

Childhood Poverty in Kyrgyzstan

Initial Literature Review

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Overview of CHIP Research Agenda in Kyrgyzstan

This literature review is the first stage of a programme of research by the Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre (CHIP). It is part of a wider programme of research and policy work on childhood poverty taking place in Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, China and India and the UK. It is funded by the UK Government Department of International Development, Save the Children UK, Save the Children Alliance and the Chronic Poverty Research Centre.¹

The two-year study seeks to understand the nature and causes of childhood poverty in Kyrgyzstan and how it varies geographically across the country. It also examines the extent of intergenerational poverty transmission, and whether chronic poverty is developing in Kyrgyzstan. A third focus of the study is the impact of local, state and donor responses in addressing this poverty. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following key questions:

- How does poverty affect children and young people in Kyrgyzstan and how do they experience it?
- What are the key reasons why so many children are living in poverty?
- How do key livelihood or coping strategies affect child wellbeing? What are the immediate and possible long-term effects?
- How do childhood poverty and children's future life chances vary between mainly agricultural and mainly pastoral areas, isolated industrial/ former industrial towns and urban areas? Isolated and less isolated areas? Mountainous and low-lying areas?
- What evidence is there that intergenerational poverty cycles are taking place or developing? Which groups are vulnerable to falling into intergenerational poverty cycles?
- How far are existing social and economic policies causing/ helping tackle childhood poverty?

¹ For further information on CHIP's programme of work see www.childhoodpoverty.org

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Executive Summary

This paper reviews existing evidence concerning childhood poverty in Kyrgyzstan. It discusses the factors contributing to childhood poverty and the main activities which aim to tackle it. The review is principally intended to inform a programme of primary research which examines childhood poverty and children's life chances in more detail; it is also hoped that it will be of use to practitioners and policy-makers. The main findings are as follows:

1. The problem of childhood poverty in Kyrgyzstan is widespread; it is not only a problem of relatively small vulnerable groups.

- Sixty per cent of rural children and 54 per cent of urban children under 10 live in poverty; 21 per cent of rural children and 12 per cent of urban children under 10 live in severe poverty (using National Statistics Committee, 2001 figures and poverty lines). For children under one, the most vulnerable age group, these figures are even higher – 65 per cent of rural children and 57 per cent of urban children live in poverty. In other words, a greater proportion of children live in poverty than people of any other age group.
- This means that over half the nation's children and youth live in households with incomes too low to satisfy their minimum needs and between one fifth and one quarter of rural children live in households with incomes too low to buy enough food.
- Though some aspects of child health (e.g. mortality rates) have been improving, poor health and nutrition continues to affect large numbers of Kyrgyzstani children and thus affect both their childhoods and future prospects. In the late 1990s, 16 per cent of urban and 29 per cent of rural children were stunted, while 19 per cent of urban and 28 per cent of rural children had severe or moderate anaemia. Fifty two per cent of northern adolescents and 87 per cent of southern adolescents showed symptoms of iodine deficiency.
- Children's overall school attendance has declined since 1989, particularly at secondary level. Though the precise numbers are disputed, most observers agree with these trends.

- Since independence, there has been a pronounced increase in child labour with children working in agriculture, herding, trading, as market porters, in cafes, as domestic servants, collecting rubbish and scrap metal for resale and begging. Approximately 50 per cent of child workers do not attend school.
- It is clear that some children are working in very dangerous occupations such as prostitution; some are trafficked out of the country to do so. Very little information about this is available. However, an estimated 1 in 10 prostitutes in Bishkek and those trafficked outside the country is under 18.

2. Gaps in knowledge about childhood poverty and intergenerational poverty

It is widely recognised that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the shift to a market economy have led to a substantial increase in poverty, and are critical reasons for the emergence of poverty. A range of services which protected children and promoted their development has disappeared, as well as affected them through increased family poverty. Less clear, but also important is the impact of poverty on how far families and communities are able to support one another and protect children, and on changes in attitudes towards children. Families in poverty are forced to make choices for survival that may undermine their children's wellbeing; not enough is known about the impact of family coping strategies on children or the kinds of support that could prevent negative impacts.

Little is known about if and how poverty has been carried forward from the Soviet period to the present, and the extent to which people who became poor after independence have been stuck in poverty from which they cannot escape. Similarly, very little is known about whether people who were poor as children or adolescents – in the Soviet era or since independence – have grown up to be poor as adults and the implications of this for their own families. Though there are assumptions about this, there is little evidence.

If a chronically poor section of the population has developed in Kyrgyzstan, understanding why and how this can be tackled is very important for policy, as chronic poverty can have serious long-term effects and also undermines goals of equal opportunities for all.

3. Policy

Two main kinds of initiatives are expected to help reduce childhood poverty. The National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS) stresses that macroeconomic growth is expected to be the main means of poverty reduction, improving the situation of children by improving that of their families. Ensuring that growth is genuinely pro-poor is therefore vital – implying that measures to promote regional development, employment creation, small and medium size enterprise development, and supporting smallholder farming must be among the top priorities for implementation. Increased levels of funding for key social services (health, education, social protection) are also crucial, and depend on commitments of the international community as well as the Government.

The other set of initiatives is focused on individual children, often from particular groups such as ‘street children’ or ‘families at risk’, and take a social work / social welfare approach. These provide material or practical and social / emotional support to such children and families and are often very small-scale. This is the main approach of NGOs, as well as government social workers. Though such action is of great practical importance to families in poverty, it must be seen as one part of the web of actions needed to tackle childhood poverty. If social work becomes the main response to childhood poverty, a view of childhood poverty as a problem of individual families with difficulties (‘risk’ families) could become entrenched, and could draw attention away from necessary economic and social investment.

I. Introduction

This literature review is the first stage of a programme of research by the Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre (CHIP). The two-year study seeks to understand the nature and causes of childhood poverty in Kyrgyzstan and how it varies geographically across the country. It also examines the extent of intergenerational poverty transmission, and whether chronic poverty is developing in Kyrgyzstan. A third focus of the study is the impact of local, state and donor responses in addressing this poverty.

This review aims to provide an analysis of existing material relating to poverty and poverty reduction, with a particular emphasis on understanding childhood poverty in the Kyrgyzstani context. This involves:

- analysing available statistical and qualitative data on poverty from social research conducted by Kyrgyzstani state agencies, international and non-governmental organisations (NGOs);
- examining children-related aspects of poverty by looking at key areas (i.e. nutrition, healthcare, education, social inclusion);
- and analysing legislation, government social and economic policies, and the activities of international and non-governmental organizations in areas related to childhood poverty and wellbeing.

The review will attempt to provide preliminary answers to some of the major research questions of the programme. For example:

- what is the nature of childhood poverty in Kyrgyzstan and what are the main factors underlying it?
- is childhood poverty a purely transitional phenomenon or it does it have some roots in the Soviet period?

- is there evidence that intergenerational poverty cycles are developing in Kyrgyzstan?
- what are the main reasons for so many children living in poverty?
- what are families' key coping strategies and how do they affect the wellbeing of children?
- to what extent are existing policies helping to tackle childhood poverty?

The review aims to prepare a basis for CHIP's primary research by establishing the credibility and reliability of data and information, and identifying gaps and key areas for further research. It also aims to provide an overview of existing research for individuals and organisations concerned about poverty, particularly childhood poverty, in Kyrgyzstan.

2. Understanding Childhood Poverty in Kyrgyzstan

2.1. Key Terms

In this paper, and in the CHIP Kyrgyzstan primary research, we use the terms poverty, childhood poverty, chronic poverty and intergenerational transmission of poverty as follows:

Poverty

How poverty should be defined and measured has been a matter of debate for at least a century, with distinctions drawn between absolute and relative poverty; between lack of income or other forms of material deprivation, and wider forms of disadvantage including powerlessness. This debate cannot be discussed here. However, given the nature of children's development processes, it is critical to take account of the multiple aspects of poverty, as deprivation in one area (e.g. nutrition) can affect wellbeing in another (e.g. health or ability to learn). In this report, we use poverty in its wider sense – to refer to a linked material and social deprivation, rather than simply a lack of income. We also make use of 'subjective' assessments of wellbeing, derived from qualitative analysis, as well as statistical measurements of different aspects of poverty.

