Children's Rights, Development and Rights-Based Approaches: The Way Forward

**Children & Poverty
Working Paper 5**

Mike Wessells

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The Way Forward

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*This working paper is the fifth in a
series dealing with Children & Poverty.*

Other working papers in this series include:

Working Paper 1:
Understanding Children's Experience of Poverty:
An Introduction to the DEV Framework

Working Paper 2:
Improving Children's Chances:
Linking Developmental Theory and Practice

Working Paper 3:
Child-Context Relationships and Developmental
Outcomes: Some Perspectives on Poverty and Culture

Working Paper 4:
Promoting the Agency of Young People

Contents

Glossary of Terms

ASB   Antisocial Behavior

CCF   Christian Children's Fund

CRC   Convention on the Rights of the Child

DDR   Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration

DEV   Deprivation, exclusion, and vulnerability

IGS   Income Generating Scheme

NGO   Non-Governmental Organization

PRSP   Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

RBA   Rights-based Approach

SAP   Structural Adjustment Program

SES   Sex and Socioeconomic Status

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

UNHCR   U. N. High Commissioner for Refugees

UNRISD   U. N. Research Institute for Social Development

Foreword

In 2002, Christian Children's Fund (CCF) commissioned a comprehensive study on the experience and the impact of poverty on children. The resulting three-part series, *Children and Poverty*, provides a fascinating and thought-provoking summary of major issues from the perspective of children, youth and parents. CCF offered this study to community and colleagues as a contribution to our common field of endeavors – breaking the cycle of multigenerational poverty.

The findings of the Poverty Study provided CCF with the opportunity to reflect on and debate the implications for our programs – how we develop them, work with communities, and evaluate our effectiveness. Key issues emerged from the Study that have been discussed in a set of Working Papers, which are now circulated for your review, consideration and discussion. The first of the working papers defines and discusses the proposed Poverty Framework for our work with children and is of critical importance to our future programming efforts. This Paper and the other four are summarized below:

Working Paper 1
Understanding Children's Experience of Poverty: An Introduction to the DEV Framework
In light of the findings from CCF's poverty research, this paper argues that children experience poverty in three domains: Deprivation, Exclusion and Vulnerability. Each of these domains is examined individually, although it is shown that the complexity of poverty for children emerges from the interplay of all three, rather than from any one alone. In this way, it is hoped that the DEV Framework will assist staff in deepening their understanding of child poverty and consequently designing and supporting more relevant and effective programs.

Working Paper 2
Improving Children's Chances: Linking Developmental Theory and Practice
The paper explores the importance of linking research to practice in designing effective and appropriate interventions that aim to improve the developmental chances of children living in difficult circumstances. Interventions should be informed by a knowledge of developmental epochs and pathways, as well as sources of influence at different points in development. Further, it is noted in the paper that the developmental level of the target children, the risks they face and local child rearing practices must be understood before an intervention is planned.

Working Paper 3
Child-Context Relationships and Developmental Outcomes: Some Perspectives on Poverty and Culture
The paper points out that programs must be sensitive to the several contexts that simultaneously influence the child's development – the ecology that surrounds the child, the developmental period he or she is in, and the developmental domain (social, emotional, cognitive, physical). It also seeks to provide a more thorough discussion of some of the complexities of child-context interactions in poverty contexts. Cultural practices form a central component of the child's context. The second half of the paper explores the ways in which cultures structure the experience of childhood.

Working Paper 4
Promoting the Agency of Young People
As a child-focused organization, CCF places the well-being of children and youth at the heart of its work, and the measure of success has always been the benefits accrued and the results achieved. In the past, however, this has not necessarily meant that programs directly engage and work with young people, or expect them to take a leading role in program development and implementation. In this paper, we describe how CCF has come to place children and youth at the center of its attention, how the concept of agency is changing our program practices, and why this evolution advances our goal of broadening and deepening CCF's impact on children's well-being.

