

Children and Poverty

**A Review of Contemporary Literature
and Thought on Children and Poverty:**
Rethinking the Causes, Experiences and Effects

CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S FUND

Children and Poverty Series

PART I

Children and Poverty: A Review of Contemporary Literature and Thought on Children and Poverty

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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 review is offered as the first 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.

Christian Children's Fund (CCF)
2003

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FOREWORD

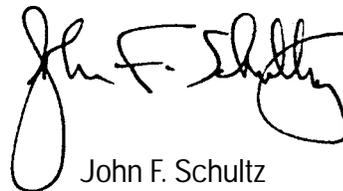
As a worldwide organization that has been lifting children and their families from the grip of poverty for over 65 years, Christian Children's Fund (CCF) understands well the difficulty of our task. Not all of our approaches have worked and some have become outmoded over the years. Education alone is certainly not the guaranteed route out of poverty and deprivation we once thought. Anti-poverty programs of all types have had mixed success.

As a learning organization that has changed enormously and adapted to new situations and new locations, CCF is always seeking out ways to do what we do better. We know that breaking the cycle of multi-generational poverty-making a truly long-lasting difference in a young person's life — is a tall order. There are no set recipes. It is always good to reflect on our goals, our methods, and our rates of success in accomplishing our mission.

In 2002, CCF launched an effort to better understand the effects of poverty on children. We commissioned an extensive three-part study including a review of contemporary literature and thought, a five country case analysis (we went to the real experts - children and parents living in poverty) and an overview that provides implications and recommendations for future interventions. What resulted is fascinating and thought provoking. Based on this exhaustive study, it should not surprise us that many of our operating assumptions may well be invalid. Even the role that children themselves play in an environment of poverty may be quite different from our common understanding.

CCF offers this study to our community and colleagues as a contribution to our common field of endeavors. There are controversial conclusions in this study document. Already some of these findings have begun to shape our own thinking about program design and methods. Although this is not an official policy document, we hope that you will find these collected insights as valuable and as challenging as we have at CCF.

Our gratitude goes out to the consultants and our colleagues who have produced this important "white paper" on the most serious global issue of our time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. Schultz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

John F. Schultz
President

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ever since 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 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 experience 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 riven with cultural and conceptual biases.

Most worrying 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/priorities interact with those of local communities and the agendas of international agencies. This has perpetuated the overwhelming reluctance in the literature to acknowledge the resilience of children as social and economic actors in the struggle against poverty.

The main findings of the literature survey may be summarized in 10 key points:

1) Assumptions and Cultural Bias

The literature of child poverty is based on demarcations of children and childhood drawn from Western cultures, and promotes certain conceptualizations of child and family relationships as the ‘goal’ of alleviation strategies, while vilifying others as the ‘cause’.

2) Inaccurate Measurement, Irrelevant Indicators

The literature is overly dependent on the statistical, quantifiable dimensions of child poverty, and organizes its knowledge around adult and institutional requirements rather than real situations. This has meant that the terminology, indicators and resulting interventions are often irrelevant to children’s lives in many ways.

3) Overly-Simplistic Macro-Micro Linkages

Not enough attention is given to how features in the macro environment — such as economic policy, political governance and conflict — translate into impacts on children. This partly because child poverty studies tend to adopt a ‘snapshot’ approach, making it difficult to assess the longitudinal effects and linkages to larger macro frameworks.

4) Stigma and Discrimination

The understanding of how child poverty is regarded by and responded to within the community is poor, and myopic, exclusively targeted interventions may themselves encourage or create further discrimination, as is the case with disabled children. There too little focus on how institutionalized systems of exclusion (e.g. caste and ethnicity) interact with the economic poverty of the family.

5) The Narrowness of Health

Health is a prime indicator of child poverty, but in the literature it is largely confined to considerations of mortality, excluding the mental health issues and other less visible concerns of older children. Local understandings and practices of healthcare are ignored, as are the views of the children themselves.

6) The Reification of School-based Education

Literacy and schooling are consistently held up as the universal keys to breaking the cycle of poverty in the literature, despite increasing evidence from many countries that education may be contextually useless or damaging, particularly for girls. The benefits are far from automatic, and are rarely available to all.

7) The Myths of Child Labor

Culturally biased notions of childhood as ideally 'work-free' have vilified the labor contribution of children and over-determined the causal link between work and poverty. There is evidence that in many cases employment can actually be more beneficial to the child than schooling, and may be entered into willingly without parental pressure.

8) Overstating Vulnerability

The creation of categories of 'especially vulnerable children' such as street children, AIDS orphans and child sex workers has led to disproportionate attention at the expense of other children suffering similar but less visible threats to their protection. It also appears that the vulnerability of such groups is in many cases overstated or misplaced, and being singled out in such a way may unintentionally further their stigmatization.

9) Ignoring Child Agency

The literature is very reluctant to accord any social or economic agency to children, despite increasing evidence of children taking control over their own lives at significant stages, and developing strategic capacities for coping that were once thought beyond them.

10) Understanding Poverty and Protection

There is little recognition of child poverty as a protection issue, despite significant reports into child prostitution and trafficking. If at all, these threats to the protection of children are nearly always considered as originating from outside the home, and very little information is available on how poverty affects levels of domestic violence, family dynamics or alcoholism, for example. Some simply see these issues as pertaining to crime and lawlessness, and therefore outside their 'development' mandate.

These factors show that the increasing prominence of children within development agendas, while encouraging, is not in itself enough to tackle the complexity of child poverty with efficiency and longevity. There is still a long way to go in recognizing the biases and inaccuracies that distort how we currently conceive of, relate to and act around children, before we can develop methodological approaches that are both relevant to children and inclusive of their agency.

INTRODUCTION

Defining Child Agency

For too long, the literature on child poverty (and indeed the vast majority of research on children in general) has followed a standard model of childhood rooted in ideas that first emerged in the 19th century in the industrialized countries of the North. This model conceives that childhood is (or at least *should* be) a time free from responsibilities such as work and centered on the home, school education and play. It is associated with a view of children as passive, immature and incompetent beings who are socialized into adulthood adult guidance and training (James and Prout, 1997). Children's contributions to society have either been ignored all together or placed with in a framework that presents parental/adult control and dependency as a prerequisite. However, recent sociological, anthropological and child development research shows that children are far more capable than once thought, with the cognitive, social and economic competencies to actively shape their own development and also to influence the development of the wider society (James and Prout, 1997; Waksler, 1994; Mayall, 1994; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998). Child-focused institutions, development agencies, researchers and adults in general are now starting to realize the multitude of ways in which children exert their agency, particularly when faced with the adversity that was previously thought to render them helpless, passive victims (Save the Children, 1995; Punch, 1998; Baker, 1998).

But what exactly is child 'agency', and how can we hope to reconcile it with poverty alleviation strategies that are — like the literature — channeled through and for adults? In its broadest sense, child agency may be seen as *"the transition from 'the child' as an instance of a category to the recognition of children as particular persons"* (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:6). It therefore entails a paradigm shift in attitudes towards children in stressing their existence

as social actors *shaping* — as well as being shaped by — their circumstances or social 'structure'. Agency is not merely equivalent to action, however; it also encompasses the child as a person with opinions, a decision-maker (ibid.). Nasman (1994) looks upon this attribution as the 'individualization' of children, an idea that was reflected in Edwards (1996) policy arena discussion two years later, where children were identified as:

"...Social actors — individuals with rights and responsibilities of their own; playing an active role in the lives of their families, communities and societies; and having interests, views and priorities which may differ from those of the adults with whom they interact."(830)

The failure to recognize these capacities in children has led to the belief that children affected by poverty require 'rescue and rehabilitation', with adults in the driving seat. This underlying framework, backed up by media images of child destitution and suffering, makes it very easy to over-emotionalize poverty and talk of 'lost innocence' and 'stolen childhoods' without being aware of the implicit value judgements that are being made. This can be dangerous in potentially encouraging the creation and perception of 'poverty' where there is actually very little, or none. Worse still, the insistent focus on what has been 'lost', 'damaged' or 'destroyed' through poverty at the expense of what has survived or even been gained, can undermine children's self-esteem and self-efficacy, insofar as they are constantly pushed to confront the inadequacies rather than the merits of their situation. This unerring focus on the negative aspects of children in poverty, while relevant to attempts at amelioration, presents us with only a partial picture of children's lives. It ignores the fact that despite the severity of their situation, many children continue to hold positive attitudes and aspirations and are able to draw upon this morale as part of their risk management strategies.

These are just some of the larger issues that emerge from the literature on child poverty,



and as will be seen, they are themselves both the cause and the product of numerous other distortions afflicting all levels of analysis. While this review does not claim to be exhaustive, it nevertheless highlights the disparity between the astonishingly complex nature of child poverty and the often simplistic, unsophisticated character of current research and responses.

No one definition of 'children' has universal acceptance.



1.0 THE PROBLEMS OF RESEARCHING CHILD POVERTY

1.1 Conceptualizing the Child: Exposing the Stereotypes

No one definition of 'children' 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 and among the literature, 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. In some countries and cultures, childhood may be qualified in relation to such factors as the commencement of work, the end of schooling, the onset of menarche or betrothal and marriage (Boyden and Levison, 2000). Even within the same society, the attainment of 'adulthood' may differ according to social class, as in Bangladesh, where a working child leaves childhood earlier than one that attends school and has no economic responsibilities (Blanchet, 1996).

The age at which childhood ends is also drawn upon lines of gender in many societies, with puberty being a critical threshold particularly for girls. This is because unlike cognitive, social or physical development (which are recognized 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 (Boyden and Levison, 2000). In the case of girls, this boundary is

distinctly marked by the onset of menarche, but for boys the transition is less identifiable, and they are often consequently required to prove their maturity in other ways (for example, through employment) in order to be conferred adult status.

Childhood is thus conceived and demarcated through gender in terms of both physical changes in the body and the tasks that young people are 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 (Levison, 1991). This is in contrast to parts of South Asia, where it is girls who form the majority of school drop-outs at this age as they begin to carry out the domestic tasks of an adult woman (Johnson et al., 1995).

What is seen as 'appropriate' roles for children in society does not simply shift with geography and culture, but may also be reconfigured in accordance with the varied demands of climate, environment, social class and poverty. 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 as a culturally and contextually diverse social construction that demands continuous analysis (Boyden and Levison, 2000).

This is not to say that the guidelines 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 their framework to interventions in different cultures.¹ Any child-focused research or development assistance is inevitably built upon a set of

¹For more on this, see the section 'From Needs to Rights — Child Poverty and the CRC'.

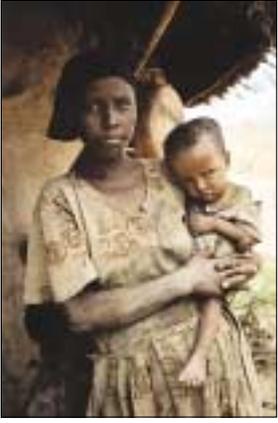
cultural assumptions about the 'proper' role and lifestyle of a child that may or may not bear much resemblance to those of the particular children targeted, and it is the lack of preliminary investigation into this potential discrepancy that has led to the difficulties or ultimate failure often encountered through implementation. As regards child poverty, the ideological stance taken toward 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 toward more locally meaningful futures. As Korbin (1983) points out:

"If we do not include a cultural perspective, we will be entangled in the ethnocentric position of considering our own cultural values and practices preferable, and indeed superior, to any other. At the same time, a stance of extreme cultural relativism, in which all judgements of human treatment of children are suspended in the name of cultural sensitivity, would be counter-productive to promoting the well-being of the world's children" (3).

The uncritical acceptance of child development as a process whereby all children develop through a series of progressive stages has given rise to other problems. The suggestion is that each stage of development builds on the previous one and that particularly stressful or traumatic events experienced in early childhood (including poverty) will disrupt or distort children's later development, often with life-long negative effects. This theory has primarily been advanced by child psychologists and psychiatrists stressing a largely medicalized view of children's responses to adversity, and has been blown out of proportion to the point that the literature now almost instinctively and continually mourns the 'permanent damage' suffered by children who, for example, are exposed to hazardous labor at an early age.

Apart from a lack of substantiated evidence for such claims and effectively ignoring children's resilience in coping with such pressures, this automatic connection is far from accurate, for 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 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 (Lyenes and Mahjoub, 1992; Dawes, 1992; Zwi et al., 1992).

Despite increasing acknowledgement of childhood diversity within the literature, the vast majority of those writing are still relatively blind to the assumptions and preconceptions 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, irrational to rational behavior and dependent childhood to autonomous adulthood (Boyden and Levison, 2000). When this research then becomes the basis of intervention, it can have serious consequences for the children targeted, 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': interventions that are now recognized to have effectively increased the poverty and vulnerability of the children involved by forcing them to seek jobs far more hazardous than those they held originally (Zalami, 1998; Myers and Boyden, 1998).



1.2 Conceptualizing the Family: Looking Beyond the Nuclear

The literature on child poverty is underpinned by the belief that without the care or protection of adult figures such as a mother and father, children are automatically and especially vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, malnutrition, disease and death. The immediate, nuclear family is viewed as the 'best' place for a growing child, and those who live in other domestic arrangements — for whatever reason — are seen to be deprived (Mann, 2001). As the Canadian Christian Children's Fund suggests, "*with their parents unable to feed, clothe, educate or protect their health, their only inheritance is destitution and desperation*" (CCF, 1999 cited in Ledward, 2000:14). While it has been acknowledged through participatory research with children that the break-up of the family unit is undoubtedly very difficult and upsetting for many children and while adults do fulfill many important functions with regard to the care and protection of children, we need to qualify a number of assumptions related to the role of the nuclear family unit.

First, while the literature acknowledges that not all children grow up in households together with their immediate family, it does so under the implicit assumption that any alternative living arrangements are the result of the wide and varied pressures of poverty, or other 'unusual' circumstances. Anthropological studies from around the world dispute this assumption, and have shown that children are often very mobile, circulating between households and communities in times of prosperity as well as deprivation. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Demographic and Health Surveys found that in Namibia, for example, 42% of girls and 36% of boys aged 12-14 do not live with either parent, with similarly high percentages in other countries such as Cote d'Ivoire and Haiti (DHS figures cited in Mensch, Bruce and Greene, 1998). This is not just a consequence of HIV/AIDS, but an existing cultural practice.

Moreover, in many societies, child-rearing is a communal affair that includes care-givers that may or may not be related to the child in question. For example, Tronick et al. (1987) found that among the Efe of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'multiple mothering' — rather than being a symptom of deprivation as asserted in much of the literature — is a culturally-sanctioned and actively encouraged norm. When a mother is working, crying babies are put to the breast of any woman, including those who are not lactating. Even when she is nearby, a mother is not necessarily the sole caregiver of her child. Similar diffusion of child-rearing responsibilities crop up among the Malays on the island of Langkawi (Carsten, 1991) and among the Inupiat of Northern Alaska (Bodenhorn, 1988). Harper and Marcus (1999) acknowledge that 'the range of household types and structures in which African children grow up is huge' (8), and other researchers have even gone so far as to assert that in West Africa, "a network of kin, with the obligations they exchange, may be more crucial to a child's present and future experience and achievement than the child's parents" (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985:55). In many countries, it is the older siblings (usually girls) and other children who act as primary caregivers — in the UK alone there are at least 60,000 children who are the sole caregivers of incapacitated adults/parents (Mann, 2001).

The point here is that two-parent families are neither the most common household form in many parts of the world (regardless of adversity), nor act as primary caregivers for children in many cases, and are thus undeserving of the reification they receive in the literature. As well, living in a two-parent nuclear family is not in itself a guarantee of protection against poverty. As Harper and Marcus (1999) point out, although the effects of poverty on the most vulnerable groups of children (for example, orphans from AIDS, street children, etc.) are the most easily identifiable, it is likely that "the effects on children in two-parent families... while much less discussed, are equally persuasive" (9). In South Africa, for example, it is common for parents in poor households "to be physical-

ly present, but to have little time for active parenting as they leave for work before sunrise and return after dark" (GoSA, 1996:12). In the UK, 350,000 children under 12 years old are left alone at home every day, but their vulnerability remains unchecked because both parents are statistically present (Blewett and Woods, 1999). Many times, these children are left in charge of younger siblings in a country such as India or Bangladesh, and as Maggie Black (2000) suggests, one does not anyway have to be physically alone to suffer spiritual, mental and emotional isolation. 100,000 children under 16 run away from home every year in the UK, an estimated 18,000 of whom have been forced out by parents or caregivers, usually because their home life is violent and miserable (The Children's Society, 1999).

