or the assumption of productive responsibilities outside the home.

3.1.4 The Place of Poverty in Children's Worlds

Poverty, however desperate, is but one way of thinking about the life of an impoverished child. While it may have considerable influence over the condition of their health, edu-

cation and material well-being, this does not mean that it is omnipresent in children's lives. In fact, it is difficult to judge how important poverty really is to children. Would the children interviewed by the CCF research team have accorded the subject such significance if they were not being asked to as part of a study? Childhood is a period of intense and varied emotions, interests and experiences, only some of which would be directly connected to poverty. For example, the biggest complaint among children in one Bolivian village was not a lack of money, clothes or food, but that their lives are 'aburrido' (boring). By the same token, puberty can be a particularly difficult phase for children and the exploration of their sexuality can become a major preoccupation at this time regardless of their material well-being. This is also true of other immediate experiences such as school examinations and domestic violence.

While we know children tend to worry most about issues (such as friendships) that are intensely personal, this does not exclude them from taking an interest in, or at least having an awareness of, the broader political or social picture in their country. Children, like adults, are part of a collective culture that is informed by the public concerns of adults, as much as by peer pressure and by private preoccupations. In addition to frustration about their dull existence, many of the children in rural Oruro, Bolivia, also expressed concern about environmental pollution — not with regard to themselves, but as a political issue in general. Similarly, children working as shoe-shiners in Oruro were highly knowledgeable about issues connected with government policy, such as the selling of gas reserves to foreign companies, a move they viewed as deeply anti-patriotic. They were also very aware of how the current political climate affected their rights both now and in the future with regards to housing and employment.

Child Shoe-Shiners in Oruro, Discussing Bolivian Politics

A: This government that we have here,

for me is a good President. Because before when there was president Hugo Banzer Suarez, he complicated things more, that's why there's a crisis now. There wouldn't have been one otherwise...

A: El Goni [the Bolivian president] is a venda patria [nation seller]. He sells the things of Bolivia, the oil deposits, this president is very bad.

A: Evo Morales has made blockades to protest...He is a campesino (peasant), he was going to be president. Evo Morales thinks for his country, while Goni thinks only about making money and making money only. He doesn't care about our mineral wealth, while Evo Morales thinks it should stay in Bolivia and wants to rescue what we have passed to Brazil and Chile.

Q: What would a good president have to do for the poor children in Oruro?

A: Build houses... There are people, who live renting and they don't have enough money. And give them clothes... because when Goni entered office he said 'were going to pay you the bonus bill 1800 to the renters', and now he doesn't want to pay...

- All shoe-shiners interviewed were boys aged 12-15.

The way in which poverty studies focus primarily on the negative aspects of peoples lives can often be misleading. The tendency is to present the lives of poor populations as far more dominated by poverty than they may actually be. This is particularly true for children, who are often depicted as effectively paralyzed by the weight of their impoverishment, be it material, spiritual or physical. This image is not borne out by the data from this study, in which children spoke of the numerous pleasurable activities that they are able to enjoy in spite of their difficult circumstances. For example, children from various towns and villages across Kenya mentioned playing football, volleyball, pool,

jump-rope (skipping), darts, swimming, going to church, going to the cinema (video shows), going to village dances and making friends as just some of the things they like doing, even if the equipment they use is of poor quality.

The point here is that children usually have a much larger life outside of their poverty, which must be recognized in order to properly contextualize institutional responses. Poverty does not stop a child hoping: for many children were quick to point out that they want to be pilots, teachers, doctors, soldiers — even presidents — despite the limitations of their situation. Nor does poverty prevent them from enjoying certain other aspects of their lives; risk and resilience can coexist, and children can cope with huge adversity over the long-term while at the same time being able to find pleasure in some activities on a day-to-day basis. This explains the apparently contradictory comment of children in a village in Madhya Pradesh, India: "we are poor, but life in the village is good because we are friends". Therefore, caution is needed to avoid over-interpreting the importance poverty may play in a child's life, lest we end up with a partial image of a stereotypical 'victim' rather than an understanding of the child as a whole and rounded person.

...children usually have a much larger life outside of their poverty, which must be recognized in order to properly contextualize institutional responses.



SECTION TWO: CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF POVERTY

3.2.1 Adult vs. Child Perspectives on Poverty

A common theme emerging from discussions with adults in all of the research sites was the assumption that children do not understand or sense poverty as deeply as adults do.

Children are not really aware of poverty, mainly because they do not have information access to other dimensions of the world. They accept up to a certain age that the way their parents live is the way they would also live.

- CCF staff member, Honduras.

Children do very little to alleviate poverty. I don't think they have proper knowledge or awareness of it.

- CCF staff member, Sri Lanka.

In a similar vein, adults in India seemed to assume that children only become conscious of caste distinctions at about age 10 to 11. Yet, from research in several parts of the world we know that children are already aware of social markers by about age 3 to 5.⁴⁴ Likewise, the data from the CCF study suggests that children are conscious of caste well before age 10, even if they cannot articulate their views on the subject well and struggle to understand the rationale behind it. In fact, adults make a great deal of effort to instill a sense of caste awareness in even quite young children.

[Children] are always told by the elders that 'you belong to a lower caste', 'you come from a poor family', and that makes them to feel inferior to other children.

- Female CCF staff member, Madhya Pradesh, India.

*...in many contexts
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Unsurprisingly then, children in a rural school in this area of India were acutely aware not only of social differentiation but also of its discordant nature.

Why is this world divided? We say that this world is our family. In serving nation, there is indulgence in fighting and war. That is why we don't like this.

- 13 year old boy, rural village in Madhya Pradesh, India.

It turns out that in many contexts adult ideas about children's competencies bear little relation to children's actual abilities, the assumption being in most cases that children are less able and aware than they are in reality. This consistent underestimation of children is reflected in parenting styles that focus on discipline and constraint as opposed to encouragement and confidence

building. In Sierra Leone, as in many other places, children are not normally allowed to participate in decision-making in the home until they are married. Adults may also keep important information concerning family life a secret from children, whether on the grounds of their own protection, because they are not trusted, or because they are not considered able to affect the situation.

You can observe this even when you try to help your father. Maybe you can see that your father is sad or troubled and you may come and ask him, "Daddy, what is the problem? Why are you sad?" He will not tell you anything because he considers you too young.

- Male CCF staff member, Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Of course, it is very difficult to generalize about the ways in which adults and children interact concerning poverty.

Adult vs. Children's Perceptions of Poverty in Southern Kenya⁴⁵

Adults tended to speak of poverty in very general terms (i.e. in discussing issues that faced the community as a whole), while children more often related it to problems in their particular family or household, or to items of specific relevance to them. For example, one of the most important issues to Maasai children was their unhappiness at having to walk a 6-hour round trip to and from school in very uncomfortable 'fire-stones' — sandals so-called because they are made using old rubber tires from the brand 'Firestone'.

Similarly, adults were usually able to supply a longer-term perspective on poverty, whether this was their historical experience of it over a number of years, or their predictions as to how it would affect them in the future. Children were in contrast focused much more on the ways it affected them on an immediate or daily basis. Thus, while Maasai adults discussed the future problems arising from drought, their children spoke of the fights that ensued over scarce

⁴⁴Schweder and Much 1991.

⁴⁵Collected from various FGD with Maasai adults and children in Mbirikani, Kenya.

food and utensils at meal times: “We fight because...maybe there is one spoon in the house and one wants to use it and the other wants to use it” (10-year-old girl in Manyatta).

Finally, while adults tended to conceptualize poverty in terms of lacking particular material possessions (normally essential items such as accommodation, food, and the like), children more often discussed the ways in which poverty dynamically affected their freedoms/abilities (for example, the constraints it placed on school attendance, being forced to work, and so on). Poverty severely constrains household choices and in some situations children may have to do the work of the opposite sex (as when boys are made to clean the house). Maasai children stressed that this is very embarrassing for them. As one girl lamented, “it is shaming for a girl to be seen carrying a stick following the animals” (girl in year 8). Both sexes were equally vocal in their disappointment at not being able to go to school, or being sent home from school because their parents cannot afford tuition fees.

Similar patterns emerged in Belarus. Here, adults pointed to accommodation and food as arbiters of well-being and poverty, while children focused on items such as toys or the ability to take part in social activities such as going to the disco. It was apparent that matters which adults might regard as trivial may be very significant to children:

Not being able to go to the disco is a problem. Of course, maybe it is not such an important problem but it is very important for young people. Not for their parents but for young people it is important to do such things. For young children below age of 10 the most important thing is to have food, some toys. The most important thing is to have friends, communication. For children it is very important to have things like ice cream or a nice toy. For them this is important. For teenagers it is important to have nice clothes and to go to discos. It's very

important for children and young people to dress the same way as everybody else. It's shameful if you don't have it.
- 17 year-old girl, Minsk, Belarus.

As noted, children in middle childhood tend to attach a great deal of significance to friendships with peers and hence regard social approval and acceptance as an important factor in their well-being. It is not therefore surprising that for children of this age, the experience of poverty is very much mediated by its effects on their social world, their ability to go to the disco and the like. In other words, children measure the effects of poverty primarily in terms of the constraints it puts on their social networks and approval of peers. The fact that children are so sensitive to the pressures and opinions of their peers helps to explain why they experience the humiliation of poverty far more deeply than adults generally assume.

Meanwhile, in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the researchers were struck by the level of detail used by children in discussing poverty and by the fact that they quite often showed far more sensitivity than adults to the various degrees and gradations of impoverishment. They suggested, for example, that children who live next to the rubbish dump and whose parents are recyclers are the poorest, while marginally better off than these are shoeshine boys who work on the streets in the city center. Very few of the children interviewed referred to themselves as poor, however, and then only in a very broad and general sense, indicating that pride is an important defense against anguish in this context.

SECTION THREE: CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF POVERTY

The experience of poverty — be it sudden, short-term, or chronic — can be very distressing for both children and adults alike. Because in many contexts poverty is perceived as shameful, it can be a serious social impediment for children. Indeed, as indicated, the study found that how poverty con-



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strains your relationships with others and how it influences their treatment of you can be more important to children than having to go without food or other goods. Thus, in rural Bolivia, children know full well that chronic shortages of water have a significant effect on livelihoods and on the survival and health of both humans and livestock. Yet, above all, they highlighted the shame of being unable to wash and therefore being labeled dirty and poor. Children recognize that frequently they are themselves the main instigators of abuses directed at others due to their poverty. In fact one of the worst consequences of being thought of as 'poor' is the associated social exclusion and susceptibility to teasing, bullying and denigration by peers.

In Sierra Leone, children did not seem to be significantly troubled by the stigma of poverty, although it was still indirectly an issue in school teasing. This is most likely due to the fact that the war has rendered practically all populations equally poor and absolute shortage is a grave problem everywhere. Hence it would appear that, except in situations of acute and generalized scarcity, relative poverty has a more significant impact on children's well-being than absolute poverty (that is for children beyond early childhood at least).

3.3.1 The Gendered Experience of Poverty

Frequently, gender is the most significant factor of differentiation among children, even though gender distinctions often become more marked with age. For example, among the Maasai in Kenya, the gendered division of labor starts to obtain social significance around the age of 5, when boys learn from their fathers to distance themselves from female tasks and from their mothers. A boy will be 'discouraged from crying', (considered as cowardly) and from lighting the fire or fetching water, both of which are seen as girls' jobs. Instead, he will be trained how to carry a spear and hunting stick, and once these items become his he should never be seen without them, for 'that

makes you a lad'. Similarly, in Sierra Leone, boys are not expected to pound rice or fetch water, and a 'real' man will not go and console a crying child himself — even when the mother is busy working — because "We have a saying that children are mainly for women. When they are grown up they will do more for their mothers than for their fathers" (adolescent girl, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone).

Although gender differentiation is not the same for children as it is for adults, there are important parallels. Within childhood, gender is often the single most important determinant of codes of behavior and dress, education, leisure and work opportunities, susceptibility to poverty and practically all aspects of life. Distinctions in the treatment of boys and girls are often justified by ideas about biological or psychological difference. In Bhutan, girls are perceived as weaker and softer than boys, having before them a life of struggle.⁴⁶ Parents prefer their daughters to stay with them because they show greater tenderness and are softer at heart. Girls, it is believed, must help with the care of younger siblings, housework and looking after the elderly and should not be burdened by school attendance.

During times of trouble, gender distinctions frequently grow, sometimes with very serious consequences for children who are the least valued. A number of interviewees with males of all ages in post-conflict Sierra Leone emphasized the struggles confronted by boys.

Q: Who suffers more — the boys or the girls?

A: The boys. The girls can get money and sell and keep money for themselves. Their parents can give them off for marriage and their husbands can help them. They are better off because there is a man behind them.

- 15 year-old boy, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

A: The boys have to labor, sell kerosene, pay school fees.

⁴⁶Wikan, 1989, quoted in Van Beers, 1994.

- 17 year-old boy, Makeni, Sierra Leone.
- A: Parents pay more attention to the girls. To prevent the girls from going to the streets. They say the boys are men - they will survive.
- 16 year-old boy, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

A: Men have more problems. He carries all the woman's problems and her family's. If they die you must take up the responsibility to bury them. If the woman falls sick he must take care of her. The man must feed her - whether she is sick or not.

- Elderly man, village near Makeni, Sierra Leone.

Poverty can make the transition from boyhood to manhood very difficult and stressful, even before taking into account physical afflictions such as malnutrition. For example, adolescent boys in Kenya expressed great concern at how lack of funds is preventing them from moving out of their parent's home and into their own hut, this being a right of passage that is extremely important to their acceptance as men within the community.⁴⁷ Likewise, in Sierra Leone young men are expected to build a hut, rather than inherit their father's, as the first step in starting a new family and this custom has also been undermined in recent decades by the poverty that has spread with the conflict.

That said, in the vast majority of countries — including all five research sites — poverty bears down far more powerfully on girls than on boys. This was clear from interviews with both sexes and across many age groups, with the main indicators being that girls work harder and for longer hours than boys, are more likely to be out of school and less likely to enjoy opportunities to play. Girls from Belarus and Bolivia emphasized how adults resist giving them equality with boys:

The mentality is that boys can do things: have sex, smoke, drink - but girls can't. This mentality gives the impression that when girls do this they have more problems. People are shocked when they

hear that girls do it - but the girls don't necessarily have more problems — they are just doing what the boys are doing. Boys have always been allowed to do more than girls.

- Female Shelter staff member, Smorgon, Belarus.

For example, my brother goes to football training. And I play volleyball but often they [parents] won't let me go. They say 'oh, it's going to rain'. And my brother, even if it's raining, he goes.

- 13 year-old girl, La Paz, Bolivia.

Girls in La Paz (Bolivia) were keen to point out that they had notably less recreational or free time than their male counterparts. Some of them spoke excitedly of how an innovative project in La Paz had helped them train in gender consciousness and to fight for their rights:

I live next to my niece, and I see that her brothers do not do anything, anything at all. They never have done... and we have complained, because we had to wash their plates. And still they didn't do anything. So we have started to tell them if they don't [wash their plates] we won't either! And it has started to change, and we ask, demand, our rights, because in our houses our brothers don't do anything.

- 14 year-old girl, La Paz, Bolivia.

The impact of gendered discrimination may then be doubled if combined with differential treatment according to age. In many societies the oldest child in a family is especially privileged, male primogeniture often being recognized as the norm, allowing the eldest son as the only legitimate heir:

The arrival of the first-born is celebrated in many communities as the validation of marriage and the inauguration of a new set of family relationships: mother, father, son, daughter. The first child is often given a special title ...perhaps indicative of special family rights and responsibilities.⁴⁸



The impact of gendered discrimination may then be doubled if combined with differential treatment according to age.

⁴⁷Focus group discussion with adolescent boys, Wamunyu, Kenya, Nov 2002.

⁴⁸Robertson, 1991, p. 21



The exact reverse may also apply, however, in that as the number of children in a family grows, the eldest child (or elder children) is expected to make major sacrifices to help the younger ones. The life cycle of the household has a major impact on the amount of housework the eldest daughter does for example.

Undoubtedly, the impacts of gender prejudice and discrimination on girls throughout the globe are massive. In some areas and cultures, the differential valuing of boys and girls is powerful enough to influence whether or not the child is even born. A worldview in which girls are perceived as an economic burden as opposed to an asset has led to increasing numbers of parents either aborting their daughters before birth, or abandoning them later.

Abortions are quite common... Publicity is cheap, abortions for 55 rs [rupees], in the newspapers... only phone number will be given, but it has become easier for women, unwed mothers, to get rid of them, female children. And if you visit the orphanages, its mostly girl children who are abandoned. Some parents due to poverty, they have to abandon the child. But mainly because of the mentality that the girl is unwanted.

- Female CCF staff member, Bangalore, India.

In India, the widespread practice of abortion of female fetuses following a sex determination test is linked to inflated dowries and to the fact that at marriage a girl leaves her home to contribute economically to her husband's family, which means no financial return to the investment in raising a daughter. Boys on the other hand, are welcomed as future income-earners, the expectation being that sons will support their parents as they grow old.

Gender discrimination often results in girls being cast in a subservient role and subjected to a range of restrictions to their personal autonomy, educational opportunities,

income and mobility. In many countries, girls start work before boys. In some places girls are expected to sacrifice their education so that they may work to pay for a male sibling to attend school.

We work so that the boys can go to school.

- Adolescent girl, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

My sister got married and I had to take over her household work, so I had to leave school. My father told me, 'Now that your sister is married, how can you go to school? Graze the cattle during daytime and at night you can study at home.

- Adolescent girl, Oruro, Bolivia.

Gender may even influence the age at which childhood, girls normally passing into adulthood before boys. In Nepal, for example, a girl takes on the work roles of an adult woman at age 12, while boys do not pass this threshold until they reach 14.⁴⁹ As an alternative to work, girls may be married off early so as to cement alliances with other families and/or communities and thereby increasing the access of the household to potentially valuable networks and resources.

These discriminatory ideas and practices are often judged very harshly by aid and human rights agencies. While such reactions are understandable, assuming a judgmental attitude is unlikely to help improve the lot of girls, especially in situations where families do not feel they have any alternative. Promotion of gendered equity in access to resources is clearly an important ingredient of anti-poverty policy for children, but must form part of the broader promotion of better livelihood security for all poor people. Moreover, channeling the vast majority of attention and resources solely to girls and women can have detrimental effects on their well-being. One of the perverse effects may be to increase the burden of women's responsibilities in providing for their children and lead men to further relax their obliga-

Promotion of gendered equity in access to resources is clearly an important ingredient of anti-poverty policy for children...

⁴⁹Johnson, Hill and Ivan Smith, 1995.

tions towards family maintenance (Mayoux and Johnson, 1997). In many cases, programs targeting women misfire because they fail to acknowledge how household decision-making operates. Women in Sri Lanka, for example, are accepting loans for micro enterprise development that are then given to and used by their husbands, sometimes to buy alcohol. Ultimately, the women then find themselves repaying debts incurred by the men.⁵⁰

Problems also arise through the reification of the 'girl child', as with events such as the 'Year of the Girl Child' initiative mounted by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the UNICEF India office. The majority of writing and information surrounding this movement concerned the low status of the girl, her limited opportunities for education and the gender bias in the home.⁵¹ Despite its good intentions, this angered many activists, who expressed opposition to the 'feminist method of carving the female persons' group out of the human race and examining it in isolation, on the presumption that females are always wronged'.⁵² Indeed, the tendency to present the girl child as essentially more vulnerable than boys in general, regardless of wealth or ethnicity, 'masquerades as a concern for their vulnerability',⁵³ while actually serving to reinforce the traditional ideals of male control and supremacy over women's sexuality and fertility. Exactly how to incorporate gender equity within child poverty alleviation strategies thus needs careful consideration.

3.3.2 Neglect

The Importance of Family

The CCF study highlights how, in addition to their inner resources and competencies, children's interpersonal relationships can be essential factors mediating risk and resilience. Families and other important reference persons play a major role in helping children interpret, 'process' and adjust to, or overcome, difficult life experiences. Children will draw on different family members for different things at different times in their lives.

For example, in Belarus, it was found that for children between the ages of 10 and 14, grandparents (and grandmothers in particular) were their primary allies when they are in conflict with their parents in some way, and a very important source of support, including financial.⁵⁴ However, in the eyes of older teenagers grandparents were 'out of touch' and, while still considered approachable for financial assistance, were rarely looked to for advice or protection. As indicated, when children enter adolescence their reliance on family normally diminishes while their orientation towards peers grows. Teenagers in Kenya repeatedly mentioned friendships as being one of the most important things they valued in their lives, for: "People need to discover their own potentials. If they are in groups then they can discover it. But if no one shows them any other options they don't have any ideas. The peer pressure from the group keeps people on track."⁵⁵ Or, as one adolescent girl in Sierra Leone put it, "Some good friends can be better to you than your own brothers and sisters".⁵⁶

Whatever the case, people who act as mentors can have an enormous impact on children's coping, providing models of and reinforcement for problem solving, motivation and other skills. Feeling supported and secure and having guidance and reassurance during difficult times promotes self-esteem and helps children to build a sense of hope. When such mechanisms are lacking children become more vulnerable. The loss of a family member can frequently start a chain reaction that drastically affects children's lives in very practical ways. The death, disappearance or desertion of male breadwinners creates the need for women to find viable employment, often involving migration. The children left behind may be taken in by extended family where the likelihood of neglect increases, for extended families that have become dispersed and impoverished are seldom in a position to provide proper care for orphaned or separated children.

If the child continues to receive little support or encouragement, he or she may give up

...people who act as mentors can have an enormous impact on children's coping, providing models of and reinforcement for problem solving, motivation and other skills.

⁵⁰Boyden, Kaiser and Springett (2003).

⁵¹Ennew, 1996.

⁵²Barse, (1991) p99.

⁵³Ennew, (1996) p4.

⁵⁴Focus Group with children aged 10 — 14, Smorgon, Belarus, Dec 2002.

⁵⁵Interview with CCF Staff members, Nairobi, Kenya, Oct 2002.

⁵⁶Focus Group Discussion with adolescent girls (12-17), village near Kabala, Sierra Leone, Jan 2003.

Poverty can have a major detrimental impact on family life, with many adverse consequences for children.

hope altogether and attempt suicide. One youth group in Kenya was able to point to at least three children in their community who had taken their own lives, and suggested that the neglect of the extended family and wider community was in some way partially responsible:

There are some children here who killed themselves. Three in our slum area - all of them were orphans. This is the last option. It means that they have already tried everything - they tried here, they tried there and they failed. So they feel there is no other option but to kill themselves. They have no hope of life. They see that there is no future.

- Adolescent boy from Youth Group, Nairobi, Kenya.

Factors Contributing to Neglect

Poverty can have a major detrimental impact on family life, with many adverse consequences for children. Anger, exhaustion and frustration caused by unemployment or low incomes can result in domestic violence, substance abuse and abandonment of the family by one or both parents, this leading in turn to greater destitution. Belarus has the highest divorce rate of all the former Soviet States, and respondents suggested that this is a direct result of poverty:

People in our society are becoming more and more angry. Children are angry and dissatisfied with their life. Parents are angry with the school - in every interaction they are aggressive. Some parents don't seem to want their children. They feel their children are a bother. They only care about giving children food and clothing and that's all — they don't need to do anything else. They think that school has to educate the children. The high divorce rate is because of the low socio-economic situation — people start to quarrel when there is not enough money for clothing and so on.

- Male teacher, Smorgon, Belarus.

In the more extreme cases children are

delivered up to residential institutions by their parents. CCF staff expressed deep concern about this trend, as in institutions: "...they can't develop any skills or be exposed to real life... Even if a mother is bad she is still a mother. In the institutions they [children] have clothes and food but they don't receive care and guidance."

- Female teacher, Minsk, Belarus.

There are many other ways in which poverty exacerbates difficulties within the family. In situations where adults and children spend a lot of time in each other's company, for example working together on the family farm, adults have many opportunities to teach children about values and practices that are cherished by their community. But in the modern context household members are far more liable to be dispersed and separated from each other through migration, diversification of labor in different occupations and employment in specialized work sites like factories and mines. Many children and adults hold multiple jobs concurrently, many work overnight or in shifts that take them away from the home when the rest of the family is present and many work very long hours. All these factors together severely restrict the amount of time adult spend with their children, with the effect that in many parts of the world it is children (particularly girls) and not adults who are the prime caregivers of the very young. Consequently, adults can quickly lose touch with their children's needs and priorities and what little recreational time adults do manage to put aside for their families may be marred by misunderstandings and feelings of resentment.

Parent/Child Breakdown — Belarus Case Study⁵⁷

Adults felt that family life is changing significantly as they now have to take on several jobs at the same time to make ends meet. This leaves much too little time for parenting and supervision of children.

Parents are losing touch with what children are doing and thinking — when

⁵⁷Focus group discussion with parents, Minsk, Belarus, Dec 2002.

children get problems the parents don't know how to help them. Parents and children are becoming strangers to one another. That's why children look for help on the streets. And children question their parents so much. In first class they did a survey to see how much communication children have with their parents and they found that 25% of children don't tell parents what their problems are. Parents and children don't spend much spare time together anymore, like doing sports or going to the swimming pool. There is no time and money anymore. Holidays are no longer possible for families — during Soviet Union times this was possible but this is now impossible.

Many parents have to leave their children alone at home, even when they are only 6-years-old. They have to go to work and there is no one to look after them. This is very bad. One mother said she had to leave her 4-year-old without supervision for 2 hours every day when she was bringing up the child on her own.

Some parents bring their children up via the telephone: they phone them at home and tell them what to do because they are at work.... Some parents said they had no problems with children before but that these are social problems. Now you have to pay for everything. Children's whole focus is on money — not about learning about being good or about culture. Morals are important, loving your neighbor, culture, music, literature are important for rearing children but children don't care about that.

The struggle to meet the material needs of the household can frequently have the effect of dividing its members. When adults and children are unable to spend much time together, children may find themselves in conflict not only with parents but also with grandparents and other extended family members.

The adults don't have time anymore to talk to their children. The youths are expected to cope on their own without guidance - this is new and never used to happen before. The westernization of life is causing problems. Like dressing with youths copying the western styles. People are very conservative here, and the youth feel they are not listened to...

- Male CCF staff member, Rusinga, Kenya.

There is a lot of conflict with parents: the parents don't like youth organizations because they want the youth to stay under traditional culture. The parents don't understand the issues/ problems of the youth.

- 16 year-old boy, Nairobi, Kenya.

The young have changed because they can get money for themselves now so they feel they don't need the elderly anymore and they have no more regard for the old. The young feel they are educated, self-sufficient and they consider us who are old, uneducated, unable to produce anything — as nothing in society. They look down on us.

- Elderly woman, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Some elderly people attribute their poverty, in part at least, to the selfishness of younger generations, who, in their view, shirk their responsibilities. Elderly women complained of children not remembering them and failing to remit funds to support them. Sons were cited as being particularly guilty in this respect, but instances of daughters neglecting their family after marrying into another one were also mentioned. In general, it was felt that the current generation of children is becoming too self-centered:

You can be wealthy but your children are squandering your money. They are not wise and you haven't managed to show them how to live wisely. This can happen when you have spent money educating your children but then they become

Some elderly people attribute their poverty, in part at least, to the selfishness of younger generations...

employed and don't send any money back home. They don't replenish that money you spent - they become individualistic. So you remain a poor man and just go down. Our children have gone away and have forgotten about us. This is a big problem for us as we have spent our money on them but they do not remember us and don't come to see us.

- Elderly man, Wamunyu, Kenya.

Rather than moral welfare, children were concerned about adults being too strict, out of touch and interfering.



Insofar as household economic strategies result in children being left alone and without adult guidance for long periods of time, this can become very debilitating for children socially. As noted in Chapter 2, lack of parental support and guidance is linked in many peoples' minds with the idea that children are growing up without discipline and a moral frame of reference. However, in Belarus children's views on these matters are very different from adults. Rather than moral welfare, children were concerned about adults being too strict, out of touch and interfering.

There are significant generation differences. Parents were brought up with some rules and we were brought up with others. Like when you color your hair green and this is fashionable now but the parents can't understand it and they say "When we were young..."

- 16 year old boy, Minsk, Belarus.

Parents don't understand us. They want the best for us but they think that they know what that is. Like they will say "why are you hanging on the street? It is better to go to the theatre". But you feel like hanging with your friends.

- 15 year-old boy, Minsk, Belarus.

Conflict arises over things like getting a bad mark (your parents can shout at you) or over our bad habits, like drinking or smoking.

- 17 year old boy, Minsk, Belarus.

Parents forbid you to go out. If you come back really late, especially in winter

where it's dark early my mother will ask me where I will be and she will ask me for my telephone number so she can call.

- 17 year-old girl, Minsk Belarus.

Also sometimes parents don't talk to you — it's like emotional punishment. And it is the worst form of punishment. Your conscience presses on you and you feel bad. Because it is impossible not to talk at all.

- 16 year-old girl, Minsk, Belarus.

In Belarus, one of the most important arenas for children to mix with peers is the computer club. There are now around 200 of these computer clubs all over Minsk, although not all of them are legally registered, and most boys (but very few girls) between the ages of 10 and 18 spend a lot of time in these places. In the cities, not being able to participate in these clubs may reduce children's social interaction, and yet many parents are unwilling to let their children go there, on the grounds that other children there may be unruly. Similarly, teachers complained that there is very little adult supervision in the clubs, which stay open day and night and allow smoking, drinking and alleged drug dealing, as well as enabling children to access pornography on the Internet. Children, however, denied that these things take place at the clubs.

3.3.3 Living with an Alcoholic

Alcoholism, and to a lesser extent other forms of substance abuse, among adult caregivers is a major concern for children in many communities throughout the world and a high proportion of the children interviewed as part of the study live with, or associate closely with other children who live with, an alcoholic adult(s). Alcoholism has also been responsible for many cases of family separation across the research sites, particularly in Belarus and Kenya. Alcoholism can cause a great deal of suffering among children, and can significantly intensify the estrangement between parents and their children, as one 14 year-old girl from Minsk highlighted:

Q: If you have a parent who drinks alcohol, what can you do?

A: The child cannot do anything. They will be afraid of this parent. I know some children like that but they are so afraid of their fathers they won't ever say anything to him. My friend has parents that are divorced because the mother is drinking. But her father doesn't want her at his house - he leaves her with the drinking mother instead. When her mother drinks she goes to the other room and she cries. She is the only child. Sometimes when a parent drinks alcohol then a child also starts drinking.

- 14 year-old girl, Minsk, Belarus.

Similarly, a 15 year-old boy from Smorgon in Belarus said that in his experience children who are exposed to drunken abuse at home tend to become extremely introverted. He also observed that they generally make easy targets of bullying or teasing at school because they lack self-confidence.

