

child poverty

research findings for development policymakers and practitioners

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Designing child-sensitive policies

Children constitute up to 50 percent of developing country populations. Analysis of children's roles in pro-poor policy processes, however, is relatively new.

There is increasing attention on the role of different types of evidence used in policy decisions and in promoting pro-poor policy change. What type of evidence can help promote child-sensitive policies?

A growing number of research initiatives on childhood poverty, the ongoing shift among international NGOs and UNICEF away from service delivery to research-informed policy advocacy, and increasing encouragement of children's participation in policy arenas, make this an important concern.

New research from the Overseas Development Institute and the Institute of Development Studies in the UK asks questions, such as:

- Under what circumstances is evidence based on research by adult experts likely to lead to child sensitive policies?
- When is participatory research that children lead or are included in, likely to result in child-sensitive policy outcomes?
- How can both expert-led and participatory sources of evidence be effectively combined in policy processes?

The researchers argue that neither expert nor participatory-led approaches are necessarily pro-poor or child-sensitive. However, they say it is possible to identify elements that make policies child-sensitive and that this is important to strengthen policy processes on childhood poverty. They analyse two policy issues – child budget monitoring and quality service delivery – in India, Peru and South Africa to contrast the relative effectiveness of expert- and citizen-led evidence based policy (EBP).

Children and poor people need to have their 'voices' heard either by directly participating in policy processes or through evidence that informs policy processes. These processes could be either instrumentally pro-poor (they could reduce poverty faster) or intrinsically pro-poor (people have a greater say in policies that affect their lives).

The researchers conclude that at least five factors determine pro-child policy outcomes:

The policy level: expert-led EBP seems more influential at national and international levels,



A child in Ghana eats fufu, a boiled starchy dish often made with cassava or yams

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whereas citizen-led EBP has greater potential at sub-national and community policy levels.

The policy sector: policies requiring a high level of technical expertise, such as nutrition and immunisation, mostly rely on expert-generated evidence. Citizen-led evidence is more influential in policies requiring an understanding of subjective experiences, such as, what is quality education?

Audience receptivity: how well audiences and policymakers receive and accept different types of evidence matters (for example, impact evaluations persuaded finance ministries of the value of cash transfers, whereas consultations with children for the 2006 UN Study on Violence influenced that study's recommendations).

The policy change required: citizen-led evidence seems more influential in setting policy agendas (for example ensuring children are considered in budget resource allocation decisions), whereas expert generated evidence seems influential in policy formulation and implementation (for example, influencing the content of PRSPs or national development plans).

The quality of child participation: citizen-led EBP is highly dependent on this. Initial efforts to involve children in policy processes were tokenistic. Best practice guidelines have been now developed and are increasingly used.

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See also

Childhood Poverty, Politics and Policy Processes: Are Child-Sensitive Policy Processes Expert-led or Citizen-led? Evidence from Case Studies, Paper presented at the UNICEF Conference on Child Poverty and Disparities: Public Policies for Social Justice, by Nicola Jones and Andy Sumner, 2009

Taking the long view to provide social protection for children

Children are vulnerable in different ways to adults. Mainstream social protection programmes must therefore take account of their differing needs.

Recognising how deprivation and poverty are transmitted across generations and across time requires programmes to take a long-term view, tackling multiple deprivations through protective as well as transformative ways.

A paper from the Institute of Development Studies in the UK, describes how children are vulnerable and how social protection programmes to reduce vulnerability and the risks faced by low-income households have failed them.

By narrowly targeting food or cash transfers to designated 'vulnerable groups' such as female-headed households, programmes have often misdiagnosed the range of vulnerabilities facing different groups.

Child-specific vulnerabilities are linked to the inequalities children face in relation to resources, responsibilities, opportunities, rights, constraints and their ability to speak out. Child-intensified vulnerabilities, such as famine, may affect whole populations but

are more damaging for children.

Child poverty and wellbeing are multidimensional and owe much to how resources and labour are organised within households.