Other studies have meanwhile suggested that even in situations where numerous adult care-givers are present most of the time — such as polygamous arrangements — the children do not automatically benefit, with the poorest often receiving discriminatory treatment. The World Bank Participatory Poverty Assessments collecting the 'Voices of the Poor' found that polygamy was in fact generally regarded as a contributing factor of poverty (Narayan et al., 1999). Children within these domestic situations therefore need a great deal more attention within the literature, but tend to be overlooked in the rush to highlight those without adults around. The practice of fostering warrants closer attention, as will be seen in the discussion of poverty and HIV/AIDS.

The fact that nuclear families have been idealized — however implicitly — in this way for so long has already had serious consequences therefore, not only in terms of biasing the literature into focusing on non-nuclear 'exceptions', but also in influencing attitudes among the families. Increasing evidence of an 'unraveling' of kin-based safety nets and a refusal by relatives and communities to fulfill 'traditional' care-giving responsibilities for children in need suggests that the nuclear family has gained greater

significance and that important extended family ties are on the decline (Ayieko, 1997; Hunter et al., 1997). While the increased monetization of economies and the associated growth of inequality and urbanization have been strong influences in this respect, Harper and Marcus also find some culpability in "colonial/Christian ideologies of the family which served to reduce reciprocity within lineages, and emphasized nuclear families as the main unit of society" (1999:23). Children are more and more being seen as the responsibility of immediate, rather than extended family members. In western Tanzania, Tibajiuka and Kaijage (1995) directly relate the rise in refusals among relatives to take in orphans to the change in the concept of family, whereby "family responsibilities are increasingly viewed in terms of nuclear rather than extended families" (25).

1.3 Hidden Behind the Lines: Measuring the Poverty of Children

According to normal usage, poverty is *"the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions"* (Kanbur and Squire, 1999:3). This definition is deceptively simple, but gives rise to two important implications relevant to the measurement of child poverty. First, that poverty will be differently defined at different times and in different societies; and second, that poverty is conceived in terms of the ability to purchase goods and services (money) or their ownership (material possessions). Contemporary measurements of poverty using income consumption analysis in line with the second of these considerations have led to the World Bank's creation of an 'absolute poverty line' (equivalent to US\$1 a day) under which a quantifiable number of people may be calculated to live. In response to the culturally sensitive demands of the first implication, a second 'relative' poverty line has also been developed in tandem to account for differential cost-systems and fluctuating ideas of the amount of money deemed 'socially acceptable'.

Neither of these measures is adequate in

gauging child poverty, for a number of reasons. First, these measures have evolved, as Harper and Marcus (1999) point out, from the primacy in the West of income as a means to access living standards, privileges and services. In many parts of the world where a market economy is relatively new, there are numerous distributive non-market channels and practices (for example, barter and self-provisioning) which render such measurements inaccurate and irrelevant in assessing the situation of children. Similarly, focusing on formal sector incomes, as much of the literature does, fails to take into account income generated from within the informal economy, where many poor adults and the vast majority of children are employed.

Second, children's access to, and control over, income is extremely marginal. Indeed, prioritizing economic welfare through the analysis of consumption and expenditure by adults tells us nothing about the welfare of children dependent on those adults, or about the intra-household distribution of that expenditure. We are also wrong to imply that children are necessarily dependent on adults, for the reverse is often true (Mann, 2001). We are left only to rely on the assumption that the head of household is a benevolent dictator who executes all time and resource allocation decisions in such a way that takes all family members' well-being into account. Numerous studies have shown this faith to be misplaced, and it is commonly acknowledged that in many countries today altruistic principles of distribution rarely prevail, with the burden of poverty being unequally heaped in accordance with age and gender biases that adversely affect women and children in particular (Kabeer, 1994).

Third, poverty lines give no indication as to how children's time and labor are being utilized or the contributions they may be making to help maintain the level of 'household' income, particularly in situations of deprivation. One study of nine Latin American countries found that without the income of children aged between 13-17, the

incidence of poverty as measured by the absolute poverty line would rise by 10-20% (UNICEF, 1997). Domestic activities — mostly by girls — are also rarely valued in economic terms, and yet contribute a great deal to the ability of other members in the family to undertake income-generating employment outside the home, and as such should not be overlooked.

Finally, poverty line measurements drawing on income-consumption criteria do not give us any information about the multitude of other aspects of deprivation impacting children's lives, such as access to water, shelter, health services, education or transport. Nor do they give any indication of indebtedness, dependence, isolation, physical weakness or disability, high mortality or low life expectancy, social exclusion, low status or self-respect. Most of all, they tell us very little concerning the lack of opportunity and choice that appears to impinge heavily upon poor families, and that greatly undermines their ability to protect their children from hazard or exploitation by others. The idea that parents may themselves be willing exploiters of their children (and their labor in particular) is also ignored. If anything, therefore, poverty lines serve to further obscure children's experience of poverty, and are invoked less to meet the needs of the poor, and more to satisfy the 'static and standardized wants of professionals' (Chambers, 1992:81).

The United Nations Development Programme devised the Human Development Index (HDI), which includes indicators such as education, literacy, political representation and crime, with a view to developing a more effective means of gauging human experience, including the experience of poverty. While there is at least some welcome disaggregation of age and gender within current UNDP indicators,² it should be noted that almost every one relates to the purely physiological impacts of poverty, in terms of survival and good health. In reality poverty is also experienced through a number of other psychological, social and political

²These include life expectancy at birth, calorie supply per capita, under-5 mortality, immunization, etc.

dimensions. As Arjun Appadurai points out, most analyses still concentrate on the physical and ignore “the critical qualitative dimension which must belong to any robust conception of the standard of living. Components of this include: the perception of security in livelihood, the sense of freedom from harassment and abuse...and so forth” (quoted in Chambers, 1992:83). It is by focusing their efforts solely on alleviating these physical aspects of child poverty at the expense of social structural problems, such as social exclusion, security and discrimination, that some organizations repeatedly ignore causal factors and instead merely treat the symptoms of poverty rooted elsewhere.

Greater efficiency and relevance in research may perhaps lie in recognizing the agency of children and giving them the opportunity to define and express what poverty means to them. This was the approach of Save the Children UK in *‘Different Places, Same Stories — Children’s Views of Poverty, North and South’* (2001), which found that:

- For research in industrialized countries at least, the word ‘poverty’ may not be a useful concept to children, who rarely talk about ‘poverty’ as such and more about other things affecting their lives. Children who were deemed poor by poverty lines never identified themselves as such — ‘poverty’ was something that happened to other people. Furthermore, indicators such as a lack of education, health or emotional support were never classed as ‘poverty’ in the North — most children associated the word with the homeless.
- Children in the South were, in contrast, more likely to mention the word ‘poverty’ in connection with themselves, and appeared to have a broader definition of ‘poverty’ that included lack of well-being and lack of infrastructure as opposed to strictly a lack of material goods. Children from both North and South were generally aware that in

most cases poverty is related to lack of money, particularly in the North, where the economy is highly monetised and relatively stable. In the South, children were more aware that having money did not necessarily protect against certain forms of poverty.

Children closely related poverty to feelings of insecurity.

- Children closely related poverty to feelings of insecurity — fears for physical safety, fears about the family collapsing and fears of not achieving a settled lifestyle in the future. Bullying in school was also mentioned in both the North and South, as was the danger younger children felt they were in from older children. Despite the anxiety that poverty engendered, children were still predominantly optimistic about their lives, “reflected in the great self-reliance that children display” (23).

1.4 Tireless Obsession with Statistics

One of the most striking things about the literature on child poverty is its tireless obsession with statistics — percentages, ratios, population counts and predictions. It is difficult to find a text that does not at some point utilize the terminology of “*one in four...*”, or “*an estimated...*” or “*...is three times more likely to be...*”. The extent and omnipresence of such statistics should in one sense reassure us that child poverty is a phenomenon about which we know a great deal — that collating the numbers and scale of those involved is somehow the key to solving their persistent deprivation. At the very least, this ‘politics of hype’ (Ennew, 1996) will appeal to people’s sense of outrage and endow the issue with an urgency that is undoubtedly important. It may also stimulate greater funding and awareness, both of which are necessary ingredients in poverty alleviation strategies.

But in many ways, the statistical portrait of children that can be assembled from these data is still fragmented and incomplete, and often serves to further obscure child pover-

ty, which is far more complex than the static, quantifiable phenomenon it may be presented as. For example, information on a child's social *condition* is still seen as sufficient indication of their *experience*, when in reality the two may be considerably different. Moreover, most statistics treat children as attributes of the family rather than a unit of observation in themselves, and this has led to significant misreading of their situation. For example, information on the number of poor households with children (rather than the number of poor children in households) has distorted the distribution of poverty and concealed the fact that in most cases, the percentage of children under the poverty line is higher than the corresponding percentage for families. In other words, only when children are separated from the adult nexus and treated on their own terms does the true extent of their poverty become apparent (Saporiti, 1994).

The heavy reliance on statistics may be misguided, for as one UN Special Rapporteur pointed out back in 1983, "The important point is not the scale of the problem but its degree of seriousness as a violation of the fundamental rights of the human person" (Fernand-Laurent, 1983:14). In other words, if one child is suffering it is still one too many, with the concern being the extent of the problem not in terms of quantified numbers affected, but in terms of the qualitative experience as felt by the child. This was reiterated almost 20 years later by Maggie Black (2000) in warning that "the pursuit of global statistics is not a very useful way of trying to understand the problem" (15). Why then, does the vast majority of the literature still persist in this statistical collection?

According to Ennew (1996), it is largely because although international interest in children has gained considerable momentum following the UN International Year of the Child (1979) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989/90), "little has changed in terms of the way research is carried out and used by child welfare and advocacy organizations, despite considerable advances in theories of childhood and meth-

ods of researching children's issues within the academic community" (12). The increasing recognition of children's agency and of cultural relativity are two such advances, both of which are now slowly beginning to influence certain pockets of intervention. The vast majority of research into child poverty continues, however, to prioritize the identification, measurement and analysis of statistical data that can only ultimately provide us with a snapshot of scale, rather than insight into poverty as a process opening, unfolding, fluctuating and differentially affecting children over time. While knowing the number of orphans sleeping rough on the streets may be useful in helping to plan the scale of our response, additional knowledge is required as to how children perceive their situation, what aspirations they may hold for the future, or why some days are better than others.

The prioritization of statistics, and quantifiable phenomena, has also led to the literature focusing on child poverty as an overwhelming experience of loss — loss of income, loss of material possessions, loss of health, loss of a family member, and so on. No mention is made of the things that many poor children retain, such as resourcefulness, courage and - more often than adults - optimism (Save the Children, 2001). Is it because these factors are simply too difficult to translate statistically, or is it more because ignoring them apparently makes responding to child poverty easier?

Most of the literature outlining the causes and manifestations of child poverty seems to have been written with a pre-conceived solution in mind, and has manipulated the observations to fit within neat statistical categories against which targets can be set and interventions drawn up. As Ennew (1996) asserts, "knowledge is organized around adult requirements for particular kinds of fact" (23) rather than the actual lives of children. This is partly because a great deal of the material originates from field research and consultancy, in which certain frameworks and biases are imposed from the outset. In practice, children's lives, particularly under the unpredictable insecurity

of poverty, are rarely so simple as to fit within these assumptions.

Robert Chambers' work stands out in consistently highlighting the need for perpetual self-scrutiny when assessing the poverty of other people. Though he does not specifically address children, his depiction of the numerous biases that beset the unsuspecting researcher are just as relevant to the collection of data on children as adults. His general argument is that 'real' poverty (which he believes to be predominantly rural) is effectively hidden to the outsider — not merely those in rich countries should have no exposure to it, but also (and perhaps especially) the professionals whose very task it is to seek it out. This is because of the following biases affecting the researcher:

The 'spatial bias' - whereby researchers are likely to only see certain places as part of their research, principally those close to tarmac roads to ease transportation.

The 'climate bias' - whereby research tends to be conducted most frequently in the dry season when travel is easiest and climate most pleasant, but missing the wet season when malnourishment and poverty exact a different and often greater toll.

The 'person bias' - whereby researchers are more likely to meet men than women, the elite rather than the underprivileged, the healthy rather than the desperately sick.

The 'diplomatic bias' - whereby courtesy, language barriers, or social custom may prevent researchers asking certain sensitive questions.

The 'professional bias' - whereby the specialist misses the interconnected nature of poverty by focusing particularly on economic, environmental or other factors.

Source: (Chambers, 1983; 1991)

Failing to at least acknowledge the possible influence of these biases on child poverty data is a powerful reason as to why the literature remains so insular, circulating the same statistics and convictions within what is predominantly Western discourse. Categories, language and assumptions are all too often left unquestioned, with the political backdrop (both of the researcher and the researched) rarely gaining much more than a passing reference. This suggests there is a strong need to rework statistics from a child-focused perspective and also to create space for inclusion of children's own perspectives, not merely through the reporting of their visible occupational roles as child laborers or sibling caretakers in times of crisis (which is about as far as most people go), but in allowing them to tell us their priorities, strategies and aspirations.

1.5 The Dynamics of Child Poverty

Much of the literature on child poverty makes the important distinction between transient poverty — where the child experiences a temporary period of deprivation, usually as the result of seasonal or random shocks such as the death of a breadwinner, or a bad harvest and chronic poverty, where deprivation is a general condition for the child and spans a far greater period of time, in some cases, the child's whole life (Goodhand, 2001). 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. As well, making a distinction between the two requires data collection over long periods of time. In practice, such data usually comes from household panel surveys, which currently exist in a number of developed countries but are rare in the developing world, particularly Africa (Moore, 2001; Grootaert et al., 1995). There is at least one longitudinal 15 year study currently in operation titled 'The Young Lives Project' (DfID, 2002) which tracks the lives of children born into poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam in the year 2000. The



results may not be forthcoming for some time, but will no doubt be extremely valuable in providing agencies and scholars alike with all too rare child-focused longitudinal data.

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 (Kanbur and Squire, 1999). For example, data from a study of six villages in India between 1975-1983 showed that 50% of the population were poor in a typical year but only 19% were poor in every year (World Bank, 1990).

While chronic poverty represents a range of durations, dimensions and levels of severity (Hulme, Moore and Shepherd, 2001), most of the literature conceptualizes it in terms of a cycle or process whereby poverty is inter-generationally transmitted (IGT) (DfID, 2002; Save the Children, 2001). This is usually understood as the transmission of poverty from older to younger generations (notably from parents to their children), but 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 IGT processes can be affected by external interference?

Karen Moore's (2001) study of intergenerational poverty sets out to answer these questions, and her analysis contributes a great deal of information and thinking relevant to the conceptualization of child pover-

ty in particular. First, she examines the multiple actors and directions through which poverty may be transmitted, and the factors that control these flows, arguing 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, whilst actually aspiring to the opposite.

With a broad understanding of the processes discussed above, it is important to ask what is the 'poverty-related capital' being transmitted through these channels? Moore (2001) divides capital into five distinct, but interacting groups listed below.

(1) Human Capital

The capital transferred between generations whenever someone cares for someone younger or older, or provides labor, goods or services. It generally relates to broader issues of parental investment in children, but can also be transmitted from outside the family. For example, it is often pointed out that educated parents are more likely to communicate the value of schooling to their children than uneducated parents (Danziger and Stern, 1990; Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1997; Black, 2000). Other examples of human capital include health and nutrition, knowledge and skills useful as part of coping and survival strategies, and inheritable or communicable disease or impairment.