There has been a marked increase in alcoholism in Belarus in recent decades. Nor is the problem confined to male adults, since in many communities women also drink to excess. Importantly, children noted that an alcoholic mother can be even more oppressive to children than an alcoholic father. This is because women are usually far more involved in childcare than men and hence more liable to neglect or harm their children when drunk:

She can't control herself - she is supposed to bring up her children and she can't do it. And children see their mother drink like that and they also start to drink.

- 17 year-old girl, Minsk, Belarus.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when asked what is the one thing they would change about their situation if they could, many children in Belarus, Kenya and India responded by saying: 'stop my parents drinking'. Teachers from Minsk indicated that on several occasions they had had to approach

the council to intervene in cases where alcoholic parents were seriously neglecting their children. At the same time, a significant proportion of children also drink alcohol regularly. School pupils were able to recollect cases of children who had been hospitalized with alcohol poisoning.

3.3.4 Social Exclusion

It has been argued that the poorest people and the poorest countries in the world tend also to experience the effects of entrenched social divisions and hierarchies, and chronic discrimination. In this respect, physical appearance, language, ethnicity, religion, level of education and other such markers interact with and exacerbate poverty, resulting in severe social exclusion. Consciousness of being excluded and willingness to discuss it are two very different things, but despite the sensitivity of the subject, many children came forward to explain how they feel about being poor. The study found that children are highly sensitive to and tormented by poverty. Children's focus groups in Belarus were particularly articulate on the subject. Children are acutely aware of the divisive nature of poverty and feel its effects not merely (or so much) in terms of lack of basic goods and services as in the associated humiliation. At the same time, while they may be conscious of the larger macro level causes and consequences of poverty (especially in Bolivia, where children are highly politicized and articulate), they commonly express greater concern about its more immediate effects on friendships, schooling, family relationships and the like.

Children are highly sensitive to and tormented by poverty.

Teasing, Bullying and Exclusion in Belarus

Poverty means unequal relationships with others. If you are poor you suffer from stigma. Others look at you in a certain way like you're worthless. Feeling unimportant: "No one will listen to me, no one cares for me". "You don't count". "I'm poor, I don't count, I'm a piece of dirt."

- 17 year-old girl, Minsk, Belarus.

When you are answering in class, you



can feel your classmates who are more rich than you looking at you. You feel uncomfortable and you don't want to answer much in class and you also don't want to talk to such people. And even if you try to talk to them they wouldn't want to talk to you. They will tell you that "you don't belong to our group."

- 15 year-old boy, Minsk, Belarus.

Some kids are very poor and some kids are very cruel. One boy in class was very poor and he behaved strangely, he was running around the stairwell and talked to himself and all the children made fun of him. He dressed really badly and they teased him about this. He left the school and he's home-schooling now. Children are cruel and make fun of each other until they are about 12 or 13 but after that they stop.

- 14 year-old boy, Minsk, Belarus.

[The rich children] give you a bad nickname. They don't respect you. They can spread rumors about you that are untrue. Even if the person is poor she can still be a good person. But some people would say that she has some kind of disease and you mustn't talk to her because otherwise you will get the disease.

- 17 year old girl, Minsk, Belarus.

Poor children are shy — they are not confident and it is difficult for them to communicate with others. It's not that they don't want to but they don't know how to do it. Rich children don't want to talk to them. They feel pressure from other children. Even parents of rich children don't like their children to be friends with poor children. So poor children have problems making friends.

- 18 year-old girl, Minsk, Belarus.

The physical attributes of children—skin color, height, weight and the like—can be important markers of difference, leading to branding and social ostracism. Many impoverished children suffer from malnutrition, stunted growth and similar physical effects caused by an inadequate diet and poor health.

Often, such children are unable to actively participate in class on an equal footing with others, are ridiculed or simply ignored, as another example from Belarus shows:

Size is a problem: people ignore kids that are smaller although they are the same age as the other children in the class. Adults only pay attention to taller children — the little ones get ignored and told to shut up. This is a real problem and annoys them greatly. Kids are very sensitive about that and they think this is very unfair. All children should be treated the same.

- 15 year-old boy, Minsk, Belarus.

Two of the boys look 'different' from the rest: one is much smaller than the others and has deep rings under his eyes, is pale and very thin. The other is the 14 year old whose hair stands off in all directions and whole clothes look old and threadbare. [During conversation it becomes clear that all of the children are either from very poor families or from 'unfavorable families' — the term used in translation from Russian].

- Observation of male schoolteacher, Minsk, Belarus.

This points to the worst kind of exclusion — when children feel as if they do not even exist. Their voices are ignored, their opinions are left unheard and their self-confidence dramatically declines as a result. Eventually, the only people that are willing to acknowledge or interact with them are those who suffer under the same effect. This was particularly apparent in Kenya, see below.

Invisibility and Exclusion in Kenya

Q: How do you feel when you are one of the poor ones?

A: I feel bad. I feel like the odd one out...You lack self-esteem. You feel like shouldn't talk wherever you are, like you shouldn't be expressing ideas. You feel lonely. You feel ashamed. Like if you have only two underpants and you have to

wear one and wash the other and hang it up to dry everyone will always see that you have only two — the red one and the green one — and you are alternating between them.

- 16 year-old girl, Rusinga, Kenya.

Q: What are poor people most ashamed about?

A: The biggest shame to them is if they feel they are not worthy to mix with others... It can even affect your mental state: they never feel worthy and they see their friends doing things but they themselves have all of these problems — they stay as if they are ghosts.

- Female Project Family Educator, Wamunyu, Kenya.

A: If you are poor you will just interact with the poor, the same with the middle class and the well-to-do. You just interact with those of your class. For you to come up from this class is difficult: your children will not go to school because there is not enough money, the food is poor, the fees are not paid regularly and you fall behind at school. Each one stays in their class and just stays interacting with their own. I wish there was a way of breaking this.

- Male CCF parent group member, Rusinga, Kenya.

There are wise people who are poor. But what happens in the community is this: say there is a funeral... if you are very poor that group knows that... you are going to contribute nothing [in terms of money or goods]. So even if you put up your hand and you want to speak you will be told to put it down... For the very poor you will not even be given the time to stand up to and explain your idea because you will be told that there is nothing you can say that is of importance. Okay, you can give us an idea but you're wasting their time. They want only to hear those people in the community who can help them so they should be

given chance and attention.

- Male CCF parent group member, Rusinga, Kenya.

In India, caste is clearly one of the most important markers of distinction. As indicated, some adults were of the opinion that children are not very aware of caste and suggested that it is a subject of far greater importance to adults, this being the only order the elders relate to and understand.

This feeling is going on for ages, this feeling of differentiating based on the caste system, has been from the time immemorial, and we have only been working with the groups for the past 5 or 6 years, so you cannot, within such a short time, change the mentality of the people.

- CCF staff member, Bangalore, India.

Children, on the other hand, claimed that they had been openly taught the limitations of their social heritage from a very young age, and many had gained firsthand experience of such boundaries during ceremonies such as weddings, where people of different castes are required to eat in descending order.

Children, on the other hand, claimed that they had been openly taught the limitations of their social heritage from a very young age.

3.3.5 The Symbolism of Poverty

Symbolic markers of wealth are very important in the impromptu and informal assessments people make of the economic status of others. In the study children proved to be highly attuned not just to social distinctions and related stigmas but also to the symbolism of poverty. Children appear especially sensitive to the pressures of conforming with peers, as this can mean the difference between popularity and exclusion, and physical appearance is an extremely potent symbol in this regard. Clothing, footwear and cosmetics are generally the most important and immediate indicators of difference among children and lack of appropriate apparel for social events, school and so on, can be a major source of distress in the young. For example, it is very common that children who cannot afford a uniform or shoes are prevented from attending school,

*Poor quality garments
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not merely because of official restrictions, but also because they are subjected to derision by other pupils.

Poor quality garments or clothing that children judge unfashionable can even have detrimental health consequences for the young. In Belarus, children are given money to purchase food at school but girls often save it to buy cosmetics and make-up instead. A significant number of these girls faint at school because they have not eaten all day. Meanwhile, girls who are unable to afford the latest fashions may develop eating disorders.

She goes on a hunger strike to punish the parents. Girls are also now doing this if they don't like their appearance. They do bulimia and anorexia. This is a very new thing in Smorgon — it only started appearing in the last year or so. All of them are girls... Girls also smoke to curb their appetite.⁵⁸

Similarly, as a CCF staff person in Madhya Pradesh, India, noted:

Children are not washing their clothes every day. One article is worn for about 15 days and only then it is washed. The better clothes are worn only when they are going to a wedding ceremony or something like that. This causes hygiene problems, skin diseases.

- Female CCF staff member, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Not having proper clothing was an issue that children raised in all the case-study countries as being a key indication of poverty.

How do children recognize other children who are poor? Mainly by the way in which they are dressed. Also their general appearance - they are unkempt.

- 15 year-old boy, Smorgon, Belarus.

People always tease you about the clothes you wear. For example me, they say that I am poor and that therefore I'm

bad. Because of my clothing they always call me a poor person.

- 16 year-old boy, Minsk, Belarus.

Children want to be the same as all the others and they can't be because they don't have the same clothes. Some people think they are better than others because they are richer. They think things like "Look at yourself. You are ugly". "You look bad. Where did you find these clothes from?" "Looks like it's out of the rubbish bin". "You look like a person from the street". Just looking you up and down is enough to make you feel bad.

- 17 year-old girl, Minsk, Belarus.

The children who go to schools obviously are in good clothes. My brother goes to the MN school. So he will definitely appear as more clean and with good clothes than me — look at me, I am wearing these clothes because I have come out with the cows and the goats...When I wear good clothes, then I feel all energetic and I feel good. But when I am not wearing good clothes I feel all tired and I start smelling...

- 12 year-old boy, Bangalore, India.

Q: what makes you happy?

A: When I've been bought new clothes.

A: I'm happy when I am bought shoes. [boy]

A: I'm happy when I get a new dress.

A: I'm happy when I have been bought a new uniform.

- 6-10 year-old boys, Wamunyu, Kenya.

This sensitivity to clothing is also echoed in the older generations, as one elderly woman from Wamunyu in Kenya related:

Clothing tells you how poor someone is. If someone has no dress of her own and she borrowed one to go to church we will know this. Her neighbors will know "Oh, she borrowed this dress. It is not hers". So we know who among us are the poor ones. Usually we know which dresses the other women have.

- Elderly woman, Wamunyu, Kenya.

⁵⁸Interview with shelter staff, Smorgon, Belarus, Dec 2002.

Despite these testimonies, this fixation with appearance should not be seen as evidence that children are solely concerned with outward images — rather that it is simply the most direct and accessible manner for comparing themselves with others. As one boy from Belarus put it,

We have a saying here: “People meet new people according to their appearance and they say goodbye according to their qualities”. It is important to know about the personality and not about the clothing. Their spiritual qualities are more important than their appearance.
- 12 year-old boy, Smorgon, Belarus.

At least clothing and footwear can be changed and are therefore comparatively versatile as status determinants as compared to physical attributes like height and skin color. Such versatility can be used with positive effect to overcome poverty and exclusion. In some cases, clothing is even used as an instrument for changing social identity. Thus, many rural to urban migrants in Latin America dress in Mestizo clothing on arrival in the city as a means of disassociating themselves with their peasant heritage and assuming the status of a modern urban dweller. This aids both social assimilation and employment. Likewise, in villages in Madhya Pradesh, India, girls start wearing women’s clothes at about age ten “...because they look big, and people will employ them for work. Otherwise, if they wear shorts, then they will say that she is small so won’t be able to work” (elderly man, Madhya Pradesh, India). This shows that such symbols are highly subjective and do not necessarily correlate precisely with actual status.

CHAPTER 4 WHO ARE THE POOR?

SECTION ONE: CONCEPTUALIZING ‘VULNERABILITY’

4.1.1 Categories of Vulnerability

Aid agencies are accustomed to responding

to poverty in terms of support to the poorest of the poor, or the most vulnerable and powerless social groups. This is because it enables them to focus scarce resources on priority needs while also meeting the imperatives of social equity and justice. For example, since gender discrimination is a major cause and feature of poverty globally to promote gender equality and secure a broader impact for poverty measures on the family as a whole, policies and programs aimed at the most vulnerable or poorest sectors of the population normally incorporate gender as a central component. Thus, many agencies select women, particularly female heads of household and/or widows, to be their prime beneficiaries. Such targeted policies can be very effective, and have made a significant difference to the livelihoods and well-being of poor children, their families and communities, in many parts of the world.

Nevertheless, approaching poverty through specific categories of vulnerability is fraught with difficulties of many kinds. For instance, because they are isolated from decision-making, seldom have control over resources and often lack the sense of self-efficacy needed to assert themselves, vulnerable groups are commonly precisely those that are the hardest to identify and access. Therefore, in practice, many aid organizations ultimately do not work with the poorest sections of the population. In fact, this is a common feature of social and economic provision everywhere, in that services and resources tend to benefit those who already have better resources and social access. On the other hand, measures that do reach the poorest may not have the intended effect. Thus, respondents in Nairobi claimed that street children are receiving a disproportionately large amount of assistance and attention, with little actual impact. They were also of the opinion that, in the Kenyan context at least, working through notions of vulnerability will not address the causes of poverty and related adversities.

There are so many NGOs working with the street children - but no one is work-



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many kinds.*

ing in the community to try and prevent the children from going out into the street. We are trying to prevent the children from becoming street children. But if you work with them at the end point you can't do much because new lots come and more come and more come. Most of the poorest of the poor are just normal people — not groups such as orphans or HIV.

- Male CCF staff member, Nairobi, Kenya.

Aside from this, there is the problem that concepts like 'vulnerable group' can by implication deny and denigrate the coping efforts and individual agency of those so defined. It should be stressed that vulnerability does not preclude ability. Indeed, the poorest sectors of the populations are often the most creative and active — it is just that the odds are stacked against them. Further, the question of which groups constitute the poorest is often very variable according to context, and may change radically over the individual, family, or community life cycle. War is a particularly dynamic setting and commonly results in widespread destitution, social disruption and transformation, such that those who were once weak and vulnerable may become the wealthiest and most powerful, and visa versa. Social and political transitions may have a similar effect, for example in the former Soviet Union where radical changes in the social order have resulted in 'new' vulnerable groups such as skilled and educated yet unemployed workers.

4.1.2 Contextual Understandings

Another challenge associated with defining vulnerability is that concepts cherished by the aid community and other outsiders are frequently based on universalized images that are not always shared by local populations. People everywhere employ their own criteria and prejudices in deciding who the 'poorest of the poor' are. A good example of the stark contrast in perceptions that can arise comes from Belarus. The main message of the World Bank's 1996 report was

that the country's priority need is economic growth.⁵⁹ It was further stated that the poorest people in the country are the pensioners, followed by families with more than two children, single parent families and rural dwellers. A focus group discussion on the subject of vulnerability with CCF teachers, social pedagogues and trainers shared the World Bank's view. It was asserted that "elderly people who live alone" is one of the groups most in need, the rationale being that "They get a small pension and have to ask money from people to get by." However, many other people interviewed for the CCF study stressed in contrast how pensioners are one of the few groups in the country in receipt of a reliable and regular income. Indeed, it emerged that many pensioners support whole families from this, admittedly meager, source.

The rich people in our country are the retired people because they get their pensions on time. That is why they can support us. They also know how to save money - they still work and they get their pensions as well. Of course, elderly people are not rich in Belarus. But at least they get their pensions on time. The pensions are between \$ 40 and \$50 a month. And about \$20 goes for rent every month. Those poor people who are not working they are really poor.

- Middle-aged woman, Minsk, Belarus.

Similarly, several urban respondents from Minsk noted that they receive monthly food parcels from relatives living in rural areas and that rural dwellers are better off than urban because of their access to land.

The empowerment and enrichment of vulnerable or marginalized groups entails major changes in the attitudes and behavior of the wider population — changes that are not easily made. The mismatch between outsider and local perceptions may lead to interventions that can potentially be seen as biased or politically motivated, in that assistance is sometimes provided to groups that the local population does not regard as the

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⁵⁹Interview with World Bank, Minsk, Belarus, Dec 2002.

most needy but who are simply the most visible (such as street children). Projects can meet with resentment and are more likely to fail if local populations are not in agreement with the stated priorities. Resistance by the more powerful and wealthier sections of society may mean that the most vulnerable who are selected for support can in fact find themselves excluded from the benefits given to them.

Aid agencies need therefore to be wary of employing concepts such as ‘the poorest of the poor’ or ‘the most vulnerable groups’ uncritically. Lumping people together in this way may stigmatize them, as in the case of children engaged in the sex trade. In Batticaloa, an area of Sri Lanka that has long been affected by ethnic conflict, Tamil women criticized aid agencies for identifying them as widows and supporting them on that basis because ‘widow’ is a pejorative term in their community.⁶⁰ Due to the humiliation that can be attached to such labels, aid agencies may confront difficulties finding beneficiaries for their interventions. One CCF staff member in Kenya noted: “...labeling people as poor was not good. If we said okay you’re in the program because you are poor then they wouldn’t come. To be poor carries some kind of stigma and no one likes to be called poor.”⁶¹

SECTION TWO: WHO ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE?

The problem of defining which groups are the most susceptible to poverty or destitution is further compounded by the fact that multiple sources and forms of vulnerability can co-exist within a single population group, household, family or individual. The factors that determine whether and how a person comes to be poor operate at numerous levels, and few of these factors are actually within the control of the individual they affect. For example, a child may find itself disadvantaged from birth simply because it is of a particular ethnicity, religion or social group. As the child grows up, this vulnerability is then multiplied if she happens

to be a girl (and thereby suffers intra-household inequities), lives in a rural area (having little/no employment opportunities or access to basic services) and has a disability (attracting social stigma). While each of these factors are no doubt hindrances in isolation, it is through their accumulation within the life of the individual that a child is rendered amongst the poorest of the poor.

Yet this aggregate interplay of vulnerability is seldom recognized in institutional responses to poverty. The tendency is to focus instead on treating a separate and single characteristic (such as disability or orphan-hood) in individuals, and to ignore the way in which this interacts with and is exacerbated by other aspects of the child’s life. In other words, it is like trying to complete a jigsaw by focusing only on one piece, with no regard to how it fits into the broader picture. What this section intends to show is the web-like interdependence of vulnerability, and its potential cumulative effect at numerous levels of an individual’s life.

4.2.1 Group Vulnerability

Caste and Ethnicity

Within any country, there always exist major societal distinctions that have the effect of privileging certain groups of people over others. These distinctions may be economic (in terms of earning more, or possessing greater capital), social (in terms of commanding greater respect from peers), political (in enjoying greater legal protection or political power), or a combination of these. In many cases, the majority of those born into the less privileged groups are unable to move out of them, for such distinctions are usually well-embedded into the social, cultural and economic fabric of a society and do not normally offer much mobility between status groups. The Indian caste system is one example of this kind of hierarchy, for the status, classification and indeed much of the fate of over 100 million dalits (‘untouchables’) in India is determined at conception, and cannot be changed even after death. By affording upper levels of caste greater social



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⁶⁰ref.

⁶¹Interview with CCF staff members, Nairobi, Kenya, Oct 2002.

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freedom and opportunities for economic prosperity this then perpetuates the poverty of those at lower tiers. Similarly, discrimination is rife throughout Bolivia, where indigenous people are subject to differential treatment and reduced access to basic services simply because of their ethnic origin. In Kenya, tribal links to particular territories with few natural resources also act to perpetuate poverty. For example, the Masaai today struggle to draw sustenance from the essentially desert land they inherited over two generations ago. Chapter 5, 'Causes and Contributing Factors', examines these issues of structural discrimination in greater detail.

Rural and Urban Vulnerability

Some groups may find themselves disadvantaged simply by virtue of where they live. When CCF staff were asked which groups were the poorest in their particular countries, the top answer was 'rural populations', with one respondent indicating that as many as 96% of poor people in Uganda live in rural areas. This reflects the widespread experience of the aid community as a whole that rural dwellers are necessarily worse off than urban, in that they have less access to many societal resources that generate wealth. It is undoubtedly true that rural populations throughout the world are generally far poorer, particularly in terms of income and capital, less well provided for in terms of physical infrastructure and services and more isolated from political processes than urban inhabitants. This applies particularly to many of the countries in South America, where high rates of GNP disguise severe disparities between urban and rural populations and an extreme concentration of wealth in the cities.

In Bolivia, rural adults, feel themselves to be severely and unfairly discriminated against by the urban élite. As two women in their 30s from the village of Opoqueri observed:

A: While in the city, they, wow, they have a house, and with their money they think they've won, while here we say "with what are we going to do these things?" That's the route they discrimi-

nate us through... them, all well-dressed in ties, not us...

B: They're stuck up... in the countryside we die like dogs.

A: There's no justice. And for them there's justice, there's law, while here there's nothing, we die and that's it. Quietly we disappear, while they don't. That's how it is... that's how we are... for us there's no law, however loudly we demand it...

B: No one listens to us... We haven't got the right to walk in the street... to be listened to, for that you have to have money.

Poverty among and discrimination against rural populations has led to very high rates of rural to urban migration throughout South America, many of these migrants being children who travel alone. Meanwhile, low quality and inadequate schooling in rural regions of India has also acted as a strong 'push' factor towards urban migration.

However, even though poverty may legitimately be seen as a largely rural problem in many parts of the world, it is also important not to overlook the extreme poverty of significant sectors (for example, seasonal workers, war-displaced/ those displaced by armed conflict and violence, immigrants and squatters) of the world's urban populations. Modern cities are growing at a phenomenal rate, due both to natural population increase and migration, and while the city may embody ideas of wealth, employment and many other material benefits, the reality is often very different. Urbanization in the modern world is not associated with economic development and industrialization as it was in 19th century Europe, and takes place instead in the context of unemployment, livelihood insecurity, illegal housing and public sector retreat. The poorest families in cities are generally concentrated in the areas least suited to human habitation, where population densities are extremely high, housing dilapidated, employment restricted and services non-existent.

In fact, as indicated, there was considerable evidence from Belarus to suggest that some rural families are better off than their urban counterparts. While rural dwellers have access to land on which they can grow subsistence crops, in the cities most families have become accustomed to depend on formal sector employment that, since the demise of the Soviet Union, no longer provides regular and adequate wages. Some of the urban families who receive food parcels from rural relatives rely on these to get them through the lean periods in the year. This situation may be far more common globally than is generally realized: as a CCF staff member from the Ukraine pointed out in the questionnaire, “the overwhelming majority of poor households are concentrated among large city dwellers.” In light of this kind of evidence, it has become impossible in the 21st century to develop viable anti-poverty strategies without incorporating an urban dimension.⁶²

Displaced People

Migration is an important household maintenance and survival strategy that enables many people throughout the world to overcome destitution and take advantage of new economic, educational and social opportunities. However, despite the undoubted advantages of migration, it can bring some serious difficulties too. Throughout the world millions of people are forced to migrate due to war, political oppression, environmental collapse and economic crisis. For the villagers in Madhya Pradesh, India, who depend on the monsoon maize crop for survival, the decline in rainfall since 1997 (a drop of approximately 35 percent) has led to a large seasonal migration of workers to nearby urban centers (some in neighboring states of Gujarat and Rajasthan) for 4 to 6 months of the year. This migration usually involves the whole family (men, women and children) with only the elders and school age children staying behind.

Migration clearly has implications for those who leave home as much as for those who remain. Forced migration is far less likely than voluntary migration to have positive

economic outcomes because it is so often linked to oppression, social isolation and many other adversities. Most enforced migrants are people who are displaced within their own country, although many cross international borders. The great majority of the world’s forced migrants are in developing countries — around half of them are in Africa. In other words, they live in some of the world’s poorest countries, many of which are themselves experiencing conflict, drought and political instability. Large numbers of displaced people, asylum seekers and other migrants around the world continue to find themselves heavily disadvantaged in relation to their host populations. Many are trafficked and many live illegally in their host community, this cutting them off from state services and benefits and rendering them highly susceptible to exploitation in the labor and housing markets. Children who migrate alone make up a significant and growing proportion of displaced populations globally and often this is the most vulnerable group of all.

Even before they are given the chance to prove themselves, forced migrants must struggle under the weight of their portrayal in the national and international media, which often critically refers to them as ‘fundamentally untrustworthy’,⁶³ ‘dependent and helpless’,⁶⁴ and as direct threats to national security and the economy.⁶⁵ In other words, they are defined as ‘problems’ in themselves, rather than as ‘ordinary people with problems’.⁶⁶ Even without bringing potential ethnic, religious or cultural differences into the equation, locals will often view displaced or asylum seeking populations with resentment, given that in many cases they are themselves already confronting high unemployment and resource competition. Frequently governments merely exacerbate these difficulties, as ‘foreign’ or outsider populations are neglected or denigrated in policy and provision in order to appease registered citizens. Where migrants are perceived as a threat to national security or to ethnic or religious homogeneity, they may be criminalized.

Throughout the world millions of people are forced to migrate due to war, political oppression, environmental collapse and economic crisis.

⁶²Amis, (2002) p3.

⁶³Voutira & Harrell-Bond, (1995) p216.

⁶⁴Hitchcox, (1990) p173.

⁶⁵Zetter, (1999) p75.

⁶⁶Malkki, 1995.



Migration is commonly associated with failure to remit income, abandonment of the family and further impoverishment of those left behind.

Because of these kinds of problems, there is an absence of reliable information or statistics relating to these groups, which not only aggravates existing tensions, but also creates new friction regarding the level of assistance needed and who should receive it. For example, according to the Minsk representative of the Ministry of Education in Belarus,

[T]here are huge Chechen populations in some suburbs of Minsk - not allocated by government - people just settled there on their own free will; others go near the Polish border, trying to make their way to Poland. The government has started working with them to see if the children are okay - generally they are okay.

In contrast, representatives from the World Bank in Minsk claimed that the government “didn’t know anything about refugee children, street children or Roma/Sinti children. On the last issue they said there were none or only very few... The government response to questions about street children is that none exist...” This lack of interest, knowledge and experience within government circles, in combination with historic antagonism to certain groups, can culminate in the needs of these marginal groups being left unmet.

Migration is a risky strategy and its effects on originating communities can be devastating. Migration is commonly associated with failure to remit income, abandonment of the family and further impoverishment of those left behind. Indeed, the research suggests that for a number of reasons remittances are becoming less common. In many rural communities in Bolivia there is a notable deficit of men, for there are no jobs locally. As well, in this country children often migrate alone, sometimes going abroad.⁶⁷ Yet remittances were striking in their absence in Bolivia, given how many people were said to have emigrated to comparatively wealthy countries like Spain, Argentina and Chile.

In Sierra Leone, the promise of immediate

and accessible wealth working in the diamond mines of Kono has led many young men to leave their families permanently, but with little apparent success. Before the war they were able to send money back to their parents, even if only sporadically. When war broke out, though, the mines were taken over by various factions of the conflict, and the migrants no longer earned sufficient amounts to send money home and what they had managed to accumulate was either burnt or looted. The research uncovered numerous abandoned wives and children who had heard nothing of their departed members for a long time and who were struggling to repay the debts that had been left behind in their wake. Elderly men in Sierra Leone spoke with some sympathy of the failure to remit income: “young people also have lots of problems. They have girlfriends, they need to pay rent and clothing - so how can they send back money to us?”⁶⁸

Migration to the Diamond Mines of Kono, Sierra Leone

Q: Why do young men go to the diamond mines at Kono?

A: Extreme hardship and poverty causes them to go. While they are here in the village the young men don’t have money to dress themselves properly and appear neatly in public, they have no money to marry and their parents can no longer support them. Their heavy indebtedness of the young men comes about when parents have nothing to live on, even food, the young men are forced to borrow. This leads to threats and court action — as a result they hide and go. Some who go to Kono succeed but it is risky. Some who find diamonds can be attacked and beaten. Many who find diamonds don’t send money back home. They may have the intention to do so but the war has made many of them lose contact with their homes. Those who don’t succeed have moved to other mining communities. Their parents would like them to come back to do farming so that there is food at home but they don’t

⁶⁷Punch.

⁶⁸Focus group discussion with elderly men, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

come. They continue to move from village to village.

B: Miners... stand a chance to become rich overnight. But they desert their families going to the diamond mines in the hope that they will become rich. But their children are left behind to fend for themselves. So they create poverty in their home villages as well. Some people spend all their lives in Kono and never find anything - they never get a single cent. They even have problems coming back - they are ashamed to admit that they have spent 20 years there and have nothing to show for it.

A: But there is a feeling here that people in the mining areas enjoy life more than us. Quite a number of beautiful houses here in Makeni are owned by miners. So if we say mining is not fruitful how can they build such houses? Mining is a give and take thing: you spend a long time not finding anything but then you find one and then it compensates for the rest of the time you have spent looking.

B: But it is impossible to sustain so many people on this diamond industry...

A: 18 year-old boy, Kabala, Sierra Leone.

The effects of migration on children are numerous and significant. Household membership may shift markedly between seasons, and possibly from one year to the next, as much as over the longer course of the domestic cycle. Family routines change, until money is remitted the standard of living invariably worsens, children may be separated from supportive adults and care-taking systems are disrupted to accommodate new responsibilities. In Madhya Pradesh, India, some villages are left almost empty and families split apart when men, women and children all migrate for cash work in the cities. In Samalya Badhi village in India, it was found that a number of children whose parents had migrated called their current guardians — their grandparents — ‘mother’ and ‘father’

and were rarely able to recognize their real parents. Migration had in this sense clearly affected children’s perceptions of kinship.

4.2.2 Household and Family Vulnerability

Adverse Family and Household Structures

The centrality of the family in children’s well-being is hard to exaggerate. In most of sub-Saharan Africa to be without family is to be destitute: in the Chewa language of modern Malawi, the word for ‘poor’—umphawi—implies a lack of kin and friends. In Kenya, many measure wealth in terms of the number of wives and children a man has. Indeed, ancestry has a considerable bearing on children’s expectations and in many societies its ability to control destiny stretches across numerous generations. In all the countries researched, families whose members work collaboratively to maintain the household were considered the most likely to be able to withstand poverty. Families that are unable to match this ideal are often judged harshly. In Belarus, for example, impoverished families are sometimes referred to by the term ‘nepolneeye’ (using Roman script), which implies a condition of being ‘unfavorable’ through the alcohol abuse and poor relations associated with such groups.

Nevertheless, anthropological research has long made clear the enormous cross-cultural variability of kinship systems and residential arrangements. In some places, blood ties beyond the three generations of child, parent and grandparent are extremely weak, while elsewhere precise lines of descent can be traced through many centuries. In some countries children are bound by powerful obligations to their lineage, clan or dead ancestors — obligations that determine the economic and social choices they make throughout their lives. In other countries, children may have few familial duties beyond respect for and obedience towards parents and the accomplishment of school tasks in accordance with parental and personal aspirations.

The effects of migration on children are numerous and significant.