Social protection for various groups of vulnerable children typically assumes economic poverty is the common problem and employs short-term approaches to address household income or consumption deficits. It is rare that social protection programme design considers children and their long-term needs in relation to their caregivers and broader society.

Key findings supporting the need to take a long view of poverty are:

- While evidence indicates a proportion of the educational gap among children is genetic, social environment plays a crucial role in transmitting disadvantage.
- Poor nutrition in mothers and in early childhood is linked to stunted growth and reduced productivity at school, leading to restricted life prospects for children.
- Many programmes target early child development (for example, nutritional supplements for pregnant mothers, school dinners) with little overall impact, especially in Africa.
- In West and Central Africa many women find it hard to afford or access health services, but a parallel shortage of services means cash transfers to poor groups may not work.

In most of sub-Saharan Africa a small minority is much better off than the rest, a trend reflected in child poverty indicators for education and health. Efforts have to focus

on the broad mass of the population if they are to be effective. But the persistence of child poverty has as much to do with lack of action to address structural inequalities to break the cycle of intergenerational transmission.

While food and cash transfers are important for households, three alternative approaches to address child vulnerability focus on:

- transformative Social Protection for children that aims to level the initial inequalities over time, for instance by targeting attitudes and norms prejudicial to girls' wellbeing
- legalising children through birth registration to help them claim their rights; in South Africa registration is necessary to secure Child Support Grants
- child-sensitive social protection through an integrated approach using protective and responsive services, legislation, transfers and insurance, while reaching those most in need.

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See also

'Taking the Long View: What Does a Child Focus Add to Social Protection?' by Rachel Sabates Wheeler, Stephen Devereux and Anthony Hodges in *IDS Bulletin* 40 (1), edited by Joy Moncrieffe (January 2009)

Nepalese children speak out on climate change

Nepalese children have a clear understanding of the impacts of climate change upon their lives.

Children have a right to participate in climate change debates and adaptation programmes, and governments should listen to them.

'I think that the way we have depleted the forest in recent years is the main reason for flooding,' argues Soma Kumari Rokaya, a 14-year-old from Matehiya in the Banke district of Nepal. 'The most important priority for me is to improve the roads and bridges in the village,' adds Dikisangbo Tamang, aged 13, from the same community. These children have valuable opinions on what their communities need to adapt to changing weather patterns: an end to deforestation, access to agricultural technologies, better infrastructure, increased awareness of climate change and good disaster risk reduction.

Working with partners from ActionAid Nepal, researchers from the project – Children in a Changing Climate – at the Institute of Development Studies in the UK, gathered children's views on climate change. They used participatory video, focus groups and interviews to enable children

from four poor Nepalese communities to express their views on changing weather patterns and the possibilities for adaptation.

Nepal is particularly vulnerable to excessive rainfall, drought, landslides and floods. Climate change is expected to have huge impacts on water resources, hydropower, agriculture, biodiversity, forestry, health and education throughout the country.

The report summarises the effects children are already experiencing on livelihoods, health, education, emotional wellbeing and access to water within their families and their communities. In their own words, children describe how their families are coping through crop diversification and micro-loans, through the development of farming cooperatives, new irrigation technologies and improved drainage systems, and by storing food and generating new business opportunities. They also describe the constraints: poverty; lack of infrastructure; forced relocation; little access to markets; poor irrigation.

The researchers note five key priorities for climate change adaptation amongst the children involved in the study:

- An end to deforestation, through tree planting and environmental conservation programmes at the local level.
- Access to better agricultural technologies to increase productivity.
- Improvement of basic infrastructure: bridges so they can attend school during floods; embankments and walls to reduce flooding and landslides.

- Better awareness of climate change impacts, through peer education and training.
- Good disaster risk reduction programmes from local authorities.