Working Paper 5
Children's Rights, Development and Rights-Based Approaches: The Way Forward
The purpose of this paper is to analyze whether CCF should adopt a rights-based approach to programming. After providing a brief overview of the international human rights movement, the paper examines the strengths and limits of rights-based approaches. It concludes that although a strict rights-based approach is too narrow operationally for CCF, children's rights should be integrated more fully into all aspects of CCF's work. CCF can make its most significant contributions through a distinctive combination of child-focused, strategic programming that addresses urgent needs, integrates child protection into all programs, and reduces the underlying sources of poverty, particularly deprivation, exclusion and vulnerability.

We look forward to continued debate and reflection through dialogue with CCF staff and partners, children, youth, parents, partnering organizations, and colleague agencies in our collective efforts to decrease children's vulnerability, strengthen their resilience, and reduce poverty.

Michelle Poulton, Ph.D.
Vice President, International Program Group

Background

As an agency committed to children's healthy development, CCF frames its work in terms of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Consistent with its mission of supporting children, CCF strives to promote children's best interests, strengthen family and community systems that support children's protection and well-being, and create positive environments in which children grow up amid respect, hope, and social justice. For CCF, the fulfillment of children's rights is essential for reducing children's vulnerability, strengthening children's resilience, and ending the poverty, oppression, social exclusion, injustice, war, and abuses that rob children of their dignity, childhood, and well-being.

The importance of human rights, together with the increased recognition of the rich interconnections between human rights and development, has led many agencies to adopt a rights-based approach to programming. The purpose of this paper is to analyze whether CCF should adopt a rights-based approach. After providing a brief overview of the international human rights movement, the paper examines the strengths and limits of rights-based approaches. It concludes that although a strict rights-based approach is too narrow operationally for CCF, children's rights should be integrated more fully into all aspects of CCF's work. CCF can make its most significant contributions through a distinctive combination of child-focused, strategic programming that addresses urgent needs, integrates child protection into all programs, and reduces the underlying sources of poverty, particularly deprivation, exclusion, and vulnerability. Since the question whether CCF should adopt a rights-based approach admits no simple answers and warrants extensive discussion, this paper is less a policy proclamation than a stimulus for informed dialogue.

The Global Human Rights Movement

The global human rights movement arose in large part out of the ashes of World Wars I and II as an effort to end tyranny and social injustice, establish universal standards for the treatment of all people, and codify into international law the fundamental entitlements of all human beings. These elements are strongly interrelated since universal standards provide a basis for international laws that prohibit discrimination, torture, and other heinous forms of abuse. In turn, international law provides a potentially powerful set of levers or tools for holding states accountable for their actions. With international laws in place, states that enact or permit horrors such as genocide, mass starvation, and racism would have no means of continuing their abuses under the cloak of sovereignty.

Key human rights instruments include the following, among many others:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Adopted by the UN in 1948, this foundational document outlines key human rights, standards, and principles.

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)
This prohibits discrimination based on race, color, descent, or ethnic or national origin.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
This instrument delineates the civil and political rights for all peoples.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
This covenant defines the economic, social, and cultural rights for all peoples.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)
This prohibits discrimination against women and obliges governments to take steps to improve gender equality.

Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984)
This prohibits torture worldwide.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989)
The world's most widely adopted human rights instrument, this document defines and protects children's rights in a comprehensive, universal manner.

Optional Protocol on Children and Armed Conflict (2002)
This supplements the CRC by outlawing the participation of people under 18 years of age in armed hostilities and prohibiting child recruitment by non-state actors.

The human rights movement seeks not only to set appropriate standards but also to create a context of accountability and responsibility. The rights movement has spawned a growing array of agencies that monitor rights violations, sometimes under the most dangerous conditions, and that make it impossible for rights abusers to hide. The identification of rights abusers, coupled with the development of global rights standards, makes it possible to hold abusers accountable for their actions by applying the instruments of international law. States that violate rights can be penalized through devices such as moral shaming, sanctions, and aid denial. Further, individual perpetrators may be prosecuted and punished using legal mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court. Although this system is far from perfect, it has made it more difficult for states, groups, and leaders to trample basic rights with impunity.