These kinds of distinctions can make a major difference in the way in which children and their families respond to adversities like poverty. For example, in societies where great importance is attached to the survival and success of the family, clan or lineage, having a large number of children may be considered a desirable goal for this guarantees perpetuation of the bloodline. In this context, the well-being of individual children may be sacrificed for the greater good of the family as a whole. Thus, a child may be sent long distances to seek asylum in a rich country as a way of gaining a foothold in that country — from there, they can then send remittances home to support those they have left behind. While such actions may offer families the only opportunity they can identify for climbing out of poverty, these children may become prey to traffickers and others who seek to exploit the vulnerable. In contrast, in societies where the sense of family loyalty and duty is far weaker and public resources are more readily available to support the poor, this kind of practice may be condemned as an unacceptable abuse of children. In this latter kind of setting children are as viewed as dependents of the family and are not thought of as being capable of contributing to its well-being. At the same time, partly because children are a cost rather than an asset, strategies for combating poverty are far more likely to involve the planning of family size and keeping the number of children to a minimum through contraception.

...often the household is not the same as the 'family'.



A major distinction between many Western societies in particular and other parts of the world is that in the former the 'family' and the 'household' are normally seen as synonymous. In other words, the nuclear family, which generally occupies a single dwelling, is the basic unit of society and as such is involved in production, reproduction, consumption and socialization. However, it should not be assumed that this is the case universally, for often the household is not the same as the 'family'. Hence, although it is generally understood that households are formed primarily through alliances of marriage, fostering and adoption, in many con-

texts the household may in practice be constituted through rather different means and may also include a number of unrelated, or extended family members. In Sierra Leone children's responses to the question 'Who do you live with?' were very diverse:

A: Alone with my mother and my sister and some neighbors. We live in somebody else's house. [Note the use of the word 'alone' here — the child lives with several adults but because of the absence of his father, he is 'alone'.]

A: I live with my father, grandmother, two younger brothers — we are many. And some neighbors in the back house.

A: I live with my elder brother, father, mother, two aunts, grandmother, elder sisters.

A: I live with my younger sisters, younger brothers, mother and aunt, two elder brothers and four other adults.⁶⁹

The living arrangements of children aged 6 to 10 in Minsk, Belarus, showed similar divergence, with a marked absence of the father in many cases. For example, out of eight children interviewed in one group, only two had fathers living with them. One child lived with six adults, with no other children in the house. Another lived with only his mother, while one boy lived with his mother, his 16-year-old brother and his 15-year-old girlfriend, seemingly an unusual situation.

The high proportion of children in Belarus who are not living with their fathers is likely to be connected with the break up of the Soviet Union, which had profound and multiple impacts on family and household structures, correlating with an increase in divorce rates and fundamental changes in intra-household roles and responsibilities. The population is no longer able to rely so completely on government for support, and women have had to take on a more central role in providing for the family:

Before the Soviet Union, the traditional

⁶⁹ Activity with children aged 6-8, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone, Jan 2003.

way was that the man should provide for his family. But this all changed with the October Revolution: men and women became equal. Everyone was proud of women who were working. If a woman didn't work she would be considered very bad. If you have a child who is older than one year there is no excuse for not working and you would be looked down upon and considered to be the worst person in the world. Since perestroika things have changed. Our men are no longer important as professionals - they lost their jobs quickly. The majority of our men can't earn money. They can't! But our problem is also that during the Soviet Union we didn't have to think about tomorrow, about what will happen in the future because we knew the government will organize it for us. Now things have changed and we have to think about our own futures. And some of our men just can't do it.

- Middle-aged woman, Minsk, Belarus.

Close ties within the extended family that stretch across multiple households may have certain positive effects in terms of the domestic economy, for they make it possible to spread domestic resources well beyond the boundaries of individual residential units. However, some family arrangements have less positive economic consequences and research globally does indicate a correlation between households headed and/or managed by women and acute poverty (the reasons for this are discussed in Chapter 5). Many of the women who head households are lone parents or in charge of extended families, especially in industrialized countries, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, although far less so in Asia and the Pacific, where women seldom run households. Indeed, today, between one-quarter and one-third of all households globally are headed by a single parent, and nine out of every ten lone parents are women.

Life can be extremely difficult for lone parents, especially the single mother, not least because of prejudice and discrimination.

Raising children alone and trying to be the main source of both affection and authority within the family while also generating income causes profound physical and emotional fatigue in many cases. Children in households run by a lone mother are likely to be less well nourished, less healthy, less educated and have fewer friends than other children.⁷⁰ Thus, a preponderance of households without men, as in Belarus, can be a serious cause for concern with regard to children's economic well-being. Families run by lone teenage mothers are more vulnerable than most because early child bearing can cause health complications, poverty and social rejection. The children of lone teenage mothers are likely to be underweight for their age and malnourished.

While women-run households are disadvantaged in relation to those led by men, child headed and managed households and families are still more likely to be destitute. This is especially true of child headed households in areas affected by HIV/AIDS where extended family ties are severely weakened by exceptionally high rates of morbidity and mortality among adults. The likelihood is that as HIV/AIDS takes its toll, so child headed households will become the predominant form of domestic unit in many areas and communities. Child headed units confront many difficulties, not least the shortage of domestic labor, problems with education access, the likelihood that their patrimony will be usurped by relatives or the legal and power restrictions that prevent them from accessing credit and other resources. With the odds stacked heavily against them, child headed households are likely to become a major factor in the inter-generational transmission of poverty in many parts of the world within the coming decades.

Family and household structures are thus variable, changeable and complex, and interests of members do not necessarily coincide. The unit of production and the unit of consumption or management of resources may not be the same and the household may not be the operative social unit in terms of the

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⁷⁰Of course, many households that are managed by women benefit from income remitted by male migrants. This source of income and support is notoriously difficult to track, however, since it is often linked with illicit practices such as trafficking, bondage, and illegal work overseas.

domestic economy or economic strategy. Hence, the household economy may depend on migrants who remit income, or funds or goods generated through rural enterprises run by extended family members. Kin relations are but one aspect among external social, economic and ideological relations that help define the unit, and aid agencies must fully understand the complex interrelation of these if their poverty alleviation strategies are to be effective. It is this diversity that profoundly affects how children and other household members experience poverty. In most cases, poverty is far more acute among households managed and headed by lone parents, especially lone mothers, and in those that contain no adults.

The Feminization of Poverty

Gender emerged as a crucial determinant of economic status and economic solvency in the CCF study, and is a major factor in the differential control and management of household resources and workload. Household resources (including income) and work roles are normally organized around culturally defined gender beliefs, rather than democratic entitlements. Almost invariably, these beliefs disadvantage women in relation to men and girls in relations to boys, with serious adverse consequences for females in terms of survival, nutrition, health, power, wealth and practically all other aspects of life. In fact, as noted, the evidence of gender inequity within households, communities and nations has led the majority of agencies to regard gender prejudice as the single most significant causal factor in vulnerability and social exclusion globally.

For example, although property law in Kenya replicates English laws that permit both men and women to own property on an equal basis, custom and tradition is more discriminatory and holds that for women ownership is a privilege rather than a right. Hence, very few women own property separately, even those items bought with the woman's money, and most share ownership together with their husbands or partners. Similarly, in many tea plantation areas of

India, where women contribute their labor as pickers, the tea is in practice owned by the man of the house, and the monthly payment for it goes to him. He then decides how to distribute the money, with no guarantee that the female workers will be reimbursed for their efforts. The issue of ownership is more complex in Sierra Leone, as this example shows:

If there is food at home the wife goes out to sell two days in a row. The proceeds from one day belong to the woman and the second day's belongs to the man. If there is no food she goes out to sell on 3 consecutive days. First day's proceeds go to man, second for food and third for woman. If it is polygamous home each wife goes out to sell for 2 or 3 days, depending on whether there is food. But poyo [tapping palm wine] business is not consistent. During bad times, if the man has kept anything by he provides for the home. Or the woman goes out to dig bush yams or collect wood or borrow things to trade or break palm kernels, extract the oil, sell it and feed the family.

- Middle-aged man from rural village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

The long running war in Sierra Leone has also affected traditional patterns of inheritance and ownership within the family, which would previously exclude women: "People give land to their daughters and to their son-in-laws now. But this is unusual and is only because they feel sorry for them because of the war. This is mostly for the benefit of the grandchildren so that they will be okay."⁷¹

The feminization of poverty is manifested in many ways, both subtle and overt. For example, in all five of the research sites, the greater burden of poverty seemed to fall on women. Female respondents conveyed the sense that they are alone in the struggle against poverty: this applied even in cases where men are contributors to the household. They devoted considerable time to

The feminization of poverty is manifested in many ways, both subtle and overt.



⁷¹Focus group discussion with women, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone, Jan 2003.

lamenting the irresponsible behavior of men, their continuous absence from the home, their failure to contribute properly to the domestic economy. This was particularly true in Kenya and India, where culture firmly dictates that men provide for their families. The incidence of men abandoning their families, whether by leaving the home or flouting their responsibilities, appeared alarmingly high. Often this was linked with alcohol abuse or infidelity:

A: [Men] are neglecting their responsibilities and are not providing for us. The men sell the carvings bit by bit and the money they get is not enough for providing for all the needs of the family. So he goes and drinks and when he comes home he is drunk and even before he reaches his house he already starts shouting: "This is my home! I have all the rights in my home". And the woman is expected to bring food to him. Not all men do this, but many. Some men are engaged with other women and they can even sleep outside and not care about what it is happening at home. They spend the money on other women.

- Member of Women's farming Jirani group, Kenya.

Q: What makes so many men start drinking?

A: Men start drinking alcohol because they have so many problems. They are trying to relieve their minds. When men come home they don't even want to hear about problems — they don't want their wives to complain all the time about problems so they drink to avoid the arguments. Those with the most problems drink the most. The family is a burden to them.

- Member of Women's farming Jirani group, Kenya.

Women in Belarus appeared slightly more sympathetic towards men than did women in the other case study countries. They spoke of how men suffer shame and depression when they are unable to fulfill their normal economic and social roles:

Some men are in depression because they can't find jobs to support their families. They get depressed and lie on the sofa. Or they start to drink... because there is no way out. Men are depressed because they can't buy an apartment; they can't support their families. They are trying but they can't succeed. They break because they fail.

- Middle-aged woman, Minsk, Belarus.

The woman has to support the children and the husband — both financially and emotionally. She has to be strong. She has to push the husband to look for a job...

- Woman in her 30s, Minsk, Belarus.

Comments to this effect were also made by young boys in Bolivia, who would take up drinking with other men in the villages because of the shame of being unemployed.

Interestingly, some women in Belarus took the increase in the number of men failing to keep up with their domestic responsibilities to be a consequence less of poverty and more of the different ways in which men and women approach work.

It's because of our different natures: men don't think ahead so much, whereas women have their children to look after and they have to think about what will happen to them. For men there is no way out. Women will take any kind of job and do it but men are proud of themselves and they only want to work in their own sphere. They won't take just any job — Our women are too strong and that is why men are spoilt! They are expecting that women take care of everything.

- Woman in her 50s, Minsk, Belarus.

It is certainly the case in many parts of the world that rigid gender-based divisions in work roles have the effect of rendering men unemployed, unemployable and idle, while women and children toil in low income, low status jobs. Overall, children's roles are more flexible and adaptable than adults, with the

Children's roles are more flexible and adaptable than adults, with the effect that in some cases children may work while their parents and other adult family members are out of work.

Depending on the country and culture, having a large or small family can be beneficial to the management of domestic labor and economic success of the household.



effect that in some cases children may work while their parents and other adult family members are out of work.

Despite misgivings about the reliability of men, in many cultures it is extremely hard for a woman to be single. In Sierra Leone, having a man in the house is a long-term investment, critical to the execution of important cultural traditions. As one woman put it, "We have a saying here: 'If you are a woman and don't marry, who will bury you when you die?' It is shameful for you to be buried by youngsters when you die — and if you don't have a husband then this will happen to you."⁷² Such ideas act as a major disincentive for women to get rid of partners who are abusive or fail to contribute to the household. On the other hand, one group of elderly men were quick to suggest that women are far more independent and in control of their own lives now than in the past (although, from their tone, how happy they are about this is doubtful):

The girls have become wild. They don't accept men trying to control them. This is because we say every one has rights. It is good — it shows that the women are not slaves [facetious tone]. Now if you tie and flock a woman she will go to the police. In our father's time you could tie her and flock her - now she goes to police. This was not the case in the past. We are now civilized. [laughing, shaking of heads].

- Elderly man, village near Makeni, Sierra Leone.

A similar picture emerged in Bolivia, although here men still resist gender equality within the home:

A few generations ago women didn't work outside the house, or didn't work at all, and there are men who still think like that. They say that women are of the house and have to stay there, sometimes there are professional women and their husbands don't let them work, even though they're professional they won't

let them work, they're machistas, they make them leave their jobs and they are housewives, maybe do a bit of domestic work but leave their profession. Why? Because their husband is machista. And there are men who are still like that.... Men were of the street, women were of the house, sewing, embroidering, like that, and there are still men like that, not letting their women work, and keeping the women in a corner.

- Woman in her 40s, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Family Size and Vulnerability

Depending on the country and culture, having a large or small family can be beneficial to the management of domestic labor and economic success of the household. There are advantages and disadvantages to both, but most aid agencies and governments today tend to follow the dictum that the larger the household (i.e. the more children born to a family), the greater the likelihood of it being poor. There is, of course, a lot of evidence for this assertion, with countries such as India and China struggling under the weight of rapid population growth, overpopulation and diminishing resources. In Belarus too, CCF teachers, social pedagogues and trainers suggested that there is a noticeable difference between large and small families. In this case the comparison was between a family of three and one of six:

There is a big difference. You notice it in appearance. They [the family of 6] don't have the necessities, clothing. In that case the government gives some assistance, material assistance to them. But they give only very small sums of money — maybe R35 000 per child — about \$20. If the child needs some winter shoes it is impossible to buy them from this money.⁷³

In Sierra Leone, on the other hand, the situation is very different. There is great pressure on women to have children, as remaining childless can lead to social ostracism and poverty. In fact, a childless woman is generally perceived to be in a worse situation eco-

⁷²Focus group discussion with women, village near Makeni, Sierra Leone, Jan 2003.

⁷³Focus group discussion with CCF teachers, social pedagogues and trainers, Minsk, Belarus, Dec 2002.

nomically and suffer more stigma than a widow with many children, or a woman with disabilities, as these examples show:

Q: Which among you are suffering the most?

A: This woman, because she has no child [she points not to a widow with 9 children but to a childless woman]. She has been trying to get a child with her husband but still there is no child.

- Woman in her 30s, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

A: And in your old age you will have no one to take care of you and you will suffer. They will call you a witch because you have no child. People will say you steal.

- Middle-aged mother, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

A: Those worst off are the old men and women who have no children. They have no one to labor for them. They live on the sympathy of others. Next are the handicapped: the blind, polio victims and lepers who sometimes stay with relatives.

- Elderly man, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Children are also a criterion of wealth among the Masaai tribes of Kenya because they tend the herds, animals being the most important asset in this population. The widespread practice of polygamy among these tribes means that it is not all that uncommon for a man to have up to 30 offspring. Many consider this to be a major economic advantage. As one CCF staff member from the Rusinga region remarked, "people believe that if you have so many children you are rich." Nevertheless, polygamous households are often very complicated and changeable in terms of resource allocation, as favoritism and competition become powerful determinants of who is included and excluded from domestic resources.

My father has many wives and he loves the other wives more than my mother.

This means that we (children of this wife) never get as much as the other children. My mother is the first wife. The others have gone to the traditional healer to get charms to influence my father so that he prefers them.

- Adolescent girl, boarding school in Rusinga, Kenya.

Many women also reported being abandoned or ignored once their husband had taken on other wives.

I was well-to-do before my husband married a second wife. He married and he took all the cattle to the second wife and he left me with nothing. Now I am completely poor and he doesn't assist me or the children at all. I have to struggle on my own.

- Elderly woman, Wamunyu, Kenya.

While a large number of wives and children can confer at least the appearance of wealth on a father/husband, large families can also put great pressure on them in terms of food and income support. According to elderly men interviewed in the Wamunyu region of Kenya, this is beginning to convince men that one wife and fewer offspring is a better option: "to have two or three children is now considered good". Women in particular have shown support for the change, as it is upon them that the burden of many children falls heaviest. This burden was also mentioned by women in Bolivia, as illustrated by one mother of six from the rural Opoqueri region, "We are exhausted from carrying so many children. We can't go anywhere, we can't travel, we can't go after the livestock we've got one carrying on our backs, another in our arms..." Of course, wanting to have less children and actually taking steps to do so are two very different things. Many Kenyan men expressed strong dislike for family planning and contraception, which means that

Many women do family planning without their husbands knowing until it is the right time to have a child. Some women

While a large number of wives and children can confer at least the appearance of wealth on a father/husband, large families can also put great pressure on them in terms of food and income support.

get injections and so on. Women have a positive attitude towards family planning. The number of children is directly related to level of poverty: the more children the poorer a family is.

- Male Project Family Educator,
Wamunyu, Kenya.

4.2.3 Individual Vulnerability

The Differential Status of Children Within the Household

In most countries, children's access to, and control over, domestic income and other resources are extremely marginal. Only in households headed by children or in households in which children are the principal or sole breadwinners is it likely that they will play a significant part in decisions about the intra-household allocation of resources or division of labor. As a consequence of their relative powerlessness, children may be deprived of essential items such as nutritious foods or assigned to onerous tasks while adults in the family may do less demanding and more rewarding work. Moreover, in many cases, household obligations and rewards are divided unequally among siblings in accordance with judgments about the differential value of individual children, leading to serious disparities within the sibling group. All known societies uphold ideas about how children distinguished by social power, order of birth within the family, or personal characteristics, should be treated and what they should be allowed or expected to do. These ideas greatly influence the way different children within the household are treated. According to their social power and status, children experience different environmental opportunities and constraints, the implication being that they also experience different levels of exposure to adversities associated with poverty. As was argued in Chapter 3, girls are far more likely to be disadvantaged in this respect than boys.

The most important of household resources is usually food, and one of the most common practices is to feed males, particularly adult males and older male children, first. Also,

men are often given the most nutritious, tasty and largest servings of food. This is usually justified in accordance with cultural and religious beliefs about the relative needs and contributions of different household members. As one female schoolteacher from Mbirikani, Kenya, explained, "The children eat the men's unwanted food, then women eat. Men have big muscles and need more". That said, however, it is impossible to generalize even within a single region concerning intra-household distribution of items like food.

Practices of Intra-household Food Distribution in Sierra Leone

A: The first to eat are the youngest. Because they cry, the mother gives them food to distract them. Then the wife and the rest of the children. And then the man, because the man comes home last. I eat a little and leave the rest for the children. [This is called warreh — a tradition in Sierra Leone that you never finish food, but always leave something for others — "So the slaves can eat"]. I come and ask "Have the children eaten?" and the wives say yes. But even so all these little eyes and mouths turn up. So I eat a little and leave the rest for the children.

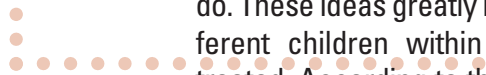
Q: But you as men always get the biggest pieces of meat?

A: [laughter] Yes, yes. But sometimes we the men don't eat. There is not much food. So I take 1 spoon and leave the rest for the children. I go and drink poyo [palm wine] instead. If I drink too much I becomes useless so I shouldn't drink too much. Then in the morning I go out to find food again.

- Elderly man, village near Kabala,
Sierra Leone.

A: Children just like their mothers suffer most. In our homes the best part of the meat goes to the father. The bones and the minor things go to the mother and children. What our mothers do is they satisfy their husbands first and forget the

*According to their
social power and
status, children
experience different
environmental
opportunities and
constraints...*



children. Children are not considered first but last.

- Female CCF staff member, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

A: Some of the traditional customs here make our younger brothers and sisters suffer. Some are severely malnourished — because children are not supposed to eat meat. They should only eat rice and sauce but no meat. So they get only poor nutrition. We have a lot of meat here in this district but it is for the elders. Children can only eat when the elders are satisfied. If you share a meal with a child [the custom is for people to eat together from one large plate] the children are not expected to take any of the meat. Only if you as an adult push some meat towards the child - then he can eat. Traditionally there are some variations. I have heard that amongst the Limbas they give meat to children. They say that you as an adult you have already eaten your meat in your life and now it is the turn of the young ones. But most tribes say that meat is not for the young ones, only for the big ones.

- Male CCF staff member, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

A: Men beat you up and chase you away if you don't give him food. You as a woman are advised to give him the food even if it is small food because you have born children with him — you are told not to eat anything without your husband behind his back. You just have to share with your husband even if the children don't have enough food.

- Middle-aged woman, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

Q: Do the boys eat more than girls?

A: No. The girls eat with their mothers. Since they eat with the mothers they could serve more and eat more than the men. I don't know how much the women dish for themselves. I only leave the warreh to acknowledge them as my daughters.

- Women in her 30s, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

Traditional poverty measurement strategies that analyze a generalized household unit fail to recognize the importance of these 'implicit contracts' between household members, even though such contracts can sometimes mean the difference between life and death for severely malnourished children. As indicated, data on calorific intake in relation to requirements also show that children (especially girls) can suffer from substantial deficits even in the richest households, which means gender discrimination is not something economies can 'grow out of'.⁷⁴ Nor should one assume that gender distinctions within a single country are of the same or even similar degrees: the differences in gender disparity among Indian states or among the provinces of Pakistan, for example, are typically larger than those between nations.⁷⁵ This suggests that there is also likely to be a significant number of children whose poverty is overlooked because of the wealthy status of the household as a whole.

Separated Children

Loss of family can be a major cause of poverty, or more likely, outright destitution, in children. Some of the poorest children globally are those separated from their families — whether through orphan-hood, migration, accidental separation, divorce, abandonment, or other forces. This is particularly true in Africa, where war, together with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, has left large numbers of children alone, in the care of elderly grandparents or neighbors, or heading up households and in charge of younger siblings. By the end of 1994, more than 100,000 children in Rwanda had been orphaned or had lost contact with their parents as a direct result of the conflict, and similar figures have been reported for other recent conflicts in the region.⁷⁶

Child separation is a serious problem in other continents too. In South America, abandonment of boys, migration of girls (to cities, in search of employment as domestic servants) and children running away from home are commonplace. In Bolivia, where family is seen as an insurance against destitution and is often regarded as the only asset

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children.*

⁷⁴Mahmud, W. and S. Mahmud (1985) Aspects of the Food and Nutritional Problem in Rural Bangladesh. ILO/WEP Research Working Paper 10-6/WP74.

⁷⁵Filmer, D., E.M. King and L. Pritchett (1998) Gender Disparity in South Asia: Comparisons between and within countries, World Bank, Washington DC.

⁷⁶Mann quoting (Machel 1996).

A significant proportion of the world's children must therefore grow up with minimal or no support from their families.

people have, interviewees identified children and people who beg and/or sleep on the streets as among the poorest. At present, there are around 9,200 children in state homes and institutions in the country — up from 6,000 just two years before. But child separation is by no means restricted to the South: UNHCR (2001) recently estimated that there may at any one time be up to 100,000 separated asylum seeking and refugee children in western Europe and this figure does not take account of the many European children without family contact. And in Romania, where the legacy of a pro-fertility policy and state-sponsored care of abandoned children remains strong, there were until comparatively recently more than 100,000 children in residential institutions.

A significant proportion of the world's children must therefore grow up with minimal or no support from their families. Most are forced into this situation through circumstances beyond their control: even in the case of runaways, most leave home because of neglect, abuse, or rejection. In some cases, as in India, child separation is due to institutionalized and widespread practices such as child bondage. In countries like Sierra Leone that have been affected by war it may be due either to the extensive recruitment of children into military units, whether by force or voluntary enlistment, or to separation resulting from violence and forced migration. A significant proportion of separated children drift to towns and cities in search of employment, excitement, accommodation and anonymity. Some of these children end up in highly exploitative situations, such as brothel prostitution, while others take up life on the streets. Meanwhile, in many rural societies there exists a long-standing tradition of neighbors and kin caring for children who are left without immediate family. This is not to imply that such children are always well received and provided for in their new homes, but this custom has at least acted as a buffer against destitution. However, as the economic pressures on rural families grow, the HIV/AIDS pandemic spreads and other

crises such as armed conflict unfold, the capacity for rural populations to absorb these children diminishes.

Separated children seldom remain alone for long: most develop ties and friendships with other children or adults and take up residence with them. These quasi-familial relationships can be very loving and supportive, but of course they can also involve severe exploitation, abuse and wider social stigma. Children who have been abducted by rebels or whose parents had been killed or deserted them during the war in Sierra Leone expressed feelings of being branded, even when they had been taken in by extended family members. In this context having parents or someone to belong to gives a child protection and support and encourages self-confidence. Without a guardian to take their side, children must accept what others do to them: any attempt to try and assert or protect themselves only makes matters worse and exposes them to greater criticism or hostility. As one adolescent girl put it:

You have to be humble to the aunt and uncle and show them respect. You must not be proud. Because you don't have mother, you don't have father so you have no other choice but to be humble. If you do good things you never get praised - they always shout on you and put you down.

- 15 yr old girl, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

Separated children have long been a priority for aid interventions. Many organizations have contributed to the construction of orphanages, homes and shelters for these children, and it is often assumed that children who have secured a place within one of these institutions are 'in care', and no longer vulnerable in the sense of needing immediate attention. However, the research in Belarus suggests that these homes are far from the caring environments they are intended or imagined to be.

Vulnerability Inside Institutions in Belarus
According to the Minsk representatives from

the Ministry of Education, there are 73 shelters in Belarus, which, after a formal assessment in 1997, have now increased in capacity. New emphasis was also put on making sure that the six months period which children can stay at the shelter is implemented strictly. Despite these efforts, numerous problems still remain:

Shelters weren't trying hard enough to integrate the children back into families... The children also have real problems integrating into society — they did an assessment of children who had left boarding schools four years later, and the results were horrific: half they couldn't trace, while others had problems like drugs, alcohol, lived on the street, were in jail or in trouble with law etc.

- Representative from the Minsk Ministry of Education, Belarus.

Theft occurs a lot there, cruelty is common, orphans are without love and care. They become indifferent because no one cares for them and they are not taught anything. Their treatment is quite bad and they are punished severely. They are often locked in dark rooms. They have no belongings or toys... very few things belong to them. They experience feelings of loneliness, abandonment, feel hurt because they don't feel loved, disappointed and this leads to anger and to becoming cruel. They are cruel to the other children at the orphanage and with themselves. They deliberately put themselves in harm's ways. They feel jealous of others. They are untrusting because they don't trust anyone and they find it difficult to form relationships with others.

- Female CCF Peer Educator, Minsk, Belarus.

Some parents get their parenting rights taken away from them, but that can be horrible too because some kids want to stay with their parents. One 9-year-old girl in our class was abused by her mother, who came to school one day and

smashed the girl's head repeatedly against the cupboard. The mother lost her parenting rights and the girl was taken into a shelter, where she would cry for her mother every day.

- Discussion with mixed girls/boys 12-16, Minsk, Belarus.

While there has been growing acceptance in aid and government circles that institutional care is seldom the best option for separated children, it has also proved hard to find viable alternatives. Many agencies have sought to build on traditional customs of fosterage and expand these in times of crisis with awareness raising campaigns and various forms of economic incentive to foster families. However, rates of placement breakdown remain unacceptably high in many cases. Besides, this option is increasingly unworkable in communities affected by HIV/AIDS simply because of the sheer numbers of children involved and the widespread debilitation of family structures. Thus, destitution among separated children remains a major and growing concern throughout the world.

Domestic Abuse⁷⁷

While the power of family cannot be denied, it is not always a benign force in children's lives. Given how commonplace is partiality towards particular categories of children and inequalities in intra-familial resource allocation, intervention at the level of the family is no guarantee that children will benefit. Moreover, the family is easily undermined and is frequently unable to combat child poverty. At their best, families make a profound contribution to the health of society and its individuals by preserving culture, values, ethics, and wealth. At their worst, they resist change, restrict individual freedom, and indulge in prejudices that can lead to abuse, conflict and abandonment.

In the majority of countries child abuse and neglect are taboo subjects, and lack of research and statistical information makes it impossible to draw firm conclusions. However, even with the shortage of system-

While the power of family cannot be denied, it is not always a benign force in children's lives.

⁷⁷For the purposes of this study, child abuse is defined as any act, physical, emotional, sexual or other, that is intentionally perpetrated against a child that causes discomfort, distress, injury, failure to thrive or other adverse effects in terms of development and well-being.



Children within abusive situations are often fully aware of the dangers they and their siblings confront.

atic evidence, it is known that while the economic status of the household does not have significant bearing on sexual and emotional abuse, the incidence of physical abuse and abandonment does tend to be higher in poor communities than in rich. Some observers believe that child abuse is relatively more common where importance is attached to the privacy of the nuclear family and where urbanization and rapid social change have undermined traditional values promoting extended family networks. Thus, a low incidence of violence against children is often reported for more traditional cultures where family life is very public and where shared parenting and childcare within the extended family and infanticide of unwanted infants may act as safeguards against abuse.

The causal link between poverty, unemployment and alcoholism and physical abuse within the family was emphasized by respondents, children and adults, in all of the CCF case study countries. For example, a group of boys from Cochabamba remarked that some children frequently arrive at school bearing visible marks of abuse:

A: Sometimes they are bleeding — on their backs, their feet.

Q: What do they [parents/other adults] hit them with?

A: With cables

A: With cables, with hoses.

Q. And how do you feel when you see them like that?

A: Bad.

A: That affects them, scars them...

Q. Does that mark them for life, that bad treatment as a child?

A: It's a mark that stays here, like a scar. The marks of the belt.

Q. So they have marks inside...?

A: There are some techniques that other parents use.

A: There's a singer that sings like that, about the little stick...they use the leather of the cows, in a braid...

- Boys of 10 and 12, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

In another interview, with Sofia, a young woman in her 30s from Cochabamba, it was asserted that:

S: I think that psychologically and physically, there are lots of families... I know one family, psychologically there is abuse in the family and they grow up with that mentality: if they are formed in that environment they think its normal. So the children start acting like that...The force of physical abuse passes, but not psychological, that lasts... so, that's very important.

Q: What do you think causes these family tensions ...?

S: Drunkenness — men and women drink. Wives behind their husbands get drunk and the children listening, and the next day the children are repeating what the parents said, and this affects, lots of trauma... more than physically, and when they grow they are traumatized psychologically.

Interestingly, the Bolivian data suggest a difference in the integrity and quality of relationships within the family between rural and urban areas. While in urban Cochabamba, women talked about domestic violence and associated problems, in rural Oruro, women never indicated in any way that there were difficulties between partners. In the latter, far greater weight was given to assertions that husbands are partners for life and an important source of protection for women.⁷⁸

Children within abusive situations are often fully aware of the dangers they and their siblings confront. Despite usually feeling powerless to stop it, they can become very protective of those who are being abused, particularly when a younger sibling is involved.