Childhood Poverty

CHIP uses the term childhood poverty as distinct from child poverty to emphasise poverty during a specific period of the life cycle, rather than to denote that the poverty of children is a specific form of poverty. CHIP argues that the poverty of children is inseparable from adult poverty, and the poverty of families and communities. The reason for focusing on childhood is that it can have long-term effects – short periods of poverty in childhood can affect a person's future life as well as future generations (CHIP, 2003). In both this literature review and the primary research, we focus on poverty experienced in childhood where children are deprived of access to basic needs and / or opportunities for their development. This deprivation may be the result of a variety of economic, geographical, transitional, socio-cultural and structural factors, and is centrally linked to the distribution of resources and opportunities both nationally and internationally, and within households and communities.

In this review and in the wider programme of research, the CHIP Kyrgyzstan team focuses on the 55 per cent of children in Kyrgyzstan who are living in poverty in rural and urban areas. This review also reports on the situation of specific groups of children who are often considered particularly vulnerable, such as street children, disabled children, working children and the children of migrants. However, neither this review nor the primary research will specifically focus on these groups. Much is already known about the situation of these groups of children, and although there is still much to be done, there is a high level of both political and social awareness, of the problems which they face and some action to tackle these.²

Instead, CHIP's research will concentrate on the large number of 'invisible' children living in poverty, who may be at risk of deprivation and harm that will affect their future lives. The research aims both to investigate and raise awareness among policy-makers and the international and NGO communities, of the urgency of this problem. It also aims to clarify how children experience poverty, and how factors such as family structure and the position of children in society affect childhood poverty.

Chronic Poverty

Hulme and Shepherd (2003: 405) define chronic poverty as 'occurring when an individual experiences significant capability deprivations for a period of five years or more'. Though the choice of a 5-year period is rather arbitrary, there is evidence, they argue that 'people who stay poor for five years or more have a high probability of remaining poor for the rest of their lives' (ibid). Hulme and Shepherd point out that it is helpful to distinguish the length of time spent in poverty, and thus whether particular people are always poor, usually poor, live close to the poverty line and often move above or below it, occasionally poor, never poor, or always wealthy. The distinction is particularly important in the context of countries in transition, in which the dynamics of poverty may be very volatile but where there is some evidence of the emergence of a group of chronically poor people. Special attention should therefore be paid to the factors responsible for the potential shifts of households from occasionally poor to always poor and the other way round. Given the

2 For example, there are several NGOs devoted to the problems of street children and disabled women and children. There have been a number of research projects on the issues of street children (research on street children in Bishkek and Osh was conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre), children of migrants (an AUCA Sociology Department project), and working children (a SIAR project). There is also a "Raising social awareness" campaign conducted by UNESCO which includes weekly newspaper articles devoted to the problems of street children.

potentially severe effects on children's development of a period of poverty in childhood, it is vital to gain a better understanding of the reasons why some households have become chronically poor.

Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty

Intergenerational poverty is a particularly severe form of chronic poverty, as it implies poverty transmission from one generation to another with little or no chances of escape. Vleminckx et al (2001: 1) describe the phenomenon of intergenerational transmission of poverty as 'those who grow up in disadvantaged families are more likely to suffer unemployment, low pay, and poor health in adulthood and to transfer this poverty of opportunity to their own children. Thus, poverty can grind down generation after generation'. A high incidence of intergenerational transmission of poverty may indicate both economic and social policies which fail to tackle poverty, a rigid social structure and a high degree of inequality in society. Breaking intergenerational poverty cycles is thus a challenging task which may involve both macro-level policy change and changes to prevailing values and practices.

Poverty experienced during childhood and adolescence may increase the risk of intergenerational poverty cycles. Childhood is a particularly important period some chances (such as physical development or education) missed during these important years may be very difficult or impossible to regain in the future, thus increasing a child's chance of being trapped in chronic poverty. Furthermore, during childhood, a person develops mental structures which he or she will use for interpreting reality and making choices later in life. It is a time when the person develops beliefs and values, some internalised from his/her parents and the surrounding community which will affect his or her life aspirations, perception of interests and life chances and choices (Harper, Marcus and Moore, 2003). These may have a long-term impact on how people cope with poverty, and the strategies they engage in to get by or escape from poverty.

2.2. Emergence and persistence of poverty in Kyrgyzstan

To understand the emergence and persistence of poverty in Kyrgyzstan, one needs to draw

on insights from general analytical frameworks of poverty, which explain poverty in terms of international factors such as the functioning of the global capitalist economy, and issues of human capital development. These need to be complemented with analysis of the ways in which the systemic changes and major institutional restructuring of transition have contributed to the emergence and persistence of poverty.

The emergence of poverty has to do with the question of why people become poor, while persistence of poverty deals with the question why people remain poor. General theories of poverty tend to deal more with the latter question, since they have mainly been applied to societies where poverty is a long-standing phenomenon. In post-socialist countries, however, understanding the reasons behind the emergence of poverty are vital, and may help explain its persistence, as they are likely to have longer-term implications. Thus, to produce a better account of the emergence of poverty overall, and specifically among children, in Kyrgyzstan, one needs to look at the situation which existed in Soviet Kirgizia, as well as processes which have been triggered by the communist collapse.

While Soviet statistical data on the issue of poverty is unambiguous – in a country of general equality, poverty was a non-existent phenomenon – many Western researchers report that there were varying levels of poverty, both among different republics of the USSR and between different groups of the population. Falkingham (1998), citing Atkinson and Micklewright (1992) reports that in Kirgizia, the poorest republic after Tajikistan, and strongly dependent on subsidies from Moscow, roughly 30 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line. The question is whether the same people who were poor then are also poor now.

Undoubtedly, many new, 'transition-specific' poverty groups have emerged, such as 'street children', and workers in various sectors whose jobs have disappeared with privatisation and restructuring. Similarly, many former middle class state employees and service providers, such as teachers or doctors, have been pushed into poverty as pressures on state budgets have eroded the value of wages (Mihalev and Heinrich, 1999). At the same time, the main group which was largely poor during the Soviet era – rural people involved in agriculture – remains

poor today (discussed in section 3). Poverty is higher in rural than urban areas. Substantial anecdotal evidence suggests that people who were well placed within the Soviet economic and political structure (e.g. as enterprise directors or part of the party elites) were able to secure their livelihoods and wellbeing at independence (Abazov, 1999). This suggests both a continuity of poverty and wealth, which may be intergenerationally reproduced, and an emergence of poverty related to the specific circumstances of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. A multi-dimensional analysis of poverty makes this particularly apparent, as the collapse in a wide range of services which contributed to people's quality of life is a major factor in understanding poverty (Counterpart Consortium / World Bank, 1999). CHIP's primary research is attempting to clarify the circumstances in which poverty among families with children was inherited from the Soviet era, and those circumstances in which it is a new phenomenon.

Whatever the extent of transmission of poverty from the Soviet period, it is undeniable that a specific set of factors have led to the emergence of poverty since independence. The break-up of the Soviet Union, which entailed the breach of a complicated system of economic interdependencies between the republics and the loss of many of Kyrgyzstan's traditional export markets, and the loss of subsidies equivalent to approximately 13 per cent of the republic's GDP (UNDP, 2002a: 17) has had an enormous impact. It has also led to enormous transformation in all spheres of life – economic, social, political and governmental - creating huge pressures across society and on government.

There has been a raging debate over the past fifteen years about whether a 'big-bang' or 'shock-therapy' approach or more gradual changes is the most effective approach to transition. A small country with very few resources, Kyrgyzstan was dependent on foreign aid and had to accept the conditionality packages of IFIs (International Financial Institutions). Combined with a preference for liberalisation among the political elite, Kyrgyzstan has opted for a 'shock-therapy' approach with relatively rapid economic and institutional reforms. Most importantly, these include the liberalisation of prices, withdrawal of subsidies, widespread privatisation and strong efforts to integrate into the global economy, with the expectation that rapid transition will be more effective in the medium term, despite inevitable short-term costs to certain groups of

the population. What might have happened had Kyrgyzstan pursued a gradual approach to transition can never be known. However, it is undeniable that the speed of reforms and the way in which they were carried out have contributed to the increase in poverty, which reached 63 per cent in 1998 and has subsequently declined to around 50 per cent of the population (Kararro and Ibragimova, 2000).

