

Children and Poverty

Shaping a Response to Poverty:
A Conceptual Overview and Implications for
Responding to Children Living in Poverty

CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S FUND

Children and Poverty Series

PART III

Children and Poverty: A Conceptual Overview of the CCF Poverty Study

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

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

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

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FOREWORD

Today, despite major advances in state provision, scientific knowledge and technology, one in four babies globally is born into extreme poverty and conditions of extreme adversity. Half of all the world's poorest people are children and there are more destitute babies than ever before. The magnitude of child mortality and suffering globally because of poverty is overwhelming and has attracted the attention of organizations such as Christian Children's Fund (CCF), that are focused on the protection and well-being of children in different parts of the world.

In a recent agency wide organizational self-assessment within CCF, the following observation was made:

"In general, CCF development practice insufficiently draws on a cause-based analysis of child poverty, vulnerability and deprivation. These symptoms are considered a sufficient basis for action."

Within this context, CCF set itself the task of developing an agency wide understanding of the cycle of poverty, what it means in our work and how program efforts work to break the cycle. To this end, a multi-country study of child poverty was planned, and a task force and steering group established with responsibility for accomplishing this assignment. The first step in the study was a critical review of the literature on child poverty. This has been published as the first volume in our "Children and Poverty" series. The country study, undertaken in India, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Bolivia and Belarus, entitled "Voices of Children" has been published as the second in the series.

This Overview document is the third in the series and seeks to summarize and integrate the findings of the first two publications. It also underlines some of the implications of these findings for CCF. As we observe the results of the study, we can indeed note that children experience poverty differently from their parents and other adults and, contrary to popular belief, are sensitive to their situation from an early age. It is clear that, while we should allow for the evolving capacity of children as they get older, weight must be given to understanding their experience, perspectives, solutions and contributions as well as of adults. Another important lesson we learned from the study was that the impact of poverty on children is better understood in terms of living in adversity. Adversity should be understood comprehensively beyond material needs, to include psychosocial stress, stigmatization, enduring social marginalization and violence. Finally, it became clear throughout the study that, in most parts of the world, childhood is a period of social and economic responsibility where children are effective agents contributing to family well-being. This is a vital source of self esteem and motivation for many children.

We are very grateful to Dr. Jo Boyden, Tom Feeny and the team from Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, who have worked so hard and effectively with us on this very comprehensive study. Thanks also go to all those in our country offices who participated in the study and gave their opinions. We are also appreciative of the work and efforts of the members of the Task Force, who worked long and traveled far to accomplish their mission. Above all, we would like to thank all the children, who shared their views and perspectives openly and freely with us. We hope that this series of publications will make a valuable contribution to the current thinking and discussion on children and poverty.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global mortality and suffering caused by poverty is overwhelming. Children are often more gravely affected than other population groups. Although the problem of child poverty has attracted increasing attention in recent decades, present trends do not bode well for children living in poverty.

The world's resource base is falling into critical disrepair. Over consumption by the minority world drives the economic expectations and planning of the majority world with serious distortionary effects. Inequitable access to the key resources of modernity, capital and monetary income, is becoming more pronounced. Many areas are affected by poor management of basic assets, primarily fertile land and the related resources of food, wood and water. The mismanagement of basic assets with the accumulated effects of global warming is resulting in a growing frequency and intensity of environmental disasters. The effects of these trends on children are devastating. Despite major advances in state provision, scientific knowledge and technology, one in four babies is born into extreme poverty. Half of all the world's poorest people are children. In fact, there are more destitute babies now than ever before in human history.

Concerned to mount an appropriate and effective response to the problem, Christian Children's Fund (CCF) is committed to the development of an organization-wide understanding of the cycle of poverty. CCF policy and practice in this area is to be guided by a poverty framework in which an overview of the key issues, concepts and principles of strategy is given.

Rather than build on normative ideas and assumptions, CCF's framework is to be based on a combination of recent theoretical understandings in social science and the actual experiences of children in the communities in which CCF operates. To this end, a multi-country study of child poverty was planned and a taskforce established.

The study canvassed the views of CCF stakeholders, young people (mostly 8-20 years old), their families and communities, CCF staff and the staff of partner organizations, on the nature, causes and consequences of child poverty and coping strategies. A questionnaire was distributed among CCF staff, and field research was conducted in India, Kenya, Belarus, Bolivia and Sierra Leone. The present document, which is based on the findings from the field research and the staff survey, is the foundation of CCF's conceptual overview of poverty.

1.0 WHAT IS POVERTY?

1.1 Moving Beyond Economic Explanations

For decades, influential financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF, policy 'think tanks', research institutes and government bodies have conceptualized poverty as an economic problem, characterized by levels of income, production, assets and consumption. This perspective has come under heavy criticism recently from scholars and agencies in the aid and social sectors who argue that material scarcity is an inadequate measure of poverty. The critics maintain that social concepts such as 'relative affluence' are more meaningful to most people than economic growth and to focus merely on material deficits is to deny the true consequences of poverty in terms of human suffering and hardship. The United Nations Development Program devised the Human Development Index (HDI), which includes indicators such as education, literacy, political representation and crime. The HDI attempts to develop a more effective means of gauging human experience. However, the HDI relies heavily on traditional measures and statistics that are poorly disaggregated, particularly in terms of children.

In line with other critical perspectives, the CCF study found poverty to be a very complex and dynamic process, with multiple and interacting causes, meanings and manifestations. Conventional criteria like unstable and low income, poor housing, lack of productive assets, particularly land, livestock and seed were prominent in the study. Less conventional economic factors such as extreme competition, lack of opportunity and marginal return to innovation, appeared even more pressing in some cases, particularly in India and Bolivia. Social and political criteria were often more significant than either conventional or less conventional economic factors.

The following are highlights in varying degrees of different groups of CCF stakeholders:

- Powerlessness and exploitation (especially in India and Bolivia).
- Social stigma and related discrimination (material symbols are very important in distinguishing different status groups and are used as a basis for discrimination).
- Susceptibility to corruption and crime (mentioned in all case study countries).
- Exposure to environmental pollution, degradation and disasters (water was the single most important resource mentioned in the study; in Bolivia children were more concerned about environment matters than adults).
- Lack of social networks and resources for crisis planning and management (kinship alliances were highlighted over and above neighbors and other sources of social support).
- Restricted or no access to services (especially health care and education) and the disproportionately high cost of the same.

The comments from stakeholders highlight that that traditional production, consumption or income-based analysis are flawed. Economic measures alone cannot tell us whether people are able to meet their career aspirations, educate their children, withstand economic shocks and so on. In other words, poverty can not be thought of as exclusively or even primarily an economic phenomenon, but must be seen as a highly political one. The poorest people and the poorest countries in the world tend also to experience chronic discrimination, corruption, and political instability and their poverty is both a cause and consequence of these experiences.

Particularly compelling is the evidence linking poverty with entrenched armed conflict. Seven of the 10 countries with the highest under-five death rates are exposed to conflict.¹ Yet, more children die of malnutrition or infection in war than from exposure to weapons.² In many places the havoc wreaked by this potent combination of poverty and conflict is exacerbated by a

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¹The Machel Review 1996-2000, p20

²The Machel Review 1996-2000, p20; Farhood, L., H. Zurayk, et al. (1993); The IRC International Rescue Committee (2000) found that in eastern Congo one third of deaths between August 1998 and May 2000 were of children under five, food shortages being one of the main causes.

Ideas about the causes of poverty have too long been shaped by economics and economists, so explanations of its effects have provided only a partial view.



close correlation with extremely high rates of HIV infection and AIDS.³ What emerges from this evidence is that, beyond more traditional strategies to improve livelihood security, poverty measures need to incorporate dimensions that aim to increase peace and security, empower disenfranchised populations, and reduce corruption and crime.