⁷⁸Second women's focus group, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

However, this does not mean that they will necessarily approach an adult for help, as this may have more severe consequences for them and their families:

[I]f you start involving adults in this process it may set in motion a chain of events that lead to your parents being denied their parenting rights and you ending up in an orphanage. If the situation is so severe that you don't get food it's better to go to the orphanage. But most of the time it's better to put up with the situation because the orphanages are like prisons and you can't come to school anymore. You also lose everything if you go into orphanage: your friends, your freedom, going to your own school, etc.⁷⁹

Domestic Abuse in Bolivia — Alejandro's Story

12-year-old Alejandro from Cochabamba was abandoned by his parents and lives with his aunt and uncle. Although the setting for his interview was too public to discuss the issue explicitly, it is obvious from what he said that domestic abuse was a significant concern, not only for Alejandro, but also for his separated younger siblings:

- Q. What is it that most worries you?
A: My little brothers and sisters. They don't live with me.
Q. Who do they live with?
A: With my mother — some are with my mother, others with my father.
Q. But you don't know them.
A: I know them.... I've met them
Q. And why do they live with your parents and you not?
[Shakes head]
Q. You don't know... does that worry you, sometimes?
A: They say that they fought a lot
Q. Your parents
[nods]
Q. And do you think its better or not for a child to be with parents when they fight a lot?
A: I don't know.

Q. Why do you think your parents argued a lot?

A: Because of the economic necessities.

Q. So when people don't have money they fight, no?

A: Sometimes — yes - they swear and shout.

Q. So on top of your little brother and sisters, you worry about them? What worries you about them? Why could they be in a bad way?

A: I wonder if they are eating, if they're in a bad way, if they are fighting, being hit....

Q. Who could be hitting them?

A: My father. They say he's violent.

Q. Your uncle and aunt say that? Why do you think he's is violent? What does violent mean?

A: Very aggressive.

Q. So if you do something what could he do to you?

A: Hit me.

Q. With what?

A: A belt.

Alejandro appeared slightly uncomfortable while telling his story and the researchers were not keen to press him too far. However, when asked what he would do with 100 pesos, he immediately said that he would hire an investigator to find his parents.

Children with Disabilities

Because of poverty, environmental hazards, war, dangerous housing, poor hygiene and lack of health care, there are far more people with physical or mental disabilities per head of population in poor communities than in rich. One-fifth of all disabilities are caused by malnutrition and 90 percent of infant disability is believed to be due to disease and poverty, rather than genetic in origin. In poor countries, care of children with disabilities is usually left to the family, most often the mother. Although the researchers witnessed many situations in which children with disabilities were clearly cherished and loved by their families, such children are often perceived by society as a grave burden. This is because of the extra time and expense that

...there are far more people with physical or mental disabilities per head of population in poor communities than in rich.



⁷⁹Belarus Smorgon Group of 9 children aged 10 — 14.

is frequently involved in providing for children with disabilities and also because many are unable to support themselves (let alone their families) when they grow up. Indeed, in communities already dealing with chronic poverty, the costs of medical treatment and other forms of support can be quite overwhelming.

I have two disabled children. One of them is 7 — she is not able to talk, can't eat, can't walk. She needs expensive medicine. They are 200 Shillings per day. When it comes to making decisions it goes against the rights of the other children - because she needs medicine every day. Education is very expensive. The child needs a wheelchair, which costs 2000 a month. I am unemployed and rely on casual labor all the time. The greatest problem is that the hospital bills are high, the medicine is high. The nearest hospital is far and I have to pay for transport to take them there. The disabled children are more expensive to care for because they need special schooling and the fees are higher. In the process the other children have to be neglected.

- Mother of children with disabilities,
Nairobi, Kenya.

Without support, some families may neglect their disabled members. For example, there is evidence that children with disabilities are far more likely than others to be excluded in the allocation of scarce resources within the family. Indeed, 'early lack of investment in disabled children is not just a reflection of ignorance. In situations of poverty this is a desperate but rational decision.'⁸⁰ As a result, children with disabilities are disproportionately represented among the poorest populations in all parts of the world, often comprising as much as 15 to 20 percent of the poorest in developing countries. Such circumstances not only impede development, but also damage the confidence of the child, intensifying his or her dependence on the family and isolation from the world outside.

In practice, for many children with disabilities, the physical or mental challenges they face are far less of a hindrance than the ignorance and prejudice of society at large. Disability attracts a powerful stigma in many places, often provoking feelings of humiliation, loneliness, guilt and anger among affected populations at the extreme social rejection, isolation and powerlessness they suffer. Families in Kenya described being chased out of villages, or cut off from community and relatives out of fear of being affected by association. Indeed, the shame was enough to drive one Kenyan father to chain his 17-year-old disabled son in his room for two years. Meanwhile, in Bihar, India, one family who ran a roadside stall kept their daughter chained to a chair, explaining that it was to protect her from running out into the road or burning herself on the stove. These extreme actions are often prompted by the fact that in many cultures the birth of a disabled child is considered a tragedy or a curse. As one interviewee in a Nairobi slum in Kenya remarked:

People think it has something to do with witchcraft - someone has put something bad on you. It's like the way people used to think of twins - they are a bad omen and they used to be killed. It is the same with disabled children. They are considered bad luck.⁸¹

And in the words of a CCF staff member in Smorgon, Belarus:

Society is generally shocked and not used to seeing children with disabilities - even now there's still stigma attached to a parents with disabled children. They look at the family and say: "What sort of people are these?" There are also a lot of myths regarding invalids: parents of normal children don't allow their children to play with disabled children because they think disability is contagious and their own children will catch the illness....[disabled children] are intellectually developed but they become upset at not being able to par-

⁸⁰ Ashton, B. (1999).

⁸¹ Interview with parent, Nairobi, Kenya, Oct. 2002.

ticipate in social things, and getting a girl or boyfriend. They realize that there is no future because there are no jobs for them and they just hang around.⁸²

CHAPTER 5 CAUSES AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

SECTION ONE: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CAUSES OF POVERTY

Introduction: Understanding Systemic Poverty

Poverty tends to be manifested and experienced in ways that are intensely personal, individualized and/or localized. However, it is in reality the local product of a wider system and structure, and of broader trends at the global, regional and national levels. Connecting these larger macro political and economic policies with localized manifestations of poverty is not always easy, though, given that these policies often take years to work themselves out into conceivable effects on the ground. Moreover, those macro policies directed particularly at children are usually mediated through the family or other local institutions such as schools and health services. This greatly reduces the likelihood of any direct and obvious causal correlation being formed, and goes some way to explain why the causes as perceived by field officers and poor people themselves are often vague accusatory statements against distant bodies. For example, many CCF questionnaire respondents explained poverty in very general and vague terms, as being a result of 'globalization' or 'privatization'. And one merely stated: "I think that bad economy is the only cause of poverty". Others offered more comprehensive explanations of the phenomenon:

The lack of necessary political will and economic mismanagement have been principal causes of the unhealthy state of the nation. A package of measures aimed at restructuring the economy in order to restore growth by cutting public

expenditure, removing subsidies, devaluing the local currency, opening up the local economy to foreign competition, selling off public companies and reducing the size of the civil service have resulted in undesirable social effects.

- CCF staff member, Zambia.

At the heart [of poverty] lies the economic systems and policies of the country, as well as the world; and the ineffectiveness of the state to respond to the country's history of apartheid, which in essence legalized underdevelopment of the majority of people. The macro-economic policies and lack of comprehensive social assistance responses reflect this.

- CCF staff member, South Africa.

It is often assumed that people with limited education and limited literacy and numeracy are unable to make sense of the many macro-policies that influence their well-being, but the research suggests that this is not always true. Of course, discussion of the national political scene is often a luxury only the wealthier urban elite can afford, for rural areas tend to have limited access to policy making bodies, advocacy campaigns and the media. The fact remains, however, that poor people are often very aware (often more so than the rich) of the causes behind their situation: the point is that their lack of education renders them far less able to do anything about it. Thus, the CCF study showed overwhelming acknowledgement among the poor that governments are failing in their task to provide adequate services to their citizens, largely because of corruption and misspending. Overall, poor governance, low levels of democratic representation, inappropriate utilization of national resources, hegemony of power and wealth by oligarchies and social discrimination featured strongly in most of the discussions with respondents. Even in those countries where governments had signed up to child-focused legislation following ratification of the CRC, implementation is stated to be weak. As one CCF respondent put it, "Indonesia on paper is very wonderful and a

Poverty tends to be manifested and experienced in ways that are intensely personal, individualized and/or localized.

⁸²Interview with CCF staff member, Smorgon, Belarus, Dec 2002.

The assumption that children are either unable to comprehend or uninterested in their larger political or economic environments is also contradicted by the research.

haven for children, but Indonesia in reality is completely the opposite.”

The assumption that children are either unable to comprehend or uninterested in their larger political or economic environments is also contradicted by the research. A large number of children in Bolivia, for example, were very keen to express their thoughts on the government and were able to relate certain macro policies, such as the increase in incidences of police brutality, to their daily problems. In fact, in some cases, their analysis were more sophisticated and developed than those of adults.

5.1.1 Poor Political Representation

In Sierra Leone, the selfishness and ineffectual nature of politicians was frequently touted in association with poverty, if not as one of the causes then as a factor in its perpetuation. This was especially true for groups who felt themselves to be marginalized through reasons of ethnicity or geography, and who had little or no political representation at the national or international levels to further their interests:

The selfish ambition of our politicians is exploiting our country. People have become egocentric and don't help the others to come up. If I cannot help my brother how can I expect him to improve? This part of the country [Koinadugu] has been neglected by the politicians. Education, agriculture - any aspect of life has been neglected by government. We can only boast of good roads from here to Makeni and the rest of the district the roads are poor. The district is fertile but you can't access the remote areas. The people from those far off villages can't reach the town to sell their produce. Government is responsible for the poverty in this district.

- Male CCF staff member, Kabala, Sierra Leone.

The government can't assist us. Our representatives are not caring for us - they

only have interest in their own advancement. In Kuranko country we are just like nothing. Our children are educated but we have no power. There is no political representative who represents our interest. But if you go to Temne country you see they have people there to represent them. But for us Kurankos they usually send other people to come and rule us. The only Kuranko who we have in parliament has been powerful since the 1960s but he does nothing for us. We usually don't have much choice to select our leaders. They force us to vote for someone and when they get to parliament they don't really represent our interests.

- Elderly man, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Many respondents in Sierra Leone also expressed a strong conviction that poor political representation and a general discontent with political leaders were major catalysts to the war:

There was latent tension between south and north. Powerful people were from the north, from one village - Binkolo - and the president came from there and some key ministers. This seemed like favoritism and was one of the main complaints of the RUF.

- Middle-aged woman, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

In Bolivia, the incompetent and corrupt government was similarly blamed for the strikes, blockades and protests that were effectively paralyzing large areas of the country at the time of the research. Rather than negotiate a settlement with the cocoa growers of the Chapare region who were behind these protests, the government used the army to break them up, causing further resistance and chaos. Many other groups had similar complaints against the government that were also being expressed through protests of various sorts.

The peasants from the Chapare and all over the country have a huge number of

complaints and requests, but the government pays no attention to them, it doesn't solve anything, so at the end of the day the peasants start blocking the roads, they won't let anything through and so, its like that the country falls apart. The bananas that we're exporting can't get through, and this creates more crisis for the country as a whole. But the government doesn't care — they don't solve the problems because there's no extra money in it for them. So it doesn't do very much...

- Male Community Leader, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

5.1.2 The Unequal Distribution of Wealth

The unequal distribution of wealth that characterizes all of the countries researched was held by most respondents to be a direct reflection of monopoly of power and inequality of political representation. In India, the vast majority of wealth is shared by just 15 percent of the population, and it is these rich few who are believed to hold power:

The ruling class are supported by the wealthy people to ensure they are elected, and so that schemes, laws, rules — anything — can be changed in the favor of the rich. It's actually the wealthy class who is ruling the country, it is not the political parties. This is my opinion... It's very rare that a middle or backward person can contest an election, you need millions of rupees otherwise you cannot win. So who gives money? The wealthy. And they get their men and get all things done for themselves. It's a very complex system, so as a consequence neither the people nor their situation change much.

- Man in his 30s, Bangalore, India.

In Kenya, the historical marginality to economic development of certain communities has led to a lack of knowledge and skills necessary to take advantage of market opportunities (where these exist). This in turn creates the conditions whereby those

who do possess the requisite skills and capital can exploit those who do not. Agricultural extension programs and similar measures are noticeably rare, and many communities have no bargaining power with local authorities, the central government or other bodies. Thus, the Masaai in the Mbirikani region have no leverage with the Kenya Wildlife Service, the body charged with running the national parks and receive no financial benefits from Amboseli National Park, even though it encroaches on their land. Tourist revenues from the park go directly to central government, which also receives subsidies from international conservation interests. Even though wild animals roam on Masaai land, eat their crops and spread diseases to their cattle, the Masaai have been unable to obtain compensation. There has been open conflict over this in the past and, unsurprisingly, Masaai interviewees stated bitterly that as far as they were concerned, "the government loves animals more than it loves us — we have no government."

5.1.3 National vs. International Interests

Respondents were in many cases highly critical of the foreign policies and agreements set up by their governments, which were seen as directly contributing to national impoverishment. Their concerns revolved mostly around the unequal access to and exploitation of natural resources, which, in the case of water, can mean the difference between life and death for some of the poorest communities. This is the case for the people in Rusinga in western Kenya, where access to water for irrigation is highly restricted in accordance with a treaty signed by Kenya under pressure from the British at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. This treaty prohibits certain countries from using the water of the lake and while Egypt is the main beneficiary, communities in western Kenya are comparatively disadvantaged. These communities are deeply resentful of the situation and blame their government for failing to lobby adequately for change:

...unequal access to and exploitation of natural resources...can mean the difference between life and death for some of the poorest communities.

We are not allowed to use the water from the lake for irrigation. This prevents us forming an irrigation system so that we can harvest throughout and have cash crops.

- Female Project Family Educator,
Rusinga, Kenya.

*...neo-liberal
'growth' strategies
have not spread
wealth to the poor, but
rather
incited a crisis that is
firmly blamed on the
government.*



A group of shoeshine boys working on the streets of Oruro in Bolivia were similarly insistent that their government's current policy of selling off oil and gas to foreign countries is detrimental to the wealth and prosperity of the nation. They referred to Gonzalo Sanchez de Losada (the president) as a 'traitor' and 'venda patria' (nation-seller). They saw liberalization not as a rational macro-economic policy, but as an anti-patriotic one that serves to perpetuate national impoverishment. Indeed, the latest round of IMF inspired policy decisions — promulgated in mid-February 2003 — sparked off wide spread rioting in the country and led to some 15 deaths. As in other countries, neo-liberal 'growth' strategies have not spread wealth to the poor, but rather incited a crisis that is firmly blamed on the government.

5.1.4 Corruption

Corruption among government factions and individuals is, unfortunately, widespread across the developing world. In the case of Africa, a recent World Bank study of African poverty at the Millennium concluded that "The failings of political systems, and the social forces underlying these, are identified as the key primary factors underlying the poverty problem of many African countries" (White and Killick, 2001). The evidence for this argument includes an analysis of how political corruption and poor governance stunt economic incentives and accumulation; constitute a major source of the inadequate human capital of the poor; and remain largely unresponsive in the face of urgent and growing crises such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic. For example, the uncontrolled importation of second hand clothes, allied to a lack of initiative in developing the domestic market, has in effect destroyed the Kenyan

textiles industry. Government officials who are involved in the importation of clothes have a vested interest in shutting down local textile factories, even when this leads to a rise in unemployment. Many respondents also blamed corruption and poor mismanagement for the collapse of the sugar cane market. 'Dumping' by rich countries has destroyed the market and ruined thousands of farmers.

These larger economic processes exist alongside the small scale but increasingly widespread corruption at the local level that people across the research sites reported. Local level corruption includes institutionalized practices such as being stopped regularly by traffic police wanting bribes in Kenya, the widespread demand for *bak-sheesh* (bribes) in India, and the inability to obtain credit without personal connections in Belarus. Such practices may not immediately appear to affect children. However, to suggest that corruption affects mainly adults is equally wrong, for it is often within institutions such as schools and hospitals that corruption occurs:

Education is corrupt down to the classroom level. Teachers expect children to bring tins of sardines to school, or a cool drink. Or in Freetown teachers make cakes for sale and they expect the school kids to buy them and if they don't the teachers discriminate against them.

- Female CCF staff member, Freetown,
Sierra Leone.

Of particular concern to aid and development agencies working in poverty-stricken countries is corruption by staff, or by individuals and groups who pose as aid workers to extort money from communities. In Sierra Leone, a significant number of communities have been exploited by a scam in which fees are levied for registration in spurious aid programs. The fee and registration are explained as a necessary measure for indicating that a community is willing to receive assistance. As one elderly man described:

Some people came here two years ago and collected L 1000 from each household. They intended to buy since to re-roof our houses. They did nothing. Last year another group came and collected L 2000. Leaders claimed that some company will come to rehabilitate our houses. People took this L 2000 as a registration fee - so that they will bring clothes, rice and building materials for us. We have seen or heard nothing from them.

- Elderly man, Kabala, Sierra Leone.

As the main channel for governmental aid during the war, NGOs of all shapes and sizes sprang up all around Sierra Leone, many acting as unofficial facades for war profiteers. Some are owned by politicians who use aid to curry favor with the population prior to elections. These incidences can be very damaging to the reputation of bona fide organizations, and act to undermine the trust and willingness of communities to become involved in aid interventions.

5.1.5 Economic Transition

The post-Soviet transition from a centralized to a market economy in countries such as Belarus has had devastating consequences for many communities. Essentially, economic transition has led to extreme monetary instability, a massive retreat in public sector and other forms of employment and a radical shift in workplace skills requirements. The majority of respondents from Belarus lamented the dramatic changes they had suffered. Not only has transition meant the loss, sometimes overnight, of savings and devaluation of incomes and pensions, but it has also undermined the status of many adults within society, since traditional skills and professions are no longer valued as they once were:

We lost all our savings from the Soviet Union. This happened in 1993 and again 1996. Overnight all our money lost its value and our savings were reduced to a ridiculous amount. Each one of us was given a check in 1992 to start up our own

enterprise and businesses by the Belarus government. But when we tried to use this money no one accepted it and it was useless. It was just the government blowing us full of hot air - they have disappointed us so many times. We cannot believe anything they say anymore. So I still have this check at home in my cupboard — as a memory to these times. In 1992 there was nothing that we could invest this money in. So we had great plans for what we were going to do and then it all became useless...

- Elderly man, Minsk, Belarus.

Everything has got worse since perestroika - nothing is better now. Inflation has gone up, the Rubel has devalued, there is no work, we have to pay for everything that used to be free before, we have no more holidays anymore. The pension used to be R 100,000 but it was more than enough. During the Soviet Union R 100,000 was enough — we had everything. Food, clothing, a place to live, holidays once a year. But now everything is difficult. We can't save up for new furniture - if a chair breaks we can't replace it... We realized the lie of the government. We ended up spending in one week the money we had saved up over a lifetime. I moved around for many years and saved money and put it all into the bank. I had \$ 10,500. In 1996 my bank account was emptied — the money just disappeared. No one knows where it went or who took it. I got absolutely nothing.

- Elderly man, Minsk, Belarus.

Here in Minsk we have a lot of people who lost their work, but they were highly educated and part of the *intelligentsia*. They became poor and lost their position in society. Someone changed his life and his lifestyle, became poorer. This is not a situation where someone's parents were poor, or his grandparents were poor and so he is poor - no, this is someone who has just suddenly fallen down into poverty. Over night these people's situation

*...economic transition
has led to extreme
monetary instability,
a massive retreat in
public sector and
other forms of
employment and a
radical shift in
workplace skills
requirements.*

changed. Those who did not even have any kind of position during the Soviet Union times may now be on top [rich]. When someone's status changes so quickly there are a lot of factors involved. It is difficult to adapt to this situation.

- Male CCF staff member, Minsk, Belarus.

As the last quotation reveals, the problem in Belarus is that there is no longer a clear relationship between level of education and wealth, as is arguably more the case in African and Asian countries. For example, the salary of a young teacher is about \$50 a month, which is barely enough to live on even when it is paid on time. Respondents reported that it is not uncommon to remain unpaid for their work for as long as four or five months at a time. Although the problem is more evident in small towns rather than the larger cities, the issue was raised in both urban and rural areas. In fact, pensions are the only reliable source of income in Belarus, which as noted, has led to a situation where many pensioners now support their grown children. Pensions are small, however, and workers have little choice but to continue working in their jobs in the hope of eventually being paid.

I work in a printing factory. Our equipment is very old and breaks down a lot. But we have no money to fix these machines. Now we haven't been paid for four months - we don't know why and we don't know when we will get paid again. Some friends are lending me money because I don't have a husband so I cannot feed my children without my salary. There is a production plant very close to us and it is the same situation there - people haven't been paid for a few months now.

- Woman in her 40s, Minsk, Belarus.

As this example shows, lack of investment can lead to use of unsafe and poor quality equipment. Accidents are inevitable in such situations, and can pose serious problems for workers who receive very little (if any) social insurance. As one such workman related:

I used to repair apartments [handiwork] and I used to just work for myself and take orders for things from people. But then three months ago I had this accident: it happened while I was working. I used a machine for cutting wood and put my hand into it and it cut off my fingers. Now I can't do handiwork anymore. Everyday I look through the papers to get a job but there is nothing I can do. My routine is simple now: I just sit at home. I can't work, I can't even help my wife with the housework, can't play with our child.

- Middle-aged man, Minsk, Belarus.

Economists have argued that while the transition from a centralized to a market economy may be difficult, the period of 'short-term pain' experienced by poor families will eventually be more than compensated for by the 'long-term gain'. This does not take into account the amount of time macroeconomic policies take to come into effect, and assumes that such policies will always result in better conditions. In practice, the 'short-term pain' — characterized by constant worrying about survival, tension within the household, possible domestic violence and family break-up — could very well span the entire developmental years of a child, and there is no guarantee at all that the situation will improve in the long run. World Bank studies of the impact of the Mexican and Thai financial crises show that:

...even after the economies of these two countries recovered, health status was still affected. During the transitory but acute recessions, children were taken away from their schools, entered hazardous jobs or prostitution rings, or sustained permanent brain damage from acute malnutrition.⁸³

Transition seemingly offers the poor all kinds of opportunities to maneuver their way out of poverty, through informal sector employment or illicit activities, for example. However, adults who have been accustomed to high levels of dependency on large-scale state enterprises tend to find

⁸³Cornia, (2001) p837.

they do not have the appropriate workplace skills for the changed job market and lack the entrepreneurial skills needed for self-employment or enterprise development. Training may appear to be a good solution, but this is costly, as a middle-aged man from Belarus notes: “The problem is that we would retrain for new jobs but the training courses are all expensive. If we had free training courses it would be helpful. Not everybody is strong enough to overcome these kinds of problems.” This confirms the suggestion above, that transition may benefit some, but is unlikely to improve the condition of all.

Young people tend to be more adaptable than adults in terms of developing new skills and taking advantage of new opportunities and are therefore better able to avail themselves of the benefits of economic liberalization.

Young and Old in Belarus — Experiences of Transition

Quotations taken from two elderly men, Minsk, Belarus

- In the Soviet Union... the government would solve all kinds of problems. Any initiative from the people was punished - only the political party could solve the problem. If you wanted to do something or you organized a small group to solve a problem you would be punished. So this has an effect on us now - we have a lack of initiative...
- *The psychology has changed. But young people could survive and make it now if they could grasp the principles of market economics. The opportunities are there now whereas it wasn't before. But young people are lazy now and give up too easily. Our thinking is “go to get a job” but the government is pushing for an enterprise mentality. But the young people are not taught about how to survive in a market economy.*
- We don't blame the young people for this - it's just their circumstances. They don't know how to survive in this world. But you must strive to survive and work hard.... At least here in Belarus the gov-

ernment can give out a little amount to support the people and it hasn't sold everything off. Russia is selling off everything, privatizing it. At least we in Belarus still own something.

- *Belarus doesn't have its own resources and this is the problem. Belarus was the intellectual hub in terms of assembling computers but very weak on actual production. There is no gold, oil, coal and that is why we are reliant on Russia. We need a relationship with Russia to get resources. Things that are produced here in Belarus are very poor quality. No one wants to buy our products anyway...*

- But it's not just that — it's due to the West's policies. The West is preventing the products from being sold in the European market. If they started accepting products from here they would be so cheap they would put everybody out of business there. Our only hope is to join with Russia.

In some post-Soviet transition societies there has been increasing tension between young people and adults over their different responses to economic change. The facility with which young people take on street work, prostitution and other informal or illicit income-generating activities has caused considerable disapproval among adults who at the same time are themselves unable to adjust to the new labor demands.

5.1.6 Structural Adjustment Programs

Economic policy has an enormous impact on the lives of children and there is always potential for it to cause great harm. In recent decades the IMF and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) have arguably been highly detrimental to the well-being of children. Originally intended to bring struggling economies back onto their feet, SAPs have worked through a series of so-called stabilization measures. These have generally included currency devaluation, reductions in government spending and,

Economic policy has an enormous impact on the lives of children and there is always potential for it to cause great harm.

most damaging of all with regards to children, the introduction of user fees for basic services such as health and education. The effects of these fees can be easily perceived at the household level, with greater proportions of the poor unable to afford even the most basic treatment or schooling for their children.

In almost all countries undergoing structural adjustment, the result has been an increase in unemployment as public services have been streamlined and cut. At the same time, the anticipated compensatory growth in new private sector jobs has failed to materialize, leaving the poorest families in particular struggling to survive. In Zimbabwe, the proportion of the population below the poverty line rose from 33% in 1990 to approximately 60% in 1995 after the first phase of the adjustment program — a trend replicated in the vast majority of other countries undergoing the same process.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, competition in the informal sector has increased as retrenched workers and new entrants to the labor market scramble for income-generating opportunities. Children have been called upon to earn incomes in compensation. In Nigeria, “children have always worked, but the Structural Adjustment Program has aggravated the necessity of work for all members of the family for collective survival”.⁸⁵ “The effects of structural adjustment programs in Kenya” indicates the numerous and widespread adverse effects SAPs can have on a country.

The Effects of Structural Adjustment Programs in Kenya

Medical

Before SAPs were imposed on the country in the early 1990s, the cost of medical treatment was usually borne by the government. Now medical subsidies have been eliminated, and the expense of treatment has prevented the poorest from accessing vital services. CCF documentation has shown that the life expectancy of adults in Kenya has dropped by 13 years since SAPs were introduced, with 23,000 children now dying every year from malnutrition.

Education

Education was free before the SAPs were introduced. Now the cost-sharing scheme means that the government only pays for teachers, and parents have to pay fees for school maintenance, uniforms and teaching materials. The number and expense of books required is also increasing, and parents are forced to spend more and more. The fact that there are no schools in Kenya that are completely covered by public funds has also had an impact on school enrollment. In 1985 the level of school enrollment was around 96%. However, the government decided to cut all subsidies to schools in that year, the level subsequently falling to 85% by 1996. Since then, the Coalition government that came to power in December 2002 has made primary schooling free again — one of its first and most popular policy initiatives.

Informal sector employment

Since the introduction of SAPs, the informal sector in Kenya has grown markedly. It is not legal: it is not taxed; and it is not directed or controlled. Many people want to enter the formal sector, but the government pays no attention to such aspirations and gives no assistance so they have to go it alone. The informal sector today employs a lot of children, but the conditions are not safe: the city council regularly harasses or arrests the hawkers on the streets. Women with children are at more risk because they cannot run, and this often leads to quite fierce battles between street vendors and police. But there remains no system for how children in these situations can be taken care of.

As indicated, arguably the worst consequence of structural adjustment for children came through the introduction of user fees for basic services such as health and education. With ineffective exemption schemes for poor children and the absence of satisfactory social welfare provisioning to fall back on, poor children suffer greater hardship and sometimes death as a consequence of these fees. Poor people were not

⁸⁴Government of Zimbabwe, cited in Mwanza, 1998.

⁸⁵Oloko (1996), p61.

exempted from fees in Kenyan and Zambian health facilities, and many staff and institutions faced with an acute lack of resources introduced additional charges.⁸⁶ In China also, the replacement of the communal health system with user fees and private healthcare has led to a resurgence in diseases such as tuberculosis, a fall in child immunization rates and an increase in both stunting and under-5 mortality over the past 15 years.⁸⁷

In a special report prepared for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, Save the Children argued that increased involvement of the private sector in basic services is likely to have a negative impact on service equity, quality, and capacity.⁸⁸ Using numerous examples, it argued that local community exposure to global market forces and multinational companies can be devastating for poor children. For instance, in August 2001 the public water regulator in the Philippine capital of Manila was persuaded by private sector water providers to raise water rates by over 50 percent, despite not meeting their obligations to supply a 24-hour service.⁸⁹ Populations already confronting severe poverty cannot reasonably be expected to adjust to such dramatic moves. Another source points to the trend in private sector expansion drawing trained and qualified personnel away from the public sector, as witnessed in Thailand's health system during the 1980s and 1990s.⁹⁰ The result is the lowering of both quality and quantity of staff in public services, with poor children disproportionately affected.

Despite this kind of evidence, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund continue to promote public-private partnerships as a means to deliver sustainable development, although the commitments to increased liberalization central to the structural adjustment programs are now more heavily disguised within the new Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Even the IMF has been forced to concede, how-

ever, that "it is broadly true that the core macroeconomic and structural elements of the early PRSPs have changed little from the programs of the recent past" (IMF and IDA, 2002). The key, therefore, lies in trying to include more child-focused policies within these grand economic schemes, so that children's well-being is at least acknowledged as a priority concern.

5.1.7 Unemployment

Livelihood insecurity is a major feature, or possibly the key feature, of poverty globally and as the capitalist market economy spreads, unemployment becomes one of the most common indicators of this condition. In countries without state benefits, unemployment can have dramatic effects. In response to the question "what are the main causes of poverty in your country?" in the CCF questionnaire, 'unemployment' was the top answer. The numerous examples of poor governance, corruption and structural adjustment discussed above evidently feed into this issue, and it is not surprising that in each of the research sites respondents complained continuously of difficulties in finding jobs. But it is important to note that unemployment as a concept generated a variety of social opinions and responses that went far beyond the state of simply not having a job. For example, in Sierra Leone and Kenya it was cited as an indicator of the conflicting world-views of old and young generations, while in Belarus it is an issue drawn around lines of gender.

Perceptions of and Reactions to Unemployment

When I was young and now is quite different. When it was time for working the younger ones would come to join you to work on the farm. And everything was enough — enough rice, groundnuts, everything, because all the younger ones came to help. When we were young there was no payment for work. People just worked for free to help each other. But now if you want a job done you

Livelihood insecurity is a major feature, or possibly the key feature, of poverty globally...



⁸⁶Booth et al, 1994; Narayan and Nwamwaya, 1996.