That poverty should increase with transition, and particularly the privatisation of public property, was to be expected, even if the scale of the increase could not be predicted. Furthermore, the workings of the market economy are such that, unless there is targeted intervention and redistribution, the winners will get richer and the losers will get poorer with time. This happens even when there are signs of positive development and economic growth at a macro-level because there is 'some degree of differential benefit from growth, with some people structurally excluded from participating in processes that lead to improved well-being' (Hulme and Shepherd, 2003).

The reasons for structural exclusion are many. In addition to those widely recognised from studies of poverty worldwide, such as those related to factors such as old age, youth, disability or belonging to a minority ethnic group, a number of factors are specific to the situation of a small, isolated post-socialist country. In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan specific factors include the asset base with which people entered transition, or were able to secure during privatisation, which was often related to the position they or their families occupied during the late Soviet period. Though privatisation experiences varied substantially across the country, many observers report a biased distribution of assets, with poorer or less powerful people obtaining poorer quality land, land in several different locations, insufficient animals for a viable flock or receiving no share in previously collective farm equipment³. They also relate to the pressures faced by newly privatised enterprises, which lost their markets during the collapse and have had to compete with cheap foreign produce. The inabilities of these enterprises to compete continues to have a serious effect – from 1999 to 2002, privatised enterprises shed 20,000 jobs (GoK, 2002). The related collapse or privatisation of key technical (e.g. veterinary) services and social services (e.g. kindergartens) has further contributed to fragile livelihoods and reduced social wellbeing.

3 <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/development/latest/factsheet1.html>, 14 November 2003

Another critical factor may be rapid changes in valued forms of 'human capital'. Though levels of academic and technical education were high in Soviet Kirgizia, with the collapse of the Soviet economic and institutional system, many people's skills and knowledge have been rendered obsolete. As a result, certain categories of people, particularly factory and other industrial workers, certain groups of engineers, teachers and other scientists have lost their jobs, and been pushed into poverty. Similarly, many herders and farmers, used to specialised jobs within a farm-wide division of labour, have had difficulties in becoming independent producers. This is a particular concern for older age groups, in which it becomes more difficult to learn new skills and find subsequent employment. Some new forms of entrepreneurship, such as *chelnoki*, who travel abroad to buy supplies, have taken in some of the unemployed former plant and factory workers, engineers and academics. However, the new market economy called for many other, primarily managerial-level professionals, whose development takes years of training. Though the education system has responded, retraining has often not been available to older workers. This can have implications for young families, as well as older people, since young families often rely on support from older relatives.

Many of these factors also help explain why poverty persists. Over the longer-term, several more general factors may also be important. At the macro-level, these include the structurally disadvantaged position of Kyrgyzstan in the global economy (Zhukov, 2000), and limited, not particularly broad-based economic growth which maintain severe discrepancies between urban and rural areas and different socio-economic groups, despite efforts to overcome them. The overall decline in GDP has meant vastly reduced resources for key social services – for example, in 2001 government expenditure on education constituted only 3.9 per cent of GDP, compared with 7.6 per cent in 1990 (UNDP, 2002a: 24).

These fiscal pressures have been exacerbated by debt servicing pressures, though the rescheduling of Kyrgyzstan's debt negotiated in early 2002 may reduce this constraint. Increased military expenditure may also constrain social investment (UNICEF, 2002). At the meso-level, poor governance, including corruption and non-implementation of reforms, discrimination based on

gender and other social differences, and a young demographic structure may also be important. At the micro-level, as will be discussed in section 3, issues related to family size and structure may also play a role.

Cultural or psychological factors and values related both to the Soviet legacy and longer-standing cultural traditions are widely believed to be important reasons for poverty persistence in Kyrgyzstan – by both policy-makers and poor people alike. The comprehensiveness of social provision during the Soviet period, and the extent to which the system provided security, are often cited as the main reasons for the persistence of poverty – people are alleged to expect the state to provide, and thus to be unwilling or unable to act on their own behalf. Thus policy-makers view stimulating people's own efforts as the vital element for poverty reduction (e.g. Kim, 2003). In assessing this argument, it is important to distinguish views and actions – while action to reduce poverty may be regarded as the government's role, this does not stop people from engaging in a wide range of activities in an attempt to secure their livelihoods and wellbeing. Some of these, and their potential impact on children, are discussed in section 2.3.2. below.

On the positive side, cultural traditions of reciprocity and mutual aid have been vital for helping reduce the impact of poverty. That said, there is evidence that access to such social resources is declining because, in many cases, their social contacts are in a similar position (Kuehnast and Dudwick, 2001). It is also important to consider which of the values cherished by the population find their way into state policies, particularly those related to social welfare, education and health. Phipps (2001) in her study on values, policies and child wellbeing, found that there is a significant correlation between people's perceptions of the causes of poverty (e.g. bad luck, laziness, injustice, inevitability) and the generosity of social transfer programmes. In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, there appears to be a disparity between popular support for quality social services and a substantial decline in provision. This may change with commitments to increased health, education and social protection spending in the NPRS (GoK, 2002).

2.3. Understanding the emergence and persistence of childhood poverty in Kyrgyzstan

The prerequisites for child wellbeing and, conversely, the causes of childhood poverty, lie in a variety of strongly connected environments at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.

Family

In most cases, children's experiences of poverty depend on the situation of their family. Family access to material and social resources (including from other family members) has a significant impact on children's wellbeing. The way in which family access to resources affects children varies substantially depending on family structure, power distribution and divisions of labour within the family, child care practices, attitudes to children and the importance attached to children's education, as well as a general set of values informing basic socialisation processes. Their impact may differ according to the gender, ability, personality and aptitude of the child, as well as the views of parents or carers towards individual children.

Community

The structure of communities, the way in which members interact, the kinds of social capital networks that exist, the extent of commitment to work for the public good, mutual help and community responsibility towards children, all contribute to childhood wellbeing, directly through support to individual children's development and indirectly through helping to cushion the effects of poverty.

Social policies and programmes

Provision by the state and other national and international organisations are of crucial importance and may alleviate childhood poverty by providing vital services for human development, and supporting an inclusive, cohesive, stable society. The failure of such services and programmes may exacerbate childhood poverty.

Economic policy environment

Although clearly a critical determinant of child wellbeing, economic growth will not necessarily have a positive impact on poor children without complementary social investment. The situation of poor children may be unchanged or worsened if growth is unequal, only distributing benefits to certain parts of the population, or is achieved through adults working long hours and spending little time with children.

Applying this framework to the situation of children in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan helps to understand the emergence and persistence of poverty among children; how particular policy changes may be affecting children; and why current policy priorities may be insufficient to secure child wellbeing across various social groups. It also provides a useful framework for comparing the current situation with that of the Soviet era.

2.3.1. Childhood poverty in the past

How far is childhood poverty and deprivation a new phenomenon in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan?

How is it related to and / or different from childhood wellbeing in the late Soviet era?

Considering each of the elements of the framework laid out above suggests the following:

The economic environment which secured parental employment, and the existence of free health-care and school education, free or affordable pre-school care, and social benefits to families with many children allowed an acceptable level of material wellbeing for most of the population. A widespread ethic of social and community responsibility for children in general, not simply children of one's own family, also acted to promote child wellbeing (Markowitz, 2000). This resulted in numerous programme aimed at promoting children's citizenship and moral development, and thus providing leisure and developmental opportunities, albeit with a specific political slant.

However, there were nonetheless disadvantaged families. Those with many children, despite social benefits, were believed still to have a worse standard of living than those with one or two children, and although no comparable statistics are available, would probably have been placed

below the poverty line. There was also a differentiation in wellbeing levels according to the stage in the life-cycle, with many families with small children having difficulties in making ends meet, and often being unable to secure their own place of residence for 10 – 15 years after their wedding date. Children of alcoholics or abusive parents, families with chronic health problems, and disabled children who were often sent to institutions, were also disadvantaged compared to their peers. Continuing gender discrimination also affected some children's futures. Arguably, the Soviet emphasis on work, and women's 'double burden' of work and childcare reduced the time available for parents to spend with children. This said, compared with the stresses of the 'transition' era, Kuehnast (1997) suggests that 'by 1994 it seemed that Soviet socialism had allowed for the continuation of Kyrgyz family-centred practices much more than capitalism did' (Kuehnast:1997: 134-5).