The report concludes with four key recommendations to enable governments and policymakers to uphold children's rights in the context of climate change:

- Listen to children. They understand the impacts of climate change on their lives and they have a right to be heard at all levels from their community to international climate change debates.
- Work with children on climate change adaptation measures to protect their rights to life, safety, participation and development.
- Offer scholarships, stipends or fee waivers to ensure that families do not take children out of school as a coping strategy.
- Include the needs of children in National Adaptation Programmes of Action consultations and discussions.

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See also

Child Voices: Children of Nepal Speak Out on Climate Change Adaptation, Children in a Changing Climate Research Report, by Dhruba Gautam and Katy Oswald, November 2008 (PDF)
www.childreninachangingclimate.org/docs/Child%20Voices_np.pdf

Children's needs for prevention and protection from HIV and AIDS

Global AIDS policy has focused on treatment and prevention amongst adults. International development strategies have focused on poverty reduction and economic growth. New debates, such as those over whether money should be invested in HIV and AIDS programmes or general health systems, continue to neglect children.

In Africa, around 12 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. In some populations of sub-Saharan Africa, one fifth of all girls are infected by HIV. In Dar es Salaam, many adolescent girls face constant sexual harassment and several seek economic protection through sexual relationships with richer men. Government and donor responses have been inadequate, marginalising the needs of such children.

According to the introduction in the latest *IDS Bulletin*, the challenge for policymakers is not simply to reach the 12 million children whose families have been affected by HIV and AIDS. The authors claim that the challenge is much bigger. Policymakers must look beyond the category of 'orphan'. They need to design policies and interventions that address the different needs of all poor people as well as vulnerable children in aids-affected societies.

The authors note the significant proportions and vulnerabilities of older children amongst those affected by the

epidemic. They review findings of research on HIV prevention among adolescents. They also ask what makes good policy relating to children and AIDS and how to make responses affordable. Reviewing research from South Africa, Tanzania, Cambodia, Zambia and Brazil they find that:

- HIV prevention among children is failing. Structural measures are needed to change the circumstances in which children are made vulnerable – at work, school, and by local marriage conditions.
- Poverty is the backdrop to the HIV and AIDS crisis but not the cause.
- Interventions and policies need to reach children primarily through families but also through education, health services and community groups.
- Most children of concern are 11 or older and migrant children tend to be ignored.
- Appropriate responses vary according to diverse circumstances (epidemics, income levels, inequalities, government service provisions) and should be designed with local participation and ownership, including with young people.
- HIV prevention among adolescents should focus on social, economic and cultural contexts of vulnerability, and not primarily on behavioural change.

The research concludes that social policies for children affected by AIDS can only work against a backdrop of equitable universal service provision for all children. Recommendations include:

- Policies should be simple – those that can be most rapidly, effectively and efficiently adopted and scaled-up.
- Policies should be politically sustainable. Popular policies are easier to adopt, implement and hold to high standards.
- Policies with wide social goals, such as education or poverty reduction, should



Children living with HIV observe International HIV and AIDS Orphans Day India, at a drop-in centre run by a network of People Living with HIV and AIDS

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be AIDS sensitive (ensuring access for those affected and addressing problems associated with HIV).

- Process is vital. Policies driven nationally and managed with transparency and civil society support are the most successful.

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See also

'Children, AIDS and Development Policy', *IDS Bulletin* 39 (5), pages 1 to 9, by Alex de Waal, Jerker Edström and Masuma Mamdani, 2008 (PDF)
https://cms.ids.ac.uk/UserFiles/file/publications/bulletin/1deWaal39_5.pdf

Rising food prices catch children in poverty trap

Food prices have increased dramatically in world and local markets since 2006. Children are suffering as a result.

In Ethiopia, where food prices have risen by more than 50 percent in the last year, around a third of rural children are chronically malnourished. As a result, these children are gaining lower grades at school. Malnourishment is impacting their cognitive development and their reading, writing and maths skills. Poor and malnourished children from Ethiopia, Peru, India and Vietnam also have fewer friends at school than their peers, lower self-esteem and lower aspirations for their lives. They are caught in a poverty trap.