⁸⁷UNICEF, 2000; Bloom, 1997.

⁸⁸Save the Children, 2002.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Sitthi-amorn et al, 2001.

have to pay people. And if you have no money you can't find anyone to help you. Getting money is a problem — there is no way of getting money.

- Elderly woman, Kabala, Sierra Leone.

School leavers complain about unemployment. They don't know where to go. They complain that in order to get a job they need money. If I want a job from you I have to talk to you through money. Maybe Sh.100 000 to get a job. And if you don't have it, you don't get a job. Not having the training they need is another problem. The family can't take them for training because of lack of money. The parents of educated children have problems too: educated children can't find jobs and just stay at home. The youths complain that after all that high education now the parents are telling them to work on the farm. They feel after education they can't go back to working on the farm.

- Male Project Family Educator,
Wamunyu, Kenya.

A major problem is the huge unemployment. Women are particularly affected by this. The men too, but women find it really hard to get jobs. The population at one point in Smorgen was 60,000 and now it's 35,000, but it's probably even less than that. People are just moving out of Smorgen because of the unemployment.

- 17 year-old boy, Smorgen, Belarus.

The high rate of unemployment is the worst problem in Smorgen. Especially among women. 2,600 people are unemployed in Smorgen and in total we have 35,000 - but another 8,000 are outside of Smorgen looking for employment. And I think the figure is still much higher.

- Female teacher, Smorgen school,
Belarus.

Research indicates that people who are poor because of systemic problems such as high rates of un- and under-employment are also more prone to other problems which

are causal in poverty, such as ill-health and substance abuse (discussed in Section Two — 'Social & Cultural factors' below). Unemployment can also create significant feelings of resentment against those who have work and self-pity or self-loathing among those who do not. This is particularly true if the spread of opportunity is unequal, or when greedy individuals take advantage of a desperate workforce:

There are no jobs so there is plenty of idleness. Some people are holding four jobs. Instead of employing 10 people a boss will employ only two people who he will overwork and then pocket the other money for himself.

- 25 year-old man, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

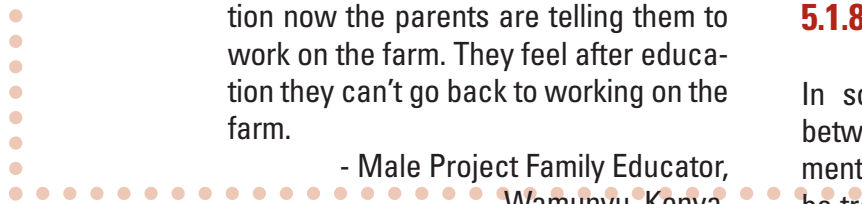
5.1.8 Conflict

In some countries, there is a clear link between armed struggle and impoverishment. For many families, poverty may even be traced back to a single instance of fighting in which they suffered significant material, financial or personnel losses. In many parts of Sierra Leone that were affected by the conflict, for example, it was not uncommon for whole villages to be erased at a time. Social networks of support were severely weakened and the ability of friends, relatives and neighbors to offer assistance to the poorest was significantly reduced, increasing the desperation and vulnerability of families to exploitation by money-lenders and credit agents. As the following selection of testimonies from women in Sierra Leone reveals, conflict has brought increased poverty through injury and physical abuse, death/desertion of the bread-winners, looting and burning of property, forced migration, reduced mobility and loss of trade (see below).

Conflict and Impoverishment in Sierra Leone

During the war I was beaten up by the rebels. They beat me on the head with the rifle and since then I cannot do any

*In some countries,
there is a clear link
between armed
struggle and
impoverishment.*



heavy work. I try to make brooms for selling by getting ropes from the bushes. Every week I have serious headaches that don't go away for many days.

- Middle-aged woman, village near Makeni, Sierra Leone.

Both my husband and my father were killed by the rebels. I am completely on my own in trying to care for my children. We in this village really suffered in the war. Houses were burnt down. People were beaten to death, they burned property, they cleared off everything from us. They would strip the women naked to look if they were hiding money.

- Woman in her 30s, village near Makeni, Sierra Leone.

The rebels came every day for months and months on end. We used to have many animals here but now we have not even a single one. They took it all away from us. Even if they came and found you eating meat they would take the meat from you and beat you up. This carried on for almost one year.

- Woman in her 30s, village near Makeni, Sierra Leone.

The war came and left us with nothing. They attacked this place at night and we all ran for our lives. When the rebels came they fired into all the houses. We stayed in the bush. We ran away from the bullets and hid in the bush for 10 months. We lived on roots, with no rice to cook for the whole time. We couldn't make a fire because the rebels would see it and come. And we got sick from the cold.

- Elderly woman, Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Before the war we were farming without problem — NGOs were assisting us with plantations and harvests. Some vehicles would come to collect our fruits and take them to the market. But now the situation is different: when we have harvest there is no vehicle to come and take the fruits and vegetables. The tomatoes and

peppers and the mangoes are rotting, and there is no way to get them to the market. The roads were blocked. We couldn't get anything to eat.

- Woman in her 40s, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Historically, cattle-raiding was widespread throughout eastern Kenya, and virtually everyone involved in herding engaged in the practice, usually taking up to five cows at a time. In Keria valley, the increased availability of small weapons from surrounding countries such as Sudan has transformed traditional cattle raiding practices between rival tribes into a deadly activity. Now hundreds of animals are stolen in a single raid. Whereas before, arrows were used and casualties (always adult men) were relatively few, the use of AK47s (costing roughly four cows each) commonly leads to the massacre of entire villages, and women and children are not spared. The risk of such attacks and the possibility of losing everything to raiders have in effect rendered certain tracts of the country uninhabitable. The government is too weak to do anything about this and there is no redress for people who lose their herds. Many people have been forced to move into the mountains for safety, although must continually venture back and forth in order to access the water in the valley.

SECTION TWO: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAUSES OF POVERTY

5.2.1 Caste and Class Discrimination

As discussed in Chapter 4, for large numbers of children, poverty, abuse and other forms of adversity are not random or chance experiences, but simply the result of who they are. In more prescriptive and hierarchical societies the prime cultural precedent for social action and exchange is patriarchy and patronage, which in turn builds on distinctions of religion, ethnicity, caste and/or class. Relations between people in different social categories are generally governed by strict codes of conduct, while individual destiny is affected in many ways at birth by a

In more prescriptive and hierarchical societies the prime cultural precedent for social action and exchange is patriarchy and patronage, which in turn builds on distinctions of religion, ethnicity, caste and/or class.

person's place within this social order. Patriarchy and patronage also appear to constitute a major obstacle to improving the lot of the poor and a major factor mitigating against economic development. In such contexts, therefore, some aspects of poverty may be understood as virtually preordained, determined at birth by social status and/or economic role.

Yet it should also be pointed out that in countries like India poverty is not confined to those of the lowest rungs of the caste system. To say that the caste system alone is responsible for poverty, as many observers do, is therefore inaccurate. Nor is it as simple a matter as low caste = poor, high caste = wealthy either. High caste families may lose their savings through economic crises just as lower caste families lose their crops through environmental disaster. In some of the villages visited, high and low castes lived in close proximity with relatively small differences in their material standards of living. Discrepancies arise more in the differential opportunities for employment that caste determines, particularly in rural areas. The difference is therefore not one of vulnerability to poverty, but rather the range and effect of the support networks and risk management strategies that various castes have available to cushion themselves against adversity. For example, as one CCF India staff member described:

...even if you are economically backward, if you are from an upper caste you still have political influence...your voice is heard, and if you say something, you can use that advantage to get social benefits. You can become a member of any organization, even if your financial situation is questionable, whereas this would be impossible for a dalit (untouchable), no matter how much money they may have.

- Male CCF staff member, Bangalore, India.

The poverty of the caste system is thus a poverty of opportunity and choice rather than simply a lack of capital or income. As

one man put it, "Caste has nothing to do with rich or poor. All the castes are the same. They are able to survive because of the maize that they are growing, now that water is there we take water to grow wheat and chick peas" (Elderly man, Madhya Pradesh, India). From this man's perspective, Indians from various castes are leveled to a certain extent by the peculiar demands of the environment in which they live. Thus, overcrowding and competition for resources arguably affect all but the extreme top end of the social scale. However, caste distinctions undoubtedly impose severe restrictions on social mobility, so that people who are born poor tend to stay poor, or at least confined to a certain status that they are not expected to supersede.

The Indian government repeatedly asserts that caste is no longer a divisive factor in Indian society and emphasizes that it has legislated against caste discrimination. However, many states, including Gujarat, have banned conversions to Christianity, one of the main strategies used by lower caste people hoping to escape their caste rank. This ban has effectively entrenched religious and caste affiliation in many areas.

In the study, the extent to which people accepted caste as the status quo varied significantly between genders and generations, as did the support for fatalistic theories downplaying the possibility of social mobility. At the same time, acceptance of caste as a prescriptive and hierarchical system does not necessarily prevent people from seeking to act upon their poverty. In fact, the research suggested that such notions were very much an upper caste/outsider perspective, employed mainly to preserve the hierarchy. As one CCF staff member put it, "the poverty [of the lower castes] exists today mostly because the upper caste people exploit them", working to perpetuate an inferiority complex that is in their own interest. Parallel discriminatory practices in India (such as gender biases) then work to further reinforce immobility within the caste system, cumulating in a compli-

The poverty of the caste system is thus a poverty of opportunity and choice rather than simply a lack of capital or income.



cated network of social inequity.

Sierra Leone, a society that is inherently less hierarchical than India, offers a contrasting perspective on the mechanics of social differentiation. Respondents spoke in particular of the leveling effect of the war, in that all families were touched by the conflict in one way or another and many of the economic and social distinctions that had prevailed in the past were eliminated by the widespread violence and loss:

We are all the same right now. No one is better than the other. The war has left everybody being the same. Before the war there were some families better than others. Some had cows, sheep — but during the war all has gone. We are all poor people now and no one is better than the others.

- 16 year-old girl, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Nevertheless, while war may have reduced social differentiation, some remarked that it has also created new sources of ostracism in the form of abducted children and to a lesser degree, amputees and the war-wounded. It has also fragmented many of the old traditions of sharing and collective action so that out of sheer desperation and necessity people now tend to think of their own individual interests rather than the communal good.

5.2.2 Ethnic Discrimination

Ethnic discrimination was found in the CCF study to play a major role in determining both children's susceptibility to becoming poor and their ability to escape poverty. Ethnic divides were particularly pronounced in Bolivia, where indigenous peoples constitute more than 50% of the population, yet account for the great majority of poor. In rural areas, 82% of indigenous peoples live in poverty as opposed to 64 percent of the non-indigenous population⁹¹ — an imbalance that has proved fertile ground for racist generalizations identifying indige-

nous people as inferior. A similar picture emerges from neighboring Peru, where indigenous groups were 50 % more likely to be poor than non-indigenous groups in 1997. In fact, the incidence of income poverty is generally much higher among the indigenous populations across Latin America as a whole.⁹²

Indigenous women living in urban areas of Bolivia appeared especially distressed by the discriminatory treatment they regularly receive:

If someone in more or less humble [impoverished] condition goes to the doctor and says I'm from the CCF project, they say "wait a minute, someone is waiting before you"... Then they say that the doctor isn't there, but I can see her. I say, "look, she's right there — please attend to me as this is urgent". They make you feel that... if you're going to die, you still don't like to say it in front of them... There was one woman who came out so cross, she said 'I'm never going back there, every time I go they always say the same thing, tell her different things, that there are no doctors available, whatever...

- Woman in her 40s, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Many interviewees also lamented the fact that so few women who are subjected to this kind of treatment have the courage to complain.

Indigenous Views of Ethnic Discrimination in Bolivia

Berta (B) and Silvia (S) - two women in their 30s Margarita (M) - a young community leader in her later 20s Elena (E) - a woman in her late 40s/early 50s

B: Why do people discriminate like that? We've all come from people like that, humble people. All our ancestors have been humble.

S: Well, it's a question that no matter who you are, there is always someone

...while war may have reduced social differentiation, some remarked that it has also created new sources of ostracism...



⁹¹From Lugo, Orlando and Mario Gutierrez (2001) *El Seguro Basico de Salud: Difusion y Uso*, La Paz: UNICEF.

⁹²World Bank, 2000.

...people who are subjected to discrimination must often struggle additionally with poor self-esteem and feelings of isolation, to the point where they may not feel equal to taking on jobs or activities alongside the majority populations.



who thinks they can act better.

E: Even our own children! For example, our daughters have become embarrassed to be seen with their mother if she is wearing a pollera [coarse woollen skirt worn in rural communities]

B: Oh God what a barbarity! Lots of young people are growing up in this environment of discrimination, that sometimes children are ashamed of their parents. But that does not have to happen. Parents have to make children respect them as well!

S: Because whether she wears a pollera or a pair of trousers, we're the same.

B: Of course we are the same. The women of polleras are very pretty, I don't know why there's discrimination — we're all attractive...

E: I think it has a lot to do with the education of the parents. A mother will say 'I don't like those women who wear pollera', which is her opinion.

B: Because the same children of the same women who discriminate against others say 'oh look, that child's mother is in a pollera, don't mix with him... In these cases we parents have to be active! To tell children they shouldn't say these things... I have to respect my people, our culture, and we should never forget that. So we should talk to our children about where we're from, who we are, where we've come from, how we've got here...our customs, our race...etc

S: Exactly. My mother wears a pollera but my wawas are not embarrassed at this...

B: See, that depends on how we raise them. The children have to know how we have eaten, talk to them and tell them what their family background has been like... At the moment we are effectively

discriminating against our own race and that is not right...

As with caste, discrimination of this kind imposes a poverty of opportunity. However, it is not simply that affected populations cannot get the jobs because they are discriminated against, or because the state fails to invest in their schooling and health. Rather, people who are subjected to discrimination must often struggle additionally with poor self-esteem and feelings of isolation, to the point where they may not feel equal to taking on jobs or activities alongside the majority populations. When they do, they are often relegated to menial, badly paid occupations (such as street sweeping, cleaning) that effectively keep them in poverty and reinforce their minority status.

Of course, discrimination, stigma and exclusion operate to varying degrees in all countries around the world, not merely the poorest. In the United States, not only are poor black children five times more likely to be chronically poor than all other children, but the infant mortality rates in some states are still as high as those in the developing world, even though the USA is a wealthy country. Even the completion of many years of schooling rarely makes a difference to this pattern, for at every education level, black men had the highest rate of low earnings in the country, followed by Hispanics and then whites.⁹³ This suggests that children from ethnic minority groups facing entrenched discrimination are almost *universally* more likely than other children to suffer poverty. Yet current alleviation strategies do not reflect this concern, tending to concentrate instead on categories of vulnerable children such as street children, working children or the sexually exploited.

5.2.3 Gender Discrimination

As noted in Chapter 4, the overall trend prevalent in all the research sites, and indeed practically everywhere throughout the world, is the feminization of poverty. Thus, within many families and households

⁹³Danziger and Stern, 1990.

women and girls suffer disproportionately from the effects of poverty while at the same time female headed and female managed households form a disproportionately high proportion of the total among the poorest sectors of the population globally.

Clearly, the susceptibility of women to poverty is a consequence of a multitude of factors, linked to societal systems and structures, as much as to collective and personal attitudes, values and practices, and these factors operate at all levels of society. We have argued that women have access to fewer (especially skilled) occupations than men, are less mobile within the labor market, less likely to inherit/control property and less able to decide on how income is used. At the same time, women are more likely to be concentrated in low-earning or informal (and thereby insecure) occupations and in part-time work, as well as to be involved in child-care and other unpaid domestic chores that compete with their earning activities. As well, they have less access to education and to health care, which implies increased risk of personal debilitation.

As the quotations in Chapter 4 reveal, women are often acutely aware of their many disadvantages and of the injustices associated with gender inequity and discrimination. Yet, often because of the constraints associated with motherhood and similar family responsibilities, they commonly feel powerless to act on and change their circumstances. When they do, they can risk violence and abuse by male partners who feel threatened by a possible reduction in their power. That said, many of the women respondents in the CCF study are engaged in important initiatives to improve their lot and that of their families, as is revealed in Chapter 6.

SECTION THREE: 'INCIDENTAL' CAUSES OF POVERTY

Unanticipated and incidental events or circumstances (such as alcoholism, ill health and family separation) at the family or individual level are a common cause of poverty

in many communities. Depending on one's perspective, these incidental causes are at the same time sequential *impacts* of poverty, in that they are more likely to affect families and individuals who are already suffering from the systemic problems discussed above. This is not to say that poverty is a necessary precondition of alcoholism or family break-up, since we know that rich people also become divorced, addicted to substances, and also neglect their children. Rather, it is to emphasize that the weight of both long-term systemic and shorter, incidental, problems is often enough to overwhelm coping capacities and push families and/or individuals over the edge into deeper and more desperate levels of destitution.

It was apparent from interviews across the research sites that for many people such incidental factors are the most important as a cause of poverty. This may be because respondents were less willing (or able) to think analytically about the bigger picture or because the personal effects of alcoholism, family separation, ill health and so on, are far more immediate and dramatic than, say, structural adjustment programs. This is not to suggest that respondents were unaware of the interrelated nature of these factors, but that they were more explicit in referring to immediate and personal causes. Overall, alcoholism and substance abuse, ill health (particularly HIV/AIDS) and family separation (including the neglect and abandonment of children) were the three most critical concerns, and are discussed in turn below.

5.3.1 Alcoholism and Substance Abuse⁹⁴

Alcoholism was by far the most frequently cited problem associated with poverty. In the countries where heavy drinking appears to be a serious problem nationally (most notably Belarus), it was blamed for a variety of social ills, including domestic violence, family separation and abandonment and, of course, impoverishment. In the Belarus case it has also apparently led to a significant number of children being taken away from

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⁹⁴For a discussion of the effects of adult/caregiver alcoholism on children, see Chapter 5.

Adults allow and even encourage their children to drink beer from an early age as a rite of passage into adulthood.



their parents and put in shelters or passed to other families. Part of the reason for the high instance of alcohol abuse in Belarus is because liquor — and vodka in particular — has long been favored as a means of relieving boredom and reviving bodily warmth and strength during the bitterly cold winter. Alcohol is easy to come by in urban areas especially. Children reported that even they are able to buy it from mobile street kiosks, as the staff tend to ignore age restrictions. Cultural beliefs also play their part, in that beer and beverages such as fruit-flavored gin and tonic are not generally perceived to be alcoholic. Adults allow and even encourage their children to drink beer from an early age as a rite of passage into adulthood.

We have a new problem: beer alcoholism among children. It is a dangerous thing. Some children are given beer to drink from about 2 to 3 years of age. Their parents or grandparents or relatives believe that it is good and healthy to drink beer. Parents don't think that beer is a problem — they think it's healthy for everyone. The children start drinking beer and by the 7th form they start using vodka and using more and more. Beer is therefore the first start on the road to alcoholism. The beer also has different fruit flavors here, like cherry or something, and the children like to drink it. It's also very cheap — R 500 for a 1.5 liter bottle

- Female CCF staff member, Minsk, Belarus.

In Kenya, a focus group discussion with schoolteachers elicited similar criticism of heavy alcohol use. The financial repercussions were highlighted:

The local brew is breaking many families here. It is sold at a cheap price and you can quickly find yourself becoming addicted. All the household money goes to buy it, and parents don't care because when they drink they get satisfied. If you don't have many activities, you don't have any goats, you don't have a *shamba* to cultivate and no business, you just

wake up at 6 and start to drink.

- Male teacher, Mbirikani, Kenya.

Many interviewees implied that just as alcohol is a causal factor in poverty, so too is poverty causal in alcoholism. When asked why it is that men in particular drink excessively, interviewees from both Belarus and the Wamunyu district of Kenya made a clear connection with poverty:

We can't say that everyone starts to drink because of this or the other reason. But the main reasons are unemployment, low salaries, or falling into bad company. Also personal problems cause alcoholism. They try to forget about them for a couple of hours. We also have teenagers who are alcoholics. But many children drink because they think it is cool.

- Female in her 40s from the Catholic Church, Smorgon, Belarus.

Some women nag their husbands and the men don't want to be at home. Especially if they are poor and have nothing to give to the wife — if she still nags him then he will just stay away and drink. The men are drinking because of poverty. They want to forget about their problems for a while. They are hiding from their problems by being drunk.

- Female Project Family Educator, Wamunyu, Kenya.

A similar sense of humiliation and failure was reported to drive Bolivian men to abandon their homes and families and seek refuge in alcohol. As one 14-year-old teenage girl from La Paz put it, "They haven't the courage...to face up to what will happen to their families". She went on to point out that this is the model that many young boys grow up to imitate. Some of the women interviewed revealed that they had dealt with the issue early on in their marriages by getting rid of alcoholic husbands before they had a chance to destroy the family.

I put up with that situation for four years until I got tired. I kicked my husband out

and now I alone work to bring up our four children. Despite the fact I have to work very hard, I am more at peace and my children too. I haven't heard anything from my husband since then.

- Female in her 30s, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

However, given the difficulties confronted by single parent, female-headed households in Bolivia, such cases tend to be few and far between.

Many interviewees (including many children) also suggested that drugs were often easily accessible. Focus group discussions in Minsk with adolescents aged between 10 and 14 revealed that a wide range of drugs — especially marijuana, heroin and ecstasy — can be purchased from barmen at local discos, while older children act as amateur dealers at summer camps.

As many as 25 people can be selling drugs at a time on certain streets of the big cities. A cup of Marijuana is selling for \$15 and a gram of heroine for \$50. Many kids try them because they are poor and depressed or because of peer pressure. Those children who have a bad family life do this a lot and take drugs to try and fit in with the older boys.

- 16 year-old boy, Minsk, Belarus.

Drugs are a problem for richer kids as well because they have the money to buy this stuff and they often do it to be trendy. Other children do it because they are tired of life. They are tired of struggling. They can't deal with the stress in their lives and they look for an escape.

- 17 year-old girl, Minsk, Belarus.

Many children also reported finding hypodermic syringes in their school playground, though not all knew what these instruments were for.

5.3.2 Ill-health

In conditions of impoverishment, it is very rare that children, or indeed adults, receive either the quality or quantity of food and drink they need to remain fit and healthy. Under-nutrition and inadequate fluid intake combined with dirty and unhygienic environments are a major cause of infectious and diarrhoeal diseases. Malnutrition together with poor hygiene and sanitation is especially liable to undermine the health of younger children, as these examples from India and Belarus show:

A combination of various reasons: unhygienic conditions, sanitary conditions are poor, then food spoils, or is not hygienic and then no safe water...All these things can give worm infestation. People who eat food leftover from last night, the next morning — that can also cause stomach problems. Normally what people who don't have enough fuel to cook twice a day do is, instead of cooking twice, they will cook once and use that food for the second meal also. But that is not a healthy thing, it affects the health of the children.

- Male CCF staff member, Mukti Niketan, India.

Health problems among children: many teachers report that children would faint frequently and are malnourished because they do not eat fresh fruit or juices. They eat only potatoes, porridge and soups and they lack vitamins and proper nutrition.

- Male CCF staff member, Minsk, Belarus.

Ill health is a major drain on family resources. Treatment can be prohibitively expensive and so many poor people cease a course of pills or injections before it has been properly completed, further exacerbating their health problems. Hospital care (assuming there is one) is often out of the question, whether because of the cost of transportation or treatment, or because poor

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Chronic ill health, disability or terminal illness in the prime contributor can cause total destitution.



people are denied access through discriminatory treatment (as in Bolivia). It is also the case in Bolivia that indigenous people often do not trust western-style doctors, who treat them with disrespect and without regard for their cultural traditions. These problems can have serious repercussions for the household, particularly if the affected person is the main breadwinner. Chronic ill health, disability or terminal illness in the prime contributor can cause total destitution. This is without the costs of a funeral ceremony, and the social disgrace often attached to diseases such as AIDS.

In African countries such as Kenya, the AIDS pandemic has reached terrible proportions, and respondents were quick to highlight the terrible poverty that follows in its wake:

HIV is one of the major causes of poverty. Many households are headed by women. If one of the parents is sick, the income is reduced. The infection rate is 10% and 7000 people die every day of AIDS related illnesses. The population is 30 million, but it's shrinking at a rate of 700 a day and that is just HIV deaths.

- Male CCF staff member, Nairobi, Kenya.

AIDS contributes massively to poverty. There are so many orphans here now who are being taken care of by their grandparents because their parents have died from AIDS. Many of these children don't go to school and end up getting employed as a househelp, herder, or thief. Many of the young people themselves are dying. More women than men are infected with HIV. Women do sex work in order to get some money to take care of their children, but this puts them at further risk.

- Female Project Family Educator, Wamunyu, Kenya.

Local beliefs about HIV/AIDS do not help the situation, as they encourage fear and isolation

of suspected carriers, who then receive little or no support in their destitution (see Box 5.6). It has become common to describe people who are ill with AIDS as suffering from malaria, a disease that does not carry the same negative connotations. This allows those widowed following death due to AIDS to marry again.

Community Beliefs Surrounding HIV/AIDS, Wamunyu, Kenya

- People do not openly come out with saying that they have HIV - they deny that they are suffering even if they are. However, if locals see that a husband and wife both died then they believe that one of them had been suffering from HIV.
- Some people believe that if you have HIV, it is because you have been bewitched. There are signs that allow you to tell that someone is suffering from HIV, and if the wife or the husband notice them, they can find a new partner for sexual activity.
- In the Book of Revelations it says that there will be an incurable disease that will come and wipe out people and this is what this disease is about.
- There are some people who say I cannot die alone — we must die together. So if they know that they are infected they try to infect someone else so that they die together. There is no good death — whichever way it comes it is death.
- People think that HIV is gotten through immorality and it is bad manners to be associated with HIV.
- Some people who have HIV just commit suicide. Those are people who do not have the moral strength to say I have AIDS and I will die like this. There are three people here in the area who have done this. two men and one woman - they were our age mates, not too young or too old.
- Those who it is known have HIV/AIDS are isolated, not cooked for, no one wants to be their partner [have intercourse with them]. But some parents

take good care of their children even when they know that they have AIDS.

According a women's group in Rusinga, AIDS has led to: a decrease in farming because patients are unable to work; malnutrition; an increased likelihood of children replacing adults in work; a significant rise in the number of orphans; a new role for grandparents as caregivers; high medical costs; and family separation and abandonment.⁹⁵ They cited the case of one 70-year-old woman who lives in a village on Rusinga Island and who cares for 17 grandchildren without any assistance.

5.3.3 Divorce, Abandonment and Institutionalization

Family breakdown and separation is a major cause of poverty throughout the world. Anger, exhaustion and frustration caused by unemployment or low incomes can result in domestic violence, substance abuse and abandonment of the family by one or both parents, this leading in turn to greater destitution. Belarus has the highest divorce rate of all the former Soviet States, and respondents suggested that this is a direct result of poverty:

People in our society are becoming more and more angry. Children are angry and dissatisfied with their life. Parents are angry with the school - in every interaction they are aggressive. Some parents don't seem to want their children. They feel their children are a bother. They only care about giving children food and clothing and that's all — they don't need to do anything else. They think that school has to educate the children. The high divorce rate is because of the low socio-economic situation — people start to quarrel when there is not enough money for clothing and so on.

- Male teacher, Smorgon, Belarus.

The poor quality of institutional care in Belarus has already been discussed (see Chapter 4). CCF staff thus expressed a deep concern that institutionalization of children

is unlikely to be in the best interests of children, as in institutions: "...they can't develop any skills or be exposed to real life... Even if a mother is bad she is still a mother. In the institutions they [children] have clothes and food but they don't receive care and guidance" (Female teacher, Minsk, Belarus).

Another worrying trend raised by both staff and others in Minsk is the increasing incidences of stressed and impoverished parents simply deserting their children, leaving them to take care of each other. This places great demands on the older of the remaining children, who must take on adult responsibilities in caring for younger siblings.

Children are forced to become adults much too soon. One example is a 17-year old boy with a 15-year old girlfriend looking after two small children. The mother just took off and just left.

Q: Does this happen often?

A: Yes, more and more. The parents are just gone and no one knows where they've gone. Minsk is city of 2 million people and it's easy to disappear. Women just leave their families and move in with another man. This puts real pressure on the children - they are forced to become parents to young brothers and sisters. It happens often.

- Adolescent girl, Minsk, Belarus.

In Sierra Leone, it is the responsibility of the eldest son to run the household in the event of his father's death or absence. If he is deemed too young for this task, then an uncle will move in to take care of the children until he is thought to be ready to take on the responsibility himself. Many war orphans or children who have been separated from their parents are given to relatives to look after in the same way. While this is a culturally accepted practice, research shows that fostered children are often treated less well than children born into a family.⁹⁶ For example, among the Inupiat of Northern Alaska, it

⁹⁵Focus group discussion with women, Rusinga, Kenya, Nov, 2002.

⁹⁶Mann, 2001; Mann and Ledward, 2000.

was found that orphans who are taken in by people outside their extended family are often pushed from house to house and treated as slaves (savikti).⁹⁷ In most contexts, girls are fostered more easily because of their domestic labor potential and because with marriage they move away from the foster home and thus tend not to be viewed as ‘permanent’ additions to the family or long-term competitors for resources.⁹⁸ Boys, on the other hand, are seen to take longer to mature and to require more resources in terms of land and money for dowry payments. Among some cultures in Western Kenya, families look upon orphan boys as “likely to thrive and crowd-out other sons in their foster home”,⁹⁹ while in one children’s center in Rwanda, 126 of the 128 children who remained to be fostered were boys.¹⁰⁰

CHAPTER 6 RESPONDING TO ADVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Recognizing Resilience¹⁰¹

Poverty is seldom something that happens to people against which they have absolutely no defense, despite often being presented as such in popular media and fundraising campaigns. Rather, it is a set of circumstances with which people of all ages and both genders interact in numerous ways. Some will, of course, be more mentally and/or physically powerful than others in responding to adversity, but all individuals — including children — do at least engage with and interpret their situations in ways that need to be acknowledged. The tendency in many quarters to approach poverty with a universalized ‘rescue and rehabilitation’ response has meant that the strategies adopted by individuals, families and communities to combat the effects of poverty have frequently been ignored or under-estimated. Aid beneficiaries are too often targeted as passive recipients rather than active participants in poverty alleviation programs, and traditional risk reduction strategies already in place are too quickly dismissed as ‘inferior’ to those of modernity. This is despite

anthropological evidence from around the world detailing the astonishing resilience people have shown to various forms of chronic and acute poverty. Poverty alleviation measures need to build on these existing mechanisms, rather than undermine or overrule them, if they are to bring sustainable relief.