2.3.2. Factors underlying childhood poverty in independent Kyrgyzstan

Using this framework and drawing on the analysis of poverty emergence and persistence discussed above, the following appear particularly critical factors.

Economic environment:

As outlined earlier, it is clear that the overall economic environment has led to large-scale unemployment, many people being forced to make a living in the informal sector and a substantial rise in the prices for many basic goods. Economic pressures of this kind lead to families adopting a range of coping strategies, some of which may undermine their or individuals' long-term wellbeing, even if they help to get by in the immediate term. For example, research in Osh and Jalalabad in 1994 revealed that poor families eat more monotonous diets, and have cut out 'luxuries' such as tea or meat; many sell all dairy products rather than keeping them for consumption (Howell, 1996). This can have immediate and long-term consequences for child nutrition, discussed in section 3.2. below. Howell's research and the Consultations with the Poor study (Counterpart Consortium/ World Bank, 1999) also revealed that children in poor families share clothes and shoes; in winter lack of shoes can prevent children from attending

school. A shift towards wood (which can be gathered for free) for fuel may contribute to both respiratory diseases and environmental degradation. Degraded environmental resources, of course, contribute to poverty in the longer term. As well as sacrificing consumption, or making use of goods which are free but require considerable investments of time, poor families are also having to sell off the assets that secure their futures. For example, the Consultations with the Poor study (Counterpart Consortium/ World Bank, 1999) documents families who were forced to choose between selling seed potatoes to raise cash so that children could attend school, and having a crop to plant the next year.

In some families, children have had to start doing paid work to help families make ends meet (see section 3.3. below), while many others have taken on more home-based work, such as looking after animals, cultivating land and gathering fuel. Other strategies to make ends meet may also affect children's wellbeing – migration, for example, can split up families and result in children having reduced access to education – although it can also bring in extra resources which support children's wellbeing (see section 3.3.). Another important coping strategy is sending a child to live with richer relatives, where he or she would do domestic work, in exchange for their food, clothes and sometimes education. Further analysis of the coping strategies of poor families is important for a clearer understanding of how poverty is undermining children's futures and how intergenerational cycles of poverty may be broken.

The fiscal problems which the government has experienced over the transition era have led to low public sector wages, and to under-funding of key services. As a result, formal and informal charges for key services, such as health, education, and electricity have increased and created a further strain on poorer families, reduced living standards and, in some cases, meant that children cannot access essential services. The impacts of poverty on children's school attendance are discussed in section 3.2 below; there is also evidence of poor families delaying treatment for diseases for as long as possible and relying principally on herbal or spiritual treatments (Counterpart Consortium/ World Bank, 1999; Leuze, 2000). Enterprise restructuring and constrained state budgets have also led to the closure of many services directly oriented towards child development, including kindergartens, milk kitchens which supplemented child

development, and sports and other leisure facilities (ADB, 1998). Though some NGO activities attempt to provide developmental opportunities for children, they are usually on a small-scale. Private facilities are concentrated in urban areas, and tend to be beyond the reach of most poor families. As a result, in addition to lower living standards, many children face reduced developmental opportunities compared to the previous generation.

Some research has also addressed the effects of economic pressures on social relationships. For example, Kuehnast and Dudwick (2001) show how poorer people are less and less able to fulfil their cultural obligations to support family members and others in their social networks, though as Berg (2001) and Stellrecht (2001) point out, such support is still critical for the survival of many poor households.. How strains on social networks are impacting on children and young people, and particularly on their educational opportunities, has not been studied systematically and will be explored during CHIP's primary research. Other under-explored issues include the impact of changing family structures – due to migration or increased rates of divorce – which may impact both on children's work responsibilities and on the care of young children. Changing attitudes towards or aspirations for children are also poorly understood. Though there is substantial anecdotal evidence of increasing gender discrimination which may limit girls' opportunities, in particular, this has not been systematically documented. CHIP field research will attempt to fill this gap.

The range of factors involved suggests that a multi-dimensional approach to tackling childhood poverty is needed. We will return to this issue in section 4 where we examine existing poverty reduction policy from the perspective of what it may achieve for poor children. First, however, we examine in more detail the nature, extent and distribution of childhood poverty in Kyrgyzstan.

3. Poverty and Childhood Poverty in Kyrgyzstan – An Overview

3.1. Material poverty in Kyrgyzstan: an overview of the evidence

World Bank (2001) estimates suggest that the most significant factors underlying poverty and wellbeing in Kyrgyzstan are number of children in the family and size of the household; single-adult headed households; education of household head; knowledge of Russian and oblast of the country⁴. At the same time, factors such as whether the family is nuclear or extended, whether the household is female-headed and the age or ethnicity of the household head were not found to be significantly related to poverty levels. A similar study conducted by Braithwaite et al (2000) supports the World Bank's findings of the importance of the number of children in a household and of geographical location. It does, however, find that the age of the household head is significant (younger and older household heads tend to be poorer, with middle-aged households better off), and that female headship is correlated with higher poverty levels. Importantly, Braithwaite et al also highlight the importance of employment and access to productive assets, such as enterprise or land ownership, which may be affected by the factors just noted above.

The following tables and graphs indicate some of the key distributions of poverty in Kyrgyzstan. These use an expenditure-based definition of poverty, based on families' ability to afford a minimum set of goods, known as the Minimum Consumer Basket. Section 3.2. discusses the evidence relating to some 'capability' measures of poverty, such as nutrition, health and educational status.

⁴ It is recognised that these statistics, calculated using Soviet methodology, which does not count a child who dies within an hour of birth as an infant death, understate infant deaths in comparison with World Health Organisation methodology (GoK, 2002).

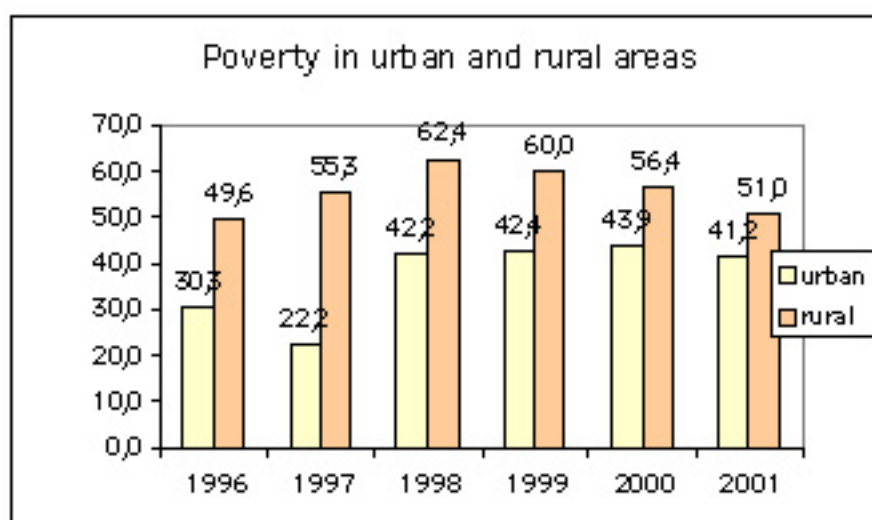
Figure 3.1. Poverty incidence by oblast, 1997 - 2001 (Percentage of population living in poverty)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Bishkek	3,5	20,9	27,9	29,9	29,5
Issyk-Kul oblast	57,6	58,1	46,9	60,9	55,2
Jalal-Abad	65,4	65,2	77,0	67,9	55,0
Naryn Oblast	87,1	83,5	57,6	81,4	70,4
Batken oblast				69,0	41,2
Osh oblast	51,5	70,1	66,2	51,6	56,1
Talas oblast	57,8	77,0	70,9	72,7	67,3
Chui oblast	21,4	31,1	30,7	28,1	29,2

Source: Poverty monitoring data, National Statistics Committee

The figure indicates that, despite widespread poverty throughout Kyrgyzstan, it is the two isolated, mountainous oblasts of Naryn and Talas which have the highest concentrations of poverty. Though poverty levels have declined in Naryn, overall poverty levels are still the highest in the country. As UNDP (2001:11) observes, ‘in mountainous areas, most problems peculiar to the republic overall, take on a much more serious stance’. Problems of limited access to markets, short growing seasons and constrained access to services may be particularly exacerbated by isolation, both in these two provinces and other mountainous areas.