Rights-Based Approaches

Two decades ago, a schism existed between development work and human rights work. Many development agencies saw human rights work as too political or too legalistic, as potentially violating humanitarian principles such as neutrality and independence, as jeopardizing the safety of staff, and as risking expulsion from countries for having criticized the government's human rights record. Most development agencies sought to promote long-term development, thereby reducing poverty and addressing the root causes of suffering and rights abuses.

In the last decade, however, international opinion has shifted towards a rights-based approach to development, which views human rights work and development work as inseparable. Although there is no single rights-based approach but a family of rights-based approaches (RBAs), all RBAs share four assumptions, which are outlined below.

Development work is not charity.

Development workers have sometimes used a charity model in which they give impoverished, needy people basic items or services such as food, water, shelter, health care, and education. The charity model, which views compassionate action as a moral commitment, is well intentioned but psychologically crippling since it breeds dependence and treats local people as victims or passive recipients of aid. In contrast, RBAs view people as having universal entitlements and as active agents who should be empowered to achieve their rights and to become active, effective agents within their political, social, and economic systems. From this standpoint, humanitarian work is not at all about charity and enabling the helpers to feel good, but about helping to fulfill basic human rights.

Duty bearers are bound morally and legally to fulfill their obligations to rights holders.

The lack of accountability in traditional development work, much of which focused on meeting basic needs, led many agencies to adopt an RBA. According to RBAs, for every right there are one or more duty bearers who are obligated to fill the right. This system of rights, duty bearers, and obligations makes it possible to achieve greater accountability in the development enterprise. If, for example, a war-torn country had signed the CRC but provided little education for children, development agencies could use the CRC as a tool to press the government toward fulfilling its obligations to educate children. In parallel, they could teach rights holders – children and families – how to assert their rights for access to education.

As this example illustrates, education is neither a service nor a charity but something to which all children are entitled. Also, the CRC, like other human rights instruments, is a potentially powerful lever for achieving development. RBA proponents argue that needs-based approaches fail to achieve high levels of accountability since reigning powers may decide whether or not to meet the needs. In contrast, RBAs demand accountability and responsibility since rights are entitlements that states and other duty bearers are obligated to fulfill.

RBAs are necessary in order to address poverty in an effective manner.

RBAs break with older development approaches to reducing poverty through community projects and boosting household income. RBAs emphasize that poverty is more than low income and is rooted in interrelated conditions such as discrimination, poor access to the government and its services, lack of participation, and patterns of exclusion and exploitation. Most important, poverty is not a natural condition but a product of political policies and the abuse of power. Too often, traditional approaches to poverty have neither identified nor addressed the issues of power lying at the heart of rights abuses.

RBAs assume the necessity of addressing the political and structural causes of poverty and view community development projects as band-aids when implemented in isolation from wider political, economic, and social reforms. In this

view, effective development work requires careful analysis of the systemic and structural causes of poverty and efforts to change the policies of deprivation, exclusion, and vulnerability that create conditions of poverty and suffering for millions of people. Development work must be political, advance systems change, and enable people to assert their rights in an effective manner. Also, effective development requires that citizens achieve high levels of access to and participation in their government, which in turn must be responsive to people's rights. In the past, governments have had too little accountability, creating widespread disaffection and ripeness for civil strife. At heart, RBAs seek to create a new relationship between the people and governments in which empowered citizens actively press for their rights and states respond by taking steps to fulfill their obligations.

Human rights principles should guide all phases of the program cycle.

In RBAs, programming is driven by an abiding concern for human rights. An assessment maps patterns of human rights abuses, analyzes the policy and structural roots of the rights abuses, and identifies local NGOs and other agencies that track and address rights abuses. Program planning entails the development of strategies for policy reform and for helping people to understand and assert their rights. Program implementation, which seeks to empower local people and strengthen their sense of agency, frequently involves extensive work at the policy level. This can occur through organized advocacy targeting the change of particular policies, efforts to educate policy leaders, or public media campaigns helping to teach people about their rights and how to assert them. Implementation also involves efforts to build the government's capacities at local, regional, and national levels to fulfill citizens' rights. Evaluation, too, is guided by human rights principles and focuses not only on the well-being of individuals or communities but also on the extent to which duty bearers such as the government are meeting their obligations by, for example, creating new policies and implementing them effectively on a large scale.