Ideas about the causes of poverty have too long been shaped by economics and economists, so explanations of its effects have provided only a partial view. Take the discourse on child poverty for example. Undoubtedly health is a prime indicator of child poverty, especially for children under age 5. However, the discourse largely confines itself to considerations of mortality, and excludes mental health and other less visible yet very important concerns of older children. Children interviewed in the CCF study cited numerous emotional and psychological consequences of poverty, in many cases prioritizing these over and above physical effects. Such evidence calls for a more holistic depiction of poverty, and for account to be taken of morbidity and of the quality of life experienced by children over age 5. This is in line with the World Health Organization (WHO), which defines health holistically as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

Use of phrases like “quality of life” highlights another facet of the poverty discourse requiring critical review. Such phrases reflect a growing recognition that there is no direct causal relationship between economic status and human gratification, or happiness. Additionally, wealth and good quality of life are not synonymous. By the same token, many poor people are happy with their lot. Indeed, the idea that a direct and observable link exists between difficult or painful experiences and human suffering is increasingly challenged. Without a doubt poverty can cause immense hardship and have a very corrosive effect on social and human capital, on the other hand, wealth is certainly no guarantee of well-being.⁴ In

Britain, for example, psychosocial disorders in young people increased notably during the post-World War II period, a time of almost unprecedented economic growth in that country.⁵

The experience of poverty is mediated by a multitude of factors, many of which do not relate to ‘objective’ physical states such as destitution, homelessness, malnutrition, or hunger.

Relative concepts of poverty and wealth are significant in shaping people’s sense of well-being. Among other things, cultural values and life goals are a very important mediating force in human experience and have a major influencing on aspirations and expectations, thereby influence levels of material satisfaction. Unless proper account of social concepts of poverty is taken into consideration, concepts that are frequently subjective and relative-poverty measures can not necessarily improve well-being or quality of life. The power of these subjective views of poverty among children was very apparent in the CCF study.

Summary & Implications for CCF

- The objective of child poverty interventions should be to improve children’s well-being and increase their quality of life rather than simply to reduce poverty.
- Ideas about well-being and quality of life should embody cultural, social, and political goals and not just economic ones.
- In some situations, empowerment of the poor and creating an enabling environment through the development of legal entitlements, political stability etc. may be as (or more) important than increasing access to assets, income and capital.

1.2 Respecting Contextual Diversity

According to conventional economic perspectives, poverty is a universal phenome-

³The Machel Review 1996-2000 estimates that of the 17 countries with over 100,000 children orphaned by AIDS, 13 are in conflict or on the brink of emergency and 13 are heavily indebted poor countries.

⁴The term ‘capital’ refers broadly to the resources available to a particular individual or group, and includes financial/material capital (money and assets), human capital (knowledge, health, nutrition etc.), social-cultural capital (social trust, social networks, individual attitudes and personality traits), social-political capital (caste, kin group, ethnicity, etc.) and environmental capital (natural resources). See Moore, K. (2001) Frameworks for Understanding the Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty and Well-Being in Developing Countries, Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper No.6, IDD, University of Birmingham.

⁵Rutter and Smith 1995 cited in Halpern, D. (1998). ‘Social capital, exclusion and the quality of life: towards a causal model and policy implications.’ Nexus Briefing Document, presented at Nexus Westminster seminar 29 April. Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Cambridge University.

non demarcated by standardized criteria. National economies and populations are ranked against benchmarks such as Gross National Product (GNP), Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita or an income-based poverty line. Critics in the development and social sectors argue that this approach may have aided measurement, planning and disbursement, but fails to capture the reality of poverty as experienced by most of the world's poor.

Even in terms of measurement these benchmarks are of dubious value. For example, the poverty line excludes nonmonetary inputs such as non-remunerated labor (an important resource in the CCF study, especially in Bolivia and Sierra Leone). It does not even provide an accurate gauge of monetary income, since it excludes remitted income and informal sector employment. Moreover, it does not take into account the inequities of intra-household resource allocation, which is often biased along lines of gender and generation and which can lead to the impoverishment of certain members in an otherwise well-off household.

Recognizing the mediated nature of human experience and taking the concept of relative poverty seriously means challenging standardized definitions and benchmarks and emphasizing contextualized understandings. It is true that in the CCF study certain criteria of poverty, for example social injustice and the associated sense of exclusion, were cited across contexts and social groups. Nevertheless, the significance of these and other criteria varied greatly between stakeholder groups. Some groups stressed susceptibility to exploitation, while others were far more concerned about the lack of livelihood security. Some of the criteria were unique to a particular group or setting. For example, lack of privacy was an important measure of poverty in Belarus, but was not a feature in any of the other case study countries.

Poverty is differently defined at different times, in different societies and by different

social groups, suggesting a need for greater sophistication and disaggregation in the conceptualization, measurement and analysis of child poverty data to ensure that a true portrayal of the phenomenon emerges.

Summary & Implications for CCF

- Poverty cannot be remedied through a standard, limited (health and education) and prescriptive approach;
- Poverty interventions should be context-specific, comparative and relative, requiring local adaptation that draws on and is consistent with CCF's global approach, policies and learning;
- Poverty interventions should be in accord with contextualized understandings, building on and addressing the different perspectives of different interest groups in society;
- Participatory methodology and methods should be employed in harnessing and fostering local understandings.

1.3 Questioning the Power of Modernity⁷

Most statistical, planning and financial institutions assume affluence to be an almost inevitable by-product of the capitalist market economy and related expansion of the modern industrial/urban complex. Perceived as a forerunner to fiscal regulation and to the political stability deemed necessary for investment, democratic rule is cited by many as an impetus to wealth creation. Broad national statistics often appear to support these hypotheses. However, adult respondents in the CCF case study countries, all five of which have capitalist market economies and varying histories and levels of democratic rule, lamented the deterioration of their economic circumstances over recent years. This finding points to a possible romanticization of the past and/or a growing sense of alienation and disempowerment among the poor as globalized values and aspirations make them more conscious of the inequities and injustices visited upon them. It also reveals how, disguised within

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⁴Halpern, D. (1998). 'Social capital, exclusion and the quality of life: towards a causal model and policy implications.' Nexus Briefing Document, presented at Nexus Westminster seminar 29 April. Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Cambridge University.

⁷'Modernity' is a widely used but poorly defined term. It is most often associated with economics and the introduction of, for example, a capitalist market economy and industrialization. However, for the purposes of this paper it should also be taken to include the global circulation not only of finance and products, but also of technologies, people and ideas.

...the CCF study warns of the need for great caution with regard to the advance of modernity.

gross national statistics indicating overall growth, there exist increasing concentrations of wealth and increasing disparities between rich and poor. At the same time, the opportunities to rise out of poverty are diminishing as global resources become depleted, recession sets in and markets retreat. Today, certain countries in sub-Saharan Africa in particular confront economic stagnation and, worse, observable decline.

As the globalized monetary economy expands, so the geographic areas and social groups that are not part of this economy become more marginalized. In the CCF study there was a palpable tension between the forces of modernity (education, monetary income, urban lifestyles and the like) and those of tradition (collective and unremunerated labor, communal land ownership and so on). People who are resource rich in terms of traditional culture and values are generally considered resource poor according to modern, monetary based understandings of poverty. Among the Maasai in Kenya, for example, large numbers of children and cattle and extensive areas of collectively owned grazing land are the means of access to wealth. Yet, according to the principles of a modern capitalist economy such attributes inhibit income and accumulation.

Aid agencies, financial institutions and other outside observers generally equate modernity with progress. More importantly, many among them argue that the impact of global monopoly capital cannot be resisted and that the advance of modernity is inevitable. Their point is clearly born out by the fact that groups like the Maasai are entirely peripheral to the national polity and as such highly susceptible to exploitation and other violations that could in time lead to their complete demise.