Figure 3.2. Trends in rural and urban poverty – percentage of urban and rural population living in poverty, 1996 – 2001



Source: Poverty monitoring data, National Statistics Committee

Figure 3.3: Trends in severity of urban and rural poverty, 1997 - 2001

	1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
	urban	rural	urban	Rural	urban	rural	urban	rural	urban	rural
Poor	22,2	55,3	42,2	62,4	44,5	60,1	43,9	56,4	41,2	51,0
Extremely poor	5,0	20,7	18,3	25,8	17,8	23,2	12,7	20,5	9,6	15,6

Source: National Statistics Committee data. (Poverty refers to expenditures below the Minimum Consumer Basket, while extreme poverty refers to an inability to meet even basic food needs)

Figures 3.2. and 3.3. indicate that, as is widely known, poverty is more widespread in rural areas. However, the gap between urban and rural areas has been decreasing since 1997. In 1997, there was a 33.1 per cent difference between urban and rural poverty rates, which declined to 9.8 per cent in 2001. The difference in extreme poverty rates has remained more or less constant over this period. While the incidence of poverty has been decreasing overall, it is rural

poverty that has in fact been decreasing, while urban poverty has stayed at a roughly steady level during the period 1998 - 2001. The causes of the comparative decrease in rural poverty deserve investigation. Two commonly cited explanations are rural-urban migration, and the success of land reforms in providing an adequate economic base in the countryside.⁵ The difference may also reflect the difficulties with comparing rural and urban living standards, given the extent of home-based production in rural areas.

However, the unchanged levels of urban poverty are a concern. Although overall levels are still higher in rural areas, there is some indication of specific problems of malnutrition among urban children (UNDP, 2001), although this is contradicted by UNICEF nutrition data presented below. The internal migration of the population from rural areas to the cities increases the rate of unemployment, and is the most likely explanation for rising poverty levels in Bishkek.

Figure 3.4 - Poverty and Socio-Economic Status, 2000 - 2001

Socio-economic group of household head	Poverty head count (per cent)	
	2000	2001
Wage earner	31,2	30,6
Self-employed	42,7	53,4
Pensioner	40,5	36,9
Other transfer recipient	56,4	49,3
Unemployed	56,0	47,6
Other	57,9	44,5
All households	42,5	39,7

Source: Poverty monitoring data, National Statistical Committee

5 Presentations by members of the CDF Secretariat and the National Statistical Committee, World Bank/ UNDP/ IMF CIS-7 Poverty Reduction Seminar, Almaty, December 11 - 13 2002.

Figure 3.5 - Poverty and Education

Education of household head	Poverty head count (per cent)	
	2000	2001
Without education	72,4	50,6
Primary or less	42,9	48,3
Secondary	54,0	48,6
Incomplete secondary	40,5	40,0
Vocational\technical	36,9	35,6
University or above	25,8	24,4
All households	42,5	39,7

Source: Poverty monitoring data, National Statistics Committee

Figure 3.6 - Poverty and Gender of Household Head

Gender of household head	Poverty head count (per cent)			
	1998	1999	2000	2001
Male	45,9		47,8	31,4
Female	36,4		32,3	44,2
All household	43,0		42,5	39,7

Source: Poverty monitoring data, National Statistics Committee

Taken together, figures 3.4., 3.5. and 3.6. indicate the following. Firstly, the self-employed, which includes farmers and herders, as well as rural and urban providers of small-scale services, are at the greatest risk of poverty. Figure 3.4. does not, however, distinguish between different self-employed groups, as the CHIP empirical research aims to do. The fact that transfer recipients, other than pensioners, have the next highest rate of poverty indicates that these benefits are only partially successful in protecting families from poverty (Karraro and Ibragimova, 2000; Marcus, 2001). It is also notable that 30.6 per cent of wage earners do not earn enough to protect them from poverty. Education levels are related to poverty in a predictable way: people with the highest levels of education are at least risk of poverty. Nonetheless, a quarter of university graduates live in poverty. CHIP's empirical research will examine whether this is affecting attitudes towards education. Finally, figure 3.6. suggests an ambiguous pattern concerning the implications of household headship for poverty: in 1998 and 2000, male-headed households had a higher incidence of poverty, while the pattern had reversed in 2001.

Figure 3.7 - Poverty rates by age, 2001

Age Group	2001			
	Poverty rate (per cent)		Severe poverty (per cent)	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	rural
0-1	57,1	65,1	12,8	26,1
2-4	53,6	62,7	11,7	20,6
5-9	54,1	58,5	12,6	21,2
All < 10	54,6	60,9	12,4	21,8
10-14	47,2	52,7	13,5	16,3
15-19	44,0	46,7	12,3	12,8
All < 20	49,6	55,3	12,7	18,1
Total pop.	41,2	51,0	9,7	15,6

Source: National Statistical Committee data

This data show that a greater proportion of children, particularly those under 10, than of any other age group lives in poverty. The proportion of 0 – 1 year olds living in poverty (65 per cent) is particularly striking, given children’s particular vulnerability in the first year of life. Other data suggest that the larger the number of children in the family, the higher is the risk of a child being poor (UNICEF, 2001: 23-24). With children under 18 constituting 41.6 per cent of the population in 2000 (UNICEF, 2002b: 107), and 55 per cent of the population in poverty (GoK, 2002: 30), these statistics are indeed cause for concern. Overall, in the late 1990s, children under 16 were 12 per cent more likely than the population as a whole to be poor (Falkingham, 2001: 23), and rural children were at a much greater risk of poverty than their urban counterparts (ibid: 25). The statistical analysis component of CHIP’s research is analysing how this proportion has changed in the early 21st century.

3.2. Childhood poverty – human development aspects

The following section discusses trends in three key areas of child wellbeing – health, nutrition and education. Like the other parts of this review, it seeks to highlight areas where there are gaps in knowledge, as well as where information is well established.

Health and nutrition

UNICEF reports that child health indicators, many of which worsened dramatically in the first few years of transition, have now stabilised (Letarte, 2001). For example, the infant mortality rate has been steadily decreasing since 1995 and was 21.7 (per 1000 live births) in 2001 (GoK, 2002:29).⁶ The maternal mortality rate has been fluctuating and was 45.5 (per 100 000 live births) in 2000, which is higher than 1998 and 1999, but significantly lower than 1997, when it escalated to 62.7 (UNICEF, 2002b). Immunisation rates have increased in the period 1995 - 2000 for all major diseases. In 1999, 98.7 per cent of infants received AKDS (a combined shot to prevent diphtheria, whooping-cough and tetanus), while in 2000, 98.7 per cent were immunised against poliomyelitis and 97.8 per cent against both measles and tuberculosis (ibid: 74 - 76).

At the same time, levels of malnutrition among children, which are direct outcomes of poverty, are still high. Combined data for 1995, 1996 and 1997 indicate that as many as 4 per cent of urban children and 3 per cent of rural children were classified as wasted (weight-for-height measurement); 7 per cent of urban and 13 per cent of rural children were classified as underweight, (weight-for-age measurement); 16 per cent of urban and 29 per cent of rural children were classified as stunted (height-for-age measurement); and 19 per cent of urban and 28 per cent of rural children had severe or moderate anaemia (UNICEF, 2001: 33). Furthermore, there is a serious problem of ensuring adequate iodine intake, with 52 per cent of northern adolescents and 87 per cent of southern adolescents showing symptoms of iodine deficiency, and only 17 – 20 per cent of the population consuming iodised salt (GoK, 2002: 66). Overall child nutrition problems may partly be related to anaemia and other forms of malnutrition among pregnant women which can affect the nutrition and development of foetuses, and constitute a transfer of poverty from one generation to the next. Based on these trends, UNICEF concludes that ‘the levels of malnutrition in the region, in terms of stunted and anaemic children, suggest that the development of a large proportion of generation of the 1990s, has already been seriously compromised, both physically and mentally’ (ibid: 37).