As a concrete example, UNICEF in Peru had for years tried unsuccessfully to reduce the mortality levels of indigenous children under five years of age. The program approach featured the construction of health clinics and health education designed in part to boost health-seeking behavior in indigenous communities. This approach, which started from the identification of basic needs the program had sought to address, had very limited impact. Much greater progress occurred when UNICEF took a rights-based approach of asking initially why the rights of indigenous people went unfulfilled. The analysis, which uncovered deeper patterns of social exclusion and discrimination, guided a program of pressing the government to change its policies and to provide health services in a more equitable manner. The resulting policy changes achieved greater reductions in under-five mortality and also increased the government's capacity to fulfill its obligations to indigenous children. The changes achieved were sustainable since the policies endured beyond the life of the program, thereby avoiding the frequent problem in which the end of a project also ends the benefits to children.

In summary, RBAs offer significant advantages over traditional approaches to poverty alleviation and development. They move beyond charity models; empower people and groups; enable people to have greater voice, access, and participation; hold governments and other duty bearers accountable; address the root causes of poverty; and change the relations between people and governments. In short, RBAs offer a new paradigm for development work.

The Limits of Rights-Based Approaches

Despite these advantages, RBAs face significant conceptual and practical limits. Although the limits do not augur against the construction of RBAs, they point out the necessity of complementing RBAs with other approaches. This section critiques RBAs from the vantage point of CCF's recently published Poverty Study, its approach to poverty alleviation, as expressed in its Bright Futures project, and its emergency work, which is conducted within an idiom of developmental relief.

Gaps in Meeting Urgent Needs

The aim of RBAs is to hold duty bearers accountable for fulfilling their obligations to rights holders. Operationally, this translates into steps to change government policies through advocacy or to press them to enforce existing policies. However, these steps require a long time frame, typically measured in years, since policy change is an inherently slow process, as is the process of building government capacities for policy implementation.

An important, if unanswered, question is who will fill the gaps in meeting urgent needs for food, water, health care, shelter, education, and other basic items? Imagine, for example, an emergency situation in which civilians are under attack and children and families die daily in significant numbers due not only to attack but also to malnutrition, disease, and lack of access to health services. In such a situation, it does little immediate good to hold the national or local government or, for that matter, communities and families accountable for fulfilling their obligations to protect children's rights. In many countries torn by war and cobbled by corruption, governments have little capacity to respond to such emergencies, and it may take years to build their capacities and make the policy changes needed to support effective emergency support. It is ethically objectionable to allow children to die and suffer profound rights abuses in the interim.

This problem of who will fill the gaps becomes even more significant when the duty bearers who have the legal obligation to protect children are also the abusers. As the odious case of Darfur illustrates, states are often the worst abusers of children's rights. Pious declarations about state obligations have little effect where no political will exists to protect children or where strong will exists to attack or oppress children of a particular ethnicity, religion, or region. Although diverse instruments such as targeted sanctions and trade and travel restrictions exist for bringing rogue governments to heel, the instruments are highly imperfect and in any case require extensive time to take effect.

In these situations, it is necessary for international agencies such as intergovernmental agencies and nongovernmental agencies (NGOs) to fill urgent needs and begin the processes of long-term capacity building and development. To be sure, a focus on human rights is also necessary. Although children's rights are frequently one of the first casualties of war, children, who comprise half the affected population, are typically invisible and receive a level of assistance far below what their situation and legal entitlements warrant. As outlined below, however, much work on child protection is needed to address this situation. To protect children, however, it is not necessary to use the implementation strategy of RBAs, which focus mainly on legal and policy changes. In fact, this strategy is ill suited for addressing urgent, unmet needs and protection threats.