*Is poverty
always transmitted
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opposite direction?*



(2) Financial/Material Capital

The transfer of money and assets between generations — in the form of gifts, loans, inheritance and bequests — is the most obvious form of poverty-related capital, and is regulated along social-cultural and legal norms. Gender and birth order are particularly strong factors in this sector, often favoring boys and the first born above girls and younger siblings. Debt, which Moore refers to as ‘negative inheritance’, is also often transferred in the absence of effective laws, and many children become enmeshed in cycles of debt and bonded labor — particularly in parts of South Asia.

(3) Social-Cultural Capital

In its simplest sense, this refers to the tradition, institutions and value systems within a particular group, including the role of individual attitudes and personality traits in mediating the effects of poverty. The literature is largely divided here around the potential existence of a ‘culture of poverty’, which essentially suggests that people become, are and remain ‘innately’ poor because of their beliefs, attitudes and behaviors (for example, laziness, ineptitude, dishonesty, criminality, lack of intelligence). Children born into this ‘culture’ are thus believed to be either unwilling or unable to take advantage of any emergent opportunities, thus perpetuating the poverty cycle.

This school of thought, aside from having heavy undertones of racism and classism, is neither constructive — in rendering any attempt to eradicate or alleviate poverty among this ‘underclass’ doomed to fail (Banfield, 1970) — nor substantiated by any evidence suggesting that poor people have fundamentally different expectations from other members of society. In fact, participatory consultations with poor children in both the North and South have shown that “despite the anxiety that poverty often

engenders, the optimism of many children and the sheer joy of living come through” (Save the Children, 2001:23). Having said that, the same study points to cases where persistent poverty in childhood has indeed curtailed children’s hopes for the future, with many learning either not to plan ahead at all or deliberately choosing low expectations for fear of disappointment.

Despite this, it is often the case that the social-cultural traditions and values systems that seem to hinder poverty eradication — such as gender inheritance practices in South Asia — constitute structural impediments that both the poor and the rich have to negotiate, rather than a ‘culture of poverty’. Interestingly, Moore (2001) raises the possibility that it may even be a ‘culture of wealth’ among the rich and middle class that keeps the poor in poverty.

(4) Social-Political Capital

This differs from social-cultural capital in that it refers to the factors affecting one’s position within a community, such as race, ethnicity, caste, kin group and family name. Many of these are inherited, substantially raising the survival chances of certain children from the moment they are born. Socio-political capital also refers to people’s access to key decision makers, political patrons, civil society organizations and development agencies. As these factors are so influential in the lives of many children currently struggling against poverty, they will be discussed in greater detail later.

(5) Environmental/Natural Capital

This relates to the degradation of the environment and the over-exploitation of natural resources, which of course affect the livelihoods of future generations. Indeed, many children are today impoverished as a result of the environmental abuse of past generations — for example, the pollution of local ground water increases the financial burden on



families who have to buy water to avoid contamination.

These five forms of capital are not placed in any particular order of importance, and continuous disaggregation of data collection is needed among target populations to determine which are likely to hold greatest relevance in tackling child poverty. The literature overwhelmingly emphasizes human capital as the apparently universal key to breaking the poverty cycle, with education reified as the single most important intervention with impact far more significant than any other (DfID, 2002; UNICEF, all years). But agencies should exercise caution here, for education may not always be as beneficial or powerful in combating child poverty as is assumed.³ Moreover, no two communities are ever exactly the same: in one study of the dynamics of poverty in Cote d'Ivoire, it was found that in urban areas, human capital was the most important endowment explaining welfare changes over time, compared to financial and material capital in the rural sector (Grootaert et al., 1995). It should also be recognized that the evidence base for IGT poverty is still predominantly from the USA, United Kingdom and other Northern countries, which lends a Western bias to understandings of the process. These studies principally examine earnings between generations and have usually compared fathers, sons and brothers, with patterns of poverty cycles among women receiving substantially less attention. The few Southern studies that exist focus more on education and nutrition — particularly that of women and girls — which makes gender patterns much clearer (Harper et al., forthcoming).

While parents form the most common channel through which these different forms of capital are transmitted to children, from the small amount of evidence so far accumulated it appears that the number of children who actually hold their parents or immediate family responsible for their deprivation is much less than imagined (Save the Children, 2001). They frequently refer instead to broader structural factors or their beliefs about the

world at large. Thus, one researcher in Mexico asked poor children why they thought there were rich and poor people in the world, and they answered 'destiny', 'that's the way God created earth' and 'the rich are of the Devil and the poor of God' (Narayan et al., 1999:188).

2.0 CHILD POVERTY AND GLOBALIZATION

2.1 Understanding Globalization

The way in which organizations have approached child poverty over the last few decades has been heavily influenced by the increasingly complex discourse on 'globalization'. The latter is a term that continues to generate much confusion in the literature, not least because it means many different things to different people. As Cornia (2002) points out, 'globalization' is a 'magic' word that is popularly used as both '*a symbol of all hopes for future improvements and the presumed cause of all ills and social injustices*' (2). Connecting such an elusive concept with the concrete lives of children is thus a significant challenge, but one which is critical to ensuring that organizations working to alleviate child poverty do so in the most relevant and effective manner.

The first step is therefore to define exactly what we mean by globalization and to decide which of its many facets are the most important in affecting children's well-being. As Appadurai observes, characterizing 'globalization' depends primarily on the kind of social, cultural, economic or political lens we are looking at the world through, and "*at best, 'globalization' is no more than a catch-all category to refer to various trends towards more complex patterns of international circulation, not only of media products, but also of technologies, finance, people and ideas*" (Appadurai, 1990:2).

In linking globalization to child poverty, attention has tended to focus on its economic expressions (such as the deregulation of

³For more on this, see the section 'Reading Between the Lines: Child Poverty and Education', below.

the domestic economy) and the headline-grabbing activities of multinational companies in utilizing child labor in their factories. Such instances may offer the greatest chance of obtaining measurable correlation between globalization and children's lives (explored in more detail in 'Macroeconomic Policy — Making the Connections' below), but only give half the picture.

Other aspects of globalization, such as the internationalization of certain cultural values, consumption patterns and entertainment continue to be less explored in relation to their effects on children under the assumption that 'their impact is probably less significant' (Cornia, 2002:2). From the perspective of day-to-day survival, this is probably true, but care should be taken not to underestimate the ways in which media and the export of Western products can exacerbate some aspects of impoverishment (as a relational concept) among children. In post-Soviet Russia, the desire for Western consumer goods (such as Nike shoes) is a major cause of the high levels of children working on the streets (Mansurov, 1993). More analysis of this kind is therefore needed if we are to understand the numerous ways in which impoverished children both respond to and are affected by aggressive global marketing by powerful multinational companies and the associated spread of global consumer values through the media, internet and other channels.

'Anti-poverty' Democracy

While global economic trends have undoubtedly had significant impact on children's lives, the ways in which we conceptualize and respond to child poverty have also been shaped by the circulation of ideas that globalization has brought into the international political arena. Democracy is a prime example of this, having been heavily promoted as the pinnacle of nation-state development and the most 'anti-poverty' of the various forms of political rule. Conceptualized as synonymous with the positive ideas of inclusion and equality,

democracy is presented as being critical in escaping poverty and ensuring the well-being of citizens. In practice, there is actually little evidence that democratic governance necessarily diminishes either social or economic inequity (see section on 'Politics and Governance') and has in a number of cases intensified the divisions that previously existed.

The Nation State

The construction of the nation state as the ideal arena for implementing democratic rule has also had significant consequences in terms of how we perceive poverty and who we hold accountable in responding to it. 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. 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.

In many parts of the world the credibility of the nation state is not well established, having been formed without the full participation of the citizenship. Aside from this, most countries in the South 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. As well,

through globalization and the subsequent weakening of the power of the state to shape cultural practices and ideas, the definition and protection of political boundaries and borders have taken on greatly increased significance. In the process, the issue of who is 'responsible' for the well-being of people within these boundaries — be they registered citizens, ref-ugees, 'illegal' immigrants etc. — has intensified. Globalization, whilst facilitating the wider spread of technology and information, has also paved the way for unprecedented movements of people, and attempts to clarify state obligations within national constitutions have been increasingly undermined by the size and complexity of the population flows.

Human Rights

The widespread dissemination of the idea of 'universal human rights' (formalized by the United Nations Declaration in 1948) has added further complexity. Historically, the 'rights' of people have been conceived of largely in civil and political terms (voting, freedom of speech, judicial representation, and so on) and Amnesty International is a good example of one organization that until very recently has upheld this emphasis. However, more recent human rights instruments — including the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child — have become increasingly social and economic in nature, and relate more directly to the issue of poverty. The result is a framework in which poverty is now seen as an issue less of resources and more of rights, with the democratic nation state held up as the key guarantor and protector of those rights.

2.2 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Until the advent of the CRC in 1989, interventions focused around child welfare and protection were predominantly based on the notion of meeting 'universal' criteria of children's 'needs'. These mainly emphasized the child's survival and physical well-being, and were often hierarchically ranked to promote the areas of health, nutrition and

adequate shelter above all others. However, the needs-based approach was soon felt to be lacking in that it primarily depended on contextually-fluctuating attitudes of goodwill, charity and benevolence towards children, and thus remained politically impotent. In other words, the concept of need did not carry with it any notion of obligation or responsibility in meeting that need. It also conceptualized poor children as passive victims of circumstance as opposed to survivors of adversity, social actors with competencies, insights and energy that can be employed in the alleviation of their own difficulties.

In an effort to rectify these shortcomings, these 'needs' were then reframed in a more holistic discourse of children's 'rights' that laid down the duties, responsibilities and obligations of states within the formal agenda of the CRC. 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. CRC has facilitated greater state involvement in child provision and protection in many countries and there have been encouraging developments at local government level in particular in some areas. In addition to identifying the state as the prime duty-bearer in the implementation of children's rights. The CRC remains the single most widely ratified international treaty in existence, and the vast majority of child-focused organizations such as the Save the Children Alliance and UNICEF, acknowledge its central position in guiding their actions. Yet there are a number of challenges associated with the CRC as a conceptual framework and instrument for implementing policies — many pertinent to the issue of child poverty.

First, the CRC is currently being promoted as a global standard, when in practice it is a normative framework developed within a specific context in accordance with a particular set of ideas. The fundamental notion of 'rights' is tied to a world-view (specific to Judeo-Christian belief systems) in which the

individual human being exists as an autonomous entity in itself. Research from anthropology and other social sciences has shown that this emphasis on individuality and individual rights holds little relevance to more 'social-centric' societies around the world, where children exist by virtue of belonging to and sustaining a larger social group. The idea of their exercising rights autonomously is not only foreign but potentially undermining of family and community and even of child survival, since children exist only as a part of a whole.

It is also apparent from anthropological research that in many societies, the responsibilities of children are more important than their rights. Their social integration within families and communities and their advancement through the life cycle into adulthood (including their informal learning) is achieved through the fulfillment of these responsibilities. Children thus gain access to resources such as food and shelter by virtue of being a contributing member of the group, which is one of the reasons why disabled children face increased alienation and impoverishment. Their potential to contribute and fulfill their designated social and economic responsibilities within the system may be diminished by their disability, and it is often within this framework (rather than simple cruelty) that parents may resort to infanticide (Poffenberger, 1983; Mann, 2001). Therefore, the idea that persons — particularly children — possess rights that may conflict with those of other group members or with the group as a whole is foreign to many cultures, and approaches that seek to tackle child poverty through the trumpeting of rights thus risk irrelevance at best, and beneficiary defiance at worst. Indeed, setting children apart from a group to which they belong and which assigns them a separate social status can further increase their vulnerability.

Another related problem in tackling poverty through the CRC is that no children whatsoever participated in the drafting of the treaty, and very few if any have been consulted by

governments as to the most effective manner of its implementation. This disregards a number of the Articles set down in the treaty itself which specify that children are capable of forming their own views and have a right to participate in decisions and matters affecting them. This is perhaps one of the contributing factors as to why so much of the literature on child poverty is written from the point of view of how adults think children live (or should live), rather than how they actually *do* live.

However, implementation of the CRC is arguably the greatest when it comes to tackling child poverty, in that the instrument may tell us where children's rights have been violated, but it does not provide a detailed framework for effective action in such instances. The bulk of the treaty deals with the protection of children in especially difficult circumstances, many of which are connected to poverty. However, the way these issues (such as education, child labor, sexual exploitation, etc.) are commonly dealt with in turn encourages implementation and response that is similarly divided/exclusive in its attention, reinforcing category-based poverty interventions that risk stigmatizing particular groups of children further, as will be seen. It may also lead to the inaccurate conceptualization of impoverishment where there actually is none, simply because the international rights legislation does not reflect the social-economic realities of children's lives. The unequal distribution of resources, combined with the overwhelming impact of poverty can make it impossible for children and families to meet international goals, particularly when these dictates may run contrary to traditional values and customary law (Boyden, 1990).

The consolidation of a universal standard for children can have the effect of penalizing or even criminalizing the childhoods of the poor, often for the simple reason that poor families are unable to reach this standard. For example, under the CRC, it is implied that it is in the best interest of all children to be economically dependent, at least until a specified mini-

Another related problem in tackling poverty through the CRC is that no children whatsoever participated in the drafting of the treaty...



imum age, and that school is a more appropriate context for children's growth and development than work. Thus, while child work is not actually banned in all its forms, it is seen as a threat to children's development and well-being, while school is envisaged as entirely positive. This is made explicit in the juxtaposition between Article 32, which asserts that it is part of children's rights to be prevented from certain kinds of 'harmful' work, and Article 28, which states with equal certainty that all children should be required to attend primary school. This conceptualization of children's best interests means that in effect children absent from school or the home and children at work signify family or personal dysfunctioning, and are thus considered legitimate targets for state intervention. This had led to a situation in Peru where children who are working on the streets during school hours are classified by the state as 'materially abandoned' and are arrested by police and sent to orphanages (Boyden, personal communication). The assumption that the state intervention in such circumstances will necessarily serve the child's best interests is therefore often mistaken. Stephens (1995) points to the modern compulsory education system of Japan and South Korea as a 'tyranny of labor' for children, and suggests that 'the universalizing modernist discourse on children's rights... may actually be brought into service to legitimate situations that constitute new sorts of risks to children' (40).

Whether the democratic nation state is the best implementing platform to protect some of the 'rights' embodied in the treaty is questionable. While it is nation-states that 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. As this review will show, 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 intervene. 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 alleviation and the free-market economy proffered under democracy. If the state intervenes too heavily to raise and protect 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.

All of these observations do not undermine the political importance of the CRC in recognizing children as a distinct group within society, and in focusing greater international attention on the deprivations of children around the world. As an advocacy and awareness raising tool the CRC has also proved invaluable, and continues to be constructively used by many as a platform for building consensus and understanding of children's worlds. However, caution should also be exercised to ensure that governments and other implementing partners do not use the CRC to enforce alien external standards or to judge and criticize children, their families and communities for situations that are in practice beyond their control.

3.0 MACRO CAUSES OF CHILD POVERTY

3.1 Macroeconomics and Child Poverty: Making the Connections

James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank has stated that 'there are no 'child-neutral' macroeconomic and fiscal policies'.⁴ Yet, the literature on child poverty is astonishingly sparse when it comes to detailing the links between the macroeconomic environment and the situation of children on the ground. While Save the Children's (2002) report acknowledges that

⁴Quoted at the Westminster Conference on International Action Against Child Poverty (IAACP), 26th February 2001.

“globalization affects the lives and prospects of many children around the world in very real ways, and can be a significant force for good or ill in their lives” (9), the actual evidence linking global economic trends and policies and child well-being is still quite scarce. This is largely because of the different levels of causality involved in child poverty and the lack of fit in times scales between macro and local level change. Macroeconomic policies often take years to work themselves out into conceivable effects on the ground, while the manifestations of child poverty appear all too convincingly to be the sole product of more immediate factors, such as a polluted water source, for example.