Nevertheless, while it is clear that people on the margins of the monetary economy are very vulnerable, the CCF study warns of the need for great caution with regard to the advance of modernity. Because the poor are relatively powerless, they are inevitably drawn into national monetary economies on

terms that are at best unequal and at worst, overtly abusive. This was evident from the CCF findings on service access. Respondents complained bitterly of the inordinate and disproportionate prices paid by the poor for public services like health care, education and water. They highlighted the corruption and indifference of those who control and provide these services, commenting that they prey upon the poverty and powerlessness of users by charging illicit fees, dispensing sub-standard goods and ignoring them in favor of more wealthy and influential clients.

Education in particular tends to be heralded as a cure-all for poverty and underdevelopment. But, for poor families schooling commonly involves significant economic sacrifices, not least being the income forgone due to removing children from work, and the cost of uniforms, supplies and unofficial fees paid to teachers and examiners. Findings from the field research also suggested that impoverished children are frequently bullied and teased by others in their class, effectively reinforcing their sense of inferiority and increasing their distress. Indeed, the rewards from education are by no means guaranteed, for the skills imparted may not fit those required by the labor market.

There are also serious risks associated with the abandonment of customary values, practices and resources. This is apparent not just in terms of destruction of cultural heritage, which can adversely affect sense of identity and self-efficacy, but also with regard to the traditional knowledge, skills and assets that are brought to bear during times of austerity. In Belarus following the collapse of the Soviet Union and in Sierra Leone during the war, traditional coping mechanisms like the consumption of wild plants, leaves and roots, recycling, or use of traditional cost-free remedies for the cure of disease, proved essential to survival. When the expertise underlying such strategies is lost the poor risk becoming far more susceptible to famine during periods of severe adversity and crisis.

Summary & Implications for CCF

- Child poverty measures should embody proper respect for the many personal, material and social advantages offered by modernity (including education). However due account must also be taken of the potential and actual costs involved.
- The benefits and strengths of traditional cultural values and practices, traditional assets and traditional livelihood and risk management strategies need to be acknowledged and fostered whenever possible and feasible.

1.4 Recognizing the Dynamic Nature of Poverty

Most of the world's poor people experience poverty as a chronic condition that is caused by monumental structural forces, spans the life of the individual and is transmitted to subsequent generations. This is especially true of countries like India where population density and growth, inequitable distribution of natural resources, entrenched social hierarchy and discrimination, poor governance and the like, represent apparently overwhelming odds against the economic advancement of the poor.

Populations exposed to these kinds of structural forces often become caught up in long cycles of poverty that extend through many generations. Some have attributed the inter-generational transmission of poverty to a lack of consciousness in affected populations of viable solutions, or to a passive acceptance of their circumstances. People who are unable to free themselves from the chains of deprivation and exploitation, it is suggested, become resigned to their fate. Some ascribe poverty to personal failings such as laziness or substance abuse. Certainly the CCF study confirmed that alcoholism and similar behaviors can contribute significantly to poverty, because they create dissent within the family, drain income and inhibit labor productivity. Nevertheless, ideas about fatalism, or a "culture of pover-

ty," were revealed as an outsider's view that ignores the many creative strategies employed by poor people for managing and ameliorating adversity. Likewise, acceptance that overwhelming structural forces are at play can lead to the false impression that poverty is a static state.

The CCF study highlights the dynamic nature of poverty, finding it to be a highly volatile process that is subject to interacting and countervailing forces and trends. In this respect, a close connection could be discerned between structural, seasonal and personal factors in the experience of poverty. In countries like Belarus poverty has far graver implications for children during the cold winter months when they are confined in overcrowded rooms in which arguments and conflict are commonplace. For a significant minority of people poverty is a transient experience, the result of random or idiosyncratic shocks such as family or personal loss, or a major societal crisis. Often chronic conditions of poverty are exacerbated by such shocks. During the war in Sierra Leone many people who were already extremely poor lost everything—family, home, land, cattle, seed, stored foods, savings, and jobs. In some cases, livelihoods, property and whole families were obliterated in a matter of mere minutes. The combination of long term structural disadvantage and rapid and immediate loss may result in outright destitution, from which individuals, families or whole communities may be unable to recover.

Summary & Implications for CCF

- Poverty is not a static state but a continuously changing condition that arises from the interaction of several processes, personal — familial and structural — operating at the micro, meso and macro levels.
- Poverty interventions need to take full account of broad structural trends while also focusing on individual, household and community vulnerabilities, capacities and strategies.

Nevertheless, ideas about fatalism, or a "culture of poverty," were revealed as an outsider's view that ignores the many creative strategies employed by poor people for managing and ameliorating adversity.

- Policy should be responsive and flexible, adapting to changes in the conditions and circumstances of children, their families and communities and the wider society.

1.5 A CCF Definition of Poverty

Proper recognition must be given to the situated nature of poverty, which is defined differently in different social and cultural contexts and in different historical periods.

In accordance with the above insights, it is apparent that an adequate and meaningful definition of poverty should be a holistic one that gives proper weight to social and political causes as well as to economic ones. Further, such a definition must acknowledge both the dynamic and the mediated nature of human experience, in that the outcomes of exposure to economic hardship are neither predictable nor fixed and are often closely linked to subjective perceptions.

Proper recognition must be given to the situated nature of poverty, which is defined differently in different social and cultural contexts and in different historical periods. Due account must also be taken not simply of the material or physical states induced by poverty, but also of the social suffering and the adverse emotional and psychological impacts in affected populations.

Thus, taking all these principles into account, CCF is moving towards defining poverty broadly as:

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

2.0 HOW CHILDREN EXPERIENCE POVERTY

2.1 Developing a Child-focused Perspective

It is widely accepted that children are among those most affected by poverty, not simply because they make up a significant portion of the world's poor, but also because they often feel its impacts more acutely than

adults in both the short and long term. Poverty is a grave problem for the young, and some of the most cogent indicators of poverty globally, particularly under-5 mortality, focus on the outcomes in children.⁸ Clearly, understanding what poverty means for children is an important forerunner to knowing how it affects them and what forms of assistance are most effective and appropriate. In this section we draw on the perspectives of the boys and girls, adolescents and youth who took part in the CCF study and on recent research findings in the social sciences. Recalling that most of the young people in the study were about 8 to 20, we would emphasize that this reflects a bias in the reporting in favor of older children and adolescents.

Acknowledgement that children are profoundly affected by poverty and understanding how precisely they are affected are two very different things. As it happens, the links between macro level structures, policies and processes and poverty in children are seldom made explicit and very rarely are children's perspectives on poverty heard. This is partly because macroeconomic policies often take years to work themselves out into conceivable effects on the ground, while child poverty is consistently presented by aid agencies and the media in terms of immediate impacts and threats (such as lack of clean drinking water). The traditional poverty discourse, based as it is on adult ideas and assumptions, gives prominence to survival and physical health impacts, with a particular focus on infants and under-fives, as we have indicated. The question is whether children themselves recognize these as their top priorities. This discourse also gives preference to interventions at the level of the family or household, regardless of whether this mode of delivery serves the best interests of children.

Children are very much a part of the collective culture in which they live and often share the same views as adults. Nevertheless, poverty can have very different meanings and outcomes for children and

⁸UNICEF has implemented a system of monitoring through its State of the World's Children report and UNDP keeps tabs on global trends measured through national level statistics. However, these data are poorly disaggregated and often inaccurate.

adults. This is partly because children are profoundly influenced by their peers and by matters that do not concern adults, or of which adults are unaware. Intergenerational differences in understandings of poverty were especially marked among CCF stakeholders in Belarus. In fact, children's experiences of and responses to poverty are often quite different from what adults imagine them to be. The adults who generate the poverty discourse are not necessarily conscious of the extent to which children are affected. Consequently, adult perspectives on the poverty of children are at best only partially relevant.