This question of how to address unmet, urgent needs applies also to more stable countries, where changes in long-term patterns of discrimination and social exclusion may require decades of work. A government wanting to address the structural roots of poverty must deal with complex issues of policy change, power shifts away from vested interests, resource reallocation, institutional inertia, staff training and development, and enforcement and monitoring, among many others. Also, policy changes may not lead to practical benefits to children unless changes occur also in societal attitudes, which typically evolve over long periods of time. In the period during which governmental and societal changes

occur, it makes little sense to leave deeply impoverished communities and groups in a state of limbo. Teaching them how to assert their rights is essential, but this can become a recipe for frustration and alienation if done before the government has the requisite capacity to deliver. A more appropriate strategy is to complement long-term approaches with short-term interventions, including those seeking to meet basic needs.

Weak Program Guidance

A second limitation of RBAs is their inability to provide clear practical guidance for program development in situations of acute need. In post-Taliban Afghanistan, for example, children faced a multitude of risks such as gender discrimination, landmines, early marriage, dangerous labor, disability, trafficking, child soldiering, and chronic poverty. For any program aiming to strengthen children's protection in such a situation, it is vital to define strategic priorities since it is impossible to address all the risks simultaneously. Also, addressing particular risks may offer greater leverage on the achievement of longer-term development goals such as strengthening participatory governance, building human capital, or demilitarizing the society.

Unfortunately, RBAs offer weak strategic guidance for the design and development of programs in this type of situation. To begin with, child rights instruments are relatively age blind since they do not spell out the significant differences in, for example, children who are under five years of age, and teenagers. These groups have distinctive needs, vulnerabilities, and situations and require different kinds of assistance, yet the CRC and other rights instruments offer little, if any, concrete guidance on how to tailor programs to different age groups.

The lack of guidance also has conceptual roots. Rights theory is itself a highly contested area lacking a single, dominating view of what constitutes justice or freedom. The lack of a unified conceptual foundation makes it difficult to provide coherent practical guidance for practitioners. Difficulties also arise from the principle of the indivisibility of children's rights. If the rights guaranteed under the CRC are truly indivisible, how is one to decide where to begin, recognizing the infeasibility of protecting all rights simultaneously? RBAs frequently attempt to address this problem by invoking the principle of progressive realization, which enables the fulfillment of some rights before others. However, nothing in rights instruments offers strategic guidance on the critical questions of where to begin and how to work in the most effective manner to protect children's rights. In short, rights instruments define important standards but offer weak operational or strategic guidance.

In both crisis and stable situations, the paucity of operational guidance by RBAs is a conspicuous problem. Since no single, widely accepted means exists for operationalizing RBAs, there has been a proliferation of RBAs in countries struggling to deal with problems stemming from long-term patterns of oppression, political denial, and social exclusion. In some cases, the different RBAs offer competing visions of how to achieve political reform and development, whereas in others, they do not fit into an ordered, comprehensive approach to development. In part, the question is "Whose RBA should take center stage?" Too often, problems of poor coordination and competition among different actors have undermined the benefits that might have been achievable otherwise.

Distance from Children's Experiences

A third limit of RBAs is their distance from children's perspectives. Although the CRC presents children's entitlements, defines key standards, and outlines what children are frequently excluded from, it does not make strong contact with children's own views of their situation.

The CCF Poverty Study shows how children experience social exclusion not in the abstract terms defined by political and economic entitlements but in more relational, concrete terms such as the favoritism of a parent toward another

sibling or the struggle of a child who has a physical disability to keep up with peers. Children do not naturally conceive of their well-being in terms of rights but define their identity, values, and roles in relation to others. The importance of social relations is visible particularly in the developing world, where the predominantly collectivist societies teach children to think less of individual good than of collective good and the quality and quantity of their social relations with others. The denial of frequent social interaction of high quality or teasing and denigration by peers during children's formative years is likely to have a negative impact on children's development, socialization, and attachment to others. Children's experiences of multiple forms of exclusion and stigmatization are psychologically painful and isolating and can have profound, lifelong effects.