The problem is then worsened by the fact that macroeconomic policies on children are usually mediated through the family or other local institutions such as school and health services, which makes assessing any direct impacts particularly difficult (Harper and Marcus, 1999). A final obstacle is the fact that “economic models either completely disregard children, subsume them under households, or construct worlds which do not even approximate children’s realities” (Boyden and Levison, 2000:42). Therefore, economic theory and analysis still fails to take into account the value or utility of children’s time and labor in contributing to the economic arena, in both public and private contexts. As a result, much of the debate connecting macroeconomics with child poverty is based around conjecture and is subject to both over- and under-statement.

The ‘Benefits’ of Economic Growth

Although economic growth is generally associated with improved indicators of child well-being, the link is not automatic. Without efforts to reduce disparities in the distribution of incomes and assets as well as specific policies to ensure access to basic social services of good quality for the poor, economic growth cannot guarantee improvement in quality of life for all (Mehrotra and Delamonica, forthcoming). In many cases economic growth coexists with inequality

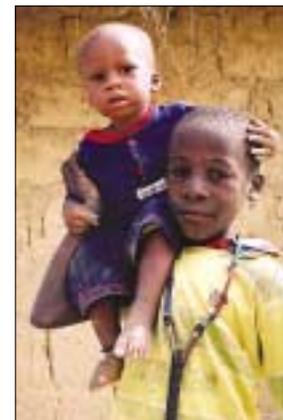
sufficiently severe to prevent the most vulnerable from benefiting, and may even increase child poverty among excluded social groups (Boyden and Levison, 2000). As UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated in his keynote report to the UN Special Assembly on Children, May 2002:

“The pattern of growth in the 1990s meant that those children who most urgently needed a share in global prosperity were often those least likely to obtain it.”

By all accounts, this pattern is set to continue into the future. While the World Bank predicts a possible US\$355 billion increase in global income by 2015 as a result of continuing trade liberalization, it nevertheless admits that the net gains to Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia will be minimal (World Bank, 2002). Unfortunately, these are the very regions highlighted by Kofi Annan as being most in need — Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest child death rates in the world, while South Asia is home to 100 million of the world’s 150 million malnourished children (Save the Children, 2002).

Foreign Investment

This is often seen as one of the great benefits of globalization for the poor. In Bangladesh foreign investment in the garment industry has brought wealth to a significant sector of the local population and has stimulated economic growth more generally, through the expansion of the construction industry, increased demand locally for consumer goods and so on. At one time it even provided employment for children in what were understood locally to be jobs that were safer, better paid and provided greater prospects for future adult employment than children’s occupations in other economic sectors. Yet studies have shown that these benefits may be very selectively distributed, in that such investment often creates enclaves locally and employees in foreign-owned firms become an élite that enjoys terms and conditions far superior to those experienced by people working in other parts of the economy.



Foreign investment may also aggravate existing rich/poor divides both within and between countries by increasing the concentration of capital flows among multinationals.



On the other hand, the exact opposite may also arise, in that foreign funds are sometimes attracted to a country only because it has abundant supplies of cheap labor. Thus, locals make up all the un- and semi-skilled labor in the Bangladeshi garment industry, whereas most of the managerial posts have been occupied by nationals from the countries where the capital originated.

Foreign investment may also aggravate existing rich/poor divides both within and between countries by increasing the concentration of capital flows among multinationals. In many contexts it does not bring greater economic security, since the mobility of capital controlled by multinationals is notorious and the risk always exists that funds may be withdrawn from one country to be invested in another as local political and economic conditions change. Garment workers in Bangladesh, for example, have had to confront the possibility that foreign investment may be withdrawn from the industry and transferred to a country like Vietnam, where labor is even cheaper. Moreover, several companies continue to violate regulations such as the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, and this has direct impacts on children (see section on health below). Therefore, without specific redistributive mechanisms that ensure the spread of financial rewards and benefits from foreign funds throughout the economy and without policies to ensure access to basic social services foreign investment seldom improves the quality of life for the whole population (Mehrotra and Delamonica, forthcoming).

Transitional Economies⁵

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, former republics of the communist state now find themselves in transition from a centralized to a capitalist economy. This process has been mirrored in other parts of the world where the global market system has penetrated previously regulated economies. In many cases, this change has resulted in widespread poverty due to high unemployment, inflation and the retreat of services. Economists have argued that while the tran-

sition may be difficult, the period of 'short-term pain' experienced by poor children will eventually be more than compensated for by the 'long-term gain'. This does not take into account the fact that given the amount of time macroeconomic policies take to come into effect, the 'short-term pain' — characterized by constant anxiety about survival, increased workloads and tension, and possible family break-up — could very well span the entire developmental years of a child. 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 as they suffered from acute malnutrition" (Cornia, 2001:837).

Structural Adjustment

The economic policies of recent decades that have arguably been the most detrimental to the welfare of children are those comprising the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme (Cornia, Jolly and Stewart, 1987a; 1987b). Originally intended to bring struggling economies back to their feet, the first steps involved the introduction of 'stabilization measures' which generally included:

"...currency devaluations, wage and salary controls and reductions in government spending. To reduce expenditures, governments frequently lay off employees in the public sector, eliminate or reduce state subsidies for goods and services, and either reduce public service provision or increase user fees for such services as health and education" (Jennings, 1997:4).

In almost all countries undergoing this process, the result was an increase in mass unemployment as civil services underwent 'necessary streamlining'. At the same time, compensatory growth of new private sector jobs failed to materialize, leaving the poorest families in particular struggling to cope (Mwanza, 1998). In Zimbabwe, the propor-

⁵In its simplest sense, transition economies refer to those countries in the process of converting from a centrally planned to a capitalist economy.

tion 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 — an impoverishment trend repeated across the vast majority of other countries undergoing the same process (Government of Zimbabwe, cited in Mwanza, 1998).

Meanwhile, competition in the informal sector increased, as retrenched workers and new entrants to the labor market scrambled for income-generating opportunities. Children were called upon to join the hunt for income, with over half of the households in Togo where a breadwinner had been retrenched withdrawing at least one child from school (World Bank, 1996). As Oloko (1996) wrote of 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” (61). The loss or reduction in income also took its toll on child nutrition by setting one or more of three significant mechanisms in motion: first, a reduction in overall food consumption; second, a switch to cheaper or less nutritious food; and third, a decrease in the time working mothers have to spend cooking/attending to their children (Jespersen, 1992).

User Fees

Arguably the worst consequence of structural adjustment for children came through the impact on public services. The introduction of user fees for basic services such as health and education had particularly adverse effects. The effects of these fees can be easily perceived at the household level, with greater proportions of the poor simply unable to afford even the most basic treatment or schooling for their children. With ineffective exemption schemes for poor children and the absence of satisfactory social welfare provisioning to fall back on (discussed in more detail in the following section), poor children suffered greater hardship and sometimes death as a consequence. In Kenyan and Zambian health facilities, poor people were not exempt from fees, and many staff and institutions faced

with an acute lack of resources introduced additional charges (Booth et al., 1994; Narayan and Nwamwaya, 1996). 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 (UNICEF, 2000; Bloom, 1997).

The Dangers of Privatizing Children's Futures

In a special report prepared for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, August 26 — September 4 2002, Save the Children pointed out that increased involvement of the private sector in delivering basic services is likely to have a negative impact on the equity, quality and capacity of these services to combat child poverty and fulfill children's rights (Save the Children, 2002). Using numerous examples, it argues 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 the private sector water providers to raise water rates by over 50%, despite not meeting their obligations to supply a 24 hour service (Save the Children, 2002). Another source points to the trend in expanding private sectors drawing personnel away from the public sector and exacerbating shortages of trained and qualified staff, precisely as witnessed in Thailand's health system during the 1980s and 1990s (Sitthi-amorn et al., 2001). The result has been the lowering of both quality and quantity of staff across public sectors, with poor children disproportionately affected.

Despite the kind of evidence cited above, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) continue to promote public-private partnerships as a means to deliver sustainable development, although the commitments to increased liberalization central to the structural adjustment pro-



grams are now more heavily disguised within the new Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Even the IMF has been forced to concede, 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 rights and needs are at least acknowledged and hopefully incorporated. This does not have to change the policy in any dramatic way, for as Stefan de Vylder (2000) suggests, all of the child-focused economic choices are beneficial for adults as well, and are characterized by the following:

- Equity
- Predictability and stability
- Human and social development
- Job creation
- Inclusive development
- Accumulation of social capital
- Long-term perspective
- Gender and age awareness

3.2 Politics and Governance: Democracy to the Rescue?

As with macroeconomic policy, the links between child poverty and political environments are often neither clear nor easily substantiated. The machinations of some dictatorships and military regimes such as those enacted in Burma, Nigeria and several other countries in Africa have obvious and immediate effects on child mortality and access to basic services. However, the literature on child poverty suffers from largely ignoring the political backdrop — probably because little or no evidence has been collected across a time period long enough to clarify the connections. In spite of this lack of data, a recent World Bank study of African poverty at the millennium was adamant in its assertion 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,

2001:30). The numerous reasons proffered as evidence for this statement include an analysis of how political corruption and poor governance stunt economic incentives and the processes of 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 (ibid.).

Democracy and Poverty

Of all the literature concerning the influence of politics on poverty, the 2002 UNDP Human Development Report takes the closest look, and constructs its analysis around a central thesis reifying democracy as the key player in poverty alleviation. We are told that “democracy is the only political regime that guarantees political and civil freedoms and the right to participate” (3) at least in principle, given evidence of continuing discrimination and exclusion in large democracies such as India and the USA. Democracy also “helps protect people from economic and political catastrophes such as famines and descent into chaos — Nobel Prize-winner Amartya Sen has shown how elections and a free press give politicians in democracies much stronger incentives to avert famines” (UNDP, 2002:3). It cites as evidence for this the fact that while staggering numbers of people have lost their lives in famines in non-democratic countries such as China (when nearly 30 million people died between 1958 and - 1961), since achieving independence in 1947 India has not had a single famine, even in the face of severe crop failures. Food production may have been hit hard during the 1973 drought in Maharashtra, but elected politicians responded with public works programs for 5 million people and averted widespread starvation (ibid.).

Another example is then cited of the benefits democratic civil society activism can bring in improving basic services such as healthcare and sanitation — both of which are vital ingredients in the alleviation of child poverty. In Porto Alegre, Brazil, citizen participation in preparing municipal budgets has helped reallocate spending to critical

human development priorities, with the result that during the first 7 years of this experiment, the proportion of households with access to water increased from 80% to 98%, and those with access to sanitation from 46% to 85% (ibid.). As usual, we need to be cautious in celebrating these statistics, for there is no indication given here of whether or to what extent the poor benefited within these groups.

Indeed, it would appear somewhat of a hasty oversimplification to conclude from these examples that the poverty of children is automatically ameliorated by virtue of democratic rule alone, for Brazil is but one country among many where democracy continues to coexist with economic and social inequalities that are among the world's largest. Evidence from other democratic countries also suggests that the relationship is far from reliable. This is evident, in India, which, despite being the world's largest democracy, still suffers from chronic political instability, the hegemony of indigenous elites and the effective exclusion of large numbers of ethnic and religious minorities from stable employment and other economic benefits (Boyden et al., 2001). Due to the entrenched indebtedness of their families, a significant proportion of children in India engage in bonded work.

Social Welfare Systems

The poorest people in any country often depend on the construction of efficient and capacious social welfare mechanisms for their very existence. These 'safety nets' are deeply rooted within the political arena and are frequently touted during election campaigns as a means of winning more votes. Even in the richer North, however, social welfare systems are seldom adequate to cope with the demand or the diversity of the poverty populations they are designed to assist (Danzinger and Stern, 1990). In the USA, for example, there has been a dramatic shift away from universal benefits for all, and now only the poverty of those not *expected* to work — such as the elderly or disabled — is addressed with expanded

welfare benefits, which leaves numerous groups including single parents and their children out in the cold (Ellwood, 1987).

In the poorer countries of the South, it is often a bonus if government assistance programs exist at all, and where they do they often suffer heavily from corruption. While contributing a little in poor people's struggles to survive, they rarely help them escape poverty altogether (Narayan et al., 1999). Furthermore, the poor are all too frequently prevented from accessing the resources and benefits that are supposed to be directly aimed 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. (ibid: 190)

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. Equally, given that participatory consultations with affected populations in these countries show that formal service provision institutions are largely 'ineffective and irrelevant in the lives of the poor' (ibid.), we should be careful not to over-estimate the influence or capacity of governmental assistance as a contributing partner in the fight against child poverty.

Sanctions and the International Political Arena

Sanctions have for many decades been utilized as the centerpiece of efforts to subdue or alienate political regimes designated as abusive by the United Nations. Countries



that qualify for this treatment may have governments enacting violations ranging from widespread human rights abuses to harboring international terrorists, and the imposition of sanctions (most frequently connected to trade) is seen to be the best solution avoiding all out warfare. However, as Graça Machel points out, sanctions have had devastating impacts on the health, development and lives of children in embargoed countries (Machel, 2000).

Trade restrictions cause serious shortages of civilian-related items, creating enormous economic hardship. They also accelerate the deterioration of public infrastructure critical to health, including water, sanitation and electrical power. As a result, families and especially children experience extreme deprivation, malnutrition and poor health. Given that sanctions usually affect civilians far more than the political regimes they are targeted at, the success rate of such measures has been poor, with many sanction regimes running for decades. The UN Security Council's sanctions regime against Iraq was its longest running and most severe ever, with half a million Iraqi children estimated to have died as a result (Machel, 2000).

The Criminalization of Child Poverty

A worrying issue connected to judiciary and poor governance is the increasing criminalization of child poverty, although this is still surprisingly absent in the literature. In some parts of the world, children's very existence as legal citizens of a country is brought into doubt by the fact that they lack a birth certificate or other means of identification. Often lack of documentation excludes them from school and many other public services and amenities. In many places, poor children who work are doing so illegally, with the effect that they do not enjoy the same protections and benefits as adults. Sometimes children are drawn into criminal activity simply because the young experience very limited options for legal employment. In Bangladesh, poverty-stricken adolescents may become criminalized after being offered small incentives by political activists looking to swell their numbers on protests and

marches. As these children are usually promenaded at the front of marches holding banners and flags, they are often the first to be rounded up by the authorities (Blanchet, 1996). Poor pay and conditions combined with demanding targets for numbers of arrests also contribute to making police in Bangladesh behave abusively towards children in the street, arresting them arbitrarily and demanding payment from their families for their release (White, forthcoming).

In some countries, a judge can put children in jail simply because they are dirty or sleeping on the streets. In Kenya, the three most common legal bases for the detention of children in juvenile remand homes are 'destitution and vagrancy', 'beyond parental control' and 'found begging', — all of which may be seen as directly related to child poverty (UNICEF, 2002). State institutions in South Africa also exclude street children from the judiciary system, treating them as young offenders in terms of the Criminal Procedures Act, instead of identifying them as neglected children and treating them under the Child Care Act (Narayan et al., 1999). In many countries, informal sector work such as street vending is also defined as illegal, while in Peru, children on the streets are viewed as materially abandoned, and can be placed in institutional care by the juvenile courts on this basis (Boyden, personal communication 2002).

Public officials, including police and urban authorities, are also frequently cited by street children as being overly oppressive and often vindictive, mainly as a result of deeply-rooted corruption and a simple lack of respect. "Laxmi, a pavement dweller in Bombay, reported 'time after time the police demolished us. We didn't realize that the police legally can demolish our plastic sheets and bamboo poles'. A community worker from Jakarta reported 'the poor are forcibly removed. In some cases, groups of thugs, under the eyes of police officials, were brought in to demolish the houses and push the people out. People were severely beaten...communities were broken; family life suffered...and their children couldn't attend schools'" (Murphy, 1990:46).

In many countries, children are marginalized legally by virtue of where they live. Population increase, lack of public sector building and poor planning result in tremendous shortages of low-cost housing. In some urban centers, for example Bombay, even families with steady employment in industry or local government are forced by the housing shortage to live on the streets. In many places, the poor are forced to resort to self-construction, invasion of unused urban land and other forms of informal housing. However, these practices are often defined as illegal. Because of this, informal settlements are often deprived of services such as education, health care, electricity, water or sanitation and may not benefit from road access to other parts of a city, this latter undermining mobility and employment.