The study found children to be far more sensitive to and tormented by poverty than was generally appreciated by adults. They are acutely aware of its divisive nature and feel its effects not merely (or so much) in terms of lack of basic goods and services as in the associated stigma and humiliation. At the same time, while they may be conscious of the larger macro level causes and consequences of poverty (especially in Bolivia, where children are highly politicized and articulate), they commonly express greater concern about its more immediate effects on friendships, schooling, family relationships and the like.

Because in many contexts poverty is perceived as shameful, it can be a serious social impediment for children. Indeed, the study found that how poverty constrains relationships with others and how it influences others treatment of children can be more important to children than having to go without food or other goods. Thus, in rural Bolivia, children know that chronic shortages of water have a significant effect on livelihoods and on the survival and health of both humans and livestock. Yet, they highlighted the shame of being unable to wash and being labeled dirty and poor as a consequence. Children recognize they are frequently the main instigators of abuses directed at others due to poverty. In fact one of the worst consequences of being thought of as 'poor' is the associated social exclu-

sion and susceptibility to teasing, bullying and denigration by peers.

Only in Sierra Leone did children seem to be little troubled by the stigma of poverty. This is most likely due to the fact that the war has rendered practically all populations equally poor, and absolute shortage is a grave problem everywhere. Hence it would appear that, except in situations of acute and generalized scarcity, relative poverty has a more significant impact on children's well-being than does absolute poverty (that is for children beyond early childhood at least).

Symbolic markers of wealth are very important in social assessments of difference between children. In the study children proved to be highly attuned not just to social distinctions and related stigmas but also to the symbolism of poverty. Clothing and footwear are generally the most important indicators of difference, and lack of apparel deemed appropriate for school or social occasions was a major source of distress in children. Such symbols are very subjective and do not necessarily correlate exactly with actual economic status. They are, nevertheless, crucial in determining relations between peers and others. Aside from dress codes, the physical attributes of children (skin color, height, weight, etc.) can also be important social markers. Many impoverished children suffer from malnutrition, stunted growth and similar physical effects caused by an inadequate diet and poor health. Often, such children are unable to actively participate in class on an equal footing with others. They are ridiculed or simply ignored.

Such subjective perceptions need to be taken very seriously because social discrimination and exclusion are often associated with outright exploitation and abuse and with a strong sense of disenfranchisement and grievance among poor children. Middle and late childhood are important life phases in terms of the formation of identity, and of a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy. These are also important periods with

The study found children to be far more sensitive to and tormented by poverty than was generally appreciated by adults.



regard to increasing orientation towards peers (as opposed to family and/or adults) as role models, mentors and sources of social support and affection more generally. Therefore, discrimination and social ostracism during these critical phases, especially by peers, can have serious adverse developmental consequences for the young.

Summary & Implications for CCF

- The link between macro environment (including macro level economic policies) and children needs to be made explicit and closely monitored.
- More child-focused policies need to be included within larger economic schemes and policies, so that children's problems and needs are acknowledged and incorporated.
- Children's perspectives on poverty need to be incorporated within all policies and programs that aim to assist them directly.
- The grave social consequences of poverty for children need full and proper recognition in all policies and interventions, implying the need for a focus on human and social capital in addition to livelihoods.

2.2 The Effects of Power Differences Within Childhood

Economic analysts and other observers often think of childhood as a relatively regular and undifferentiated phase in the human life cycle marked only by stages of development: infancy and early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. Conceptualizing childhood in these terms has important implications to understanding the impacts of poverty. Essentially, it is presumed that childhood is broadly similar throughout the globe and that all children have the same basic needs. This means that the impacts of poverty on the young are understood to be relatively uniform regardless of gender, class or culture. Undoubtedly there is some uniformity in childhood across social contexts and

groups. For instance, all healthy children gain in strength and stature as they grow up and certain physical needs (food, fluids, exercise, rest and sleep) in particular are indispensable for all. Certain cognitive processes are sequenced according to underlying neurological development. There are, in addition, commonalities in the acquisition of language and in the way biology and culture interact in the development of children. And from the normative viewpoint, childhood is becoming an increasingly globalized concept, defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the basis of chronological age, with 18 years as the upper limit.

That said, as with assertions about poverty, ideas about universality in childhood definitely have their limits. Although, as indicated, the development of children does follow certain universal biological sequences, childhood is, in practice, an extremely diverse life phase, shaped also by material, cultural and social environment, genetic heritage, personal agency and economic and political circumstance. In other words, children's multiple and varied competencies are not merely a function of age, stage of development, genetics and physiology, but also of cultural, material and social environment. How boys and girls behave, what is considered good for them and what bad, their skills and their aspirations are all heavily influenced by the social and cultural worlds they inhabit.

Social constructions of childhood differ radically in what are sometimes termed "role", or "socio-centric" societies (for example, many parts of rural Africa) and "person", or "ego-centric", societies (North America and northern Europe, for instance). In the former, the cultural expectation is that from a very young age children should develop a strong sense of responsibility and obligation toward their families and communities. The specific responsibilities assumed by children are as befits someone in a particular social role, status and set of relations. Through the fulfillment of their duties, children develop into

adults and are accepted as members of their community. They understand that they are interdependent and interpersonally responsible. In these kinds of settings, emphasis is likely to be given to competencies such as respect for others, responsibility, sharing and reciprocity.

In person-centric societies, on the other hand, personal autonomy and self-sufficiency are prized attributes of successful and well-adapted adults and assume a central place that sometimes overrides responsibility toward others. Such societies stress individual agency and individual rights over and above group membership. In these settings children are frequently in training for autonomous adulthood for long periods and success in childhood is more likely to be gauged through education performance and preparation for a good career than through fulfillment of social duties.

Social constructions are also a major source of differentiation between children living in the same community or society, with important consequences in terms of economic and social well-being. Power within childhood even affects who is considered a child. For example, in Bangladesh an individual who goes to school and has no economic or social responsibilities may be termed a “child” (shishu) up to the age of puberty, whereas a boy or girl who works is no longer referred to as a shishu even by age six.⁹ In hierarchical societies like India differences of caste, gender and class are firmly entrenched, for they are rooted in ancient history and culture and are recognized to be prescribed by divine authority. In Bolivia, Belarus, Kenya and Sierra Leone, on the other hand, there appears to be greater fluidity in power relations during childhood. In Sierra Leone, one of the few positive outcomes of war mentioned by CCF stakeholders has been its effect in minimizing economic inequality.

Many have come to regard gender prejudice and discrimination as the most pervasive and incapacitating source of differentiation

within childhood, with girls being the most frequently affected. Women are more physically resilient than men from birth: through every decade of life, men are more prone to fatal diseases, and have a lower life expectancy, than women. Despite this, UN statistics indicate that there are fewer women in the world than men. Moreover, according to CCF stakeholders, girls bear the brunt of family poverty as compared with boys. In all of the case study countries girls appear to work harder and for longer hours than boys, are more likely to be out of school and less likely to enjoy opportunities to play. However, this pattern does vary. Many of the boys interviewed also work very hard and in some settings boys complained that girls have greater earning potential, especially those in the sex trade.

During times of trouble, distinctions such as those based on gender, ethnicity and physical ability often grow, sometimes with very serious consequences for children who are the least valued. For example, perpetuity of the social group is very important in many contexts of enduring hardship where mutual interdependence is strong and the individual cannot survive alone. This is especially true in socio-centric societies. In such settings durability of the family group is commonly a greater priority than the relative well-being of individual children.¹⁰ When there is no other obvious option, children in certain categories (second daughters for example) may be considered surplus to requirement and abandoned. Others may be thought of as a good that can be exchanged or traded for income, or to forge links with political or economic allies.