Young Lives, an international project, is one of the few studies to measure children's own perceptions alongside the material dimensions of poverty. A Young Lives Policy Brief investigates the impact of the food crisis upon the project's existing cohort of children in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. The study confirms already-

documented impacts of food shortages upon children's growth and educational outcomes in the wider literature. It also highlights the likely impact upon psychosocial indicators. It compares data from the same children when they were 7 and 12 years old.

Key findings include:

- The current food crisis is likely to have a short-term impact on family spending (food, healthcare and education) and a long-term impact of stunted growth amongst young children (especially those switching from breastfeeding to family foods).
- Malnourishment affects brain development and educational outcomes (illustrated by lower reading and writing skills and grade completion) in all four countries.
- Chronic malnutrition results in reduced self-esteem, lower aspirations (the poorest children do not aim beyond primary education) and feelings of exclusion (stunted children have fewer friends and are excluded from playground games).
- These educational and psychosocial impacts can lead to lower earning potential in later life, catching children in a poverty trap and transmitting poverty to the next generation.

The author argues that the food crisis requires an immediate response. He urges

policymakers to plan and implement social protection measures that focus on the short-term nutritional needs of children and the long-term needs of poor families. These should include:

- Programmes to ensure adequate nutrition in the first two years of life (for example, promoting breastfeeding and complementary feeding).
- School feeding programmes for older children, such as the Midday Meal Scheme in India, which can reduce hunger and improve school performance in the short term.
- Social protection interventions for families, such as cash transfer and employment programmes, carefully targeted to benefit children.
- Long-term measures to reduce food prices, such as support to food production programmes.

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See also

Children and the Food Price Crisis, Young Lives Policy Brief 5, by Stefan Dercon, September 2008 (PDF)
www.younglives.org.uk/pdf/publication-section-pdfs/policy-briefs/YL-PB5-Children_and_the_food_price-crisis.pdf

International Conference

Child Poverty and Disparities: Public Policies for Social Justice, Cairo, Egypt, 19 – 20 January, 2009

Many countries have been unable to set an economic agenda that eliminates poverty at the rate foreseen by the MDGs and which is required to achieve the rights of the child. In addition, inequalities have persisted or even increased.

Children constitute around 40 percent of the Egypt's population. Egypt was one of the first twenty countries that signed the Convention on Child Rights in 1989. In the same year, the Egyptian president declared 1989 to 1999 as the first decade for Egyptian child protection, followed again by a second decade from 2000 to 2010.

Observatories for child and adolescent rights are being considered as an instrument to monitor and analyse the well-being of children and to prepare policy advice to ensure evidence-based, results-based and rights-based policy design and implementation. The National Observatory for Child Rights is one such observatory. Its partners, the Egyptian Cabinet, Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC), The National Council for Childhood & Motherhood (NCCM), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are organising an international conference: Child Poverty and Disparities: Public Policies for Social Justice, in Cairo, Egypt (19 – 20 January, 2009).

First of its kind in Egypt, this conference brings together academics, policymakers and practitioners to discuss issues around inclusive and child-sensitive public social and economic policies.

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Alongside the family and maternal support, meals are an important factor for a healthy development and quality of life of children.

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Children having a midday meal at a school in India

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www.id21.org

Useful web links

Young Lives
www.younglives.org.uk/

Children in a Changing Climate
www.childreninachangingclimate.org/

The Joint Learning Initiative on Children and HIV/AIDS
www.jlica.org/

Global Study on Child Poverty and Disparities
<http://unicefglobalstudy.blogspot.com/>

Research Network on Child Poverty
<http://children-and-poverty.blogspot.com/>

International Childhood and Youth Research Network
www.icyrnet.net/

Childwatch International Research Network
www.childwatch.uio.no/

Child Rights Information Network
www.crin.org/

Equity for Children
www.equityforchildren.org/

More resources from id21

Child Poverty Highlights also available in PDF format
www.id21.org/publications/index.html#special

More research highlights on children
www.id21.org

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