⁶ It is recognised that these statistics, calculated using Soviet methodology, which does not count a child who dies within an hour of birth as an infant death, understate infant deaths in comparison with World Health Organisation methodology (GoK, 2002).

Geographical coverage of the health system is fairly wide. However, while the number of national hospitals, general regional and children's regional hospitals, city hospitals and children's city hospitals, district, maternity and rural hospitals has remained unchanged, there has been a slight decrease in rural ambulatory polyclinics⁷ (204 in 1997 compared to 220 in 1993), and a greater decrease in FAPs (feldsher-accoucheur posts)⁸ from 905 in 1992 to 856 in 1997 (ibid: 44). The decrease in these posts means that there is a growing exclusion of isolated communities from medical services. About 14.3 per cent of the population is without access to formal health services (UNDP, 2002b). A system of Family Group Practices has been introduced in order to provide widespread general primary health care, rather than a system of specialists at the primary level. This may have reduced access to health services by reducing the network of paramedical stations in each village and school nurses' offices (ibid). Indeed Letarte (2001: 45) suggests that one of the consequences of health sector reforms has been to concentrate resources in or around Bishkek. The other major change has been the introduction of Mandatory Medical Insurance which should provide access to quality health care for the whole population. However, UNDP (2002) suggests that because many rural people are sceptical about whether they will receive good quality care, they are not, in fact, paying for the insurance.

Defence expenditure was 6.0% of GDP during the first quarter of 2001 compared with 5.5% of GDP during 1999. Conversely, expenditure on health care was 1.8% of GDP during 2001 compared with 2.7% of GDP during 1999, and 3.5% of GDP in 1994. Investment in education has fallen dramatically from 6.1% of GDP in 1994 to 3.5% of GDP in 2001 (UNICEF, 2002a: 9).

UNICEF summarises the situation as follow:

The decreasing social spending has most affected hospital infrastructure, hospital heating and salaries of medical personnel. Those patients who need hospital care, now have to meet expenses for medical care and pay for the medicines. Only 10 per cent of healthcare sector spending is sectioned for primary level healthcare, which means that the growing number of poor people with the worst health condition (women and children in particular, but also

7 An ambulatory polyclinic is a medical care institution with general practitioners and specialized doctors providing consultations and mobile care for the population of the region to which it is assigned.

8 In terms of size, FAPs are the smallest units, represented by one person serving the rural population.

others) cannot receive corresponding medical care and treatment (2002a: 11).

However, new approaches to funding the health sector, through regional budgets piloted in Naryn and Talas, may be effective in increasing the efficiency of health sector expenditure, and reducing informal costs to patients (GoK, 2002: 65).

The poorest sections of the population are most at risk of deteriorating health conditions. While malnutrition is responsible for many health problems, poor people have to meet direct and indirect health expenses when visiting a doctor or staying at a hospital. Apart from having to meet the costs of medicines, a patient in a hospital is expected to end his/her visit with a thank you present for the doctor for the treatment received. While in the past, this might have been a box of chocolates, there has increasingly been an expectation of cash payments, effectively constituting informal charges.

Rising poverty rates also account for the fact that many people cannot afford to buy medicines from pharmacies. The Ministry of Health states that 'there has been noted a significant decrease in the purchase of medicines and medical devices from traditional [i.e. formal sector] suppliers' (GoK, 1996: 37)⁸. Indeed, as indicated earlier, making use of herbal medicines, and seeking treatment from traditional healers are two ways that poor families cut living costs. Children are particularly at risk, since both malnutrition and sickness in childhood may have a profound effect on a person's health in adulthood. High child immunisation rates, achieved with the help of international organisations, may be one of the most positive achievements of healthcare reform.

Both adult and child health are affected by the availability and adequacy of water and sanitation. In 2001, 16 per cent of the population were estimated not to have access to safe drinking water (UNDP, 2002b: 14). Furthermore, there are substantial differentials between rural and urban areas, with approximately 70 per cent of households in urban areas having running water and being connected to the public sewerage system compared to only 16 per cent of rural households (ibid).

Education

According to Kyrgyzstan's legislation, all children have the right to free and good quality education. In Soviet times, this was successful with 99 per cent of the population in Kyrgyzstan being literate. However, this situation has changed since 1991, with increasing numbers of children either attending school irregularly, or dropping out completely. UNICEF data suggest that at primary and general secondary levels, enrolment was lowest in 1993 – 4 and has since risen, though not to 1989 levels (UNICEF data reported in UNDP, 2002a:11). Government data for the period 1999 – 2001 provide the following statistics on non-attendance of school-age children.

Figure 3.8 – Overall School Attendance Rates (percentage of age group)

	1999	2000	2001
Elementary classes (1-4 classes)			
Total	97,7	97,2	96,6
Boys	98,6	98,6	97,9
Girls	96,8	95,8	95,3
Secondary classes (5-9 classes)			
Total	82,8	94,9	93,6
Boys	82,0	95,1	93,5
Girls	83,7	94,6	93,7
Secondary full classes (10-11 classes)			
Total	75,6	47,0	48,9
Boys	70,5	43,4	45,6
Girls	80,8	50,6	52,3

Source: National Poverty Reduction Strategy, GoK, 2002

These figures show that there has been a notable recent decline in the proportion of children obtaining a full secondary education. The reasons for this are unclear, but if this data is accurate, this is a serious cause for concern. UNICEF data, showing trends throughout the 1990s indicate a severe decline in educational enrolment in all sectors except higher education, where participation has increased.

Figure 3.9 - Trends in Educational Enrolment, 1989-99

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Pre-school	30.0	28.7	26.1	20.5	13.0	8.6	6.5	6.6	6.4	6.5	6.9
Basic	92.2	92	91.4	91.6	85.3	86.3	87.7	89.2	89.6	90	89.5
General Secondary	36.7	36.6	35.5	31.9	27.1	26.1	25.2	27.3	30.9	35.2	37.5
Vocational/technical	28.3	26.1	25.4	24.2	21.2	18.5	14.7	12.7	12.1	12.0	11.6
Higher	13.2	12.9	12.5	11.5	10.7	11.2	12.9	15.3	19	24.8	29.8

Source: UNDP,2002

The discrepancies between these two sets of data reflect some of the widespread and recognised problems with the reliability of school enrolment and attendance data, since schools are under financial and moral pressure to report high levels of attendance. Indeed, Eversmann's widely quoted (1999) study for UNICEF estimates that at any one time, around 10 – 15 per cent of school-age children are not attending, while 25 per cent of children miss 20 or more school days per year. Government spot-checks in Bishkek and Chui oblasts reveal that up to 20 per cent of primary and secondary school pupils do not attend school regularly, either because the children do not want to study, or because they are working – in paid employment or helping on family farms or with domestic chores (GoK, 1999: 48). Similarly, McKinley and Ibragimova (2000: 5) observe that the decline in lower secondary enrolment (up to grade 9) is a serious problem, with perhaps 15 per cent of young people not receiving a complete basic education. There is conflicting evidence on the gender dimensions of school non-attendance, although there is general agreement that in the north, it is boys, and in the south, it is girls who are more likely not to attend or to drop out.

World Bank data suggest that since 1991, Kyrgyzstan has suffered one of the largest declines in the region in enrolments for upper secondary education, including vocational and technical education (World Bank, 2000b: 35). This is corroborated by the data cited above, which show a particularly dramatic decline since 1999. At the same time, the one level where enrolment

has increased, is higher education, where enrolment doubled between 1993 – 9 (NSC, 1999a: 41). These trends may reflect the calculation of young people and their parents that it is more worthwhile to invest in higher education than in vocational education.

Declining access to education is clearly income related. The 1997 Poverty Assessment Update showed that the non-income poor had 11 per cent more schooling than the income-poor, and 16 per cent more than the extremely poor. These disparities are most marked in upper secondary and higher education. In 1998, 68 per cent of non-poor, but only 53 per cent of poor 16 and 17 year olds, were enrolled in school. In higher education, the disparity is greater still – 37 per cent of non-poor 18 – 22 year olds were studying, compared to 10 per cent of the poor, and 5 per cent of the extremely poor (World Bank, 2000a: 33). If this disparity is maintained or increases, there is a serious possibility of entrenching an underclass of poor and socially excluded people.