The irony of the gap between the entitlements focus of the CRC and the relational focus of children is that children's participation in family life, education, community activities, or advocacy depends on their subjective views. Children participate in activities not because they are entitled to do so per se but because they derive a sense of meaning and positive relations from their participation. Although children's participation is a cornerstone of the CRC, children's will to participate derives less from their sense of entitlement than from their own sense of their role and social relations.

This insight has potentially powerful implications for programming. In particular, it suggests that the best means of achieving high levels of children's participation is not to tell children of their entitlement but to encourage social relations in which children's participation becomes a natural part of their social life. The entitlement emphasis of the CRC can be very useful in urging governments and communities to enable children's participation. The language of entitlements, however, may not be the most useful discourse in working with children themselves. To impose it on children is to risk the silencing and marginalization of children at the very moment when children stand most in need of empowerment.

Cultural Approaches

The discourse of universal human rights has limited rights violations worldwide and created standards that oppose abuses, no matter how widespread and seemingly normal the abuses may be in a particular culture. However, when it comes to practical programs to support children from abuses, the discourse of universal children's rights sometimes creates problems or distracts attention from useful local practices. In Angola following the 1994 signing of the Lusaka Protocols, for example, many children remained in armed groups, creating a need for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs. When CCF-Angola talked with local chiefs to ask their support for children's participation in a DDR program, their chagrined reply was that there were no child soldiers and hence no need for the program. Local definitions of childhood did not fit with the universalized standard of the CRC, which had established 15 years as the minimum recruitment age.

Although the impasse could have been handled by lecturing local people on children's rights, this path risked marginalizing local views, sending the message that outsiders know best, or having local people reject the DDR program for children. Instead, the impasse was handled by negotiating use of the term "underage soldiers" rather than "child soldiers." This term fit local norms since the 13- and 14-year-olds who were members of armed groups were under legal voting age. By referring to underage soldiers, leaders were able to retain their local views of childhood while also recognizing that young people should not be fighting. Ultimately, the leaders agreed to help develop appropriate DDR programs. This example illustrates the practical need for flexibility and working through local culture in developing programs to protect children's rights.

A related issue is that since RBAs focus on universals, however, they tend to pull attention away from local understandings about how war affects children and how to support war-affected children. For example, Article 39 of the CRC guarantees child victims of violence such as former child soldiers the right to psychological care. When the situation

of former child soldiers is framed in terms of rights abuses, the inclination is to create a universalized image of child soldiers and to identify potentially universal psychological supports such as counseling. In rural Angola and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, however, some of the worst impacts of child soldiering are spiritual. For example, a boy who has killed someone may believe that he is haunted by the unavenged spirit of the person he killed, who asks in the boy's dream "Why did you do this to me?" This spiritual affliction is best treated not through counseling but through the conduct of a purification ritual to cleanse the boy of his spiritual impurity. People who use a universal rights perspective frequently overlook the value of such local cultural resources as purification rituals.

The Way Forward

For CCF, the way forward is illuminated by its distinctive mandate to enable children's development and well-being and its leadership in behalf of the world's children. There are times when leadership requires the institutional courage to depart from the beaten path. Now is such a moment for CCF. This section suggests that although CCF ought to make children's rights a more central part of its work, it would be too limiting to take a strict rights-based approach to programming. It is possible to achieve many of the aims of rights-based programming without taking a rights-based approach. In this respect, rights-based approaches are not necessary and arguably will work better when complemented with CCF's distinctive, child-focused approach.

Filling Urgent Gaps

As discussed above, RBAs frequently leave urgent, emergency needs unaddressed. CCF avoids this problem by taking guidance from human rights while seeking to meet the urgent, unattended needs visible in emergency situations. A case in point is the work of ChildFund Afghanistan (CFA), the Afghan arm of CCF.