Simply living in one particular impoverished area within a city can make children and their families more liable to accusations of criminality. As one group of youths in Jamaica reported, 'through area stigmatization, everyone in their community was branded either criminal or an accomplice to one, so that they are disrespected by outsiders and the police alike and cannot secure a job' (Narayan et al., 1999:189). This stigmatization may result in a vicious circle whereby children from these areas grow up with little expectation or chance of doing anything other than fulfilling these stereotypes. This has a further knock-on effect for children outside these stigmatized communities — in Thailand, some children had been forced by their parents to drop out of school, not to work, but to guard the home from break-ins while their parents were out (ibid.).

3.3 Poverty and the Environment: An Enemy in Mother Nature?

The physical environment in which children live — be it geographical terrain, shelter or climate — can play an important role in mitigating or exacerbating their experience of poverty. However, this is rarely recognized in the literature, which pays more attention to the impact of humans on the environ-

ment, and focuses more on the sustainability of exclusively 'adult' livelihoods and the controversial introduction of new biotechnology into traditional agricultural practices. Children's involvement in these areas is still largely ignored within these debates, despite evidence that agriculture accounts for over 70% of the total workforce of 5-14 year olds (ILO, 1996). Although the natural environment plays a key role in the spread of disease, the impact of various environmental settings on children is still a relatively new direction of analysis. Early studies have produced some interesting findings, however, particularly in the field of child malnutrition, where it has been suggested that children born in certain regions are more likely to experience malnourishment at some point in their life partly through the influence of climate.

In many parts of the world, poor populations live in areas unsuited to human habitation and hence are highly susceptible to both long-term environmental degradation and rapid-onset disasters. The climate is also changing rapidly all around the world under the influence of processes such as the greenhouse effect, mass deforestation, desertification and soil erosion. Children in regions that already start with an unusually high proportion of arid and semi-arid land (such as Africa) face environmental situations that can only get worse. The International Food Policy Research Institute currently estimate that at least two-thirds of total cropland in Africa is suffering from degradation (White and Killick, 2001). The marginal land on which poor populations depend is highly vulnerable to soil erosion. In communities in Bangladesh susceptible to riverbank erosion, girls are commonly married off very young as a means of reducing demand on domestic food consumption and dowry payments, since the rate for young girls is lower than for young women.

With scarce affordable housing in urbanized areas, poor families are often forced to reside in huts built over water, on steep hillsides and marshes highly susceptible to

mudslides and flooding. In areas of Benin, for example, poor people live in water 'up to their ankles for three months a year', and must contend with diarrhoeal diseases and respiratory tract infections as a result (Narayan et al., 1999:47). When environmental disasters are relatively predictable, as with seasonal flooding in Bangladesh where river systems annually drain a vast basin 12 times their own area, local people and the economy slowly adapt over generations. Even then, in years when river levels and heavy rainfall peak together, there is still enormous loss of life, livelihoods, property and crops, with the poorest rural families and their children being hit hardest (ibid.).

Rural vs. Urban Poverty

This is one area where there is a relatively large amount of information available within the literature on child poverty, but it tends nevertheless to analyze the urban/rural differential solely in terms of statistics, without much insight into the actual experience of either. Some large publications such as the World Development Report 2000/2001 disappointingly appear to ignore it altogether, and make no effort to disaggregate poverty into urban and rural categories (World Bank, 2000). In general, the facts and figures quoted underline why much of the migratory movement that characterizes the coping strategies of many poor families is from rural to urban. Families in urban areas are more likely than their rural counterparts to enjoy better access to services, longer life expectations at birth, lower rates of stunted growth and better standards of living (White and Killick, 2001; Kanbur and Squire, 1999; Kabeer, 1994; Save the Children, 2000). Employment rates may also be higher in urban conglomerations, but the myth that urban salaries are automatically higher appears unsubstantiated. Thus, the earnings of the African urban working population (usually within the informal sector) are generally insufficient to lift them out of extreme poverty (White and Killick, 2001).

Caution needs to be exercised as always with urban/rural statistics, for exactly where

the boundaries are drawn between the two is not always made apparent. As Phillip Amis (2002) suggests in the case of South Africa, it is likely that the definition of 'urban' used greatly underestimates the extent of real urban poverty, largely because the apartheid history of settlement and removals has made 'urban' and 'rural' very problematic categories. Most studies do not stop to question these categories so deeply rooted in poverty discourse, and continue to cite statistics that tend to cumulatively reinforce each other to the point where much of the literature appears to assume child poverty to be a solely rural phenomenon.

Granted, the vast majority of the world's poor children still live in rural areas, and the evidence and analysis for this is well-developed (Bird et al., 2002; Chambers, 1983; Whitehead and Kabeer, 1999; World Bank 1997). However, the balance is significantly changing, particularly with rapid urbanization in the South (Jazairy et al., 1992). Africa's towns are expanding twice as fast as the total population, and the proportion of urban dwellers has more than doubled since 1960 (White and Killick, 2001). The severity of urban child poverty also appears to be increasing — in Mozambique, although rural children are more likely to be among the very poor, urban children are more likely to be among the poorest of the poor in terms of income poverty (Rebelo, 1999). Meanwhile, a recent review suggests that urban poverty as a proportion of total poverty is increasing in Bangladesh, China, Colombia, Ghana, India, Nigeria and Pakistan — seven countries that represent two thirds of the developing world's population (Haddad et al., 1999). Moreover, the concentration of services and resources in cities is no guarantee of child or youth welfare. Indeed the failure of these amenities to cope with this mushrooming urbanization has even in some cases led to the re-emergence of malaria in cities such as Nairobi and Harare, from which it was thought eradicated (White and Killick, 2001). Whatever the effects, it has undeniably become *"impossible now in the 21st century to have*

an anti-poverty strategy without an urban dimension” (Amis, 2002:3).

Those studies that do attempt to take the urban dimension into account in relation to child poverty still tend to limit their discussions to the easily visible categories of urban children (such as street children or child sex workers) who make up only a small proportion of the total. They also tend to assume that phenomena such as these are an inevitable consequence of poverty, when there may be other causes such as family discord or simply a search for freedom and excitement by young people. Only a handful of studies acknowledge the changes in family structure and household organization that characterize urbanization, whereby households shrink and the number of adults — grandmothers, aunts and older cousins — available for childcare drops dramatically (Black, 2000; Bartlett et al., 1999). There is an urgent need for more research in this area, particularly as urbanization is set to continue at an equally rapid pace.

Finally, there is also a need for a deeper understanding of how the larger macroeconomic environment is affecting the balance between rural and urban poverty. This is particularly important in the context of financial crises such as that experienced in East Asia. In Indonesia, the country hit hardest by the crisis, the traditional poverty concentration is in rural areas — in 1997 it was at 12.4% as opposed to 9.2% in the urban sector. But the immediate impact of the crisis fell on the financial sector, with incomes in urban areas falling by more than 30%, compared to less than 15% in rural areas (Poppele et al., 1999). This means that had poverty alleviation schemes continued to have been prescribed according to the traditional pre-crisis distribution of poverty, a whole population of newly poor children in the urban sector would have been missed (Kanbur and Squire, 1999). Regular assessment of other factors that potentially affect the rural/urban bias — aside from the most obvious trend in urban migration — is therefore necessary to ensure that new generations of poor children do not slip through the net.

3.4 The Enduring Legacy of Conflict

It is estimated that 540 million children, or 1 in 4, live in countries where there may be conflict⁶ at any moment, are displaced or made refugees as a result of conflicts that are already raging (UNICEF, 2000b). While violent conflict is not confined to the South, a disproportionate number of conflicts take place in poor countries — more than half the countries in Africa, for example, are affected by armed conflicts. At the macro level, there are numerous political, social and economic costs over and above the deaths directly resulting from battle. The World Bank estimates, for example, that conflict in Africa is causing a loss of 2% annual economic growth across the continent, as well as an average of 12% loss in agricultural productivity (DfID, 2001). Graça Machel’s seminal 1996 report on *The Impact of Conflict on Children* was the key in translating the multiple effects of conflict into impacts on children, with UNICEF’s comprehensive South Asian study following 5 years later (Boyden et al., 2001). These reports point to the difficulty in establishing precise links between conflict and the impoverishment of children, and the necessity of relying heavily on ‘impression and anecdotal evidence, backed up by such statistics as exist regarding basic health, literacy levels and life expectancy pre-, post- and during conflict’ (ibid:8).

The primary concern for children in conflict zones is their physical safety. The hazards associated with conflict range from being accidentally caught in the crossfire, bombing and shelling and communal massacres, to landmines, which children are particularly vulnerable to due to their generally smaller stature and the proximity of vital organs to the body surface. These threats to the physical integrity of the child make it very dangerous for them to remain freely mobile during a conflict, which may affect their access to schooling and/or employment. In some cases schools are deliberately targeted in bomb attacks and in forced recruitment drives by military units. The deliberate destruction of transport facilities and infra-

The primary concern for children in conflict zones is their physical safety.



⁶Conflict is a difficult and chameleonic term to define, but for the purpose of this review it will be assumed to refer to “a struggle, between individuals or collectivities over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are to assert their values or claims over those of others”, (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999:14).

structure also deepens the isolation. A general breakdown of law and order often leads to uncontrolled theft and looting, exacerbated by problems of food production arising from the abandonment of land through forced migration, fear of military action or shortage of labor. Poor families are particularly vulnerable here, since they can least afford to lose what little they have. Households that are just managing to survive economically may be rendered destitute by the demands of military forces living in their immediate vicinity. Particularly unfortunate are those enduring extortion from both sides — reportedly the case in many villages in Nepal and Kashmir. The poor living in these areas 'fall below the law' in the sense of losing legal protection (Keen, 2000).

Child Combatants

The connection between children and conflict is given greatest attention when it concerns child soldiers. It is estimated that approximately 300,000 children are directly involved in armed conflicts around the world at any time.⁷ Poverty is a contributing factor here for two reasons: first, military units who recruit children by force often choose those from the poorest communities because they are the most accessible and least able to defend themselves. This was the case in Uganda when The Lord's Resistance Army abducted between 5,000 and 8,000 children between 1995-97 (Amnesty International, 1999). Second, it has been suggested that coping strategies collapse more often when associated with violence than with environmental and economic shocks because of the severity and length of conflict (Goodhand, 2001). For a poor family, giving their child a gun may thus become a rational livelihood strategy — as one commentator on Liberia noted, "the law in force here is this: whoever has weapons eats first" (Kapusckinski, 2001, cited in Goodhand, 2001:16).

Joining a military group can give poor adolescents the opportunity and power to take control of their lives, to put food on the table of their family or at least to offer them the protection of the army. However, in the post-con-

flict period it can have a powerful adverse impact on their reintegration into society. This is because in many conflicts, including Mozambique and Uganda, child soldiers have been forced to kill family or community members in order to reinforce their loyalty to the rebel army and to prevent them returning to their communities (Oulanyah, 1998, Rebelo, 1999). Such experiences can destroy trust, with severe implications for social cohesion and support networks.

While it is the numbers of deaths on the battlefield that dominate coverage of conflict around the world, many more people — the majority women and children — die from wars as a result of the lack of basic medical services, the destruction of rural livelihoods and transport, and the collapse of the state (Goodhand, 2001). For those children growing up in societies where violence is common — such as urban South Africa — it may become normalized as a means of solving disagreements, and traditions which helped maintain social stability may collapse without replacement (Oulanyah, 1998). The enduring legacy of the damage inflicted by conflict can then last for many years after peace has been negotiated: "The end of any war is not the end of its costs" (Green, 1994:45). If anything, poverty is likely to continue increasing following the cessation of conflict due to the higher dependency ratios resulting from the loss of adult breadwinners and the increased proportion of elderly, women and the disabled in the population (Goodhand, 2001). Even those families who manage to retain their productive assets may be left with insufficient labor through death, ill health or disablement to make proper use of them. It may not matter how quickly the actual period of fighting lasts. In just a few minutes the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001 had devastating repercussions, as the President of the World Bank relates:

"We estimate that tens of thousands more children will die worldwide and some ten million more people are likely to live below the poverty line of \$1 a day

⁷Save the Children International Alliance Child Soldier Database, website: <http://www.rb.se/child-wardatabase>

because of the [September 11] terrorist attacks. This is simply from loss of income. Many, many more people will be thrown into poverty if development strategies are disrupted.”⁸

Whether poverty is a causal factor in conflict is still a matter of contestation — some believe that it is the combined lack of the rise of good governance, societal welfare and humanitarian crises that render poor societies “at risk of falling into no-exit cycles of conflict” (Gurr et al., 2001:13), backed up by those who conclude that “the very high incidence of wars among low-income countries almost certainly reflects a two-way causality with low-income, predisposing conflict and itself being a probable outcome of conflict” (Stewart and Fitzgerald, 2000:4). Graça Machel (2000) also points to the links between conflict and increased rates of HIV/AIDS transmissions, which have massive implications in terms of orphanhood and child poverty in general. However, the linkage is still vehemently denied in research conducted by the Clingendael Institute in The Hague, which unequivocally asserts that “there is no clear and persistent relationship between poverty and violent conflict” (Vestegen, 2001:5). Whatever the case, we can at least be sure that the many dimensions of child poverty are more often than not deeply exacerbated by conflict, for many years after the guns have stopped firing.

4.0 MESO REACTIONS TO CHILD POVERTY

4.1 The Stigmatization of Poverty

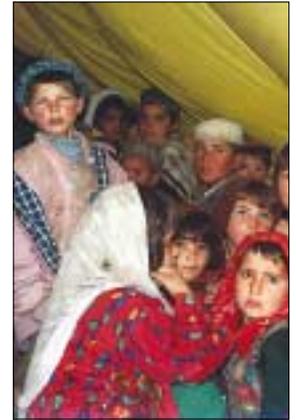
Poverty can be a source of stigma and shame for children all around the world, leading to abuse by peers, particularly in institutions such as schools, where the inability of poor children to conform physically, materially or intellectually often incites bullying. Some schools may even invite stigmatization by exacerbating the social distinctions. As one teacher from Latvia described,

“Children who receive free lunches are served at a separate table, receive poorer quality food, and feel humiliated when other children claim they are eating from other people’s money, even though some parents do community work for the municipality to pay for the lunches” (Narayan et al., 1999:31).

The assumption that in countries where poverty is the ‘norm’, poor children would suffer less abuse is also shown to be unfounded, for there is always a hierarchy of poverty, even among the poorest of the poor (Save the Children, 2001). The case of a 10 year-old Kenyan boy in Nairobi who tried to commit suicide simply because he was ashamed to go to church barefooted is a stark example (Narayan and Nwamwaya, 1996).

According to participatory consultations with poor children in the North and South, the feeling of ‘not belonging’ generated through poverty was one of the most pressing and debilitating: “I want to be named like any other people in the community because we are no different from them. The only difference is that we live in poor houses and they live in nice houses” (Zimbabwean child quoted in Save the Children, 2001:14). Interestingly, however, a significant number of children also expressed concern about being ‘full participating members’ of the societies they lived in. In the North, many feared being looked down upon, while others simply saw the ‘community’ as nosy and interfering with their freedom. This was particularly apparent among children born into already marginalized groups such as travellers, whose previous experience with ostracism made them more cautious:

“Community for me is not something I really want to belong to anyway, because there are so many rules and you have to do so many things. . . If you’re just by yourself you can do what you want, don’t have to answer to anyone, can do it your way” (UK child quoted in Save the Children, 2001:15).



⁸James D. Wolfensohn, quoted at the Westminster conference on International Action Against Child Poverty (IAACP), 26 February 2001, London.

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...



These attitudes were less prominent in the South, where cultures are more community based or because literal survival is more of a critical issue.

While it is obvious that social exclusion and poverty are deeply interconnected, with each tending to reinforce the other, it should not, however, be assumed that the two necessarily coexist. As participatory assessments with poor groups from around the world have shown, “people can be poor without being socially excluded, or excluded without being poor” (Narayan et al., 1999:188).