Indeed, studies of school non-attendance show a strong relationship with poverty. Figure 3.10. below presents official data on the reasons for school non-attendance over a 5- year period.

Problems with the reliability of official data are widely acknowledged, as schools are under strong moral and financial pressure to conceal the actual numbers of missing children.¹⁰

Figure 3.10 - Reasons for school non-attendance, 1997 – 2001

Reasons for non-attendance	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Total number of children who do not attend	8558	5078	4261	6006	4848
Categories:					
1. Children with special needs	1401	1299	1777	2490	2336
2. Children with 'normal' development:	7157	3779	2484	3516	2512
Reasons for non-attendance:					
Material difficulties	1944	948	769	201	820
Family circumstances	99	371	267	49	331
Reluctance of parents	225	1141	691	1477	294
Reluctance to study	507	370	240	43	337
Difficult family situation (including neglect, abuse)	124	236	226	25	269
Working	101	222	66	28	305
Do not speak the language	-	-	-	7	58
Other	4157	491	225	1686	98

Source: Ministry of Education and Culture

Material difficulties are the most important single reason for non-attendance. Given that working, family circumstances and difficult family situations are often poverty-related, the importance of poverty is probably even stronger than it appears. Eversmann (1999) underlines the role that poverty plays, pointing out that many children feel ashamed to attend school because of their poor clothes, or because they are humiliated if they are unable to pay charges for the rent of text books and contributions to school repairs.

Overall, Eversmann (1999) finds that the availability of work is the best predictor of school non-attendance. He suggests that in Naryn, where the growing season is short and other work opportunities few, there is greater school attendance than in other oblasts with more economic opportunities for children and their families. He also finds that illness is an important cause of day-to-day non-attendance, particularly among poorer families in the colder regions (ibid: 24). Poor conditions in schools, including a lack of heating in winter, and low morale among teachers who face low pay and pay arrears, also deter some children. The decline in the state budget for education, and the shift in responsibility for financing education from the centre to oblasts, has led to schools increasingly requesting money from parents for repairs, buying books and school fees. Although these unofficial expenses may not be very high, many families face difficulties in meeting them. Given the high levels of unemployment among educated people, it may also be that young people and their parents see a decreasing value in education. CHIP primary research will explore the extent of this perception.

Some of the strategies that families pursue to escape or mitigate the effects of poverty also impact on children's access to education. Internal migration from rural areas to cities, for example, has been of growing importance since 1990. 16 per cent of internal migrants are younger than 18 years of age, and there is a risk that older migrant children, in particular, will also be involved in work rather than attending school (UNFPA, 2001: 17). That said, there is anecdotal evidence of a strong demand for education in the migrant suburbs (novostroiki) of Bishkek, where some schools run up to three sessions per day. The access of particularly vulnerable groups of children – street children, working children, disabled children and migrant children – to education is discussed in section 3.3. below.

10 This was publicly recognized by an expert from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, at the conference 'Issues of neglected children in Kyrgyzstan' (September 9-10, 2002).

As noted earlier, declining state budgets have pushed educational expenses onto families. Figure 3.11. illustrates the burden of educational expenses for non-poor, poor and extremely poor households in 1997. It shows that, although the actual expenditure of poor households is much lower than that of non-poor households, it constitutes a greater proportion of their expenditure. More recent statistics indicate that the spending of poor households on education is 35 per cent that of richer households (UNDP, 2002: 9).

Figure 3.11 - Annual education expenditures by poverty group in 1997

Type of expense (som)	Extremely Poor	Poor	Non poor
Tuition	21	53	375
Books, Uniforms, Fees, Tutors	193	228	356
School Repairs, Classroom Supplies, Teachers, Outings	36	43	64
Meals, Transport, Other	43	82	350
Total Annual Education Expenditures	293	406	1145
Total Annual Education Expenditures as a percentage of per capita consumption	16.9	14.1	13.1

Source: Vandycke (2001: 14)

There are several efforts to protect and promote poor children's access to education. The presidential programme "Jetkinchek" aims to 'maintain accessibility and justice in preschool and basic education' by providing funds for purchasing school clothes and other items, providing free books from the funds of school libraries and providing food. Children from specified 'risk groups' are exempted from user fees and in some cities, free food is delivered to educational institutions. This programme is supported both by budgetary provisions and from contributions of other parents into a common fund used to support children from poor families. More broadly, the Law on Education, and a Decree on User Fees in Educational Institutions in the Kyrgyz Republic exempt 'socially unprotected citizens' from payment – i.e. low-income families, families with many children, orphan children, disabled children, children under guardianship, residents of children's homes, and children with special needs in boarding schools.¹¹ CHIP's primary research will seek to assess the extent of poor families' awareness and receipt of these exemptions.

¹¹ Data of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The NPRS underlines the government's commitment to improving access and quality in education. This includes revitalising pre-schools since it has become clear that the private sector will not provide these in rural areas; improving the infrastructure of rural schools; improving poor children's access to higher education via targeted grants; school students' access via government bursaries, and private and community financial support and sponsorship; enhancing the role of the private and not-for-profit sectors; improving standards in schools; developing a 12-year school education system; and improving the management and administration of schools.

3.3. Especially Vulnerable Children

The previous section has addressed some of the main outcomes of family poverty for children, in terms of their health and education. This section examines some of the more extreme outcomes of poverty for children in Kyrgyzstan, including homelessness and separation from family, and work which endangers their health, education and wellbeing. It also examines how a traditionally 'vulnerable' group of children – disabled children – have in many ways been made more vulnerable in recent years, and discusses some of the long-term risks these groups of children face.

Working children¹²

For many children in Kyrgyzstan, the need to work is a direct outcome of poverty. Though Kyrgyzstan has signed the International Labour Organisation's Minimum Age Convention (no 138) and prohibits children under 16 from working, in practice many children start working at a much younger age. SIAR's (1999) research showed that 24 per cent of children work voluntarily in order to help their family and relatives. According to the same research, the remaining 76 per cent have no choice and are set to work by their parents or other relatives.

The types of activities in which children are involved include trading, shoe repairs and polish, car washing, transportation, loading and unloading of cargo, working in cafes and agriculture, as well as begging. Trade was the most common activity among children in this study, involving 32.4 per cent. Many of these activities require heavy physical labour, which may have long-term

12 This section is based on SIAR's (1999) research on child labour which interviewed 600 children aged 5 – 15 throughout Kyrgyzstan.

health consequences Children may also be endangered by their working conditions. For example, children working in Bishkek's main market had to pay protection money to prevent police harassment (Blackley, 1999). Working children's health and wellbeing may be further compromised by their over-crowded living conditions – 16.7 per cent live in one or two room apartments occupied by 5 to 15 people.

SIAR (1999) conducted two surveys, one focusing on child labour in general, and one focusing specifically on child servants. Their research indicates that rural children sent to live with urban relatives or others are mainly employed as servants. This is encouraged by a Kyrgyz tradition, where a wealthier family is expected to support poor relatives. Just over 45 per cent of child servants in their study were sent to live with relatives, and 34 per cent with non-relatives. (The rest did domestic work in their own homes). Most of these children were sent to their relatives or other people in the hope that they would have better living conditions, and a better chance of education than in their own families. All the children interviewed in this group attended school. As well as education, they received clothes, boarding and, in just over a third of cases, wages for their work.

Approximately half the children in SIAR's general child labour study worked full time and half worked part-time. Only half the working children interviewed attended school. Not having enough money to attend, migration and not wanting to attend were the most important reasons given by a sample of working boys interviewed in Bishkek for non-attendance.

In addition to the illegal employment of children below the working age, the labour rights of young workers of 14 and above are violated. Almost all (96.7 per cent) of working children only have a verbal contract. Children are frequently paid less than adults for similar work, but are expected to be as productive as adults. The lack of formal contracts exacerbates this situation (ibid: 15).