To assess children's situation in the northeastern provinces following the fall of the Taliban, CFA conducted a child-focused assessment that used the rights defined in the CRC to identify areas of possible abuse and significant protection issues. To focus its efforts and define a program strategy, CFA followed the needs-based approach of identifying the most urgent threats addressable via interventions. These threats became the targets of a set of integrated partnership, programming, and advocacy efforts. Partnership activities included joint analyses of protection issues; establishment of or participation in coordination meetings on child protection; and collaboration in a common program framework with partners such as UNICEF, the International Rescue Committee, and Save the Children/US.

Program activities included filling urgent gaps such as access to education; addressing the protection needs of vulnerable children through community-based action; children's participation in protection monitoring and civic action to reduce protection risks; coordinating with and building the capacity of Afghan government ministries; and helping to build national networks on child protection. Advocacy activities included dialogues with government agencies, donors, and intergovernmental agencies in regard to issues of children's rights and protection. Although children's rights figured prominently in all phases of this work, CFA did not use a strict rights-based approach. The reasons why reflect CCF's strategic role and distinctive approach to supporting vulnerable children and building local capacities.

Strategic Positioning

Throughout the humanitarian enterprise, duplication of efforts and poor coordination have been persistent problems. A key to addressing these problems lies in defining a clear role that enables each agency to add value without wasteful duplication of effort. Consistent with its child-focused mandate, CCF's primary role is to support children's development and well-being. From a strategic standpoint, CCF adds value by supporting vulnerable children in a manner that fills urgent gaps, meets the needs of different age groups, mobilizes communities for development, uses local cultural resources where appropriate, and addresses the structural causes of poverty.

In emergency situations, while many agencies engage in large-scale food aid, health care, or other physical support activities, CCF focuses on child protection and well-being, since protection risks threaten to damage children and undermine the foundation for development. CCF strengthens child protection not by advocating in a singular manner for children's rights since, as noted earlier, enormous gaps exist between children's rights and children's lives as they are lived in difficult circumstances. Instead, CCF focuses on mobilizing and empowering communities, enabling both children and adults to organize committees that monitor and address protection issues. Rather than putting children

and families in a position of asking for education at a time when government capacities are too weak to provide it, CCF helps to organize community based education while also building government capacities to provide quality education. In this manner, CCF seeks to fulfill children's rights on an immediate basis, thereby complementing the longer term work accomplished by RBAs. At the same time, CCF also engages in capacity building and advocacy to strengthen governments' mechanisms for fulfilling their obligations to protect children, thereby adding to the efforts of agencies using RBAs.

A key part of CCF's program strategy is to develop age-, culture-, and gender-appropriate activities that support children's protection and positive development. Although this targeted approach diverges from the CRC, it is crucial for meeting the needs of children at different stages of development. For young children under the age of six years, CCF provides holistic early child development supports that build physical, cognitive, and motor competencies, aid social integration, and prepare children to participate successfully in school and fill culturally appropriate roles. In regard to children 7-12 years old, CCF works to increase access to quality education and helps communities to organize nonformal education if the formal school system lies in tatters. Children in this age group also participate in youth clubs to support social integration and development of life skills that open positive options for the future and decrease the likelihood of participation in cycles of violence and crime. In regard to teenagers, an often forgotten group with much creative capacity, CCF seeks to increase leadership, engage young people in youth groups and civic activities, and develop the literacy and life skills that enable them to fill positive roles in their societies. This targeted approach, which yields richer dividends than the generic approach visible in most RBAs, is complemented by CCF's unique approach to poverty alleviation.

Addressing the Roots of Poverty

RBAs arose from the critique stating that traditional, technical approaches to development fail to address the roots of poverty, which lie in political denial, exclusion, and injustice. Although this critique has considerable merit, it overlooks the fundamental point that rights-based approaches but comprise only one means of addressing the roots of poverty. Alternative approaches offer the strengths of RBAs and exhibit additional advantages such as increased proximity to children's understandings of poverty.