4.2 Social Exclusion and Ethnicity

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 (Boyden and Levison, 2000). Social exclusion on the grounds of ethnicity is a common theme throughout the literature, and plays an important role in determining the degree of children’s vulnerability to both becoming poor and being able to escape from poverty. In Peru, for example, indigenous groups were 50% more likely to be poor than non-indigenous groups in 1997, with the incidence of income poverty generally much higher among the indigenous populations across Latin America as a whole (World Bank, 2000). In the United States the distinctions are particularly pronounced: not only are poor black children 5 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, despite the US being perceived as a ‘rich’ country. Even the completion of many years of schooling rarely makes a difference to this pattern, for at every education level, black non-Hispanic men had the highest rate of low earnings in the USA, followed by Hispanics and then white non-Hispanics (Danziger and Stern, 1990).

Many of these disadvantages faced by poor children of minority ethnicities are the result of living in marginal ethnic ghettos and segregation from mainstream services, but they

may also be institutionalized within the rigidities of structures such as the caste system in India:

“It is observed by Gandas of Khairmal [a low caste] that, even in public institutions like schools, their children take midday meals sitting at a distance from other children. One Anganwadi [higher caste] worker had to leave the job because she did not want to clean the utensils touched by Ganda boys and did not like to take care of the Ganda children” (Narayan et al., 1999:202).

Children from ethnic minorities in Vietnam face similar discrimination in attending school, often with additional linguistic barriers:

“In the whole district, there are two Chau Ma children going to school. They do not want to go to the school, for the Kinh children are beating them up... Teachers are available although most of them speak only Vietnamese. The rate of Kinh children going to school is much higher than that of ethnic groups. Most of the drop-outs are found among the indigenous people — if they ever start school” (ibid.).

All of these factors — and many more — conspire to render children from ethnic minority groups almost universally more likely than other children to suffer poverty. Yet the literature does not reflect this, tending to concentrate instead on specific categories of vulnerable children such as street or working children and children in the sex trade.

4.3 Child Poverty and Disability

According to the World Health Organization, it is estimated that at least one in ten children in born with, or acquires during childhood, a serious physical, sensory or mental impairment (Boyden and Levison, 2000). They are disproportionately among the poorest of the poor in all parts of the world (Metts, 2000), often comprising as the much

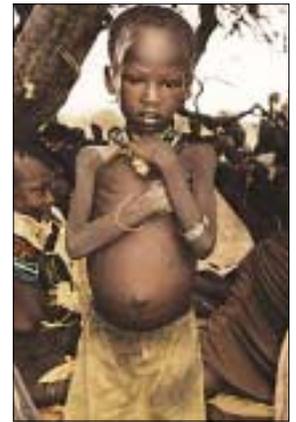
as 15-20% of the poorest in developing countries (Elwan, 1999). It is therefore astonishing to see the extent to which disabled children have been ignored and neglected in the literature on child poverty. While there are considerable problems in researching child disability, much of this negligence is apparently justified by the consideration of disability as a 'specialist' issue separate from mainstream development. Many child-focused NGOs and scholars still insist that they cannot focus on disability issues because they do not have 'adequate expertise or data', making it difficult for them to form inclusive policy approaches to tackling chronic poverty and disability (Metts, 2000). These concerns are generally unfounded however, for the issues affecting disabled children are exactly the same as those of mainstream development — equality, empowerment, human rights, poverty and so on. Biasing research in favor of non-disabled children constitutes yet another form of institutional discrimination that disabled children must contend with, alongside exclusion from education, employment and even the distribution of inheritance within the family (Yeo, 2001). Avoiding the issue is actually not in agencies' or scholars' best interests either, for as Lee (1999) points out, 'Because disability and poverty are inextricably linked, poverty can never be eradicated until disabled people enjoy equal rights with non-disabled people' (cited in Yeo, 2001:5).

Even where research with disabled children has been carried out, it has overwhelmingly been performed by European or North American non-disabled researchers, with very little opportunity being given to disabled people to influence the agenda (Yeo, 2001). The methodology behind research may itself serve to exclude people with many forms of impairment. Participatory Poverty Assessments are currently very popular, but tend to be very visual, excluding those with visual impairments. This has led to a widespread lack of comparable or reliable data on the incidence, distribution or trends of disability in general, let alone the extent of disabled children's poverty. As a result, systems of

analysis developed by agencies and institutions have been misguided.

For example, "Disability Adjusted Life Years" (DALY) is the international classification system developed by the World Bank. It claims to measure the burden of disease by reflecting the total amount of healthy life lost, to all causes, whether from premature mortality or from some degree of disability during a period of time. These disabilities can be physical or mental. The intended use of the DALY is to assist (i) in setting health service priorities; (ii) in identifying disadvantaged groups and targeting of health interventions; and (iii) in providing a comparable measure of output for intervention, program and sector evaluation and planning.⁹ However, the DALY system is, based on the incorrect assumptions that: disabled people necessarily represent a drain on society; disability can be measured in terms of years of burden and loss; and disability and disease are synonymous. There is no recognition of the discrimination or marginalization of disabled people, nor of the cultural context of different impairments. Instead, an impairment is expected to have the same value and meaning in all contexts (Yeo, 2001).

Efforts by the World Health Organization have been slightly more encouraging, with the latest form of their International Classification of Impairment, Disability and Handicap (ICIDH) being developed in 1997 to specifically incorporate some social and environmental factors. This goes further towards recognizing that a disabled person may have an impairment, but would not inevitably have significant limitation of activities if exclusion and discrimination were not experienced. However, it is still not frequently recognized that people are 'disabled from participating by others' attitudes and social barriers... Many people still believe that disabled people are not able to participate' (Hurst, 1999 cited in Yeo, 2001:15). In the few instances where aid and attention is specifically targeted towards disabled and hostility expressed towards them by the the larger community, who feel



⁹For more, see www.worldbank.org.

their own needs are being overlooked. This was the case following the Armenian earthquake (Narayan et al., 1999).

In many cultures, the birth of a disabled child is considered a tragedy. This is because such a child may need expensive medical treatment or more care and may not be considered as having the potential to ever support him or herself (let alone the family) in the future. In communities already struggling under chronic poverty, it may be viewed as 'economically irresponsible' to give an equal share of food to a disabled child who cannot 'contribute in return' (Yeo, 2001). As Ashton (1999) concludes, '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' (cited in Yeo, 2001:9). Similarly, disabled children often remain untreated in the case of illness, with their survival sometimes left to fate. They are also far less likely to be sent to school (even if physically possible) for fear that either they will not cope, or they will bring stigma upon the family and undermine the marriage prospects of siblings. Most of the time, 'disabled children are not seen as human beings; they are isolated at home and not sent to school' (Narayan et al., 1999:203), with other, non-disabled, children automatically getting priority in most decisions. As a result, the International Disability and Development Consortium estimate that a massive 98% of disabled children in developing countries are denied any formal education, substantially lessening their chances to escape from poverty (IDDC, 1999).

What is often not realized in the context of discussing disabled poor children is that at least 100 million people worldwide suffer from preventable impairments resulting from malnutrition and poor sanitation. (Lee, 1999) The World Health Organization (1992) estimates that up to 70% of childhood blindness and 50% of hearing impediments in Africa and Asia are preventable or treatable. In India, lathyrism is a motor-neurone disease that affects mobility and coordination, and is

caused by toxins in the cheapest forms of lentils. Almost everyone eating these lentils is aware of the risk, but because of their poverty have no alternative. Similarly, in Cambodia over 70% of people disabled by landmines had been foraging or farming in full knowledge that the area was infested with landmines, but again had no alternative (ADD, 1997). Unfortunately, the literature still appears some way off from recognizing this inextricable link between poverty and disability, and the notion that one cannot be tackled without the other.

5.0 MICRO MANIFESTATIONS OF CHILD POVERTY

5.1 More Than Mortality — Rethinking Approaches to Child Poverty and Health

The World Health Organization (WHO) constitution defines health holistically as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". In other words, 'health' encompasses much more than mere physical states, which makes it surprising that the literature on child health continues to focus itself around purely physical indicators such as infant mortality, malnutrition, stunting, and so on. Granted, infectious diseases do have a disproportionate impact on children, with 25% of all deaths occurring in early childhood, but this emphasis on health as a physical condition has led to an overwhelming bias in researching only very young children (especially the under 5's), and effectively ignoring adolescents altogether. This preferential focus 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 medical imperative to save lives. Within this framework, issues of mental health that tend to affect older children are awarded low priority. But as Panter-Brick (forthcoming) points out, this prioritization is not necessarily shared by societies in

the developing world, which may find the emphasis on child survival — without alleviating poverty and improving quality of life — misplaced. It has already become apparent in discussions above that children are not always a community or family's top priority, with adult breadwinners often being given the greatest share of scarce resources before child dependents.

What constitutes a 'child health' issue worthy of address within the literature on child poverty is neither simple nor unbiased. Equally, what the target populations themselves understand by the term 'healthy' is frequently context- and culture-specific, sometimes bearing little resemblance to conventional medical 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, with the consequence that they neither sought treatment for it nor looked to poor personal or environmental hygiene as contributing factors (Ene-Obong et al., 2000 cited in Panter-Brick, forthcoming). This is further complicated by results from participatory studies with children in the North and South, which suggest that although poverty is often measured through health, poor children actually appear to talk about it relatively little. They do not complain about their health to the extent that adults may, though they are often aware of not being 'fully up to strength'. In other words, children are often very aware of 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" (Zimbabwean child, Save the Children 2001:18)

Why Are Poor Children Less Healthy?

The issues raised above constitute only part of why impoverished children are more

vulnerable to illness than wealthier children. As Wise and Myers (1988) suggest:

"Children of poor families experience more time lost from school and more days of restricted activity due to illness than do those of the non-poor. The inadequacy of their diet has produced significantly elevated rates of iron deficiency anemia...Inadequate housing conditions also can affect morbidity, as lead poisoning is heavily concentrated in poor children"(1175).

In America, The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP, 1990) reports that poor children are more than twice as likely as the non-poor to die in an auto accident and five times more likely to die in a fire. These ratios are higher because of the dangerous housing many of them live in and inadequate adult supervision. Their health problems may even begin before they are born: it is estimated that each year 375,000 children in the US are exposed to addictive drugs such as 'crack' and heroin before birth. Such exposure often results in brain damage, withdrawal symptoms at birth, prematurity and learning disabilities that may not be evident until the child is between 2 and 5 years old (Danziger and Stern, 1990). It is often assumed that drug-related health issues mostly affect populations in richer countries. But, according to one study in South Africa, as many as 9 out of 10 street children are thought to be dependent on glue obtained cheaply in market places, and solvents bought in industrial areas (UNICEF, 2002).

Health as a Political and Economic Issue

The correlation between child health and poverty may also have an overarching political dimension. According to demographic analysis, countries where the income differentials between the rich and poor are large (meaning more or deeper relative poverty) tend to have worse indicators of health than countries where the differences are small. As Wilkinson (1996) concludes, "It is...the most egalitarian rather than the richest developed countries which have the best

What constitutes a 'child health' issue worthy of address within the literature on child poverty is neither simple nor unbiased.



health" (76), which further merits a redress in the analytical balance of child health and poverty to include the richer North. More research is also needed on the ways in which globalization and international markets interact with economic hardship to affect traditional child-rearing practices, for these are vital to the early health of the child.

Of course, the biggest problem for poor families and their children has most likely been the introduction of user fees for healthcare as part of the Structural Adjustment Programs discussed above, which have forced many into a 'medical poverty trap' (Whitehead et al., 2001). Meeting these often comparatively extortionate expenses drives around 3 million people in Vietnam into poverty every year, resulting in a 4% rise in the poverty headcount (Wagstaff, 2001). In Bangladesh, half of all urban families in financial crisis cite medical costs of a family member as the cause (IFC, 2002). Finally, in one survey in Cambodia, 45% of rural families who were found to have lost their land had done so as a result of debts relating to medical expenses — this being the largest single cause of debt (Biddulph, 2000).

5.2 Reading Between the Lines: Child Poverty and Education

Much has been written on the benefits of education in tackling child poverty, and its eminence in the literature is so deeply-rooted that it does not merit repeating. The rewards of literacy and numeracy have been traced to prosperity at many stages in life across sectors such as employment, health and material wealth (Danziger and Stern, 1990; Wolfe, 1990; Sewell and Shaw, 1988; ILO, 1996). Large development agencies in particular — including UNICEF, Save the Children, and Oxfam International — have continually stressed the importance of education throughout their work on child poverty, to the point where it is now immediately assumed by most observers that schooling is universally beneficial in any context (Myers and Boyden, 1998). However, there has been growing empirical evidence from

less prominent sources suggesting that this view is dangerously complacent, and that there is actually "no simplistic universal education/development relationship" after all (Gould, 1993:202). This section will therefore be given over to these findings and other less discussed areas of child education in order to balance this perspective and explore the myths.

Education most often enters the literature on child poverty at the point of its departure — in other words, when a child is seen to drop out of school through the economic pressures of impoverishment. It is stated, for example, that "children in poor families are 3 times more likely to drop out... than are children in prosperous families" (Danziger and Stern, 1990:3), with leaving school implicitly acknowledged as a decision forced upon the child by parents or care-givers struggling to make ends meet. In practice, even when schooling is free, attendance may be costly in terms of having to buy uniforms, utensils and in some contexts, bribe teachers. Many children must therefore work in order to be able to go to school. More attention should also be given to the significant number of children who drop out of school for other reasons. For example, there is ample evidence that many children choose to leave of their own accord 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 anything of value (Woodhead, 1998).

That children leave because they consider schooling to be irrelevant to their needs is particularly common. A survey of 600 children in Guatemala who had dropped out of school found that 40% had left because of systemic deficiencies such as irresponsible teachers, insufficient resources and poor curricula. Economic motives were the second most common reason cited (28%), with only 24% giving the need to work as their primary reason (Salazar and Glasinovich, 1996).

"I don't need to go to school. What can I learn there? I know children who went to school. Their family paid for the fees and uniforms and now they are educated. But you see them sitting around. Now they are useless to their families. They don't know anything about farming or trading or making money..." (UNICEF, 1998:9)

Nor should the fact that these children forgo their education lead to assumptions that they are necessarily ignorant as a result. In one assessment of the life skills of school-age children in Pakistan, it was found that those who had not been in school did better than those who had (Black, 1999).

Schools are often located at a great distance from poor communities, and this can present risks to children, especially girls, whose parents are unable to spare the time to chaperone them. In Pakistan, the fear that girls would be teased or harassed en route to school leads many households to withdraw girls from school (Narayan et al., 1999). Many children make this decision themselves, as one girl from a village in Macedonia related: "I chose not to attend secondary school in Struga because I had to travel every day by bus. Many boys would tease me, and people in the village would talk about me — look at her, all alone in the bus — and that is why I did not want to go" (ibid.:166). Girls are also discouraged from attending school for other reasons, possibly the most common being the view that education is detrimental to future marital relations.

For example, a widely-held opinion in South Asia is that education for girls is pointless because they will not learn the domestic duties expected of them. This in turn is believed to risk, 'diminishing their attractiveness as future wives and effectively ruining their possibilities of a future in the community'. Additionally, it is felt that educated girls will want an equally educated husband when they grown up, which narrows the range of potential candidates — a range that is already likely to be relatively small in the

case of poor families. Another disincentive to enrolling girls in school is the fact that in some cultures women live with their in-laws after marriage and do not bring economic return to their own families in adulthood. In Togo, South Africa and Nigeria, people viewed female education as a waste of money because it effectively meant investing in someone else's family. These factors need to be recognized in poverty-alleviation strategies that focus on education, to minimize the risk of causing more harm than good to the children targeted.

The school experience of low-income children can also be detrimental in more basic ways. Many schools do not even accomplish the narrowest of their objectives — functional literacy. Many neglect other important cognitive skills (critical thinking, problem solving and the like) altogether (Myers and Boyden, 1998). In Latin America, recent research found that half the children leaving school after 5 or 6 years could not read or write, of whom a massive 80% were children from the lower half of income distribution (Schiefelbein, 1997). The problem is that education policy and practice rarely recognizes the diverse nature and needs of different groups of children, failing to build on their existing capacities or simply denying them any effective participation (Myers and Boyden, 1998). Thus, it would appear that the unerring faith in the power of education in helping children to overcome their poverty is, at least in some contexts and countries, somewhat misplaced. This is not to argue that it is any less important, but rather to advocate a more balanced recognition that "without education all is lost, but with it, only some can benefit" (Gould, 1993:202). As the findings of a recent World Bank paper confirm, "who gets educated matters a great deal...Unequal distribution of education tends to have a negative impact on per capita income in most countries" (Lopez, Thomas and Wang, 1998:2).