Selective neglect in the family, discrimination in the community, political oppression in national government, and pronounced inequity in international relations are all societal factors undermining children's well-being and development that policy makers have the power to do something about. The question is how to identify which groups and categories of children are the most susceptible and to find ways both of reducing risk

*Power within
childhood even
affects who is
considered a child.*



⁹Blanchet, T. 1996 Lost Innocence, Stolen Childhoods. Dhaka: The University Press

¹⁰Engle, Castle & Menon 1996. Child Development: Vulnerability and Resilience, Social Science and Medicine, 43(5):621-35

Aside from the broader power distinctions founded on gender, class and the like, there are more localized differences between children based on more specific personal and family circumstances.



and providing support to affected children. The problem is that policy makers are often reluctant to engage with issues that have political, social or cultural roots, preferring to de-politicize adversities like poverty by defining them as a problem of family or individual pathology.

As well, despite evident disparities between children, it should not be assumed that status during childhood is fixed. As with definitions of poverty, concepts of the poorest of the poor are variable according to whose perception one is referring to. These concepts are also very dynamic, in that who is most vulnerable may be very changeable according to fluctuating circumstances. For example, the study showed that depending on things like total family size, and the gender composition and birth order of the sibling group, the accepted gender roles of children may be reversed to accommodate economic necessity. Thus, if there are insufficient girls of working age in the family boys may be asked to do 'girls tasks like cooking, gathering firewood, collecting water or taking care of younger brothers or sisters. Sometimes boys expressed resentment at being expected to do girls' work.

Summary & Implications for CCF

- Childhood is not a uniform life phase and depending on individual and group differences and on environmental influences the circumstances, expectations, achievements and vulnerabilities of children are highly variable.
- Social power is one of most prominent forces of difference within childhood.
- Policy and practice need to acknowledge the social suffering and economic loss associated with power differences between children and to pay full attention to issues of equity and social justice.
- In some contexts, social and economic responsibilities are normal features of childhood with many positive outcomes for children and their families. Rather than attempting to remove

responsibilities from children, CCF may need to work with families and communities to ensure that the burdens are equally shared, not harmful and compatible with schooling.

- School education can in itself be a burden, especially for working children. Education should take full account of the contributions children make to their families and communities and be sufficiently flexible to allow for the continuation of these.

2.3 Identifying the Most Vulnerable

Aside from the broader power distinctions founded on gender, class and the like, there are more localized differences between children based on more specific personal and family circumstances. Often, these distinctions render certain groups among the poorest of the poor. Within much of the literature on poverty and within the Convention on the Rights of the Child there is a notable emphasis on the protection of these 'especially vulnerable groups' of children. Among others, orphans, children separated from their families, children living in female or child headed households, those in hazardous and/or exploitative jobs, or living on the streets, are commonly singled out for special attention. This is partly in recognition of the fact that poverty can be highly concentrated among these groups. It also reflects the probability that those already marginalized by exceptional circumstances are likely to be more profoundly affected by poverty than others who have more influence and opportunities and better networks of support.

Many agencies feel that only by directing their attention to the most vulnerable and powerless social groups will they eradicate poverty. Such an approach is also seen to meet the imperatives of social equity and justice. Definitely there are a number of advantages with this kind of targeted approach, not least being the fact that limited resources can be directed at those in greatest distress. But, interventions that

focus on the most vulnerable and weakest sections of the population confront a number of obstacles and challenges. Precisely because they are isolated from decision-making, have little control over resources and commonly lack the sense of self-efficacy needed to take control of their lives, the more marginalized members of society tend not to present themselves before agencies or projects. Accordingly, the research revealed that CCF does not always work with the poorest of the poor or with the most vulnerable groups of children but with groups that already have the capacity and time to organize and become involved in projects. Prioritizing the least powerful sections of the population entails a major commitment in terms of accessing and learning about potential beneficiaries, forging relationships with them and building their capacity and self assurance.

Giving preference to the most vulnerable groups raises other concerns. First, children identified as particularly vulnerable may well be in need of special attention, however the level of attention they receive can be disproportionate in comparison with other children who may be suffering similar but less prominent threats to their protection. The tendency to single out specific categories of children has in many cases unintentionally added to their stigmatization by society as a whole, as with children suffering from HIV/AIDS.

Aside from this, social hierarchies are sometimes highly entrenched and assistance given to the most vulnerable will not necessarily be enjoyed by them. Thus, loans awarded to women in micro finance projects are commonly utilized by male partners or relatives. Often women do not benefit from these projects and may become liable for debts incurred by men. Worse still, because of the close link between the work of women and children, some of these projects have been found to massively increase children's labor burden. Social targeting of this sort may even lead to resistance from other more influential members of society, who may

object to the change in status and roles of those groups that are singled out for special attention. Finally, concepts of vulnerability employed by agencies are often based on stereotyped notions that do not conform to the realities on the ground.

Summary & Implications for CCF

- There is some merit in focusing limited resources on children who appear especially vulnerable.
- Care must be taken though to ensure that there is broad social acceptance of these targeted approaches and that highlighting the plight of a particular group will not lead to their stigmatization.
- The task is to develop child protection approaches that are not imposed from outside a society but build instead on local resources and understandings and are sufficiently flexible to adjust to local conditions and circumstances.
- Concepts of vulnerability should be grounded in reality and in the particular operational context rather than in normative and globalized ideas about childhood.

3.0 HOW CHILDREN RESPOND TO ADVERSITY

3.1 Revising Our Ideas About Childhood

One of the most serious problems associated with conventional views about childhood vulnerability is the tendency to think of children who live with adversity as passive victims of circumstance. First, the causes of poverty are thought to be largely structural, having to do with global, regional and national processes in which children have no say and over which they have no control. Second, it is imagined that children do not have much of a stake in poverty alleviation policies or interventions. Third, children are generally thought to have lesser abilities than adults, as well as unique emotional, physical, psychological and social needs

Prioritizing the least powerful sections of the population entails a major commitment in terms of accessing and learning about potential beneficiaries, forging relationships with them and building their capacity and self assurance.

that render them especially vulnerable. As such, it is assumed that they are dependent on adults (especially parents) for their socialization and protection. Beyond this, as immature persons in the process of development they are believed to have insufficient experience or skills to hold valid views on the possible solutions to their poverty.

This perspective undoubtedly has merit when it comes to infants and very young children who are entirely dependent on others for their survival. As well, it does highlight how some older children lack the self-assurance to fend for themselves and how some are completely overwhelmed by adversities like poverty. There are other considerations. Since children do, as a rule, have less power, experience and information than adults, they can benefit greatly from adult guidance and support. Most children receive immeasurable comfort and reassurance from the care, love and affection bestowed upon them by adults. Nevertheless, even with the numerous advantages children derive from the nurture and support given by adults, it remains the case that the young do not simply absorb adult ideas but are social agents in their own right.

The children interviewed in the CCF study showed very clearly that they are not passive recipients of experience but active contributors to their own well-being and development. Just like adults, children are very active in engaging with the world around them and harness their reasoning, insight and expertise to the construction of their own values, meanings, and strategies. As we have seen, many also have important social and economic responsibilities and do not regard themselves as dependent on adults so much as interdependent with adults. They think of themselves as co-contributors to the family, playing their own part in the care of younger siblings and incapacitated adults and in household maintenance and survival. Indeed, the assumption of age-appropriate roles and responsibilities within the family and community can be a vital source of self-esteem and motivation for children.

Such evidence calls for a profound rethinking of 'childhood' and for innovative child-focused interventions and strategies. Growing research and practical attention globally is now being given to participatory processes that support children in their efforts to overcome adversities such as poverty. Rather than employ the traditional deficit (victim, or needs based) model, though, most of these efforts favor a focus on children's abilities and on their potential as change agents. The understanding is that in all but the most dire circumstances children do have options and do make choices and that a focus on children's problems to the exclusion of their strengths is unlikely to have the desired effect in terms of eradicating their poverty and suffering. In fact, it is believed that approaching children as the helpless casualties of adversity rather than active survivors may render them more vulnerable, since it denigrates their coping efforts and withholds from them the possibility of acting on their situation.