The CCF Poverty Study, for example, unearthed three key factors – deprivation, exclusion, and vulnerability (DEV) — underlying poverty. Deprivation includes the lack of basic services; exclusion consists of patterns of injustice and denial; and vulnerability arises from exposure to psychosocial and physical risks without offsetting protective factors. The DEV framework resonates strongly with children's understandings of poverty as documented in the CCF Poverty Study. Repeatedly, children and parents spoke of children's lack of access to basics such as clean water, immunizations, and shelter. Children spoke also of exclusion in the highly relational terms alluded to above, identifying their feelings of pain and vulnerability as they did so. In CCF's experience, both children and adults immediately recognize and find meaning in the DEV framework, which is very close to their own experience. In contrast, they regard a framework emphasizing rights and entitlements as too abstract and removed from the conditions of their lives.

The DEV framework offers a means of analyzing the causes of poverty in terms having to do with political denial, oppression, injustice, and exclusion. Put simply, it is not necessary to use the language of RBAs in order to identify the roots of poverty. Nor is it necessary to take a rights-based approach in addressing them. Humanitarian and development workers recognize the importance of correcting deprivation, ending exclusion, and supporting vulnerable people. RBAs have done a significant service in calling attention to the need to make political reforms, policy changes, and the accountability of duty bearers central parts of development work. However, these tasks fit as well with the DEV framework as with a rights-based framework. Since the DEV framework is closer to local people's own understandings of their situation, it offers a sense of solidarity that RBAs cannot promise. As discussed earlier, staying close to children's own

understandings has the advantage of encouraging children's agency and active participation. This fits with a key message of the child rights movement that children are actors rather than passive victims and are entitled to full participation. In a very real sense, the DEV framework casts new light on children's agency and opens doors for youth leadership in a way that RBAs cannot. For a child-focused agency such as CCF, the significance of this benefit is difficult to overstate.

The DEV framework is a cornerstone of CCF's Bright Futures program for addressing poverty. Like RBAs, the Bright Futures program incorporates elements such as analysis of the national roots of poverty, participation in broad coalitions and networks at national and international levels, contributing to the development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PSRPs), advocacy with duty bearers, the construction of policies that protect rights and end discrimination, and child participation, among others. The program also aims to fill gaps in meeting urgent needs through empowerment-based programs implemented on a large scale that add value to existing efforts and build national and regional capacities for supporting children. Through this initiative, now being implemented on three continents, CCF complements RBAs, contributes to development practice, and exhibits the leadership for children befitting its mandate.

Making Rights More Central

Child rights occupy an ever more central role in CCF's programs. Over the past five years, child protection has become the rubric under which CCF has conducted its emergency work. Today, in countries such as Afghanistan, Angola, Chad, Indonesia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sri Lanka, CCF serves as a voice for child rights and child protection, and it partners extensively with agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR that take a rights-based approach. CCF often plays a lead role in building local child protection networks and participates in national networks and advocacy work aiming to protect children's rights on a national scale.

Still, CCF has a long way to go in making children's rights as central in its work as they should be. One significant step needed is the integration of child protection into CCF's longer-term development work. At present, child protection is the initiative of emergency programs, where one is also most likely to hear discussion of children's rights and to see rich linkages with human rights networks. However, children in all of CCF's longer-term programs face significant protection risks such as sexual exploitation, child labor, discrimination, trafficking, and family violence, among others. By integrating child protection into its long-term programs, CCF will at once strengthen its development work and expand its impact by participating fully in the international human rights discourse and system.

A second step is to strengthen child participation further. Although children's agency and leadership are becoming more visible in CCF's work, they need to be cultivated further in all programs worldwide. This is no small step since children's full participation requires the use of distinctive methodologies, a devolution of power, and the adoption of child participatory practices of assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. By taking this step, which requires much training and capacity building on child participation, CCF will be in a better position to fill its mandate and to achieve the intimate linkages between development and human rights that humanitarian work in contemporary settings requires.

In conclusion, CCF stands to add greatest value to development work not by duplicating extant RBAs but by complementing them through its distinctive blend of child-focused programming, community empowerment with national reach, capacity building of government and regional associations, advocacy on child protection and child rights, and child participation and leadership. CCF's focus on children adds considerable value to development since children are an important part of the human capital in any society. Ultimately, children's development and achievement of their rights are essential parts of the foundation for societal development.

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