5.3 Agency Through Employment: Exploring the Myths Surrounding Child Labor

As with education, the literature connecting child poverty and child labor is extensive, but often generalized and drawn from within perspectives that overwhelmingly portray employment as a negative, exploitative alternative to schooling, which, as noted is nearly always regarded in positive light. This section seeks to expose the large number of myths surrounding child labor and poverty, and to show how a more nuanced and context specific analysis acknowledging children's agency is required.

...cross-cultural research has shown that the position of children within the household often improves after they start contributing to household income.

Myth One: 'Work is inherently damaging to children'

Closely related to the globalized model of childhood as a life phase without economic or social responsibility discussed earlier in this review, comes the widespread perception that children should not be in work. That huge numbers of children around the world begin working from the age of around 8 to 12 is seen as a terrible problem. The literature tends uncritically to denigrate all forms of work as injurious to children and time and time again the detrimental nature of a working childhood is expressed in terms of psychological, emotional and physical damage. Nevertheless, while some forms of work are undoubtedly extremely hazardous to children and some have long-term or even permanent adverse effects on their health and well-being, this does not apply to all children's work. Emphasis on 'lost innocence' and 'stolen childhoods' tend to over-sentimentalize the issue and actually tell us more about the researcher's personal values than the experience of the children in question. Similarly, the assertion that working children are more likely to be sick or malnourished than others has also been shown to be unfounded (Myers and Boyden, 1998).

In many cases, children make the decision to work themselves, and look upon it very positively as a vehicle for self-actualization, economic autonomy and responsibility

(Woodhead, 1998). Growing up without responsibility is not necessarily the most effective way to promote children's well-being and best interests (Knutsson, 1997). In fact, excluding children from social, political and economic processes simply because they are young cannot be justified any more than the exclusion of any other group in society. This is not to suggest that children take on the full complement of adult rights or responsibilities, but that they should have substantially more rights to participate in society than they enjoy at present (Boyden and Levison, 2000).

Qualitative evidence also suggests that informal and practical skills acquired through safe and appropriate childhood work can play a role in helping children escape poverty. For example, both boys and girls have found migration from the Sahel to West African towns and cities has enabled them to learn nationally useful languages such as Bambara (Mali) and French, literacy and numeracy, and practical work skills such as sewing, building or vehicle repair. Girls who migrate for work can also build up dowries and secure more advantageous marriages on their return, a phenomenon also observed in Bangladesh (Harper et al., forthcoming).

Furthermore, cross-cultural research has shown that the position of children within the household often improves after they start contributing to household income. Working children say they have fewer conflicts with their parents and are less frequently punished than their non-working siblings. Employment can also increase their status among peers (Ebdon, 2000). While this is still no reason to actively encourage child labor participation, it does at least shed some light on why so many children choose to take up work voluntarily. Nor should we discard the evidence of work as a healing activity for children, however slight such evidence may be at present. Research with children and families in Milange, Mozambique, in 1993 showed that the building, planting and cultivation labor undertaken by children in the wake of the

long-running civil war was a conscious and successful method of coming to terms with and laying to rest the suffering they had experienced (Zutt, 1994).

Myth Two: 'Poverty constrains families to make their children work'

According to the International Labor Office, "Poverty is the greatest single force which creates the flow of children into the workplace" (ILO, 1996:8). This view is repeated throughout the literature, despite increasing evidence from around the world that it is in many cases misplaced. If family poverty were a sufficient explanation, the child workforce would be far greater than it actually is. In fact, many studies on the relationship between household income and child work have found that the correlation may be far less reliable, and in some cases, completely the opposite. Nielsen (1998) finds that in Zambia, poverty and low income have a very small effect on the probability of children working, with similar results emerging from Ghana (Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1997) and Peru (Ray, 1999). In the UK and the USA, research has shown that there is actually a positive association between household income and the incidence of children working, such that teenage children from wealthier households are the most likely to gain employment. Teenagers from low-income families, families from minority ethnic communities and those from the poorest city areas are less likely to work, through both lack of contacts, information and economic opportunities and ethnic, racial and geographical discrimination (Ebdon, 2000).

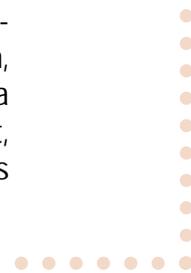
If family poverty is but one of the reasons causing children to work, and by no means even the main one in many countries, what other factors come into play? In some cases, parents may simply prefer their children to work either instead of, or in addition to, attending school to keep them from becoming idle and prevent them from running into bad company (Ebdon, 2000). This is apparent in parents' responses from many countries, including those with children in the football stitching industry in Pakistan and urban

Bangladesh (Delap, 1998). The same study also noted that some Bangladeshi parents felt that children were 'too small' to go to school, and that under the ages of 7 or 8 they would be 'too young to understand'. However, the most convincing evidence concerns the links between child work and regional variations in the opportunities and incentives to put children to work, or more precisely, the returns to child work. Availability of children's jobs is a key factor, and in places where a clear market for children's labor exists, which is arguably the case in, for example, most major Asian cities, the returns to children's work are simply equal to the child wage rate (Cockburn, 1999). This is not to say that rural children are any less likely to work, however, for there is considerable evidence that land area, livestock ownership and family enterprise are all positively related to children's participation in the workforce (Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1997; de Tray, 1983; Mergos, 1992; Mueller, 1984).

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 physical assets (Dercon and Krishnan, 1998; Owens and Hoddinott, 1999). However, an increase in physical assets, such as livestock, have been shown in many cases to lead to greater participation by children in work and to reduce time available for leisure and schooling. Land ownership in particular is among the most important determinants of work participation for boys, with rise in household land assets increasing the likelihood of a boy working by 7.7% (Cockburn, 1999). Therefore, the choice of assets in a poverty alleviation scheme is very important, and can have considerable consequences over how children use their time.

Another factor affecting children's work, unrelated to income but strongly related to gender, is the composition of the household. According to Cockburn (1999), both boys and girls are more likely to work and less likely to go to school as the number of infants (chil-

Another factor affecting children's work, unrelated to income but strongly related to gender, is the composition of the household.



dren aged less than 4 years old) in the household increases. The probability of children working also relates to the number of female adults in the household, suggesting that the former are often used as work complements for the latter. Finally, it appears that the number of elderly household members has a surprisingly strong negative effect on the work participation of boys, but not girls (Cockburn, 1999). Meanwhile, a study of working children in Egypt found that having a parent who worked him/herself during childhood substantially increased the probability of children working, with the effect of the mother having worked as a child being twice as influential in both rural and urban areas, for both boys and girls (Wahba, 2001). Whether or not this is enough to ground the researcher's hypothesis that child labor perpetuates intergenerational poverty is questionable, and indeed, these gender patterns and correlations are likely to fluctuate in different contexts and countries. The important point is that they show the need for more disaggregated data at this level to avoid perpetuating sweeping and inaccurate generalizations about the casual role of poverty in children's work.

Myth Three: 'Children working in the formal urban sector need most protection'

Many of the assumptions surrounding child labor are derived from a handful of well-publicized studies of factory exploitation and export industries (Zalami, 1998; Delap, 1998). This has, however, meant that international attention, legal and protective action has focused on children who work in urban settings and those in the formal sector, effectively underreporting those toiling in the very worst of conditions in other areas and sectors. Furthermore, the bias toward child workers in developing countries that manufacture goods for export to rich countries has distorted understanding of the extent and severity of child labor, for this group is actually very small. It is estimated that children in export production constitute well under 5% of the total of those working and that they are generally much better off (Myers and Boyden, 1998). Many of the chil-

dren working in the construction and mining sectors are in far greater need of protection, where one in three girls and one in every four boys is affected by injury or illness (Ashagrie, 1999). This bias in attention therefore needs urgent rectification if we are to help the children that are most in need.

Myth Four: 'Work has a detrimental effect on education'

Much of the literature on child poverty has concentrated on analyzing the changing relations between work and education, and is starting to reconsider the assumption that the two cannot be positively combined. Research in Peru concluded that "being employed does not significantly influence age-grade distortion. It is evident that children are able to work and attend school, with apparently no negative effect on their schooling progress" (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos, 1997:404). In a UNICEF study in Sri Lanka, two-thirds of working children argued that their schooling was not affected by their work, and half in fact claimed to be top of their class (Kiruga, 1985). Possibly the most interesting result came from Cochabamba, Bolivia, where it was found that children who do not work have the lowest educational achievement (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos, 1995). In fact, research from around the world suggests that, in many cases work contributes more to keeping children in school than to keeping them out, if only because children use their wages to cover school costs (Boyden, 1994). This needs to be taken into account in reformulating child-poverty alleviation strategies that are still based on the belief that the exclusion of children from the workforce is universally beneficial. That said, there is evidence that children who work more than around twenty hours a week will experience detrimental effects on their education.

5.4 Neglect and Inequity: The Gender Experience of Child Poverty

Discrimination between genders affects children's lives the world over, and a large amount of international research has gener-

ated well-developed literature highlighting how girls in particular are disadvantaged by social, cultural and political attitudes and practices in many countries, particularly in South Asia and the Middle East. However, when it comes to examining how gender interacts with impoverishment, the literature is less sure of itself, and often appears to be making claims based more on inference than evidence. For example, an implicit assumption running through much of the writing seems to be that gender discrimination, being most pronounced in the poor countries of the South, is somehow connected to economics and the condition of 'underdevelopment' (World Bank, 2000, UNICEF, 2001).

This is a rather ethnocentric assumption, and is not substantiated given that gender inequalities are still very apparent in most rich countries (Danziger and Stern, 1990). It has also contributed to creating the distorted notion that the condition of poverty makes children more likely to be subject to gender discrimination, or that poor children experience greater gender inequity. Yet as recent studies show, there is almost no correlation between per-capita income and the gender disparities in sectors such as health and education: poorer countries do not, on average, have worse gender disparity than high-income countries, in the South Asian region at least (Filmer et al., 1998). This is also confirmed in Naila Kabeer's (1994) analysis of intra-household gender hierarchies in Bangladesh, in which she concludes that inequities of distribution are not confined to the poor, but operate across the social spectrum.

Although practices leading to the inequitable gender distribution of resources within households are many and varied, most of them include biases towards feeding males first, particularly adult males, and giving them the choicest and largest servings. This is usually justified in accordance with cultural or religious beliefs about the relative needs and contributions of different household members and fears about the consequences of violating accepted ideologies of

female altruism and self-sacrifice: *"How can you explain to your children there is not enough food? When my son cries, I feed him. It is easier to make my daughter understand"* (Kabeer, 1994, fieldwork notes). Traditional poverty measurement methods fail to recognize these 'implicit contracts' within households, yet for severely impoverished children, they can often mean the difference between life and death. It is through facing the double challenges of poverty and gender disparity in resource distribution that girls are rendered particularly vulnerable to malnutrition, disease and neglect.

Data on calorific intake in relation to requirements also show that children suffer from substantial deficits even in the richest households (Mahmud and Mahmud, 1985), which means that gender discrimination is not something that economies can overcome. Nor should one assume that gender disparities 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 across the nations of the world (Filmer et al., 1998). This suggests that there are also likely to be a significant number of children whose poverty is overlooked because of the wealthy status of the household as a whole.

It remains evident that in a number of contexts, girls must face the likelihood that any illness or disease they may suffer may be either ignored or take second priority to those of the male children, and not always because of financial difficulty. Chen et al., (1981) showed that boys in rural Bangladesh are more likely than girls to be brought by their parents to clinics and hospitalized, despite equal incidences of infection and the ability of free clinical health care in the area under study. Another broader international study showed that while equal proportions of girls and boys may be afflicted with disease such as diarrhea, 66% more boys than girls received treatment (Sabir and Ebrahim, 1984). Part of the reason for this is that girls and women are commonly kept very eco-



Channeling the vast majority of attention and resources solely to girls and women can have equally detrimental effects on their well-being.



nomically dependent on men, either through soci-cultural dictates at the religious or communal level, or through the personal inclination of the father/husband. For example, although daughters do inherit land under Islamic law, it is a smaller portion, and women seldom enforce their rights, preferring to waive their entitlements in favor of their brothers in exchange for protection in case of widowhood, abandonment or divorce (Kabeer, 1994).

Promotion of gender 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. Channeling the vast majority of attention and resources solely to girls and women can have equally 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 obligations (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 which are then given to and used by their husbands, sometimes to buy alcohol. In the end women find themselves repaying debts incurred by the men (Boyden, personal communication 2002).

Problems have also arisen through the unquestioning promotion of the 'girls' during such events as the 1990 Year of the Girl Child initiative by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the UNICEF India office. The majority of writing and information that arose within this period concerned the low status of girls, their limited opportunities for education and the gender bias in the home (Ennew, 1996). Despite its good intentions, this angered many child 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' (Barse, 1991:99). Indeed, the literature tends to further this bias, presenting the girls as more vulnerable than boys in all cases, regardless of wealth or ethnicity. According to Judith Ennew (1996), this attitude 'masquerades as a concern for their vulnerability' (4) while actually serving to reinforce the traditional ideals of male control and supremacy over women's sexuality and fertility. At the same time, it ignores the fact that many boys are exposed to dangerous, abusive or exploitative situations and as a result are extremely vulnerable. Exactly how to incorporate gender equity within child poverty alleviation strategies thus needs careful consideration.

6.0 PROTECTION ISSUES: RETHINKING VULNERABILITY

6.1 Vulnerable Groups

A large amount of the literature on child poverty reflects the emphasis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on issues of child protection, and following individual articles of the treaty, is devoted to assessing categories of 'especially vulnerable children' such as 'street children' and child sex workers, among others. While children experiencing these various forms of adversity are undoubtedly in need of special attention in many, if not most cases, the level of interest they have received is often disproportionate in comparison to other children who may be suffering similar but less prominent threats to their protection. The focus on such groups may in reality also be misplaced or their vulnerability over-stated, and this section therefore seeks to set the record straight by analyzing whether special efforts in these areas are actually justified. As well, the tendency to single out special categories of children has in many cases unintentionally added to their stigmatization within society, and has led to many stereotypical and inaccurate representations. Rarely are the views of children themselves included, or, in the few instances that they may be, this is often countered by an autho-

rial voice gently informing the reader why they are 'wrong' (Ennew et al., 1996).

6.2 Street Children

A typical depiction of street children¹⁰ in the literature is as follows:

"He is often the victim of robbery and physical abuse by both peers and adults. He may join a gang as a way of creating a new 'family' in his state of isolation. He may be harassed, bullied or lured into criminal acts by gangs of youth or criminals. Surrounded by the drug sub-culture, he may begin to abuse drugs. Many street children develop extremely low self-esteem, apparently in response to the disparagement and abuse they regularly face in the course of making a living" (Narayan et al., 1999:198).

Such portrayals of street children as vulnerable, delinquent, abandoned or marginal youth, while perhaps accurate in some cases, are more often the result of a particular representation of children in contemporary research and policy (Myers, 1991; Panter-Brick, 2001b). That the assumptions on which such depictions rest are often disputed by empirical research and participatory consultation has not, however, resulted in any fundamental changes in this theorizing, such that the literature on street children "systematically ignores its own findings in favor of predetermined conclusions grounded in Northern, middle class mores" (Bar-On, 1997:63). Stereotypes about these children are further perpetuated by the tendency for research to examine only 'snapshot' moments in the lives of street children, rather than enacting longitudinal studies of their experience over a number of years. Even the category of 'street children' is itself undermined by the complex reality of children's lifestyle. As few as 2% of all street children are actually homeless, with the vast majority living, eating and sleeping at home (Black, 2000). Moreover, as a category it rarely corresponds to how children themselves classify street and home life (Hecht, 1998).