Building childhood policy on a vision of inclusion, self-determination and self-protection carries many challenges. It entails changes in the way adults think and act. It requires respect for children's integrity and capacity for responsible thought and action, while allowing for the provision of adult guidance and support. To do this, adults need to learn to trust children's choices. It means accepting that while children certainly can and do make errors of judgement, adults do not have an automatic monopoly of expertise concerning what is in children's best interests. At the same time, great sensitivity must be shown towards children's existing responsibilities, in that initiatives to support and protect children should not add to the considerable family and community burdens many already bear. As well, the responsibilities of childhood, including the responsibilities associated with participation, will inevitably change as children grow and mature and this needs to be taken into account in policy and action.

Building childhood policy on a vision of inclusion, self-determination and self-protection carries many challenges.



Summary & Implications for CCF

- While some children may be very vulnerable and require special assistance and support, it needs to be understood that children are not the helpless victims of circumstances visited upon them by adults but active agents in their own right.
- Forms of assistance that focus on children's abilities and on their potential as change agents as opposed to their weaknesses are more likely to reinforce their capacity to protect themselves and to overcome adversity.
- Supporting children in their own protection and in their role as change agents entails the development and use of participatory child-focused methodology and methods in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and in policy more generally. Such methodology must be sensitive to children's existing responsibilities.

3.2 Supporting Children's Resilience and Coping

Even if we think of children as social actors as opposed to passive victims, knowing how precisely to build on children's competencies and coping strategies, while also protecting them against hazard, and supporting the most vulnerable remains a major challenge. A framework for understanding how children are affected by poverty and how best to assist them must address this challenge. Some practitioners employ a model of intervention based on the concepts of "risk" and "resilience" as a means of achieving this end. "Risk" refers to variables that increase an individual's susceptibility to negative developmental outcomes or becoming overwhelmed by adverse circumstances. A number of risks are found internally; they result from the unique combination of characteristics that make-up an individual, such as temperament or neurological structure. Other risks are external; that is they result from environmental factors, including poverty and war, which inhibit an individual's

healthy development.

Not all children exposed to risks develop problems later on: these children are often deemed "resilient". The term resilience refers to an individual's capacity to adapt and remain strong in the face of adversity. Resilience depends on both individual and group strengths, and is highly influenced by supportive elements in the wider environment. These positive reinforcements in children's lives are often described as "protective factors" or "protective processes".¹¹ While it is understood that risk and resilience are not constructed the same way in all societies, it is generally accepted that the interaction of risk and protective factors plays an important role in the development of all children.

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

The CCF study highlights how, in addition to their own inner resources and competencies, children's interpersonal relationships can be essential factors mediating risk and resilience. Families and other important ref-

Resilience depends on both individual and group strengths, and is highly influenced by supportive elements in the wider environment.

¹¹Woodhead, M. 1998. Children's Perspectives on Their Working Lives — A Participatory Study in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. Stockholm: Radda Barnen.

Families and other important reference persons play a major role in helping children interpret, 'process' and adjust to, or overcome difficult life experiences.

reference persons play a major role in helping children interpret, 'process' and adjust to, or overcome difficult life experiences. People who act as mentors can have an enormous impact on children's coping, by providing models of and reinforcement for problem solving, motivation and other skills. Feeling supported and secure and having guidance and reassurance during difficult times promotes self-esteem and helps children to build a sense of hope.

The study also provides considerable evidence that social support from peers can enhance children's resilience. Children who are able to establish and maintain friendships have been shown to be more resilient than those who are isolated from other children. Positive peer relationships provide children with an arena of support outside the family in which they can experiment, develop attitudes, skills and values, and learn to share, to help and to nurture one another. These relationships both mitigate the negative effects of adversity, and also contribute to a child's sense of self-esteem. This process may in turn enhance the development of other protective factors such as a sense of competence, an ability to form other meaningful relationships, to empathize, and to feel a sense of belonging. In short, friendships provide children, like adults, with opportunities to be themselves and to feel good about who they are — these processes help to build resilience.

Community factors also play an important role in limiting children's vulnerability and supporting their resilience. Neighborhoods, schools and organized community groups and programs can supplement protective factors at the individual level by providing a supportive context for children. In Belarus, computer clubs play a crucial role in children's lives, allowing them to share leisure time with peers in a comparatively safe environment far from the domestic strife that prevails in many homes. Children unable to afford the entrance fee to these clubs feel that they are at a major disadvantage in relation to their peers. Participation in institu-

tional and social settings that provide children with meaningful opportunities to contribute and to feel useful and supported can help to foster in children a sense of hope and purpose. As it happens, however, there was little evidence from the study that children who are associated with CCF enjoy the right to take part in decisions, planning and other processes affecting them and there is considerable scope to develop this crucial area of work further.

Variations in patterns of resilience and coping are also a function of cultural beliefs about childhood and child development. We have seen that particular societies have their own ideas about the capacities and vulnerabilities of children, the ways in which they learn and develop, and those things that are good and bad for them. These ideas affect approaches to child socialization, learning, discipline and protection, and hence to a significant degree, circumscribe children's adaptation, resilience and coping.

In other words, the social arrangements, child development goals and child rearing practices of the communities in which children live play a fundamental part in determining the different capabilities and susceptibilities that children develop. Therefore, it is important that "the 'developmental appropriateness' of children's experiences, the 'harmfulness' or 'benefits' of their environment cannot be separated from the cultural context in which they are developing, the values and goals that inform their lives and their prior experiences of learning skills and ways of thinking." Children grow and flourish in a whole host of different environments and under a whole variety of circumstances, and what is adaptive in child development is very much a product of these specific settings.

Summary & Implications for CCF

- Risk and uncertainty are normal childhood experiences. Most healthy children develop mechanisms that help them integrate these experiences and protect them against becoming over-

whelmed. In this, children may be supported by a range of protective processes within the environment, including and in particular supportive relationships with family and peers.

- Exposure to adversities such as poverty increases the level of risk in children. Those who are able to cope with or overcome adversity are often termed resilient.
- Aside from prevention and eradication of poverty, a key aim of strategies to reduce the suffering caused by poverty is to increase resilience in affected children by supporting their coping skills, building on their resourcefulness and competencies and fostering protective mechanisms within the wider environment. Again, this implies investment in human and social capital, and partnership with children, families and civil society organizations.
- The competencies associated with enhanced resilience and coping, for example sense of humor and self-efficacy, will in most cases also contribute positively to well-being and overall quality of life. In this sense, efforts to support children's resilience can also contribute to the broader objective of increasing child well-being.

4.0 PARTNERS IN CHANGE

Confronting child poverty is a massive undertaking that entails involvement of and, in some cases, close collaboration with, children, their families and communities, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the state. As indicated, partnership with children as the agents of their own development and protection and as contributing members of families and communities should be the cornerstone of CCF's strategy to reduce child poverty and enhance children's well-being and quality of life. But children cannot be treated as autonomous units in isolation from the wider society and from other change agents.

4.1 The State

In industrialized countries the state, or the machinery of government, appears to be everywhere. Whether it is road building or industry, food subsidies or taxation, housing or employment, most government decisions have an impact on the economic well-being of children. Government policy and intervention grows hand in hand with industrialization and urbanization. During industrialization in Europe the state assumed many responsibilities that had once belonged to the family, such as care for the poor and dependent. By the beginning of the twentieth century most advanced states had expanded to regulate trade, consumer protection and wages. Measures to provide health care and housing also developed, child labor was abolished and universal schooling was introduced. The family acquired a new definition as a private institution, one in partnership with the state. Today, specialized state-run institutions of childhood—child care and leisure centers, schools and so on—complement the traditional roles and functions of the family.

