Children and Young People

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Why do children and young people matter in development? Firstly, there are a lot of them – in Sub-Saharan Africa under-15s represent 43% of the population (Population Reference Bureau, 2015). Secondly, they are often disproportionately affected by poverty – in the UK 28% of children live in households below the poverty line (Department of Work and Pensions, 2015). Thirdly, they are the 'next generation' so their formative childhood experiences will affect their ability to deal with future developmental challenges such as environmental change. Finally, they are already taking an active role in development as workers, carers, campaigners, soldiers and even parents – according to the WHO (2015) nearly 10 percent of girls in low- and middle-income countries become mothers by age 16.

When we think about children and young people we often think in terms of sectors – health, education, social protection – however, it may be more helpful to think of them as part of families, households, and communities, which both support and impede their development. The understanding of children as passive 'becomings' rather than beings was challenged by the New Childhood Studies literature (summarised in the Ansell paper below), but authors writing on the global South have suggested that too much emphasis is now placed on children's agency and too little on the structures that constrain them.

Some key principles for thinking about children and young people relate to this:

1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) definition of a child 'as a person under 18 years of age' obscures the fact that children of different ages have very different needs and capacities, and there are different societal expectations about when they should start work or marry. Few credible generalisations can be made about 'children'.

2. Understandings of what it means to be a child and what childhood consists of also vary across contexts, despite the discursive

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influence of a western model of childhood that focuses on play and education.

3. As with adults, children are a heterogeneous group and their status as a child is intersected by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and other social markers. For example, the gender enrolment gap in education has reduced at primary level and in many countries there are more girls in primary education than boys (UNESCO Global Monitoring report, 2015), but this is not the case for secondary education, and the gap is particularly apparent for poorer girls and those in rural areas.

4. Children often experience the same pressures as women, a double or treble day of study, work and household chores and reduced access to food in periods of scarcity, and have even less power to negotiate for what they need. For this reason analyses of outcomes should go beyond the household level.

5. While the end of childhood is clear, from the UNCRC's perspective at least, the transition to adulthood is more fluid, see for example, the African National Congress's Youth League which 'is open to all persons between the ages of 14 and 35'.

6. When evaluating programmes, it is important not to assume that children will benefit, even from child-focused programmes such as Conditional Cash Transfer schemes (CCTs). There may be unintended effects on particular types of children even when the overall impact is positive; adolescent girls dropping out from school to care for younger siblings so their mothers can take up new economic opportunities.

In the readings selected below we first take a relational approach to children and young people, which moves beyond age categories to look at exchanges between the generations (Huijsman et al). We then engage with a critique of development strategies that focus solely on empowering children (Ansell et al) rather than transforming prevailing power relationships. The third reading looks at the challenges a child-focused approach presents in relation to CCTs (Roelen), and the fourth reviews the effects of CCTs and food-for-work schemes on the lives of a new development category – the adolescent girl (e.g. see for example, DFID and the Nike Foundation's 'Girl Hub' which talks about 'unleashing the girl effect' and DFID's Strategic Vision for Girls and Women, 2013).

While child nutrition and early childhood care and education are important child-focused interventions - especially for the under-fives - we don't address them here as we look instead at whether the promises of education are realised in adulthood using the example of young male students in India (Jeffery). This reading also highlights the difficulties that young people face in acquiring the resources required to make the transition to adulthood in an increasingly competitive labour market. The consequences of this are evident on an individual and a societal level and in some contexts are seen as the reason for increased participation in political violence (also known as the 'youth bulge' hypothesis).

Key Readings

Reading 1: Huijsmans, R. George, S., Gigengack, R. and Sandra J T M Evers, S.J.T.M. Theorising Age and Generation in Development: A Relational Approach. *European Journal of Development Research 26*, 163–174. doi:10.1057/ejdr.2013.65;

http://dspace.ubvu.vu.nl/bitstream/handle/1871/51268/Generationing%20Development%202014.pdf?sequence=1

This is an editorial to a special issue outlining the project of 'generationing' development which involves re-thinking development as fundamentally generational and adopting an approach that draws on relational understandings of poverty and the life course. The approach treats young people as social actors and argues that their centrality in processes of social reproduction (for example, caring for and financially supporting siblings through their education) puts them at the heart of development studies.

Reading 2: Ansell, N. (2014). Challenging empowerment: AIDS-affected southern African children and the need for a multi-level relational approach. *Journal of Health Psychology 19 (1)*, 22 – 33 DOI: 10.1177/1359105313500261

http://www.gsdrc.org/document-library/challenging-empowerment-aids-affected-southern-african-children-and-the-need-for-a-multi-level-relational-approach/

Ansell draws on empirical research with children affected by AIDS to show how empowerment envisaged as 'individual self-transformation and increased capacity to act independently' offers little basis for progressive change. She advocates instead a relational approach that recognises the need to transform power relationships at multiple levels.

Reading 3: Roelen, K. (2014) Sticks or carrots? Conditional cash transfers and their effect on child abuse and neglect. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 38(3), 372-382.

http://www.gsdrc.org/document-library/sticks-or-carrots-conditional-cash-transfers-and-their-effect-on-child-abuse-and-neglect/

Roelen contends that while CCTs and other forms of social protection have great potential for improving children's lives, we need to be alert to perverse incentives or negative side effects and more critical of our assumptions around what works and doesn't work for children.

Reading 4: Camfield, L. (2014). Growing Up in Ethiopia and Andhra Pradesh: The Impact of Social Protection Schemes on Girls' Roles and Responsibilities. *European Journal of Development Research* 26, 107–123. doi:10.1057/ejdr.2013.36

http://www.gsdrc.org/document-library/growing-up-in-ethiopia-and-andhra-pradesh-the-impact-of-social-protection-schemes-on-girls-roles-and-responsibilities/

Camfield looks at the effect on adolescent girls' roles and responsibilities of public works schemes or CCTs, which are the main forms of social protection in developing countries. She argues that while increasing participation in social protection is intended to enhance the development of girls in participating households, evidence on their school participation and workloads suggests that the reverse may be happening. The article combines a narrative review with analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, recognising that this question cannot be answered with a methodology that considers girls' schooling or workloads in isolation.

Reading 5: Jeffrey, C. Timepass: Youth, class, and time among unemployed young men in India. *American Ethnologist* 37(3), 465-81.

http://www.gsdrc.org/document-library/timepass-youth-class-and-time-among-unemployed-young-men-in-india/

Jeffrey uses the experiences and strategies of unemployed young men in the north Indian city of Meerut, framed around the notion of 'timepass', to argue for an ethnographically sensitive political-economy approach to the study of youth, culture, and neoliberal transformation, which is attuned to the durability of social inequalities. The article highlights the challenges faced by young men in attaining adulthood and limited role of education in this process.

Questions to guide reading

1. How can you take into account the potential effects on children and young people when evaluating programmes?

2. What constitutes child-sensitive social protection? Could the concept of child-sensitivity be useful extended to, e.g. education?

3. Given that the next phase of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Grand Challenges involves 'Putting women and girls at the centre of development', should we also be asking what happens to boys?

4. What is the evidence for the harmful nature of child work? Could this topic benefit from a realist-informed analysis looking at the interactions between the characteristics of the workers, the work, and the context, including prevailing social norms and children's' other responsibilities?

5. As the focus in education shifts from enrolment to attendance and attainment, how can children's retention and learning be better supported?

6. Is there a relationship between child poverty and child protection?