The initial challenge here lies in locating and understanding the strategies for managing adversity that may be in place within a particular community at a particular time *before* any external intervention. These are often far from obvious to an outsider, and can range from a single action undertaken by an individual (for example, selling a cow to raise funds to send a child to school) to regular communal activities (such as ongoing labor exchanges for planting, irrigating and harvesting crops). Other strategies still involve looking further a field for support, to institutions of credit/money-lending, religious organizations, or even to the military. These four levels of strategizing — individual, family, communal and institutional — frequently interact with and complement one another. Whether employed separately or together they can give people the resources, strength and resilience to endure and overcome even the most desperate conditions of poverty and in some cases enable them to rise to greater economic security and wealth. Such strategies may be economic in nature (for example, taking on a second job), spiritual (such as seeking solace through religious observance) or socio-cultural (for instance, holding a costly feast so as to prove solvency to neighbors and relatives).

Acknowledging Children’s Contributions

In practically all societies and contexts, regardless of social or personal history, children are less powerful than adults. Associated with this, adults commonly belittle children, greatly underestimating their competencies and failing often to properly acknowledge their important roles in and contributions to society. This is partly because full recognition of children’s capa-

⁹⁷Bodenhorn (1988).

⁹⁸Ayieko, 1997.

⁹⁹Ibid, p12.

¹⁰⁰Mann, 2001.

¹⁰¹It is important to note with respect to this chapter that the data used were collected from children participating in CCF projects, and that in many cases these children are by no means the poorest of the poor in their respective countries. As such, the strategies outlined may not be indicative of those that are traditionally associated with severe impoverishment.

bilities would often entail adults having to show humility and admit their own shortcomings. In the UK, for example, around 60,000 children are the sole careers of incapacitated adults and many fulfill this role without the knowledge of social services or education authorities, largely because of the shame felt by the adults in question. Many CCF questionnaire respondents highlighted the tendency of societies to play children's contributions down: "children in general are considered to have a lower capacity and their ideas are usually neglected" (Ethiopia), and "it is not in our culture to listen to children" (Honduras). "Children do very little to alleviate poverty. I don't think they have proper knowledge or awareness of it" (Sri Lanka)

Most societies have strong views about what children are and are not capable of. Most also recognize child development to be a gradual process in which children grow in competence and can be given ever-increasing responsibilities. Normally the expectations of children under age three or so are minimal and this is a period during which children are indulged and allowed to play. In many communities children are expected to work by around age 6, although the early years of work are often thought of more as a period of training for the child than as productive activity. As noted in Chapter 3, puberty often marks the transition to social adulthood, when young people (again, especially girls) assume the economic roles of an adult and may marry and bear children of their own. Hence, in rural areas of Bolivia, there is a perception that children are not particularly useful before the age of around 15, when they are required to provide income for the household by working in the towns, as maids (in the case of girls) or apprentices (if boys). For example, when women in Opoqueri were asked if a group of 10 to 12-year-olds playing nearby could work, one woman replied: "Them? No! They can't do anything." Yet the following day one of the young girls in question was observed carrying her infant brother on her back and towing her 8-year-old brother around the

central square.¹⁰² This shows that adult perceptions of children's roles and what children actually do are very divergent. In many cases, this is because unpaid child work within the domestic sphere is not regarded as 'work', while paid work undertaken by older members of the family outside the home is.

Despite this adult denial, recent anthropological, sociological and development research has revealed that children are not passive casualties of circumstances beyond their control, and are far more capable in confronting poverty and other adversities than once thought. In practice, in most parts of the world, childhood is a period of considerable social and economic capacity. Just like adults, children are very active in engaging with the world around them and harness their reasoning, insight and expertise to the construction of their own values, meanings, and strategies. In fact, it has now been shown through research in many countries that children can have the ability not only to determine their own lives but to also influence those of others. For example, without children's contributions many families simply would not survive. One study of nine Latin American countries found that without the income of children aged between 13 to 17, the incidence of poverty (as measured by the absolute poverty line) would in fact rise by 10 to 20 percent.¹⁰³ By the same token, the work undertaken by girls at around age six may assume considerable importance to the household because the care of infants by older siblings releases adults for paid employment. This work may entail taking sole responsibility and even cooking for babies and other young children for several hours each day.

In line with evidence from other recent studies, the CCF research revealed that children make many direct and often very positive contributions to the struggle to overcome poverty, from fortifying the emotional and psychological resilience of other family members to taking their future into their own hands. Examples of their labor contributions in par-



Most societies have strong views about what children are and are not capable of.



¹⁰²Interview with woman in Opoqueri village, Oruro, Bolivia.

¹⁰³UNICEF (1997) Education and Child Labor, Background Paper, International Conference on Child Labor, 27-30 October 1997, Oslo.

ticular are given in Section 2.1 of this Chapter. Respondents in all of the research sites described the ways in which children assist adults, some emphasizing the importance of collaboration by all members of the household. CCF staff in Sierra Leone spoke about the personal sacrifices some children make:

Children are expected to contribute to the household by going to sell, or working on the farm. At night they may be too tired to study. Early in the morning they have to get up to sweep. So the children do suffer. They don't get a fair chance to go to school. If a child fails at school he is bullied again [by the parent] "I am spending my money on nothing".

- Male CCF staff member, Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Aside from unpaid child work within the home, many children engage in paid work, some migrating alone to places of employment located at considerable distances from their homes and families. In many countries, adults depend quite heavily on remittances sent by children who have migrated for work. In Sierra Leone, these remittances would often enable an entire family to rebuild their lives following the devastation of the war:

Q: You all suffered in the same way: the rebels came and took away everything and left you with nothing. How do some people now manage to pass the others by and become better off than others?

A: This is when they have elder children who live outside of the village. They send things. Or brothers or sisters living in Freetown, and they send things. The rest don't have anyone like that so they just stay poor.

- Middle-aged woman, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

Such evidence therefore calls for a profound rethinking of 'childhood' as a time of dependence on adults and without responsibility. Indeed, when children are denied the possi-

bility of contributing actively to their communities they may develop a strong sense of alienation and become prone to criminal and other illicit activities. Some argue that lack of proper opportunities to assume meaningful economic roles in society may even be a factor in children's involvement in armed combat in many parts of the world. Many of those with social and economic responsibilities do not regard themselves as dependent on adults so much as interdependent with adults. They think of themselves as co-contributors to the family, playing their own part in the care of younger siblings and incapacitated adults and in household maintenance and survival. In fact, the assumption of age-appropriate roles and responsibilities within the family and community can be a vital source of self-esteem and motivation for children, who in the CCF study often expressed a wish that they could do more to help. This was a common aspiration among children in La Paz and Cochabamba, Bolivia, in particular.

SECTION ONE: FAMILY STRATEGIES

6.1.1 Austerity Measures

It is widely reported that the first response to crisis is greater austerity within the household; reducing the amount and number of meals consumed each day, letting illnesses go untreated and shelter unrepaired, and so on.¹⁰⁴ Elderly men in Kenya described how, if they or another member of their family could not afford hospital treatment for a sickness, they would just "go home and wait to die"¹⁰⁵ If the poverty is expected to be temporary (as during seasonal hardship) many populations make do on this basis alone. For example, the Kenyan government bans fishing in the lake in Rusinga for four months of every year (apparently in order to prevent stocks from depleting) and many fishermen "just sit and use the money [we] have gotten previously" during this period. Others adjust to seasonal shortages by taking up short-term employment elsewhere. For instance, some Rusinga fishermen shine shoes, or grow

¹⁰⁴Kabeer, 1994; White and Killick, 2001; Naryan et al, 1999; Kanbur and Squire, 1999.

¹⁰⁵Focus group discussion with elderly men, Wamunyu, Kenya, Nov 2002.

vegetables along the lakeshore using bucket irrigation, while others engage in petty trading, selling salt and matchboxes.

In times of difficulty, nothing could — or should — be wasted or thrown away without first assessing its potential for use elsewhere. In many of the poorest countries in the world recycling has become a major enterprise, with very positive environmental and economic effects. In one of the research sites in Bolivia, a whole community has built up around and become dependent on the local rubbish dump as a resource for recyclable materials. Women in Belarus described how the pressures of poverty have led them into recycling all their possessions, particularly clothing, which is vital in keeping out the winter cold.

We are very careful with our money. We ration everything. For example, a dress that you can't wear anymore we wear it when we work on the dacha. Old clothes of our children which are too small and which you can't give to your friends, they become socks or gloves. Everything is remade into something else.

- Woman in her 30s, Minsk, Belarus.

Attitudes to economizing and recycling were, however, very different according to generation. Elderly people in Belarus complained that younger generations are far less adaptable in the face of poverty than the young used to be, partly because of changes in the social and economic environment:

Our life is full of difficulties. But we [the elderly generation] learnt how to economize with money - our youth can't do this. We limit ourselves and only buy what we absolutely need. The rest we don't buy. We know how to do this as we lived through WWII and never had clothes or shoes... But the new generation find this much more difficult - now they want to go to university, or they simply don't want to do it [economize].

- Elderly woman, Minsk, Belarus.

In fact, teenagers in Belarus did describe a number of austerity measures that they have developed to alleviate poverty, although these were less austere than the measures employed by their elders. For example, schoolgirls admitted that they prefer to spend their dinner money on make-up rather than on food — indicating that peer conformity and social status are prioritized over personal welfare. The incredulity that Belarusian elders hold for such tactics simply underlines the subjectivity and variety of coping strategies that can co-exist within a single community.

Austerity measures may have adverse health consequences for children. Often this is most evident among infants at the time of weaning, when use of solid foods of low nutritional quality results in high rates of under- and malnutrition and related morbidity. Older children may also experience detrimental consequences. Girls in Belarus who forgo lunch sometimes faint at school. Economizing may also have adverse social consequences, and many children in the study linked wearing clothes handed down from an elder sibling with bullying at school. Moreover, the introduction of austerity measures can lead to disparities of access within the family or household, since it is not simply a matter of cutting down on consumption or expenditure in general, but often involves consideration of the different needs and contributions of each member of the household. This is highlighted by the following example from Sierra Leone:

I buy clothes for myself first, then for the child who can't work. The rest of the money goes for the work gang [group of men who work together]. I spend on myself first because I had nothing decent to wear in public. Next are the children because they are not able to fend for themselves. The third set of people are the work men because my children can't work yet so I spend on those who work for me. I bought food the first time I had money. The second time I bought clothes for myself because it was

*Austerity measures
may have adverse
health consequences
for children.*



From the perspective of aid agencies and other outsiders, the economic rationale behind the disposal of assets is not always easy to define.

cheap, then for the children and then for the wife. Most of the money went on food. I buy for myself first because I can cover my child's nakedness with my clothes [pointing to his caftan, under which he could hide the children] but his clothes can't hide mine. I buy for the women last because the rebels were more considerate for the women and didn't deprive them of their clothes. They didn't spare the men and they could just take clothes off the men as they liked.

— Middle-aged man, village near Makeni, Sierra Leone.

As noted in Chapter 3, the circumstances of children can vary greatly from being fed and clothed first (as the most vulnerable) to being left until last (as the least contributing members of the household). Withdrawing one or more child from school so as to reduce education costs and increase domestic income through the child's labor is another common strategy. Girls are generally affected more than boys because it is reasoned that girls are less likely to seek skilled employment when they grow up and their economic contributions as adults are more likely to benefit their husband's rather than their birth family.

6.1.2 The Sale of Household Assets

Another strategy for staving off destitution is the gradual divestment of individual, family or household assets, usually in order of their dispensability to livelihood, non-productive items tending to be disposed of before productive ones. Indeed, the accumulation of assets, like jewelry, a bicycle, or household utensils that are essentially surplus to requirement and can easily be sold or pawned is an important means of averting destitution during periods of crisis. In most cases, land is held onto as long as possible, because it offers scope for production, provides long term financial security and status and anchors the household within family and community structures.¹⁰⁶ Having said that, the people who are doing best in Sierra Leone at present are cattle owners rather than farm-

ers, because land tends to be locked in by inheritance laws and is only valuable if it can be sown, which is hard to do when standing crops are destroyed or stolen by the military. Cattle, on the other hand, are mobile and versatile assets that can ensure both subsistence and a ready income through their sale, breeding and milk production.

From the perspective of aid agencies and other outsiders, the economic rationale behind the disposal of assets is not always easy to define. In some cultures, families go to great lengths to accumulate goods, sometimes becoming heavily indebted in the process, which are then consumed or given as gifts during a large social gathering or festival of some sort or another. The logic underlying this kind of ostentation is that it enables families to provide social proof of their solvency and facilitates the formation of important social and economic alliances that may be called upon in time of need. Equally, it is not uncommon for a family to own potentially valuable and saleable assets such as jewelry, or a bicycle, and yet decide — for reasons of dignity and community status — to go hungry during the pre-harvest season.

These consumption patterns complicate the already difficult process of determining what constitutes poverty. Is a family that has inadequate caloric intake for three months of the year poor, when it could sell a bracelet and have enough to eat? What about a father who saves money to buy a cow for his son's wedding instead of purchasing medicine for his sick daughter, as is sometimes the case in India? These questions are important, for they recognize that strategies for dealing with poverty or accumulating wealth are seldom 'neutral'. Aid agencies are often too quick to make judgments about such strategies without investigating the complex multiple reasons that may lie behind them. For example, saving money to pay for a son's wedding may make far more economic sense for a family than purchasing medicine, because the alliance brought about by the marriage may yield longer term benefits for the whole group.

¹⁰⁶Kabeer, 1994.

This complexity is rarely acknowledged in poverty studies, which often work in accordance with an implicitly constructed or assumed hierarchy whereby some strategies are considered more positive or beneficial than others. Often a child that chooses to become a soldier and participates in activities such as killing, fighting, or looting as part of his or her way of overcoming poverty is viewed in a very different way to one who takes up a job in a factory or on a farm for the same purpose. To avoid making judgments, therefore, every effort must be made to fully investigate the circumstances surrounding these strategies, including the past, present and future conditions that could potentially influence them.

6.1.3 Diversification of Income/Resources

Since a lack of money is often the first and most pressing manifestation of family poverty, the move to spread risk and seek out supplementary or more lucrative work is one possible indicator of hardship. This may involve breadwinners taking on more than one job concurrently, sending previously dependent members of the family/household out to earn an income, or changing the type and management of employment. Unfortunately, these strategies assume that the opportunity to expand employment either in quantity, scope or variety exists at a local level, which in many areas is simply not the case. Additional jobs and additional hours spent working sometimes bring only very marginal returns. In many urban areas especially, household risk reduction strategies commonly involve the deployment of individual members in a diverse range of occupations and activities. Spreading household labor across a range of occupations is used as a way of avoiding too great a dependency on any one occupation or sector, thereby lessening the impact of economic collapse in any specific area of the economy.

Families across the research sites revealed that in the face of impending poverty and hunger, they were able to organize and

exploit the various skills of different members very effectively. The contributions of children were nearly always vital in these processes, as the example from Sierra Leone below shows.

Family Organization in Sierra Leone

The girls in the family farm and plant the groundnuts with their mothers. The man cuts the forest and plants. The women do the harrowing and weeding. The children drive birds [away] in the evening and all day. The men cut leaves and make fences to keep grass-cutters and wild hogs out. On a big farm the whole family would drive away the birds. The women would go home in the evening to prepare food, leaving the men on the farm. The men make the platform from which you can see the farm and drive away the birds. The children tie strings to the pillars of the platform and tie them around the farm. They shake the strings to drive away the birds.

Just before harvest the people would pick the first gleanings from the harvest, which the women would beat and clean for eating in the evenings. Normally by 1 pm the man goes to the bush to dig wild yams. By 3 to 4 pm he comes back to the farm and the woman cooks this for the boys, the men and the women. In this way the family feeds until harvest.

- Elderly man, Kabala, Sierra Leone.

In many cases diversification is a seasonal strategy necessitated by a regular drop in income. As noted, fishing is the main source of earnings on Rusinga island, in Kenya, and yet the yield is far from regular or sufficient and when the government ban is in force from May to August every year this can lead to great hardship. Only those able to bribe officials can fish during this period. Even when the waters are open and the stocks are high the price fluctuates dramatically because the fish have to be sold quickly, and the fishermen are not organized into a union and so cannot protect their interests against middlemen. Some of the fishermen who supplement their earnings with farming take up

Since a lack of money is often the first and most pressing manifestation of family poverty, the move to spread risk and seek out supplementary or more lucrative work is one possible indicator of hardship.



offers of micro-enterprise development from donor agencies following the harvest in September and use this to carry them through the winter. While this seasonal diversification would seem to work in principle, the fishermen complained that the need to keep moving from one to another occupation impedes the development of skills in a particular profession and undermines efficiency.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the amassed income was rarely enough to provide their children with consistent and/or nutritious food.

Income remitted through the temporary or permanent migration of one or more family members is another diversification strategy that can be a crucial source of support to poor families. Except in situations of conflict where survival is in question, it is actually quite rare for large families to migrate en masse, because such a strategy tends to involve a great deal of organization and expense. Also, most families seek to leave someone behind in order to protect their property. A more common tactic therefore is to dispatch a household or family member, usually an adult, to the nearest major employment center. With the growth in globalized communications and labor markets, many migrants seek employment overseas. As indicated, migration can entail considerable risk for those left behind, for there is no guarantee that the migrant will find employment, let alone send any money back. Often, migrants pay considerable sums of money to labor recruitment officials to secure a job and in the case of those seeking employment overseas, to traffickers who arrange the papers and transportation necessary to cross national frontiers. Commonly, these payments result in a major burden of debt that cannot be readily covered by the earnings of the migrant and which takes many years to repay.

Some children make the decision to migrate themselves for personal reasons. As noted, the need to be able to contribute to family upkeep has led children in rural Bolivia to seek jobs in urban centers during their school holidays. Many of the younger children inter-

viewed back in the village expressed hope that they would one day live permanently in a city, because village life is dull. Rural hamlets were not held to be places where their ambitions could be realized, although the hours of work in the city (often 7a.m. to 11p.m.) were viewed as very arduous.

While diversification can be an effective strategy for managing poverty, it is generally the case that women or female headed and managed households have far fewer economic options than men and hence far less ability to diversify. Due to cultural restrictions and gender inequity, women enjoy significantly less occupational mobility and choice than men and are less likely to have secure or well paid jobs, or access to credit. Hence, the situation is more difficult for the women on Rusinga island who do not have a husband or partner. As women they are forbidden from participating in the fishing industry (although some fish in secret) and occupations like tailoring, teaching and basket weaving, which are permitted, seldom provide sufficient income to live on. Their only real option is to sell fish in the market. But frequently they are only able to obtain supplies if they agree to have sexual intercourse with a fisherman (see Box 6.2). This transaction of sex for fish is called *jaboya* — meaning something that holds the net when it is floating on the lake. When you try to catch a fisherman you need *jaboya*, just as with the fish. The practice can have serious consequences for the women's children, not only in terms of stigmatization by local people, but also because of the risk of their mothers contracting a sexually transmitted disease.

Single Women and Fishing on Rusinga Island, Kenya

The problem for women here is that we are dependent on men to get the fish to sell. If you do not have a man who can get you fish you can be in trouble. A fisherman can just say that you have to make love with him to get some fish to sell. Sometimes you have children and it is difficult to have to make love to someone.

- Female Project Family Educator,
Rusinga, Kenya.

¹⁰⁷Focus group discussion with Project Family Educators, Rusinga, Kenya, Nov 2002.

I don't have a husband. There are so many women who want to buy the fish. If you have cash money you can buy - no problem. But if you want credit you have to befriend the fisherman. He says "you can have this trough on credit and then in the evening you bring me the money" and then he will expect sex from you. Many of the women here on the island are widows and don't have a man to give them fish. Even if you do have a husband who brings in fish he won't give you all of the fish - only a portion for the daily meal. The rest you have to buy from the market. This is because the fisherman is not the owner of the boat and needs to hand over the fish to the owner.

- Woman in her 30s, Rusinga, Kenya.

There is also a risk of disease from men who come to fish from other areas. These men spread HIV/AIDS. Some men come from far away and they want to marry. They marry a woman on every beach but they don't look after any of them.

- Female Project Family Educator,
Rusinga, Kenya.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties confronted by these women and even though men usually control and manage the family assets many women who confront serious poverty are able to assert some degree of economic autonomy. Women in the study have devised numerous strategies for accessing and controlling resources of their own, often without informing their husbands or partners. Many in Sierra Leone have formed women's groups known as tamaraneh ['Let's help ourselves'] which work for each of their members in turn, helping to provide labor, food, or a small loan when times are hard. In one remote coastal village in Sierra Leone, where income-generating opportunities are scarce, women have organized themselves into tamaraneh groups of around 10 to 12 members to collect sand from the nearby beaches and sell it to truck drivers passing through on their way to town:

We work for 3 days and there are about 10 to 12 women working on 1 heap of

sand. The vehicles are different sizes and it depends on how big the truck is on how much they pay you. You get L 20 000 for a pick-up truck. Then you have to give the driver of the truck some money, maybe L 4 000 or L 5000. This is to pay him for coming to you and in the hope that he will come back to you again... We get paid at the end of the 3 days and their rest of the time we live on credit so that we can feed our families. So we get between L 3000 - 4000. So on average we get about L 1000 a day for digging sand.¹⁰⁸

Other women mentioned gathering wild products (for example, berries and nuts) for sale and saving the income for emergencies; diverting money and resources generated by family enterprises elsewhere; or handing only a portion of the proceeds to their husbands. While many men in Sierra Leone had also adopted this traditional way of working, it must be pointed out that in most contexts these self-help groups were predominately female. Indeed, these kinds of strategies are often essential to survival in situations where the men are apt to misuse or squander the family earnings, as was highlighted in India:

What we women do is we usually try and save a little bit of money every month, without telling our husbands. And especially from those husbands who are in the habit of drinking. Because most often whatever money they get is spent on drinking, so what we do is save a little bit of money every month so where there is a necessity, we can buy a little bit of clothes for ourselves or our children. But most often what happens is we don't even have that money to buy. So we just forget about it...

- Woman in her 30s, rural village in Bihar, India.

SECTION TWO: INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES

6.2.1 Child Work¹⁰⁹

According to the International Labor Office, "poverty is the greatest single force which

¹⁰⁸Focus group discussion with women, village near Makenie, Sierra Leone, Jan 2003.

¹⁰⁹A child is classified as a worker or economically active by the ILO if the child is remunerated for that work, or if the output of that work is destined for the market. However, for the purposes of this report, 'child labor' will be understood to include domestic work (where no remuneration is given or expected); work done by children but where the parents/siblings get paid; and work for which children do and get paid for directly.

creates the flow of children into the workplace,”¹¹⁰ and every year, huge numbers of children around 11 or 12 years of age (and some younger still) do indeed enter some form of employment, paid or otherwise. In fact, as indicated, work is one of the most important ways in which children contribute to the maintenance and survival of the household. However, increasing evidence from around the world suggests that family poverty is not a sufficient explanation of child work, for if it were the child workforce would be far greater than it actually is. For example, in many parts of the world children’s work is treated as a mechanism of informal learning whereby children acquire the skills that are necessary for adulthood. In some cases, parents may simply prefer their children to work either instead of, or in addition to, attending school to keep them from becoming idle or associating with undesirable peers.

The most convincing evidence concerns the links between child work and regional variations in the opportunities and incentives for children to work. Availability of children’s jobs is a key factor, and in places where a clear market for children’s labor exists (usually the major cities), there is often a correspondingly high level of child employment.¹¹¹ This is not to say that rural children are any less likely to work, however, for the majority of working children globally live in rural areas. In fact, there is considerable evidence that land area, livestock ownership and family enterprise are all positively related to child labor participation. Increased productive assets — such as livestock, which are often tended by children — have been shown in many cases to lead to greater child labor participation, while a growth in household land assets also raises the likelihood of children dropping out of school to work. This kind of research has important consequences for poverty alleviation strategies, for up until now it has generally been assumed that the most effective way to combat poverty is to increase the access of the poor to productive assets.

The scale and nature of child work varied substantially across the five research sites, although it was undoubtedly a key contributor to family or household income in all. For example, paid child work through migration appears to be more common in Bolivia than in either the Maasai area in Kenya, or the rural Indian communities visited. Part of the reason for this seemed to be the level of access/transport to areas of commerce and industry where children might find informal employment - in both Kenya [Maasai] and India [Bihar and Madhya Pradesh], the distances and transport facilities were more forbidding than in Bolivia. Even from the most isolated village visited in Bolivia, it was still only a three hour bus ride to Oruro, a city of 350,000. Thus, most of the children in remote rural areas of Bolivia would do paid work during school holidays, when they would temporarily migrate to the urban centers to find casual employment. During term time, they would busy themselves with unpaid domestic labor, tending cattle, fetching water and firewood, cooking and cleaning.

This is not to say that the children in remote villages with poor transport facilities were working any less. Indeed, impoverished children will usually find themselves participating in casual labor from a very early age no matter where they live, often because the poorest parents have no other option but to bring their children to work with them. This is particularly true in the poorest states of India, where children as young as two help their parents to break stones for construction. Thus, in one village in Bihar visited during field research the majority of children were involved in stone-breaking. This was because the village is so remote, there is no other work available, and because the schools rarely function due to absenteeism among teachers. The children were quick to point out the terrible physical effects, the exhaustion and monotony, of this hazardous work, but noted how they feel compelled to continue in this occupation to help their families:

All parts of my body start hurting a lot after a whole day. Everything: because

¹¹⁰ILO (1996) *Child Labor — What is to be done?* Geneva.

¹¹¹Cockburn, 1999.

we carry those stones on our head, our heads start hurting; and because we're using our hands, our hands get hurt, holding the hammer also makes your hands rough and start hurting.... It is very hard. Sometimes when the stone is so heavy we have to put whatever strength we have to break the stone. We know that if we do not break the stone, we don't get the money. And if there is no money, we cannot survive.

- 14 year-old girl, Bihar, India.

Children in the other research sites had many more work options (see below) the majority of which were less immediately hazardous but physically demanding all the same, particularly given the young ages at which children begin working.

Different Forms of Child Work

Below is a selection of the activities in which children were involved at the time of research. They include only those for which children were paid and exclude begging and the numerous unpaid tasks that children undertake within the domestic sphere. The activities are divided by country, but only to show the popularity of certain jobs in relation to others. It should not therefore be assumed that there are no children working as shoe-shiners in Belarus, for example, simply because it is listed under Bolivia — rather, that shoe-shining was more widespread an activity in the latter.

Belarus

Washing cars, baby-sitting, looking after the elderly/pets, picking fruit and vegetables on farms, cooking/cleaning at summer camps, packing things onto shelves in shops, performing in dance or song groups, sweeping streets, collecting empty bottles to take to the bottle factory, handing out pamphlets and fliers, sex work.

Bolivia

Shoe-shining, street vending, voceros — announcing bus routes through the windows of small buses, sewing piece work, domestic servants, work in retail shops, tin mining,

collecting rubbish for recycling, sex work.

India

Stone-breaking, factory work (for example, stitching garments/operating machines), looking after cattle/goats, domestic servants, agriculture/harvesting, construction and road building, leaf collecting, sex work.

Kenya

Looking after cattle, goats and sheep, fishing, farming and weeding, clearing bushes, factory work, tourist industry — especially hotels and restaurants, domestic servants, cleaning boats, polishing wood carvings, building shelters, fetching water to sell on donkey carts, making charcoal, rope making, sex work

Sierra Leone

Collecting/selling firewood, cooking/selling fruit and vegetables, collecting leaves, farm work/harvesting, community work (building schools/houses), poyo—tapping palm wine, herding cattle, sex work.

The widespread assumption that impoverished children are always forced into labor by their parents was not upheld by the research, which revealed that a large number of children began working out of their own volition. In many cases, children look upon work positively as a vehicle for self-actualization, economic autonomy and responsibility. Many of those above age 10 described feeling a powerful need to contribute to the family upkeep and to help their parents and older siblings in covering the costs of food, shelter and schooling. As one adolescent girl from Sierra Leone put it, "If your parents are poor, you can't sit and look at them — you need to go and find food". Children are extremely sensitive to changes in the family environment, and can be quick to blame themselves for the increased intra-familial stress that may result from chronic poverty. Research has shown that the position of children within the household often improves after they start contributing to household income, and working children have reported having fewer conflicts with

...a large number
of children began
working out of their
own volition.

their parents, and are less frequently punished than their non-working peers.¹¹²

Paid work in particular can also increase status among peers. While this is still no reason to actively encourage child labor participation, it does at least shed some light on why so many children voluntarily choose to work. For example, motivated by the desire to help his mother and relieve some of the tension at home that constant worrying about money was causing, one boy in Cochabamba, Bolivia, had found a Saturday job in a shop. Another boy worked every day assisting his father in his caretaking job by cleaning classrooms twice a day. This boy also expressed sadness about his family's poverty, and wished that he did not have to witness his parents' distress over not having enough food to feed the family.

Many of the children interviewed in Oruro were working not only to assist their families but also for their own personal advancement, paying their own school fees, or covering the cost of their textbooks and/or uniforms. A similar trend emerged in Minsk, Belarus, where children who engaged in seasonal work divided their minimal earnings between their own immediate needs and the longer-term requirements of their families. Early exposure to work means that many children become quite independent and skilled in the management of money when quite young, and are more confident in exercising greater control over their lives than those who do not work. In the study, some of this confidence appeared to derive from the strong bonds that emerge among working children such as shoe-shiners on the streets of Bolivian and Indian towns and cities. Lasting friendships, safety and camaraderie, were just some of the qualities that children spoke of as resulting from working together, not to mention relief from the boredom and frustration of their daily lives. For example, many of the boys working as shoe-shiners in Oruro mentioned how sticking together gave them 'protection from the bigger boys' who often hit them or steal their boxes if they accidentally encroach on their working territory.¹¹³

The study thus provides evidence that social support from peers in the work place can enhance children's resilience. Children who are able to establish and maintain friendships have been shown to be more resilient than those who are isolated socially from others. Positive peer relationships provide children with an arena of support outside the family in which they can experiment, develop attitudes, skills and values, and learn to share, to help and to nurture one another. These relationships both mitigate the negative effects of adversity, and also contribute to a child's sense of self-esteem. This process may in turn enhance the development of other protective factors such as a sense of competence, an ability to form other meaningful relationships, to empathize, and to feel a sense of belonging. In short, friendships provide children, like adults, with opportunities to be themselves and to feel good about who they are — these processes help to build resilience.

6.2.2 Crime

Respondents in all of the research sites, particularly those living in urban areas, were very aware of crime and many reported high incidences in their neighborhood. While very few were willing or able to point the finger of blame, the threat was pervasive and, whether this view is misguided, most crime was attributed to people from the poorest areas and the most impoverished social groups. For example, teenagers in La Paz felt most threatened by gangs of youths who operate in the city slums where they live. In their eyes crime is a natural and predictable consequence of poverty, and, just like sex work, theft and other criminal activities are an obvious strategy for confronting destitution. This kind of generalization, whether or not true, was reiterated by respondents in Sierra Leone, who connected crime and poverty in a similarly direct manner:

If your children are educated but have nothing to do, then the children will decide to steal. Then the children will have to go to the bush and kill [join the

Early exposure to work means that many children become quite independent and skilled in the management of money when quite young, and are more confident in exercising greater control over their lives than those who do not work.