Most 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. Aside from this, governments are commonly reluctant to intervene in the economic or social life of children, their families and communities, frequently on cultural grounds. Some are far more concerned about national security and defense than the well-being of the populace. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has facilitated greater state involvement in child provision and protection in many countries and there have been encouraging developments at local government level in particular in some areas. But, in most places, beyond health and education, responsibility for children still tends to be assumed by young people themselves, by their families and communities

Confronting child poverty is a massive undertaking that entails involvement of and, in some cases, close collaboration with, children, their families and communities, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the state.

and by local, national and international CSOs.

Government policy is crucial to wealth creation and distribution and active public sector involvement in service provision can have a fundamental impact on child poverty. Recognizing this, some international child-focused organizations work in very close partnership with government. They provide various forms of assistance, including training for public sector employees, supplies and equipment for schools and clinics, help with the planning and development of services and formulation of policy. Much of this effort is directed at the institutions of central government, especially the ministries of education, health and, to a lesser extent, social welfare. However, many agencies confine themselves to supporting local government, because in their view there is greater accountability and efficiency at this level, greater awareness of and contact with grass roots concerns and greater overall value to be had in fostering decentralization. Others work exclusively with CSOs on the grounds of public sector inefficiency and corruption and difficulties of going to scale.

The public sector was notable for its absence in the CCF study. While respondents were quick to complain about inappropriate policy, corruption or inaction by government as a cause of poverty, few talked about the public sector as fostering or contributing to wealth creation and poverty eradication. Regardless of the reasons why CCF stakeholders concern themselves so little with government, CCF as an agency has to decide on the extent to which, and ways in which, it will work with the public sector, either at the national or the local level, or both.

At the moment CCF's comparative advantage is definitely its grass roots links with families, communities and community-based organizations (CBOs). However, government is a vital actor in the field of child poverty and changes spearheaded by the public sector in the fiscal and legal environments can

make a major difference to the well-being of children. Also, in most countries there is ample room for improvement in budgetary allocations to the social and economic sectors. There is considerable potential in developing strategic partnerships with other national and international NGOs in researching child poverty so as to inform and influence public sector thinking and decisions. Such research could provide the basis of awareness raising, advocacy and lobbying initiatives with government on child-focused poverty reduction interventions and other, related, policies and activities. Similarly, consideration can be given to orientation and training of government officials around issues of child poverty and social exclusion and the need for greater attention to the development of social and human capital.

4.2 CSOs

Experience demonstrates that government's ability to ensure broad social implementation of child poverty schemes is limited. The achievement of this goal in everyday practice requires popular mobilization depending on ample participation from CSOs. This is especially true in an era of public sector austerity, "downsizing" and decentralization of public services. The non-state sector must now carry greater responsibility for generating economic and social development. Also, support to CSOs has more profound implications, in that many consider a healthy civil society to be an essential hallmark of any open and well-governed democracy that intends to make its population citizens, rather than subjects.

Addressing child poverty entails cooperation with a wide variety of CSOs. The scope and diversity of such organizations are almost boundless. As long as they are structured and functional, they need not be legally formalized. Some pursue a broad social purpose, such as the expansion of peace and social justice or the provision of charitable services to the sick and poor. Others promote the narrower interests of particular groups such as working or street children.

Some of the more influential CSOs are in fact networks or umbrella groups comprised of other member CSOs. Many CSOs resonate with political overtones, while others maintain an apolitical stance, focusing on issues from what they consider to be a rigorously technical perspective.

Children's advocacy organizations, religious and other value-forming institutions, non-formal education programs, community radio stations, professional associations, drama groups and popular culture groups are but some of the CSOs that have proven effective channels for child poverty interventions. What these many types of organizations have in common is that they represent citizens' own voluntary initiatives to promote ideas, values, groups or actions in local, national or international arenas outside the privileged spaces of government. Of special interest to CCF is the fact that they increasingly enter and transact in what amounts to an expanding global market of ideas.

In many countries there exist large numbers of community and charitable groups either working directly with children or advocating for their rights. The term CSO certainly includes such organizations, but it also points beyond them to less common partners—for instance, industrial and employer associations, trade unions, service clubs, religious institutions, social and sporting clubs, professional associations, research institutes, non-profit media, children's own organizations, and of course advocacy groups of many types.

Because many CSOs live closer to the problems of children than do public sector agencies, they generally understand them in greater detail. Indeed, some of the most effective CSOs in the field of child poverty reduction and child empowerment are children's own organizations, for example those that support the self-organization and self-representation of street and working children. Children's organizations and other CSOs also tend to be more innovative in responding to young people's problems than

are public bodies. Often they are more child-centered in their approach to children's issues than the public sector. They tend to focus more readily on the key question of what is in children's best interests, and they are more likely to bring to that question a holistic perspective of children's development. Whereas government may be constrained to a legalistic view rooted in existing policy, or a political one reflecting interest group power relationships, CSOs are more free to move directly to the matter of what is good for children and make it the main point of public debate. This role has been of critical importance in national and world debate on many different issues.

Working with children on the very margins of society who may be engaged in activities defined as anti-social or illegal and are stigmatized socially and economically can be especially challenging. It means reaching out to CSOs in less accessible communities, to children's membership organizations and to small scale CBOs, for these tend to be the bodies with the most effective responses. In dealing with child labor issues, trade unions, industry associations and working children's organizations have in some countries been especially active and creative exponents of children's rights in the workplace. Supporting these organizations entails a serious commitment to the identification of new, non-traditional partners and the promotion and capacity building of weak or inexperienced CSOs.

While partnership with CSOs may involve labor intensive and time-consuming processes, the rewards in terms of building a local constituency of support and action in favor of children can be considerable. CCF needs to make a clear decision regarding the extent to which it will foster partnerships with CSOs in its efforts to combat child poverty and social exclusion, especially non-traditional CSOs and children's membership organizations.

CCF is operating in an increasingly global environment in which the policies and activ-

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ities that support the reduction of child poverty are operative not simply at the country level but also regionally and internationally. Indeed, many of the problems confronting children today have regional or global causes and some of the most severe situations confronting children, such as child trafficking and sexual exploitation, are transnational in character. In the network of agencies working internationally with children, international child-centered NGOs and NGO alliances are particularly active, most framing their policies and programs according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. If CCF is to assume an active role in the child poverty field, attention to the broader regional and international dimensions of poverty is essential. At the very least this implies active engagement in international debates, but could also entail more significant collaboration with child-centered and other INGOs, through networking and possible partnerships.

4.3 The Family

In most countries, achieving widespread recognition and successful implementation of interventions to reduce child poverty and increase children's quality of life and well-being depends ultimately on extended social discourse that includes all important actors, including children and their families. Fundamental issues such as ending traditional forms of discrimination against girls, changing children's family roles to avoid detrimental child work, and providing for children to participate in social decisions affecting them requires extensive public discussion in order to arrive at socially supportable solutions.

As the cornerstone of society and of children's personal lives, the family should play a key role in this discussion.



As the cornerstone of society and of children's personal lives, the family should play a key role in this discussion. The centrality of the family in children's well-being is hard to exaggerate. In most of sub-Saharan Africa to be without family is to be destitute. In the Chewa language of modern Malawi, the word for 'poor'—(*umphawi*)—implies a lack of kin and friends. In Belarus, poor families

with single parents are often referred to by the term '*nepolneeye*' (using Roman script), which similarly implies a condition of being 'not full' and 'unfavorable', and in Kenya wealth is often measured by the number of wives and children a man has. In all the countries researched, families whose members work collaboratively to maintain the household were considered the most likely to be able to withstand poverty. Accordingly, some of the poorest children globally are those separated from their families and those who run households of sibling or peer groups without guidance or support from adults.