Recent research has also shown that the extreme levels of physical and psychological stress street children are widely assumed to suffer is in many cases over-stated: "rather than being the most victimized, the most destitute, the most psychologically vulnerable group of children, street children may be resilient and display creative coping strategies for growing up in difficult environments" (Veale et al., 2000:137). This assertion is supported by evidence from Nepal, which contrasts popular expectation by revealing that street children exhibit fewer signs of growth impairment or nutritional problems than in either urban squatter or village homes (Baker, Panter-Brick and Todd, 1996). Despite their lack of permanent shelter and parental care, it was concluded that these children were far from being the most vulnerable in Nepali society. Similarly, research in South Africa and Latin America has shown that street children generally hold mainstream moral values and average psychological and emotional responses (Baker et al., 1996; Swart, 1988; Aptekar, 1989 and 1991).

Another myth surrounding street children concerns the ways in which the literature assumes they interact with one another in the absence of adults. Most studies have presumed that in children's groups that span a range of ages, older children hold the highest status and level of control (Mann, 2001). Evidence collected by Aptekar (1988) among street children in Cali, Colombia, actually suggests the opposite in revealing that young children on the street are often more powerful vis-à-vis older street children in many ways. First, they are better able to manipulate adults because they are small and cute, and do not therefore pose the same physical or ideological threat as do adolescent boys. Their child-like appearance and antics also enable them to access resources more easily, thereby increasing their economic productivity and thus their status within the group. These factors therefore led to a situation in which older children were forced to rely on their younger peers for material support, while offering their physical protection in return (Aptekar, 1988).

¹⁰ According to a consensual definition of NGOs, street children are those "for whom the street... more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults" (Ennew, 1994:15). This broad definition includes 'abandoned children' without access to a family; 'children on the street' who live with their families and work on the streets; and 'children at high risk' of becoming involved in street life. The first two groups are often described as 'homeless', whereas the latter two are 'home-based' children who work or play on the streets.



Despite the considerable attention devoted to street children in the literature, there are still gaping holes in the research. For example, not enough is known about the subtlety of factors interacting to encourage children to turn to the streets in the first place. It is generally assumed that 'poverty' is sufficient explanation, yet 40% of the children on the streets of New York were recently found to have left home as a result of conflict connected to 'coming out' as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender to their families (dos Santos, 2000). Similarly, there is very little examination of how the phenomenon of street children relates to the larger mores of a society as a whole — how, for example, differential cultural tolerance of small children on the streets interacts with systems of law enforcement, mechanisms for detecting the domestic violation of children's rights, and the quality and size of systems of foster care. Without deeper understanding of these factors, collected through participatory consultation with the children themselves, it will be almost impossible to successfully aid them in leaving the streets, assuming that this is what the children themselves wish. As Glauser (1990) concludes with special reference to the current discourse on street children, it is not acceptable "...that international organizations, policy makers, social institutions and individuals who feel entitled to intervene in the lives of children with problems, do so on the basis of obviously unclear and arbitrary knowledge about the reality of these children's lives" (144).

6.3 Child Sex Workers and Sexual Exploitation

Poverty is firmly established in the literature as a key causal factor in pushing children (or inciting their parents/care givers into pushing children) into sexually exploitative roles, yet this argument is in many cases overstated and unconvincing. Many societies that are poor do not have a high degree of prostitution, while the phenomenon is becoming more widespread in the richer North (Muntarhorn, 1996). The problem here is, as Ennew et al.'s (1996) seminal study of child

prostitution" points out, that "the available global discourse on this theme is characterized by a poor understanding and use of quantitative information, lack of attention to research techniques, the reproduction of myths and unsubstantiated facts, as well as the use of assumptions and campaigning imperatives in place of established bodies of theory" (12).

This is worsened by the fact that the poverty argument increasingly tends to be used by some as justification for child prostitution and the inaction of government bodies. It may also offer sex tourists an easy opportunity to avoid feelings of guilt. In other words, by paying for a child's services, tourists can convince themselves that they are helping the child to escape economic hardship and contributing to the economy of the family and the economic development of the country as a whole (Lean Lim, 1998).

The 1996 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography estimates that about one million children in Asia are involved in the sex trade, and globally child prostitution is thought to net US\$5 billion annually (Lean Lim, 1998). The reasons why children may find themselves suffering sexual exploitation are, however, far more complex than the literature often implies. One of the most commonly cited reasons why children are sexually exploited is directly connected to impoverishment, and involves the parents selling their children into indentured servitude in brothels. One study in Cambodia found that 40% of child prostitutes had been sold by their own families, and a further 15% by 'friends' (Gray et al., 1996). Such findings tend to be set by the literature within a framework suggesting that the majority of parents who enter into these transactions suffer from a 'veil of ignorance' regarding the activities that their children will perform.

Yet in the Philippines, NGOs attempting to eradicate child prostitution found that this veil was in fact a myth and that many fami-

¹¹Child 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, 1195:6).

lies 'wholeheartedly accepted' the exploitation of their children. The NGOs reported that in several instances where they tried to press for imprisonment or deportation of known foreign pedophiles, they met surprisingly strong opposition from the families of the children involved, who came to the defense of the foreigners — many of whom, it turned out, regularly gave expensive presents to the children and helped support their families. The fact that parents are in many cases fully aware of the consequences of their actions therefore renders attempts to eradicate the sexual exploitation of children more difficult.

For some families, prostitution has become a way of life:

“How can we talk of prevention when the mother is a prostitute, the father is a pimp, the uncles and brothers are pimps and often drug pushers as well, and sometimes even the grandmother was a prostitute? We are talking about generations that have had prostitution as the only avenue open to them for making a living” (Abreu, 1991:3-4).

In Bangladesh, a similar portrait emerges, where the majority of prostitutes' daughters become prostitutes themselves. This is not least because the general disgust for the sex trade and the social value placed on controlling women's sexuality leave these children with precious few routes towards achieving social legitimacy (Barnitz, 1998). Having said that, many prostitutes in Bangladesh have also expressed pride in their occupation, in that it affords quite a bit of independence from men and enables them to avoid marriages that are often arranged and a source of misery for women. They argue that prostitution is a good business that opens up possibilities of other kinds of businesses too. Nevertheless, they remain adamant that they want their children to grow up in the community (some place their children with paid foster parents to keep them out of the brothel), to go to community schools, etc., and are determined that they should not

enter prostitution (Boyden, personal communication 2002).

In some instances, boys have continued to prostitute themselves even while living at NGO centers where they are given food, shelter and clothes. Prostitution is for them not only a means of earning money, but also part of a street lifestyle that has its own 'attractions'. These attractions may include the status attained by associating with relatively wealthy and well-traveled foreigners, and the pleasure of being taken on trips and given presents (Lean Lim, 1998). This in part explains the rise in the phenomenon of the 'sugar daddy' in western and southern Africa, where adult males provide school fees, food, clothes and gifts for children in exchange for sexual favors (ECPAT, 2000). Research has also revealed that in India, sexual assaults by older male children on the street against younger girls are relatively common, with instances where children act as pimps for other children (ibid.).

Interviews with prostituted children have revealed further variations of the controversial 'choice' argument. Sexually exploited children have in many cases freely explained that they participated in prostitution and/or pornography because they wanted to help support their families, because they were homeless and the adult who sheltered them needed some form of payment, or because their pimp was really a boyfriend who loved them and just needed some extra money (Barnitz, 1998). Although poverty lurks behind many of these reasons it must still be accepted in the face of current evidence that even if the majority of children do not themselves decide to enter the sex trade (though some of them do), they are nevertheless both willing and able to make their own choices along the way. This should be taken into account in strategies to assist them and ought therefore to lead to much greater consultation with children.

A final point must still be made concerning avenues of research where the literature falls down. First, it is necessary to realign the

dominant focus on child sex workers who service foreign clients to include recognition of those catering for local customers, who remain uncounted and ignored within current policies and programs. The focus on sex tourism is the result of Western interests rather than a true reflection of the situation on the ground. Indeed, it may well be obscuring a large part of the child prostitute population, just as the emphasis on street children excludes the far larger numbers of deprived and marginalized children in rural areas (Ennew et al., 1996). Second, more attention must be paid to sexual abuse within the home, and whether it is affected by conditions of impoverishment. This involves overcoming the widespread belief that if danger threatens any child, it necessarily comes from 'outside' the family (La Fontaine, 1990). Finally, there is a need to address the impact of prostitution on boys and its relation to cultural discourses surrounding homosexuality and male sexual behavior, for although they apparently make up an increasing proportion of those involved, they are often ignored in place of girls (Barnitz, 1998).

6.4 Children Affected by HIV/AIDS¹²

"Today, more than 13 million children currently under age 15 have lost one or both parents to AIDS, most of them in Sub-Saharan Africa. By 2010, an estimated 106 million children under age 15 are projected to have lost one or both parents, with 25 million of this group orphaned due to HIV/AIDS" (UNAIDS and UNICEF, 2002:3).

Statistics like these suffuse the majority of the literature on child poverty and AIDS, and while useful in providing a sense of the scale of the pandemic, have in many instances nevertheless contributed to providing a distorted picture of the issues. For example, the frequently highlighted severity of the HIV/AIDS problem in Sub-Saharan Africa has led to an almost exclusive focus on the experience of children within this region, despite the fact that even at a lower prevalence, the number of people with HIV/AIDS in Asia threatens to

surpass the numbers in some of the most severely affected African countries (UNAIDS and UNICEF, 2002). As well, rates of transmission are far higher in certain parts of Asia than in Africa, imply an impending crisis of major proportions.

The attention and priority given to children orphaned by AIDS has also led to solutions that do not always benefit affected children. For example, fostering is generally favored over support to children to remain within child-headed households, despite evidence that fostered children are often treated in a less favorable manner than other, non-fostered children in the family (Mann, 2001; Mann and Ledward, 2000). For example, among the Inupiat of Northern Alaska, Bodenhorn (1988) found that orphans who are not taken in by extended family members are often pushed from house to house and treated as *savikti*, meaning slave. In most contexts, girls will often be fostered more easily because of their domestic labor potential and because with marriage they move away from the foster home and are thus not viewed as 'permanent' additions to the family or long-term competitors for resources (Ayieko, 1997). Boys, on the other hand, are seen to take longer to mature and to require more resources in terms of land and money for bride price 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" (Ayieko, 1997:12), while in one children's center in Rwanda, 126 of the 128 children who remained to be fostered were boys (Mann, 2001).

Stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS is still widespread and severe, though not automatic. Foster et al. (1997) found that almost all Zimbabwean orphans who had experienced discrimination or had been stigmatized by family or community believed that this was because they were poor or parentless. For example, they felt they were teased because they had no shoes, or torn clothes, or because their father was dead, rather than because of associations with AIDS. It is like-

¹²UNAIDS and UNICEF intentionally avoid the use of the term 'AIDS orphans' because it may contribute to the inappropriate categorization and stigmatization of vulnerable children. Instead, they use 'children affected by HIV/AIDS', 'orphans due to AIDS' or 'children orphaned by AIDS'.

ly therefore that at least some of the literature on the social stigma of AIDS confuses it with more general discriminatory practices against poor populations. The fear of stigma is still enough for many people to conceal the virus even when they recognize they have been infected, and many families attribute the death of a family member to another disease, rather than face the consequential isolation. As such, it is still very difficult for analysts and child researchers to accurately assess the effect or level of the HIV/AIDS pandemic among children, and the profusion of statistics hides the fact that the vast majority of these are actually 'guesstimates'.

It should not therefore be forgotten that the health, safety and survival of all children in affected countries are jeopardized by the impacts of AIDS on families and communities, for the widespread loss of life reduces the number of skilled personnel in public management, social services, education and health care. The pandemic is also reducing labor and agricultural productivity and weakening social structures, though these correlates are not always discussed. Adults continue to oversimplify HIV/AIDS issues relevant to children, with emphasis placed either on statistics of infants affected, or on methods of altering the 'high risk behaviors' among certain groups of children, such as adolescents. The growing rate of infection suggests that the wrong problems are being addressed however, and there needs to be more prevention efforts focused on helping children in ways which remove or protect them from high risk situations in the first place (Lyons, 1998). As one participant reminded the audience at a recent international conference on Street Children, Health and HIV in Rio de Janeiro, "Condoms don't fit children" (ibid.).

CONCLUSION

Recognizing Agency, Rethinking Action

This paper has highlighted the multiple bias-

es, assumptions and myths that continue to plague our understandings of and responses to child poverty. It has suggested that many of these biases and assumptions arise as a consequence of conceptualizing children as passive 'victims' of circumstance. In reality, poverty is seldom something that happens to children against which they have no defense or control, but rather a set of circumstances with which they interact in numerous ways. Some children will of course be more mentally or and/or physically powerful than others in responding to adversity, but all children do at least to some degree engage with and interpret their situations in ways that need to be acknowledged.

As we have seen, on the few occasions where children's agency is recognized in the literature, it is done so in a very ambiguous fashion. Thus, on the one hand the distinctiveness of children as a social group with their own particular rights is upheld, while on the other provision is made for these rights to be exercised on their behalf by (adult) others. This ambiguity is further perpetuated by the overwhelming bias of the literature in focusing on how poverty affects very young children, who have had the least time to even recognize, let alone utilize, their own personal agency. Adolescents have a far greater understanding of the factors affecting their environment and how this determines what they can and cannot do, but this potentially valuable contribution is left untapped and ignored by families, development agencies and governments alike. As noted, the vast majority of literature on child poverty thus depicts the phenomenon as necessitating a 'rescue and rehabilitation' response, rather than providing a more culturally sensitive and nuanced analysis of how children can participate in overcoming poverty.

Connected to this is the strong desire in the literature to locate the causes of poverty anywhere but in children themselves. In other words, children are absolved of any responsibility in contributing to their situation. This is unrealistic, for we need to understand that children can play significant parts

...children are absolved of any responsibility in contributing to their situation.

in perpetuating (or ameliorating) the poverty experienced by themselves or other children. As we have seen, personal agency is not always benevolently expressed. For example, many children (e.g. street children) have been found to exert what power they may possess within a certain context at the expense of other, less powerful children. It should also be acknowledged, as Moore (2001) reminds us, that among the poor there are people who “act in lazy, irresponsible or imprudent ways, perpetuating their own and their family’s poverty” (15). Difficult as it may be to reconcile these points with the romantic populist notion of children as innocent simply by virtue of their age and ‘inexperience’, it is necessary in order to appreciate the range of factors that may contribute to keeping particular children in poverty.

Emphasizing children’s agency in this way should not, however, exclude recognition and analysis of the larger social structural forces that impact on children’s lives, for children are deeply embedded within important and influential networks of social, cultural, economic and political relationships. Caroline Harper (Interview, 2002) also warns against taking the agency argument too far, for poverty alleviation strategies that bypass or undermine the authority of adults are unlikely to be very effective or sustainable. A possible balance may be struck in the approach called for by White (forthcoming), in asserting that organizations should focus on “the multiplicity of relations amongst and between adults and children, and the variety of forms and terms of engagement which these comprise” (5). In other words, to understand the choices and actions taken by people, we cannot consider them as detached individuals, but have to consider their selves and activities as essentially constituted in and through their relationship with others.

Understanding the complexity and differentiated nature of child poverty therefore means building on a multitude of approaches and perspectives, not merely from those who are currently experiencing poverty, but from

those who have escaped and overcome it, and who may be able to provide valuable insights. Unfortunately, the literature tends to focus exclusively on the former group, with little or no attention paid to the latter. Furthermore, there is still too much attention to child poverty in the South, with little regard to the possible connections and/or discrepancies with its counterpart in the North. Analyzing the two together can only be beneficial in understanding what factors keep children in poverty and why certain manifestations occur in the countries they do, yet very few studies take advantage of this comparative potential.

Tackling child poverty is thus a huge and complex task, and involves an exercise in humility on two distinct levels; first, in recognizing the cultural biases and assumptions upon which current approaches rest; and second, in understanding that the eradication of child poverty is, by virtue of its far-reaching linkages, not something we are likely to achieve quickly, easily or without the active involvement of others, particularly the children themselves.

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