¹¹²Ebdon, 2000.

¹¹³ GD shoe shiners, Oruro city, Bolivia.

rebels]. If the parents are wealthy they can give the children what they want, but if they are poor, then the children will have to steal to get what they want. If they don't steal from this lady [points to one] they will steal from another one.

- Woman in her 30s, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Girls from a school in Minsk were acutely aware of the various forms of crime in their cities, and confirmed that the culprits were often street beggars and impoverished children. However, they argued that a significant amount of the crime did not appear to be driven by desperate poverty because of the nature of the goods stolen. It was also suggested that boredom was a key underlying factor, some petty theft constituting an escape from the monotony of poverty:

My mother works in a shop nearby and when she comes home she tells me what happens. She says there are many thieves. They often steal alcohol - not food or bread, but alcohol. Mostly they are older than 20. My mother thinks they do it for fun, not because they don't have enough money.

- 15 year-old girl, Minsk, Belarus.

Young people steal money, chocolate, alcohol, cigarettes, chewing gum. Some steal sunflower seeds on the market — they are displayed in open containers and old ladies sell them and they just run past and grab a handful and run away. Some also steal expensive things from shops, like breaking into a shop and stealing clothes.

- 16 year-old girl, Minsk, Belarus.

Deciding who to steal from is not arbitrary, however. Adolescent girls at a boarding school in Rusinga, Kenya, described how they would steal small amounts from their parent's businesses if they deemed their pocket money insufficient:

Some of us assist in our parents' shops during holidays. If you know that your

parents won't give you much pocket money to take away you can start stealing a little bit here and there from the shop (sugar, cocoa, or money) to take with you to school when the time comes for you to go there. This way you can save the little pocket money you have to spend on something else.

- 16 year-old girl, Rusinga, Kenya.

Similarly, from interviews with 13 to 17 year-olds in Smorgon, Belarus, it appears that older boys would frequently steal from younger boys, but never from girls, for they are 'weak' and targeting girls would not be deemed respectable by peers. The fact that smaller boys are also weaker does not stop them from being robbed, the rationale being that they are "future men — they will grow up to be big and strong".

6.2.3 Sex Work

It cannot be denied that poverty is a key factor in pushing children (or inciting parents or caregivers to push children) into sex work, whether through casual and intermittent encounters or more formal brothel prostitution.¹¹⁴ In Belarus and Kenya in particular, interviewees were very open and frank in their discussion of the sex trade, with the majority highlighting poverty as the single most influential cause. As one respondent put it,

Prostitution happens a lot in a poor family. The reason for this is that they need money. Nadia said in her building there is a family where there is a single mother with seven children. The mother doesn't have a job. The oldest three children are daughters and they are all prostitutes. This is how the family survives.

- Female CCF Peer Educator, Minsk, Belarus.

A similar picture emerged in discussions with CCF staff in Kenya, who pointed out that high levels of poverty had driven many women — and girls as young as 10 or 11 — to take up sex work for an income. The fact that some of them earn a lot of money (more

It cannot be denied that poverty is a key factor in pushing children into sex work, whether through casual and intermittent encounters or more formal brothel prostitution.

¹¹⁴Child prostitution is defined by the current UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography as 'The act of engaging or offering the services of a child to perform sexual acts for money or other consideration with that person or any other person'. The stress of this definition is that child prostitution is not 'committed' by the child but by the person 'engaging or offering the services of a child' (United Nations, 1995:6).



than on a normal salary) did not apparently alter the women's responses when asked why they do this: "What do you want me to do? - I have to earn money to eat". This was echoed in discussions with teenage girls in Minsk, who suggested that many girls take up prostitution to pay their college/school fees, or to help their families through a period of financial hardship.

Yet elderly women interviewed in the Wamunyu region of Kenya felt that prostitution has less to do with money and more to do with a lack of hope among children without jobs or livelihood skills. They highlighted a history of child abuse in the family as causal, believing that this renders children far more susceptible to further sexual exploitation. Adolescents also pointed to the existence of so-called 'silent prostitutes', who take to the streets only sporadically when they need money quickly for something specific like a smart dress or school fees. Indeed, the CCF research unearthed the critical need to look beyond generalized correlations of poverty and prostitution to the more subtle types and differences within this focus. To suggest that poverty causes prostitution is simplistic, over-stated and unconvincing, especially given that many societies that are poor do not have a high incidence of prostitution, and the rapid spread of this trade in the richer countries of the North. In Minsk alone, there are many different forms of prostitution

It is equally important to note that many children themselves did not see their sex work as 'exploitation', even if they did not entirely approve of it.



It is equally important to note that many children themselves did not see their sex work as 'exploitation', even if they did not entirely approve of it. Adolescent boys in Wamunyu, Kenya, even suggested that it was an advantage that girls could sell their bodies in times of need — an option they felt was not open to them as boys.

Different Types of Prostitution in Minsk, Belarus

It is important to distinguish between things that are done out of selfishness and those done out of anti-selfishness. Things done out of selfishness are when

you have a warm coat but you want five coats or when you want ten pairs of shoes but you already have two. A lot of prostitutes do it just to get nice things for themselves. A sign of selfishness is when you do it only for yourself and not to support others in the family. The three girls in the family of seven [mentioned in an earlier quotation] are doing it out of anti-selfishness as they are supporting the other children and the mother

- Female CCF Peer Educator, Minsk, Belarus.

Some of these girls are kidnapped and are sold for money to men. Or they are cheated into going abroad as models, but when they get abroad they are kept in brothels and their passports are taken away and they don't speak any English and they can't escape anymore. Some girls become sex workers because they need money and others do it because they want nicer clothes. Some girls look at these people [prostitutes] and they see that they can afford to buy things and they get used to it. And they don't think about their future and they just do it. If you are below the age of 19 it is very difficult to find work in Belarus. Almost impossible, because no one wants to employ you, so many become prostitutes.

- Female CCF Peer Educator, Minsk, Belarus

It must also be remembered that the sex trade involves boys as well as girls. CCF staff in Kenya remarked that most of the male prostitution appeared to be concentrated around the tourist resorts (such as Mombasa) which had become a popular destination for homosexual men, both foreign and Kenyan. However, male prostitution (and homosexual sex in general) was a highly sensitive subject for respondents in all of the research sites and in general it was very difficult to obtain information on the subject.

CHAPTER 7

COLLECTIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Introduction

Confronting child poverty is a massive undertaking that entails involvement of and close collaboration with children, their families and communities, and in many cases with civil society organizations (CSOs) and the various institutions and bodies of the state. Partnership with children as the agents of their own development and protection and as contributing members of families and communities should be the cornerstone of strategies to reduce child poverty and enhance children's well-being and quality of life. But children cannot be treated as autonomous units in isolation from the wider society in which they live and from other change agents. Community systems of support and protection play an important role in generating wealth at the local level and in limiting children's vulnerability and enhancing their resilience. Neighborhood associations, religious groups and organized community groups, among others, can supplement strategies at the individual and family levels by providing a supportive context for children and/or mounting livelihood security and other interventions. Indeed, many informal poverty alleviation mechanisms exist at the collective level in the research sites and were cited frequently as the most important source of support beyond household and family.

CSO are playing an increasing role in the alleviation of child poverty in many parts of the world. Because many CSOs live closer to the problems of children than do public sector agencies, they generally understand them in greater detail. Indeed, some of the most effective CSOs in the field of child poverty reduction and child empowerment are children's own organizations, for example those that support the self-organization and self-representation of street and working children. Children's organizations and other CSOs also tend to be more innovative in responding to young people's problems than are public bodies. Often they are more

child-centered in their approach to children's issues than the public sector. They tend to focus more readily on the key question of what is in children's best interests, and they are more likely to bring to that question a holistic perspective of children's development. That said, government policy can have a critical impact on the well-being of children, in the sense that it is crucial to wealth creation and distribution as much as to service provision. Government is a vital actor in the field of child poverty and changes spearheaded by the public sector in the fiscal and legal environments can make a major difference to children.

Nevertheless, despite the global growth in formal institutional poverty alleviation mechanisms, be they governmental or non-governmental, such mechanisms were notable for their absence in the CCF study. While many respondents talked about the informal collective strategies that they employ to alleviate poverty, more formal bodies seem to play a far less significant role. Most of the collective initiatives encountered during the research were set up by the communities themselves, and in some areas the presence and/or influence of government, CSOs and other actors appeared to be quite marginal. This is an important finding from the research, since it reveals the extent to which the public sector is failing at present to address the rights of its citizenry. School was the one exception to this general rule, since public education is regarded by many people in the study sites as an important resource for overcoming poverty.

SECTION ONE: COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

7.1.1 Informal Mechanisms of Support

Traditional community initiatives play a crucial role in enhancing production and income among poor families in many parts of the world. For example, in Peru, elaborate systems of collective land tenure, barter of food and other goods produced in different

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ecological zones, collective labor on communal projects and labor exchange between households are some of the many essential livelihood strategies that have existed since pre-Hispanic times. Frequently these initiatives are based on vigorous social alliances and networks that have been built up over many years at the local level, although sometimes they emerge in response to a specific crisis. Also in Peru, during a recent recession, over 800 soup kitchens were established, mainly by women, throughout the capital, Lima. These enabled impoverished households to gain access to cheap food supplies purchased in bulk from wholesale markets. At the same time, the demand on family labor was reduced due to the fact that food preparation, cooking and washing up were done through a system of rotation and meals were eaten communally. As such these initiatives made a considerable difference to many families that were struggling to survive during the crisis.

In a significant proportion of the areas researched, the sense of community and social bonds between individual households is very strong, and is often enhanced through systems of patronage and kinship that ensure frequent collaboration between different families and villages. Traditional forms of organization — whether these are an advisory group of clan elders in Kenya, a local headman in India, or a village chief in Sierra Leone — help to encourage collaborative efforts and dispel feelings of isolation, which for some of the poorest families can be seriously debilitating. The layout of a boma (homestead) in Kenya, for example, ensures that no-one is far away from neighbors if they are hungry, and children openly take advantage of this to seek out alternative sources of food by asking for, or stealing from, neighbors. Similarly, the morans (Maasai boys around the age of 15 who are learning to become warriors) always travel and eat in pairs to ensure each looks after the other. Thus, the familiarity with hunger, the effects of drought and so on, originates in and is closely tied to traditional Maasai protection systems, through which the

effects of poverty are mitigated. This combines with a strong sense of clan, family and community identity in which suffering is traced historically to the difficulties faced by the Maasai as a people.

As suggested, some of the most important informal mechanisms of support grow out of crisis. Several respondents suggested that conflict in Sierra Leone has blurred traditional social boundaries, increased social cohesion and rendered the poorest groups less susceptible to humiliation and ostracism.

The war has made people more flexible and more exposed to other ways of doing things. People here don't seem to get upset or to be so forceful about customary rituals like inheritance laws, sexual values...

- Local male CCF consultant, Sierra Leone.

In this context, they talked about an enhanced sense of social support. Thus, one CCF staff member argued that the Limba term, 'Maborande', which means 'let's work together', or 'let's be together', is a traditional expression of clan solidarity and support. 'When people say "we all suffer the same with no difference between us" they are at the same time embodying the notion that "we all stand together."¹¹⁵ At the same time, CCF staff in Sierra Leone were clear that community poverty alleviation strategies, while requiring greater motivation and determination to initiate, are in many ways more effective than those undertaken at the family level. However, they also acknowledged that in some areas and circumstances war had a very negative impact on collective initiatives. They conceded that in some cases the sense of community responsibility and willingness to act collectively were significantly weakened by the mistrust kindled by the conflict:

Some people like to work together. Unity is strength. This has to do with traditional structures in the community. There are some who are used to think only

¹¹⁵This is an old traditional concept and its origin is unrelated to present circumstances of war — possible reasons why people say "we are all suffering the same" include not wanting to make your own situation seem more serious than someone else's, for example.

about themselves. Like if you are a farmer and you are used to thinking only about your own piece of land it is difficult to join up with others. But actually if you join resources, skills and effort you can do much better. Like someone knows how to do this and another can do that so you can succeed much better. We used to motivate people to work together and contribute to each other. But over the years this has declined - maybe with the influence of the urban centers and the war.

- Male CCF staff member, Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Similar changes were reported in southern Kenya, where assistance from the village clan committee for struggling families has evidently been undermined by a more ego-centric outlook prioritizing privacy and individual/familial strategies. One elderly woman recalled how, not too long ago, "a child would belong to the community", with a broad network of neighbors and other village members to ensure that no children would go hungry. Ever-increasing poverty and subtle changes in child-rearing ideology have had a profound impact on these networks. For example, where before all members of a parent's age group in Kenya could discipline a child, this no longer happens because educated parents want to discipline their children themselves. With the introduction of a capitalist market economy, competition has slowly replaced collectivism in the minds of many populations, and people now feel less responsible - or less able — to deal with the problems of those outside their immediate families. As the local chief put it,

Previously there was a strong culture that if I get a problem myself (such as not being able to pay the school fees) our whole clan would gather and fundraise for me. Each member would commit a cow. But these days there're a lot of transitions, so it's very difficult to get clan members contributing for one person.

- Local chief (male in his 60s), southern Kenya.

The attrition of community resources and slow disintegration of community resolve in many of the research sites has inversely raised the level of effort and commitment needed to keep such alliances going. It was also clear from the study that participation in a 'community' initiative does not necessarily indicate the existence of a communal ideology, except in Sierra Leone where, as indicated, the idea of work gangs has and continues to be a traditional mode of co-operation.

Another trend evident from the research is that most of the schemes discussed had come into being informally during times of particular hardship, and were focused around resolving a specific problem rather than the community's well-being as a whole. In the opinion of CCF staff in the Philippines Country Office, "Community institutions for the protection and welfare of children are by and large weak, poorly funded and unorganized".¹¹⁶ Traditional risk management and coping strategies are also falling prey to the ever-increasing gap between the generations in terms of approaches to problem solving. For many in Kenya, a committee of village elders is still the most revered and wise of support networks, but this is in stark contrast to Belarus, where the elderly continually complained about being undermined, neglected and ignored by younger generations. In fact, elderly women in the town of Smorgon felt so neglected that they formed their own support group specifically for pensioners.

We formed this club called CARE to discuss problems, arrange meetings with doctors, display arts and crafts etc. The club is really good for meeting people and we drink tea or coffee and talk about our problems. In our club, the elderly experience some kindness and attention.

- Elderly woman, Smorgon, Belarus.

7.1.2 Informal Sources of Credit

Lack of support from government and other formal institutions has rendered large numbers of poor people across the research

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¹¹⁶CCF Poverty Questionnaire, Philippines respondents.

...poverty is a condition that attracts feelings of humiliation and despair and admitting the inability to support one's family can be extremely difficult for many people, particularly if it involves approaching family or community members for a loan.

sites more vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of moneylenders and credit sharks, who are often the only ones willing to help. However, as we have seen in other chapters, poverty is a condition that attracts feelings of humiliation and despair and admitting the inability to support one's family can be extremely difficult for many people, particularly if it involves approaching family or community members for a loan (see below).

Cultural Restrictions on Seeking Financial Assistance

In Bolivia and Kenya, asking for help is a culturally regulated process with clearly defined rules:

I sometimes ask a neighbor for help, but never ask anyone for money... that would scare me, not even one peso. If there's no money for food, we eat what we have. I would be too scared that they would shout at me, that I wouldn't be able to pay it back. Or that they simply would not want to help me. So that's why we eat what we have.

- Woman in her 30s, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Under normal circumstances I will borrow money from one of my friends... and then later go to the lake [to fish] and pay back. If I'm sick I borrow money and then pay them back. I ask my friends for assistance rather than my uncle. I don't really have any relatives who I can ask. The uncle I mentioned earlier is the brother of my mother and I can't ask him for assistance. I can only ask for assistance from my father's brothers. This is Luo culture: one cannot ask for assistance from one's mother's family. It is easier to ask from the father's side. If you marry the husband is supposed to take care of the woman. If a child comes to ask for help from the mothers' side it is like the father has failed in his duty. It shows him up as being a failure and being poor. So the father will not allow the daughters to go and ask for help from

the mother's side. I don't like going and asking for help from my mother's side. I am not comfortable with it. It is better to form attachments to your friends.

- Orphaned 16 year-old boy (now head of household), Rusinga, Kenya.

Frequently cultural restrictions and social stigma thus render poor people more likely to resort to impersonal moneylenders and credit schemes than to risk bringing shame upon their families. Often moneylenders charge exorbitant rates of interest, trapping people further into debt and borrowing cycles from which they are seldom able to escape. Even with the support of aid it may be impossible to climb out of debt, as one man from Sierra Leone related:

Both traders and NGOs can lend out seeds. If a trader lends you money to buy seeds but it's too little we just use it to buy money. NGOs offer better conditions. Trader terms are, he will give you L 16,000 for you to do your farming, from which you must repay one bag of husk rice. NGOs give you 24 trupence pans for which we must repay with 30 pans. But the NGO input is inadequate and the NGO will not supplement or give another loan — it's a one-off loan. But the trader will give you more loans to meet emerging needs.

- Man in his 30s, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Certain groups of people in Sierra Leone, namely young unmarried farmers and those with large numbers of dependents, appeared particularly vulnerable to these perpetual debt cycles. Farmers are often the most reliant on loans, as the time gap between investment (planting) and reimbursement (harvest) is considerable, with yields that carry no guarantee of profit. As such, they continually spiral deeper into debt to the point where the practice of farming and the condition of poverty become inseparable.

Money-lending is a widespread phenomenon in India, and the object of anger, mistrust

and hatred, particularly among the most indebted people, such as new migrant arrivals to the big cities and minority groups who are discriminated against everywhere. Thus, while credit and loans may bring short-term benefits, they have also been responsible for making large numbers of people far poorer:

In order to pay the bills, we take a loan from the money-lender. We pay the interest and the interest paying goes on life-long. And because we take again and again whenever this type of incident occurs, if we are unable to pay we sell the land also — we sell whatever small property we have, and like this we are becoming poorer and poorer and poorer.

- Man in his 40s, rural village, Bihar, India.

Many people in India (a country with a comparatively stable economy and low rate of inflation) are trapped in these cycles of borrowing and debt, subject to extortionate interest rates of up to 120 percent a year. However, the necessity of buying seeds and fertilizers for planting crops, and blankets before migrating in search of work, and the costs associated with ceremonies such as weddings means that the poor often have no alternative sources of financial assistance.

SECTION TWO: INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES

In many places, collective poverty alleviation initiatives have assumed a formal institutional character, with the creation of specialized CSOs or use of the institutions and expertise of the state, such as agricultural extension agencies and credit institutions. In this section we briefly explore some of the issues that arose in the study in relation to collaboration and partnership with the key institutional actors in the field. As noted in the introduction, the role of the state, whether in the form of local or national government, appeared to be quite minimal in the CCF research sites. As such, the section focuses mostly on non-governmental institu-

tions and actors. This reflects the reality in poor communities throughout the world, where CSOs have become vehicles for the provision of credit, capital assets and income-generating, or skills training, activities to especially vulnerable families such as female headed households.

7.2.1 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Experience demonstrates that government's ability to ensure broad social implementation of child poverty programs is limited; the achievement of this goal in everyday practice requires popular mobilization depending on ample participation from CSOs. This is especially true in an era of public sector austerity, "downsizing" and decentralization of public services. The non-state sector must now carry greater responsibility for generating economic and social development. CSOs can also improve the quality and impact of poverty alleviation initiatives. Whereas government may be constrained to a legalistic view rooted in existing policy, or a political one reflecting interest group power relationships, CSOs are more free to move directly to the matter of what is good for children and make it the main point of public debate. This role has been of critical importance in national and world debate on many different issues. Also, support to CSOs has more profound implications, in that many consider a healthy civil society to be an essential hallmark of any open and well-governed democracy that intends to make its population citizens, rather than subjects.

Addressing child poverty entails cooperation with a wide variety of CSOs. The scope and diversity of such organizations are almost boundless. As long as they are structured and functional, they need not be legally formalized. Some pursue a broad social purpose, such as the expansion of peace and social justice or the provision of charitable services to the sick and poor. Others promote the narrower interests of particular groups such as working or street children. Some of the more influential CSOs are in fact

Experience demonstrates that government's ability to ensure broad social implementation of child poverty programs is limited...

networks or umbrella groups comprised of other member CSOs. Many CSOs resonate with political overtones, while others maintain an apolitical stance, focusing on issues from what they consider to be a rigorously technical perspective.

In many countries there exist large numbers of community and charitable groups either working directly with children or advocating for their rights. Children's advocacy organizations, religious and other value-forming institutions, non-formal education programs, community radio stations, professional associations, drama groups and popular culture groups are but some of the CSOs that have proven effective channels for child poverty interventions. What these many types of organizations have in common is that they represent citizens' own voluntary initiatives to promote ideas, values, groups or actions in local, national or international arenas outside the privileged spaces of government. The term CSO certainly includes such organizations, but it also points beyond them to less common partners—for instance, industrial and employer associations, trade unions, service clubs, religious institutions, social and sporting clubs, professional associations, research institutes, non-profit media, children's own organizations, and of course advocacy groups of many types.

Participation in institutional and social settings that provide children with meaningful opportunities to contribute and to feel useful and supported can help to foster in children a sense of hope and purpose. In Belarus, computer clubs play a crucial role in children's lives, allowing them to share leisure time with peers in a comparatively safe environment far from the domestic strife that prevails in some homes. Indeed, some children spend most of their leisure time in these clubs. Children unable to afford the entrance fee to these clubs feel that they are at a major disadvantage in relation to their peers. Other examples of CSOs playing positive roles in the case study countries included Opoqueri village in Oruro, Bolivia, where it was suggested that the village would not even exist

had it not been for the support from CCF in particular. In general, it was often found that child sponsorship and the pressure to educate from CSOs had brought about many positive changes within communities, while in other countries CSOs material support in supplying school uniforms and psychosocial counseling had been equally well-received.

CSOs have many advantages over the public sector. But they also face many difficulties. For example, addressing issues — such as the involvement of children in prostitution, child trafficking, child abuse or HIV/AIDS — that can be highly sensitive culturally can present challenges on many fronts. CSOs may have greater flexibility than government, but the CCF study suggests that they need to be very cautious as to how they address such issues, for too blunt an approach can lead to discomfort, anger and resentment among aid recipients. For example, a focus group discussion with women in Kenya was disrupted by the husband of one of the participants, who said: "I don't want CCF here. I am a man. I don't want it. You are teaching my wife about family planning. I don't want it. You come to my house and talk to my wife. I don't want it."¹¹⁷ Although the man was reportedly drunk, and had actually attended such discussions himself previously, this example shows the misgivings that people may have about formal interventions by outside agencies. As a respondent in Sierra Leone highlighted,

Some NGOs give people assistance that they don't want. Like building a storage for the harvest. But now you can't expect me to put my excess harvest in there when I know that no one else in the village has any extra - they will look at me and say "Oh that one is rich" and it will make me feel bad. So I won't put the produce in there. Or they build a drying floor for people, but you find the children playing on them because people don't have any rice to dry there. Some NGOs are doing harm.

- Male CCF staff member, Kabala, Sierra Leone.

¹¹⁷Focus group discussion with Jirani group, Nairobi, Kenya, Oct 2002.

Part of the mistrust of CSOs appears related to previous poor relations with other similar organizations. Populations can quickly tire of being constantly assessed and questioned without seeing any concrete results, and a lack of professionalism among CSOs can even leave them worse off than they were before, as these children from Sierra Leone described:

There were two white people who came and promised us some things, like shoes, and uniforms and school bags. But they never came with these things. The other children use this to provoke us, saying: "Where are those things the white people promised you? You didn't get anything - you have no shoes, no uniform". We didn't know what to say.

- 15 year-old girl, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

Others were wary that involvement in poverty alleviation initiatives would simply invite further social stigma arising from being classified as 'poor' and in need of charity. As one participant added, "[the community] also think that we are the slaves of CCF because there is always something to do for the project - coming and going all the time for activities" (Female Project Family Educator, Wamunyu, Kenya).

This disillusionment may stem from the exaggerated claims many CSOs make concerning the impacts of their projects in transforming people's lives.¹¹⁸ In truth, the main decisions that affect children's well-being are usually made at the level of the household and family, and these decisions may or may not be influenced by participation in collective initiatives designed to benefit the community as a whole. As indicated above, most community-based schemes originate without the input of formal organizations, and are designed to fulfil one or two particular purposes (such as income generation) rather than influence an entire way of life. Moreover, the study made apparent the evident powers that local chiefs and traditional figures of authority (such as the Mami Queen in Sierra Leone)¹¹⁹ have in influencing

the lives of families or individuals within their community. It is unlikely that CSO interventions will command such immediate respect or active response, particularly if they are seen to be in any way incompatible with local values and practices.

7.2.2 Religious/Spiritual Institutions

Religious or spiritual adherence is often an important resource for dealing with adversity. However, it tends to be overlooked in analysis of responses to poverty, largely because it may be a deeply personal affair that is not always given practical expression and because it is not normally associated with the economic domain. However, membership of a religious or spiritual institution arose in all five of the research sites as important sources of psychological and emotional stability and optimism in the face of economic difficulty. And in many cases religious organizations are the only formal institutional response to poverty available at the local level. This was particularly true of Belarus and Sierra Leone, where Christianity and Islam have become a pillar of support among impoverished communities, not merely psychologically, but also materially in terms of food and shelter made available in churches, mosques and hostels. Furthermore, religion appeared especially important in urban centers where community bonds were weakest and people felt most alone.

Religion as a Coping Strategy in Smorgon, Belarus

Q: What makes people so interested in joining the church?

A: They have too many problems. They need spiritual support. Some older women come every day to the church and it's been like this for many years...We have more women than men. It's because women have more problems than men. And most of them come to speak to God about their problems. But among children, boys and girls are about the same [number].

¹¹⁸One issue emerging from the relatively low emphasis given to CSO and NGO activity is methodological, in that there could have been both incentives and disincentives to participants in commenting positively on local agencies' work. To try to avoid this, the researchers purposefully distanced what they were doing from any kind of evaluative exercise, and ensured that stakeholders were fully aware that the research was not about whether or not the project or programmes were working well. A more significant factor influencing the discussion of CSO impact may therefore be linked to the issues that people isolated as the causes of poverty. These were long-standing, socially embedded issues such as racial or ethnic discrimination, wide-spread and deep-rooted corruption and associated failures in the political system, and macro economic circumstances that even national governments had limited control of. Given this focus, some adults and children may simply not imagine any linkage between a local agency's scope of work and this longstanding social system.

¹¹⁹The Mami Queen is the traditional elected leader of women in some villages of Sierra Leone. She is usually an older respected woman in the community, and presides over a committee of 7, consisting of a chairlady, assistant Mami Queen, a secretary, and others. Mami Queens usually stay in the position for a long time unless they do something wrong and the village women become unsatisfied or think she is dishonest.

Chronic and enduring poverty can easily lead to deep despair in the minds of many individuals, and coming to terms with it within a religious framework can help to offer comfort.



A: Women are responsible for much more than men. Men say they don't go to church because they may consider it a weakness - they say they don't need to go there. But during the day the cathedral is open and there are many men who come in for private prayers.... The Roman Catholic Church also has Caritas [humanitarian organization of the RCC] and we receive some humanitarian aid to give families assistance, clothing, food, toys. Last year there was food assistance, rice, flour.

A: Emotional and spiritual support is given by the priest - you can talk to him about your problems. Children would come and talk to the Sunday school teachers about their problems. Faith in God doesn't give people money. People need to believe in something...Faith is something that each generation passes on to the next one. It is also important to believe that there is paradise and even if you don't have a good life here on earth you will have a good one in the next one. It gives people hope.

- Middle-aged women from the Catholic Church, Smorgon, Belarus.

However, religion remains a highly controversial issue in Belarus, as the atheistic outlook of the Soviet time has left its mark. Everyone 'belongs' to either the Catholic or Orthodox churches, but those who actually attend are considered by some to be 'fanatics' rather than 'devotees'.

Chronic and enduring poverty can easily lead to deep despair in the minds of many individuals, and coming to terms with it within a religious framework can help to offer comfort, particularly in understanding why inequality persists:

I am the area headman. I used to look after people. I had the opportunity to help others. When the war came, we who were prosperous were sought by the rebels. They destroyed everything: the kitchen, the toilet, the house. But I

have faith and the life God has given me. When it is time God will give me again. My children go to school but I can't pay for them. The war has put us down on the ground. Only God helps us — God brings us overseas visitors to help us.

- Male village chief, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

...Some people produce more from their farms. Even if you do equal work some people get more harvest than others.

Q: Why is that?

A: It is God's work. It is not my fault, or your fault or the other person's fault.

Q: Is it skill?

A: It is God's work. Like you are white and I am black. You are rich and I am poor. Why is that? It is only God's work that has made us like that.

Q: If you compare you and me — yes, it is like you say. But what if you compare you and the lady sitting next to you — why is there a difference between the two of you?

A: It is also God's work — only God decides these differences between us.

- Woman in her 40s, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

A number of the people interviewed in the study expressed the view that religious belief is one of the most effective mechanisms for staving off poverty. In the words of a pastor in Kenya, "...children who are born to saved families and families which have a very strong Christian background, tend to go to school longer than these others, and they are organized — they tend to use more of their resources to develop more the life of the children." In contrast, in a goat farming community in Rusinga, in a different part of Kenya, it was stated that Christianity is part of the problem and not the solution. There was anger that people have become too reliant on the church and have started to ignore indigenous traditions: "people have abandoned their culture and this is why they are dying". A religious sect, the Mongiki, has been formed in Kenya specifically to promote traditional culture. Among other things,

it patrols the streets to stop girls wearing trousers or short skirts. Many people expressed fear of this sect, for “they carry whips and whip people if they find them doing things they don’t like”.¹²⁰ Because this sect owns bus shelters and controls certain taxi routes, a number of youth have joined in the hope of obtaining wealth.

Interviews in other countries also unearthed the economic interests that can attract followers to certain religious groups. One Muslim youth in Sierra Leone described how he would convert back to Christianity if a Christian sponsor offered to support his studies [he had been Christian before converting to Islam]. Similarly, a woman in Bolivia related how she had joined her local Israelite church because they offered medical advice that was ‘...cheaper than the doctor’.¹²¹ In India, some Harijan or ‘untouchable’ caste Hindus convert to Christianity or Buddhism in order to escape their caste relegation, while migration for work in Madhya Pradesh has led some tribal groups to take up Hinduism in place of their traditional animist religion. However, religion can, at the same time, imply additional costs to the poor in terms of donations. In Minsk, a single mother of four described giving her local priests R 2000 every forty days to say special protection prayers for her children. She had been ordering these prayers continuously over a four-year period and when they ‘ran out’, would continuously renew them to give herself spiritual peace of mind.