Nevertheless, while the power of family cannot be denied, we reiterate here that the family is not always a benign force in children's lives. Given how commonplace partiality towards particular categories of children and inequalities in intra-familial resource allocation, intervention at the level of the family is no guarantee that children will benefit. At their best, families make a profound contribution to the health of society and its individuals: preserving culture, values, ethics, and wealth. At their worst, they resist change, restrict individual freedom, and indulge in prejudices that can lead to abuse, conflict and abandonment. Thus, it should not be automatically assumed that children in families are better off than children outside them. Indeed, when offered the choice between an abusive or oppressive family and living alone, with peers, or in a foster home, children often decide against the family.

CCF acknowledges the crucial role played by the family in children's lives. Indeed, the study reveals that one of the most devastating consequences of poverty for children is its insidious impact on family life. In almost all cases, poverty threatens the family's ability to cater to the needs of its members, particularly the weaker ones. Poverty also breeds powerlessness. Poor families have little control over resources such as capital, land, or labor. With so much time and energy being devoted to survival, there is little opportunity to use the family's capabilities to

accumulate resources, secure sustainable livelihoods, or protect children. In cases of destitution, to ensure the survival of the family, individual children may be trafficked into prostitution, bondage, or other hazardous situations. Some of the most profound effects of poverty noted by CCF stakeholders included: undermining of relations between generations; raised levels of intra-familial violence, neglect and alcohol abuse; loss of male (father's) authority and status due to his inability to be an effective breadwinner; and family separation (including migration) and breakdown.

Children in the CCF study live in a wide range of family and household types and structures, including polygamous units, households constituted of three or four generations, and single-parent families. With migration, many families stretch across both rural and urban areas, while increasing numbers straddle international borders. Children themselves are often very mobile, circulating between households and communities in times of prosperity as well as deprivation. Households that are short of labor may foster children from households with a surfeit. Moreover, in many societies, child rearing is a communal affair that includes caregivers that may or may not be related to the child in question. A significant proportion of the children interviewed by CCF come from female headed or female managed households, whether due to migration, death, or family breakdown and separation. These children may have minimal or no contact with their fathers. Even when a father is present and assumes considerable liability for his family, women tend to bear the greater burden of care, socialization and protection of children (particularly girls). The point here is that two-generation, two-parent, nuclear 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.

As a matter of policy, the family must inevitably play an important part in plans to

reduce child poverty and social suffering. However, as the CCF study confirms, family and household structures are variable and complex, and we should not fall into the trap of thinking that all or even the majority of children grow up in households together with their immediate family. In some cases the most viable family form for children is one constituted by a sibling or peer group. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that children in lone parent families are necessarily worse off in terms of the level of care they receive. Rather, they are more susceptible to poverty as a result of the social stigma and/or constraints that single parents (especially single mothers) face.

From this it is evident that if CCF is to support families in their efforts to secure sustainable livelihoods, increase their quality of life and enhance the well-being of their children, the agency must be able to countenance support to 'non-traditional' familial mechanisms. It must show considerable flexibility and openness to working with a wide range of family structures and forms. Every effort should be made to avoid stereotyped assumptions about the level and quality of care received by children in accordance with family structure. Recognition needs to be given to the role of children themselves in their own care and in the care of others, not just younger siblings, but also incapacitated adults. As well as assistance to families led by adults, consideration may need to be given to supporting child headed and/or child managed households, especially in countries and communities where these prevail in large concentrations. Where families are unable to muster sufficient resources to engage in NGO sponsored livelihood initiatives on an individual basis, collective CSO initiatives that benefit groups of families should be considered as an effective alternative.

Summary & Implications for CCF

- In order to implement its poverty framework, CCF needs to reduce its present comparative isolation from

ongoing aid and development activities at the international, national and sub-national levels and to forge and consolidate links with multiple civil society actors, including children. These links should aim to facilitate child-focused research and programming on poverty issues and entail both membership of networks and umbrella organizations and partnership with other implementing bodies.

- CCF needs to be extremely flexible in its approach to partnerships, making strategic links with the organizations and actors that can benefit children most directly. This may mean working with non-traditional partners such as organized children's groups. It entails considerable work internally within CCF to create the structures and processes that support, integrate, empower and enable actors involved at each action level, with defined mutual responsibilities, relationships and accountabilities.
- In the creation of alliances with actors at different action levels, attention needs to be paid to the development of democratic and inclusive processes and structures, adherence to mutually agreed ethical guidelines and codes of conduct regarding work with children and employment of participatory philosophy and methodology throughout.
- To have beneficial impact, efforts to reduce child poverty must engage with government in one way or another. A decision needs to be taken as to whether CCF will work directly with central or local government on capacity building and policy development, etc., or will work indirectly to influence public policy and resource allocation by building civil society consensus and supporting civil society advocacy and lobbying on the issues.
- Partnerships with communities, families and children must be open and flexible and, as appropriate, must acknowledge and accept that in many situations unconventional societal

forms and structures can be valid and effective in promoting children's well-being and development.

CONCLUSION

We have stated that economic models either completely disregard children, subsume them under households, or construct worlds that do not even approximate their realities. In so doing, economics is implicitly asserting that children are not worthy of the consideration given to adult humans. Further, economic models do not attempt to consider the implications of maximizing children's well-being and quality of life, gauging poverty solely in terms of physical states, such as raised mortality, and monetary values. As a result, they ignore the relative nature of poverty and the corresponding social injustices and anguish.

In this paper we have argued for an alternative view of child poverty. We have noted the necessity of sound empirical evidence and strong theoretical and conceptual underpinning to policy. We have stressed the importance of implementation approaches that are tailored to children's actual circumstances and needs while at the same time showing respect for children as competent actors in the face of adversity. Significant effort is also required to ensure outreach to the more vulnerable population groups and sustainability.

A paradigm has been advocated in which poverty interventions and policies are to be driven by children's experiences and perspectives and by recent social science theories on childhood and child development. Within this paradigm, childhood is conceptualized as a very diverse life phase. Emphasis is given to the importance of both individual agency and environmental forces in mediating children's competencies and susceptibilities, their development and well-being. At the same time, poverty is understood as a highly dynamic and contextualized phenomenon. It is held to be a complex and multifaceted form of adversity that is manifested not

only in material states, but also in social and psychological states, especially social exclusion and the associated sense of grievance and loss of self-efficacy. In agreement with this view, well-being and good quality of life are confirmed as more effective objectives of poverty reduction measures than mere wealth creation or sustainable livelihoods.

Recognizing that adversity is a potential or actual source of risk in children, attention is given not only to the positive, quality of life, objectives, but also to the protective mechanisms that mitigate negative impacts on children and reinforce their resilience and coping. Such mechanisms are highlighted as operating at the individual, family, community and societal levels. They include children's own cognitive and social competencies, supportive relationships with family and peers and opportunities to play a meaningful role in family and community life and in poverty-reduction and other initiatives.

Hence, the paradigm provides a basis upon which CCF can act to prevent or reduce child poverty and ameliorate its negative social, psychological and economic effects. Specific policies and activities will need to be designed in response to specific issues, conditions and circumstances affecting children in the communities and countries in which CCF operates. However, an overriding principle will be to foster and build on the idea of children as the agents of their own development and protection and contributing members of families and communities. Children's participation in social planning and action is being piloted by various NGOs and some governments in a range of situations throughout the world and CCF can learn a great deal from these initiatives. A second key principle will be the enhancement of protective mechanisms and creation of an enabling environment for children. Collaboration and partnership with children's own organizations, families and other childcare units, CSOs, childhood institutions (especially schools) and (possibly) government will be crucial to the achievement of this aim.

Christian Children's Fund (CCF) is an international child development organization which works in approximately 30 countries, assisting approximately 4.6 million children and families regardless of race, creed, religion or gender. CCF works for the well-being of children by supporting locally led initiatives that strengthen families and communities, helping them overcome poverty and protect the rights of their children. CCF works in any environment where poverty, conflict and disaster threaten the well-being of children.

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