7.2.3 Military Institutions

For countries exposed to armed conflict, the survival and productive options of families and communities are transformed, and - with the exception of those few individuals who grow rich through the war-economy - in most cases drastically reduced. The civil war in Sierra Leone began in 1991 and lasted for approximately ten years, with numerous groups of rebels fighting both the government and, on many occasions, each other. During this time, entire villages were massacred, looted and burned, women were raped

and thousands of families were left homeless and destitute. Significant numbers of adolescents and even younger children — mostly boys, but also girls — became directly embroiled in the struggle in both government and rebel forces and amongst political activist groups. It appears that a significant proportion of these children may have joined up voluntarily, for economic reasons among others. However, the notion of voluntary recruitment remains highly controversial today. Many child-focused organizations argue that all children who enter the armed forces are to some extent coerced, whether through chronic impoverishment, parental pressure, or because death was the only other option. As one female ex-combatant from Sierra Leone described:

I was captured by the rebels. I was given the alternative to be either killed or carried away so I went with them. Even my family was crying for me and didn’t know where I was. But I didn’t want to be captured - it was just an alternative to being killed.

- Girl ex-combatant (18), Makeni, Sierra Leone

Since the young tend to be particularly obedient and loyal and have a talent for escaping surveillance, their recruitment is an overt strategy of many armed forces. Some children are abducted and forced to fight, as in the example above. Some may be attracted by the power and status attached to armed violence, while others may join for reasons of political commitment, ethnic loyalty, the opportunity to engage in looting or the basic incentive of being provided with clothing, and regular food and water. For those children who have lost family members either through separation, abandonment or death, a military group may represent their best chance at being part of a family or friendship network.

Recruitment into an armed force is therefore an undeniable coping strategy for many children. However, in the case of Sierra Leone, it was a strategy that led to numerous problems concerning their reintegration into

For countries exposed to armed conflict, the survival and productive options of families and communities are transformed, and in most cases drastically reduced.



¹²⁰Activities with adolescents, Nairobi, Kenya, Oct 2002.

¹²¹Cochabamba, home visit to Dona Lucia.

society once the war was over. As noted, communal and familial networks had in many cases been significantly weakened through separation, mistrust and widespread shock at the atrocities committed. Many of the children who participated in these violations are today the targets of strong resentment by community members, regardless of the circumstances in which these acts may have been committed:

I don't feel happy. They [ex-combatants] are human beings and are not supposed to do what they did. If any of my children rise to revenge [me] may God answer them [may they succeed]. Those responsible for our punishment are enjoying. The government has trained them and is paying them [getting angry]. The peace is concentrated on the fighters. We have been forgotten.

- Male amputee, Makeni, Sierra Leone.

Many children also became estranged from their families because the fighting stretched out over a decade, while, as the above quote suggests, others have been the target of jealousy and resentment concerning the assistance given them by international organizations. This kind of informal social exclusion perpetuates the poverty of many individuals long after the fighting has ceased.

7.2.4 Government/The State

In industrialized countries the state, or the machinery of government, appears to be everywhere. Whether it is road building or industry, food subsidies or taxation, housing or employment, most government decisions have an impact on the economic well-being of children. Government policy and intervention grow hand in hand with industrialization and urbanization. With industrialization in Europe, the state assumed many responsibilities that had once belonged to the family, such as care for the poor and dependent. By the beginning of the twentieth century most advanced states had expanded to regulate trade, consumer protection and wages. Measures to provide health care and housing

also developed, child labor was abolished and universal schooling was introduced. The family acquired a new definition as a private institution, one in partnership with the state. Today, specialized state-run institutions of childhood—child care and leisure centers, schools and so on—complement the traditional roles and functions of the family.

Most poor countries do not have the funds for widespread state support to social and economic measures. Where high birth rates, early mortality and educational wastage are pressing problems, birth spacing, health and education services take priority over social services and welfare policies. In the poorer countries of the South, it is often a bonus if government assistance programs exist at all, and where they do they frequently suffer heavily from corruption. While in some cases contributing a little in poor people's struggles to survive, they rarely help them escape poverty altogether.¹²²

Furthermore, the poor are all too frequently prevented from accessing the resources and benefits of the state that are supposed to be directed at them, not merely because of bureaucratic requirements for documentation, but also through the transaction costs in proving eligibility. As one respondent in Moldova related,

Not every disabled person can afford the procedures to qualify for disability payments; the medical examination alone is 170 lei, and families outside the Chinsinau must also reckon in transportation costs for the disabled person as well as the accompanying person.¹²³

This means that huge numbers of children in poverty are unable to access assistance even when such provisions formally exist—an important argument against making hasty assumptions as to which groups of poverty-stricken children may be the most vulnerable. Indeed, as indicated, the public sector has played little part in the lives of the respondents in the CCF study. While people were quick to complain about inappropriate

¹²²Narayan et al, 1999.

¹²³Ibid, p190.

policy, corruption or inaction by government as a cause of poverty, few talked about the public sector as fostering or contributing to wealth creation and poverty eradication. This is in line with participatory consultations with poor families in other countries, which show that formal service provision institutions are largely 'ineffective and irrelevant in the lives of the poor'.¹²⁴

Governments are commonly reluctant to intervene in the economic or social life of children, their families and communities, frequently on cultural grounds. Some are far more concerned about national security and defense than the well-being of the populace. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has facilitated greater state involvement in child provision and protection in many countries and there have been encouraging developments in some areas at local government level in particular. But, in most places, beyond health and education, responsibility for children still tends to be assumed by children, their families and communities and, to a lesser extent, by local, national and international civil society organizations.

Indeed, whether the model of the democratic nation state currently reified in the development discourse is the best implementer of a globalized human rights agenda is highly debatable. In many parts of the world (such as Bangladesh) citizens' right 'not to be poor' cannot be guaranteed by the state, simply because populations are too high and resources too limited. Secondly, there is little evidence that the nation-state is actually the best implementing platform to protect some of the 'rights' embodied in the convention. While it is nation-states who sign and ratify treaties such as the CRC, the obligations enshrined therein often demand implementation by the family, and can rarely be realistically operationalized at the level where children live. A great deal of child poverty results from micro level problems (such as inequitable intra-household distribution) in which the state is simply unable to inter-

vene. While government policy may make some contribution to ensuring better and wider service provision for example, how those services are used remains subject to the will and discretion of citizens. Finally, there remains the underlying tension between poverty eradication or alleviation and the free-market economy proffered under democracy. If the state intervenes too heavily to raise and protect the income for the poorest, it thereby sacrifices the concept of a 'free-market economy'. This struggle between the public and private provision of services continues to afflict many countries around the world (including many in the West), and remains just one of the many examples of the difficulty that nation-states have in making these global concepts workable.

Of course, government policy is crucial to wealth creation and distribution, and active public sector involvement in service provision can have a fundamental impact on child poverty. Recognizing this, some international child-focused organizations, for example UNICEF, work in very close partnership with government. They provide various forms of assistance, including training for public sector employees, supplies and equipment for schools and clinics, help with the planning and development of services and formulation of policy. Much of this effort is directed at the institutions of central government, especially the ministries of education, health and, to a lesser extent, social welfare. Many agencies, however, confine themselves to supporting local government, because in their view there is greater accountability and efficiency at this level, greater awareness of and contact with grass roots concerns and greater overall value to be had in fostering decentralization. Others work exclusively with CSOs on the grounds of public sector inefficiency and corruption and difficulties of going to scale.

7.2.5 Schools

Schooling is the one public sector intervention that received considerable attention



...government policy is crucial to wealth creation and distribution, and active public sector involvement in service provision can have a fundamental impact on child poverty.

¹²⁴Ibid.

The belief in education as the panacea to poverty is deeply rooted in both institutional and popular perception.

among respondents, children and adults, in all of the research sites. The belief in education as the panacea to poverty is deeply rooted in both institutional and popular perception. In many contexts, the rewards of literacy and numeracy can be clearly traced across such sectors as employment, health and material wealth, while also helping to significantly reduce the likelihood of exploitation by others:

Education is important to avoid being cheated by others. This moneylender who takes money back, he's also cheating us because we are tribal, because anyone with whom we deal is cheating. Everyone cheats, but those who are educated somehow save themselves. We are not, so we are being cheated.

- Woman in her 30s, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Q: Why did you send your children to school?

A: So that they don't become like me, liable to be tricked by traders. I didn't send my daughter to school because people say that if you do she becomes a rary girl [wanton girl] when she is big. That was a mistake — I should have sent her to school. If my daughter had been sent to school she would have got a job and could buy her own clothes without waiting for the man to do so. This would be help to a man.

- Elderly man, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

Education is definitely an advantage in the fight against poverty, but the CCF research showed that it is far from being universally beneficial in all contexts. Many children described leaving school by their own volition in response to physical or psychological abuse from teachers, humiliation caused by other children, or discouragement at the unproductiveness of sitting in school without learning. Statistical data from Bolivia¹²⁵ suggest that nine out of ten children are insulted, ridiculed or punished in front of the wall at school; five out of ten are hit with hands, have

their ears pulled, or suffer other physical abuse; and that 50 percent of teachers associate physical punishment with discipline.

Many children enroll and then drop out of school because they or their families can no longer afford it. Even with free state schools there are the numerous costs of books, utensils, uniforms and school meals that must be met, as well as indirect costs associated with transport to and from school and the income forgone due to the child being in school rather than at work. Scholarships and bursaries are often impossible to get without excellent exam results. Although in Kenya it was reported that many children are now working day and night to save and pay for their own school fees, very few actually manage to save enough and these lucky few are often too exhausted to reap the rewards. As a strategy for overcoming poverty, education is often expensive and unreliable, as the child is by no means guaranteed a job at graduation. Unsurprisingly, therefore, many respondents expressed disillusion about schooling and reported that in practice, investment in education often fails to pay off.

The Cost of Education in Kenya

It's very difficult for us to say what is the expense in one year, because sometimes one month we do not spend anything, the next month we might have to spend something. For example, during the winter right now I have bought my child two exercise books, and then we had to buy a lantern for him, a shawl for him, and that was the expense that I had to make for this month. During the rainy season I bought him an umbrella because of the rains and right now he is demanding for shoes and socks because it is winter. But I am not being able to buy it for him because I do not have money, so it is very difficult for us to say that in a year how much we spend.

- Woman in her 40s, Western Kenya.

Kenyans are concentrating on education as the one thing that will lift them out of poverty. But the reality is that this is not

¹²⁵From Muñoz, Carola 2002 Documento de diagnostico Base Para el Taller Nacional de Planificacion Estrategica del Viceministerio de Asuntos del Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes, Ministerio de Asuntos Campesinas e Indigenas, Genero y Generacionales, La Paz, November. Page 9.

what is happening - in fact, the opposite may be true, when people are actually becoming more impoverished by investing in their children's education without receiving pay-back.

- Female CCF staff member, Nairobi, Kenya.

This disillusionment is then worsened by the widespread irrelevance of what is taught in school, which often bears little relation to the skills requirements of the job market. Ethnic minority groups frequently confront particular difficulties in taking part in school on an equal basis. CCF staff members in Bangalore pointed out that even though a lot of schools have been opened in tribal areas over the years, there are many constraints. The teachers are only available for half of the year, and are of different ethnic origin, so the lessons are not in tribal languages and the syllabus promotes different values. Issues of cultural and tribal identity are particularly important in these areas, and elders may not enroll children for fear that education will erode venerated traditions.

At the same time, education may lead to long-term social isolation or exclusion, even while providing many benefits and skills useful in the fight against poverty. Uneducated members of the community may view school children with suspicion and/or resentment, while graduates may place themselves apart from others through feelings of superiority. This was particularly notable in India, where divisions of literacy and numeracy add to the caste- and class-based exclusionary practices that already exist:

In every five to six villages, there is a convent school [these have a curriculum in English and often offer boarding facilities]. These are giving the wrong information to the society and the family...because if they are a graduate, they say they can't plough the land because they have prestige and dignity. Being educated has become a curse, and education has become a status symbol, not a skill or an asset. It has led

towards negativism.

- Male CCF Project Leader, Bihar, India.¹²⁶

Numerous interviewees in Sierra Leone expressed particularly strong doubts as to the wisdom of educating girls, for this would apparently detrimentally affect their marriage prospects, in that educated girls are regarded as being 'proud' and seeing themselves as superior to their husbands. This was in contrast to respondents from Belarus, where uneducated women are viewed as a burden on their husbands. Indeed, education in Belarus remains highly prized by both sexes, despite the fact that since perestroika the *intelligentsia* struggle with poverty just as much as the less educated. As it happens, professionals are in many instances worse off than others because their skills are not suited to the new economic environment and because the state institutions that once employed them have fallen into disarray. This apparent contradiction between expectations and reality has inspired many different attitudes to education within Belarus society.

Contrasting Views on Education in Belarus

We must start with education. We must educate the new generation. We don't have male teachers and this is a real problem. The old teachers are all women and they have a different style of teaching. Young women teachers cannot discipline a class the same way a man can and this is not good for the children....The problem in our society is the devaluation of education. Well-educated people can't find jobs now. Before they could, but now you can find many educated people among the homeless. If you only have one skill like making electronic devices [a common job in the Soviet Union] you will be lost now. We need other skills now.

- Middle-aged man, Minsk, Belarus.

Children feel that they have to study hard to get out of poverty. Many of their parents are highly educated and are really

Uneducated members of the community may view school children with suspicion and/or resentment, while graduates may place themselves apart from others through feelings of superiority.

¹²⁶India. Mukti Niketan, Bihar Project Leader Day 2 Not for circulation/quotation August 11 2003.

struggling financially now, but this hasn't changed the general belief amongst both children and parents that education is their ticket out of the poverty.

- Male teacher, Minsk, Belarus.

Q: Is the solution to the problem of Belarus to get more education?

A: No, no. Educated people have serious problems in Belarus now. Lenin appealed to us to "study, study, study" and it became the motto of our life, but now our illusions are broken! Of course education is good, but Belarussians only realize this when they emigrate to other countries. Here, even if you have a higher education you cannot get a good job. Maybe it's a matter of qualifications rather than education. They have the wrong qualifications. Sometime people with higher education change their profession and take up a new one. If you look through job adverts we can see that higher education is required. During the Soviet Union just workers were required.

- Elderly woman, Minsk, Belarus.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined child poverty in five case study countries. Drawing on the views of boys and girls, adolescents, youth and adults of all ages and walks of life, it discloses a broad range of ideas and perspectives on the subject. It explores some of the causal factors in child poverty, especially those stressed by affected populations. These vary in type from entrenched, systemic problems at the macro level, such as armed conflict or detrimental government policy, to more incidental circumstances, affecting the functioning and wellbeing of individual children and households, such as alcoholism and family separation. The study emphasizes the dynamic interaction between these broader structural forces and the more personal causes of poverty, while also calling attention to the multiplicity of levels at which poverty is generated and manifested. It argues against the use of standardized benchmarks to denote distinc-

tions between rich and poor, on the grounds that these are often misleading and have little validity in conveying what poverty actually means to those affected. Further, it favors contextualized understandings of poverty that recognize the specificity of effects at the local level.

Considering the impacts of poverty, the study poses two central questions: What does it feel like to be a child growing up in poverty? And: What are the effects of poverty on children? In many parts of the world, essential health, water and sanitation services do not reach the poorest populations. Children in these populations are frequently exposed to high levels of pollution and to chronic or seasonal shortages and poor quality of food and water. As well, many children live in environments that are congested, noisy and dangerous and at the same time undertake work that is both hazardous and deeply exploitative. Globally, the literature stresses how material insufficiencies and hardships such as these impede health and nutrition in children, causing stunted growth and development and raised levels of morbidity and mortality. Notwithstanding the gravity of these physical impacts, the CCF study suggests that poverty is a form of adversity that visits many different kinds of disadvantage on affected populations. Children's development and well-being can also be seriously jeopardized by the psychological, emotional, social and cognitive effects of poverty. Moreover, physical insufficiency can affect other domains of children's well-being. For example, nutritional deficits can produce detrimental cognitive impacts and undermine children's ability to concentrate in school. Poverty impairs human and social capital, in that individuals who are debilitated by ill-health, underperform at school, and experience low self-esteem are unlikely to fulfill their potential, whether during childhood or in adulthood.

Childhood is often trivialized in research, policy and practice as a time of play and irresponsibility. Hence, it is frequently assumed that children are not fully aware of their

poverty or that they do not have the intellectual ability, maturity, or insight to analyze its causes and effects. However, from the CCF research it is evident that children often display considerable imagination and resilience both in the analysis of their circumstances and in the contributions they make to their own and family maintenance. Moreover, children experience the many disadvantages of poverty just as powerfully as adults do, although not necessarily in the same ways. Children have a different perspective on life from adults. For children the personal and immediate effects of poverty, such as the shame of wearing patched shoes, are frequently articulated more strongly than the broader structural trends, like chronic ill health or insecurity of tenure, which adults often tend to emphasize. Children may be aware of the larger picture but less concerned about it than adults. This may be because they do not carry the same burden of responsibility for family survival and welfare, even though they frequently contribute actively to the domestic economy. Bolivia is the one country in which children expressed clear views about the macro level political and social factors that underlie the chronic poverty of a large section of the population. This is hardly surprising, because in Bolivia poverty has become highly politicized as an issue. In that country, children participate in a powerful collective discourse in which political and economic analysis is commonplace within the home, in institutional settings, community arenas and the media.

For children the sense of powerlessness and social marginalization that are so often associated with chronic poverty tend to be more acutely felt than material lack or livelihood insecurity. Above all, children in the study emphasized how poverty renders them susceptible to harsh social judgements by others. Clothing, food, and physical appearance are all taken as proof of economic success or insolvency, with the power to mark out and exclude those who do not match up to accepted standards. Such judgements are not merely painful to bear, for they also have the effect of limiting children's interactions

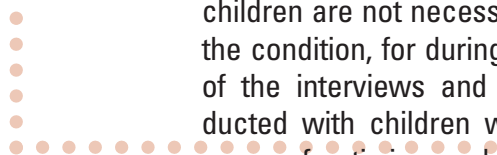
with peers, and preventing them from accessing important resources, including schools and popular social venues. Equally serious, they can lead to bullying and undermine children's sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem.

It is not just that poverty impacts adversely on children's friendships and social worlds, for it can also have a corrosive effect on relationships between and within generations in the family. Different children in a household may be valued differently and in situations of deficit those who are less cherished may be excluded from assets that are enjoyed by other children or by the household as a whole. Often girls or children with disabilities receive less affection, food, clothing, education, and medical care than boys and able-bodied children. Girls are also more likely to work harder and for longer hours than boys. Aside from the obvious injustices, such situations can be very divisive for the sibling group, pitting sisters against brothers, younger children against older ones, the sick against the healthy, and so on.

Grinding impoverishment also increases the risk of inter-generational tension and conflict. For example, the study revealed that as a consequence of rapid economic transition, adults in Belarus have become de-skilled and struggle to maintain household income against the odds. At the same time, economic and social expectations have been raised due to economic liberalization and exposure to Western values. Children increasingly look to western consumer societies as their point of reference on matters of income, lifestyle and the like. As adults and children take divergent paths in their quest for material satisfaction and wellbeing, so levels of understanding and exchange across the generations are reduced. Increasingly, adult authority is undermined by the inability to adjust to rapidly changing economic and social circumstances, in some cases leading to a loss of trust between children and their parents. This situation is exacerbated by high levels of substance use and related

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...poverty is a circumstance that pervades many aspects of children's lives and in the more extreme situations has the capacity to overwhelm individual coping.



domestic strife among adults. In this way, poverty may increase children's vulnerability to family separation, exploitation and abuse.

Evidently, poverty is a circumstance that pervades many aspects of children's lives and in the more extreme situations has the capacity to overwhelm individual coping. Hence, there is a suggestion that it may sometimes be a factor in child depression, suicide and attempted suicide. That said, children are not necessarily borne down by the condition, for during the research many of the interviews and conversations conducted with children were imbued with a sense of optimism and quite a few respondents made it clear that their lives were not constrained by their poverty. Some were far more focused on the tedium of their lives. Such a finding should be heeded by policy makers and practitioners since it indicates that a sole emphasis on children's suffering and difficulties to the exclusion of their wider hopes, aspirations and joys may be misplaced. Interventions based exclusively on the deficits in children's lives risk disempowering and stigmatizing children to the point where they become incapable of acting on their situation.

This brings the discussion to a third key question, which is: How best can aid and other agencies support children, their families and communities, in their efforts to combat poverty? This question is not at all straightforward and implies a number of major challenges. First, the more vulnerable members of the child population tend to be the hardest to reach, precisely because they are prone to exploitation, abuse and other violations, socially and economically marginalized and isolated from decision-making. This puts the onus on agencies to develop innovative strategies to reach those children who are beyond public scrutiny. Second, acting on child poverty means being alert to the global, regional, national, sub-national and local forces that influence children's lives. Even when interventions are conducted at the micro (child and household) or meso (community and region) levels, they

must have the ability to respond to pressures and trends at the macro level. Thus, for example, an understanding of how macro level policies may impact at the micro and meso levels is fundamental.

Effective measures require an awareness of the political, social and cultural causes of poverty and a willingness to engage in actions that may have strong political connotations. They may entail efforts to overcome discrimination and power hierarchies based on gender, class, ethnicity and other status distinctions. This emphasizes the importance of linking specific targeted poverty eradication interventions with broader efforts to reduce discrimination and social exclusion, build civil society consensus around children's rights issues and forge CSO networks of support and advocacy at the local and national levels. Projects that fail to do this, by working with their target population in isolation of other more powerful members of society risk creating social division and conflict. Engagement with the political dimensions of poverty also implies a willingness to confront broader issues and trends that are operating within the global economy, such as the increasing concentrations of wealth and power among major multi-national companies, the adverse social effects of trade liberalization and the like. Working at the global level means tapping into policy research, taking part in global networks with other agencies that focus on these issues and conducting focused advocacy and lobbying campaigns with institutions that have the power to bring about change.

Another challenge is that it may be somewhat naive to assume that assistance given to the most vulnerable will in fact be enjoyed by them. Thus, the dynamics of power at the level of family, household and community are often highly entrenched and complex and children do not necessarily benefit from schemes designed to support them. For example, increased income at the household level is not an automatic guarantee that children will gain and some children may

even be consciously excluded from the resulting benefits. Special effort needs to be made to ensure that adults, families, communities, CSOs or government are not acting as 'gatekeepers' in projects with children and that the intended beneficiaries really do derive support from interventions.

Likewise, it is not always obvious that well-intentioned interventions will have positive impact on children's well-being. Hence, in Bangladesh a scheme that was intended to encourage children to go to school by removing them from paid employment backfired badly, forcing many of those affected to take up occupations that were more hazardous, less secure and less well paid than the original one. This implies the need for evidence-based measures in which children's circumstances are explored prior to intervention and children, their families and communities, are fully consulted at the outset as to their concerns, the constraints acting upon their lives and the possible solutions to their problems. Such an approach recognizes the complexity of children's worlds and entails considerable flexibility and responsiveness in policy, as well as an ability to engage directly with poor populations at the grass roots level.

If aid measures are to be more effective at reducing destitution and suffering in children, a more holistic understanding of poverty is required. Poverty alleviation and related interventions tend to focus on livelihood security, micro finance and similar economic mechanisms. While these undoubtedly are important, the dominant influence of income-consumption poverty measures (for example per capita income) and thus income-oriented solutions should be reviewed within the context of child poverty. It is apparent that while income may be maintained at the household level, the distribution of this income is unpredictable, and importantly, the costs of maintaining income may be passed on to children, adversely affecting their welfare. Indeed, the use of income categories may actually obscure the extent of child poverty. Also,

recognizing that absolute shortage or lack of income and other resources is only one determinant of poverty, the impact of both relative and absolute poverty needs to be taken into consideration. At the same time, there is a need to complement economic measures with initiatives that address the psychological and social effects of poverty.

In this context, the aim of psychosocial interventions should be to seek ways of enhancing children's resilience by reinforcing their competencies and coping strategies and, whenever possible, preventing their exposure to poverty-related risks. This suggests the importance of learning about local ideas and practices in relation to children, childhood, childcare and protection as well as local approaches to risk management, since these will influence the kinds of strategies families and children adopt when addressing poverty. Often the objective of increasing resilience and overcoming adversity is best achieved by consulting and working closely with children themselves, for measures that are built on their insight and creativity are more likely to succeed than measures imposed from outside the children's environment. From other social science research we also know that children's wellbeing and resilience is likely to be enhanced when they are given meaningful opportunities to play an active part in decisions and processes affecting them. This implies that, whenever feasible and appropriate, effort should be made to facilitate children's active engagement in family, community and institutional measures to address poverty.

The study found that children and their families have resort to a range of resources and mechanisms of support at the family, collective and institutional levels. However, it is striking that in most of the contexts examined the poor obtain much less support from formal state institutions and non-governmental organizations than they do from informal mechanisms such as moneylenders, pawn shops, or remitted income. In fact, in Sierra Leone some respondents were highly critical of formal institutions, governmental

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and non-governmental, and deeply skeptical about their ability and commitment with regard to measures to assist the poor. This evidence suggests the need for aid and other agencies to engage in greater self-reflection, to carefully examine and assess their role in and impact on the reduction of child poverty. It implies the need for more imaginative models that explicitly acknowledge the social and political dimensions of poverty, respond directly to the perspectives of affected populations and complement their efforts and strategies.

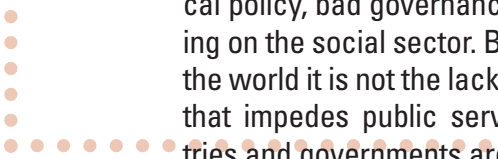
Decisions must be taken concerning whether non-governmental organizations deem it most appropriate to offer direct services to the poor or to advocate with other duty bearers, especially the agencies of the state, to fulfill their obligations towards children more effectively. In recent years, there has been a marked shift away from service provision in favor of advocacy and awareness raising. This may be highly appropriate in countries where poor public service provision is due to factors like a lack of proper fiscal policy, bad governance, or under spending on the social sector. But in some parts of the world it is not the lack of will but of funds that impedes public services. Some countries and governments are so poor that non-governmental services are the only possible option, bringing into doubt the value of a heavy emphasis on advocacy to the exclusion of direct provision.

Some of the resources poor people say they depend upon, for example religious faith or military enlistment, would not normally be taken into account in poverty eradication efforts. Moreover, some of the strategies used to avert destitution and accumulate wealth, such as conspicuous consumption during festivals, weddings or funerals, may appear to be at odds with narrow economic models. Indeed, planners and professional economists may be tempted to dismiss such resources and strategies as inefficient or irrational. However, in practice they may be very effective measures for spreading risk or mobilizing social support and funds during

crises. That people see a direct link between the experience of poverty and recourse to spirituality again emphasizes the holistic nature of human existence, in which circumstances that act on one aspect of life have implications for and consequences in all other aspects. In particular, the mention of religious faith and observance further reveals an understanding of the close connection between material deprivation and psychological, social and emotional states. The pillars of support that people turn to in times of adversity, such as religion and/or pride in one's culture, may provide emotional strength that is vital in combating the harsh realities of life. But too often such resources are neglected in analysis that conceive of overcoming adversity as a largely practical matter. The challenge for policy and practice is to ascertain how the resources and strategies used by children, their families and communities can be further reinforced and harnessed to overcome poverty and increase well-being.

While the current focus on physical consequences of poverty in early childhood is important in terms of improving overall survival and health, this approach needs broadening to take into account the poor quality of life that many children over five years of age experience. This implies a central role for education. In fact, with the spread of globalized values of modernity, school education is increasingly becoming the most potent symbol of a 'successful' childhood and the major means by which individual children and families seek to lift themselves out of poverty. At one time, children learned the skills of their society through the accomplishment of valued work tasks such as sibling care taking, the gathering of firewood and tending of livestock. But nowadays schooling is becoming the more legitimate route of socialization into adulthood in most parts of the world and children and their families in all of the research sites talked about the importance of education and described the efforts made to enroll and attend. Nevertheless, even though education has acquired a reputation

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as a guarantee to employment and economic success in adulthood and is acknowledged within the CRC as a fundamental right of childhood, many of those interviewed noted that it is fraught with problems. The reification of education as the most effective factor in poverty alleviation needs to be tempered with a more sophisticated analysis of the differential quality of schooling available, and the recognition that the value and potential of education in helping children overcome poverty varies widely across different communities, cultures and countries.

Frequently education involves major financial sacrifices that families can ill afford to make and is not always of good quality, relevant to the local labor market, or enjoyable. In some cases the education on offer in poor communities is of particularly low standard, thereby exacerbating rather than reducing social and economic disparities between different groups in society. Often, children are unable to attend on a regular basis, are forced to repeat grades, or drop out, with the effect that they do not reach a level of education that is sufficient to improve income or employment potential. On the other hand, in many countries the job market is already oversubscribed and education cannot realistically improve children's economic prospects. This suggests that there is a great deal still to be done to reduce the real cost, and improve the quality, relevance of and access to school education, as well as to create new employment opportunities for young people as they leave school. At the same time, many children make an important contribution to household maintenance and these children may need to continue working while they attend school. Hence, school schedules should be sufficiently flexible to allow for children to fulfill their work responsibilities.

Finally, adopting an approach to poverty eradication that is based on the insights and perspectives of children and their families rather than on the expertise of outsiders involves considerable institutional agility

and humility. Agencies need to decide how committed they are to taking on children's agendas, when these are likely at times to differ from or contradict established approaches. They must be prepared to think about children as social agents with insights of their own and the ability to act on their situation, rather than as the passive victims of difficult circumstances. This may be the ultimate test of organizations that have long been accustomed to devising solutions and acting on behalf of, rather than working with and in support of, children.

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APPENDIX A: THE CCF INTERNAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What are the main problems affecting children in your country?
2. What national and sub-national policies and economic trends affect children's well being in your country?
3. How would you define poverty?
4. What are the main causes of poverty in your country?
5. What makes some people poorer than others?
6. Which populations in your country are poorest?
7. What makes some children poorer than others?
8. Which key organizations have poverty alleviation or reduction programs?
9. Which of these interventions are most effective and why?
10. What do communities and families think are the main routes out of poverty?
11. What do communities and families do to alleviate poverty?
12. What do communities and families do to protect children from the effects of poverty?
13. What do children do to alleviate poverty?
14. What kinds of responsibilities do boys and girls of different ages have within the home and community?
15. Do you feel that the age, sex, ethnicity, religion, caste or any other characteristics of a child make them more likely to be poor?
16. What information is available in your country on how children think and feel about poverty?
17. Additional comments/remarks?

Christian Children's Fund (CCF) is an international child development organization which works in approximately 30 countries, assisting approximately 4.6 million children and families regardless of race, creed, religion or gender. CCF works for the well-being of children by supporting locally led initiatives that strengthen families and communities, helping them overcome poverty and protect the rights of their children. CCF works in any environment where poverty, conflict and disaster threaten the well-being of children.

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