Trafficking and prostitution

There is growing evidence of children being involved in prostitution, some of whom are trafficked out of the country. Kuehnast's (1998) research in Bishkek indicates that some young

women in their late teens enter prostitution after failing to make ends meet in other jobs, or to finance their studies. Reports of younger children engaging in prostitution are anecdotal but not uncommon. Children living on the streets may be at particular risk of paid or unpaid sexual exploitation (Blackley, 1998). The Kyrgyz Committee on Human Rights reports that over 1000 young women and girls from Kyrgyzstan have been trafficked as prostitutes to the UAE alone (PMC, 2000: 21), while the UN suggests that 4000 women and children were victims of trafficking in 1999 (UNDP, 2002: 15). Perhaps one in ten trafficked women is under 18 (PMC, 2000: 55).

Street children

Street children are defined here as those who live apart from their parents or other family members on the streets or other public places. They are thus distinguished from other working children who usually return home at night. The majority of street children have left home because of the impact of poverty – whether direct, such as the lack of food or difficult material conditions, or because of family violence related to the stresses of poverty and coping mechanisms such as alcohol abuse (Blackley, 1999). Street children face very difficult conditions, particularly given Kyrgyzstan's cold winter climate. They are also vulnerable to harassment, exploitation and abuse by adults – both organised criminals and law enforcement officials (ibid).

Accurate information on street children is limited. The Bishkek-based Centre for Child Protection estimates that in 2001, 83.1 per cent of street children had dropped out of school. Their studies of the reasons why street children do not attend school highlight the importance of poverty-related factors. The costs of schooling and the need to work have consistently been the most important reasons for school drop out (Figure 3.12. below). The other notable reason is migration which, as observed earlier, is an important means of coping with poverty. It is notable that a relatively small percentage of street children left school because they did not like it. However, Centre for Child Protection data for 1998 – 2001 suggest that between 74 and 87.5 per cent of street children would like to study.

Figure 3.12 - Reasons for street children not attending school (percentage)

Reasons	1998	1999	2000	2001
Too expensive	53,0	47,0	45,0	45,8
Obliged to work	33,0	43,0	32,0	50,8
Sick	4,0	3,0	3,0	1,3
Hate school	6,0	19,0	19,0	8,5
Family moved from one place to another	42,0	32,0	18,0	40,1
Other reasons	21,0	5,0	10,0	8,8

Source: Data supplied by Centre for Child Protection, Bishkek

Approaches to tackling the problems of street children are hampered by gaps in legislation and an outdated, punitive approach to street children which tends to treat them as criminals, rather than children with serious problems.¹³

Migrant children

Large-scale internal migration in Kyrgyzstan started in the early 1990s and is principally a response to social vulnerability, unemployment and high rates of poverty in rural areas. Statistics of migration within Kyrgyzstan for the period 1991 – 6 indicate net emigration from all oblasts except Chui and Bishkek, the capital, which were net recipients of internal migrants. The highest rate of migration was from Naryn (Ssebunya-Musisi and Olsen, 1999: 24). More recent statistics suggest a slowdown in migration from 1996 – 2000 (UNDP, 2002b). By 2001, approximately one third of the population had moved since independence.¹⁴

Despite the fact that migrants consider their life in the city to be better than in the village, many face problems of poverty, unemployment and accommodation. Access to health, education and other services can also be difficult if families do not have the correct documentation. Those who work, do so in the informal economy. According to research conducted by the sociological group of the American University-Central Asia in 2000 in Bishkek and Osh¹⁵, 17 per cent of men and 35.4 per cent of women were unemployed, while 37.3 of men and 25.3 per cent of women had permanent employment. This compares to unemployment rates for the general population of 10

13 Conference on Issues Facing Neglected Children in Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, 9 – 10 September 2002.

14 <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200107/0017.html>

15 This study sampled 258 migrants.

– 17 per cent in Bishkek and Osh respectively (GoK, 2002: 29).

According to migrants, they earn very little: 43 per cent of respondents said their income was below 1500 soms per month, 44.6 per cent said it was between 1501 and 4000 soms and 12.4 per cent had an income of more than 4000 soms per month. This compares with a minimum monthly consumption budget per capita (the amount needed for food and other basic expenses) of 1316 som in 2001.¹⁶ Though statistics on family size in migrant communities are not available, this suggests that the majority were living below the national poverty line. Twenty four per cent of respondents said it was difficult to feed their family, although 34.3 per cent did not face this problem. In addition to the financial pressures migrants themselves face, the majority send money to relatives in the village.

Most migrants – 53.0 percent – had graduated from high school only. About 28 per cent of migrants had education equivalent to 2 – 3 years of college, 19 per cent had technical education, 9 per cent had higher education (which is 5 years of university schooling) and 9 per cent had ‘unfinished higher education’. Compared to the population as a whole, a higher proportion of migrants had higher and technical education. However, a higher proportion had also only completed secondary education (NSC, 1999b). Overall people with primary, incomplete secondary or complete secondary education are at higher risk of poverty than those with vocational or higher education. However, since unemployment rates are also higher among migrant communities, education does not seem to protect migrants against income poverty.

Forty three per cent of respondents found it difficult to send their children to school, while 37.6 per cent said it was not difficult. This may reflect problems of documentation, as well as the costs of schooling. High rates of school non-attendance by migrant children are a concern and put them at potential risk of being caught in a cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Migrant families mainly live on the outskirts of cities, often some distance from the centre, where they typically face problems such as a lack of water and electricity. 27.2 per cent of migrants in the American University – Central Asia study said that they do not have water

16 <http://stat-gvc.bishek.su/Eng/Annual/Social.html#Top1>, accessed on 13 October 2003.

in the new settlements and adjacent areas, and 19.8 per cent also said that they bring water from remote places. 25.6 per cent of migrants linked water scarcity to another problem that they experience: difficulties with cultivating land and growing vegetables. This may affect their nutrition and opportunities to earn an income. 16.5 per cent of migrants said that they do not have any electricity, which means that it can be hard for children to do homework at night, and the families are cut off from television.

Migrant children may also be affected by their parents being able to spend less time with them than in the village. While in the village 8.2 per cent said that they did not have time for their children, this rose to 21.8 per cent after they moved to the city. 18.4 per cent spent one to two hours a day with their children, 32.2 per cent spent between three to six hours and 17.8 per cent spent the whole day with them.

Furthermore, though 72.5 per cent of respondents have children, not all migrants can bring their children with them. While one or both parents move from one place to another, children sometimes need to wait for a period of time. This is related to the seasonal nature of most migratory work and the problems faced in moving to the city. It is not clear what the implications are for children being left behind in rural areas. Children migrating alone face specific problems, and many end up as street children. A study conducted in Bishkek by the Centre for Child Protection in 1998 suggests that 76 per cent of street children surveyed came from outside Bishkek (CPC, 1998).

Disabled children

Disabled children are particularly vulnerable to becoming or staying poor as their disability may both create obstacles to the learning process and may limit the choice of jobs they may have in the future. Many disabled children are currently excluded from education, which undermines their futures. For many, this may mean that they depend on social welfare throughout their lives, and are thus likely to be condemned to a future in poverty.

Disabled children's exclusion from education reflects both the Soviet system which segregated disabled children in specialised institutions, and families preferring to spend scarce resources on other children's education. Many special schools have now been shut down for lack of funds, as have provisions for home education. For example, of 31 special schools created during the Soviet era, only 15 are still open, while only 7 of 22 special kindergartens remain.¹⁷ Efforts to replace this system with an inclusive education approach are being promoted by many organisations; however, this remains principally at the level of pilot projects and efforts to change attitudes towards disabled children's education. Research by Save the Children UK in Issyk-Kul (2001) revealed that school administrators, teachers, parents and medical-pedagogical committees were all reluctant for disabled children to attend mainstream schools.¹⁸

Furthermore, the system for diagnosing impairments and providing support and training for living with or overcoming these problems is failing disabled children. Existing medical-pedagogical committees now only work occasionally, and do not function in isolated rural areas. As a result, a significant number of children with physical and mental problems from these areas are undiagnosed and thus unsupported. Today, a further obstacle to diagnosing and supporting disabled children is the problem of invisibility. Chinara Djumagulova of Save the Children UK¹⁹ suggests that such children are often not 'spotted' by these committees because many parents feel ashamed and try to hide their children from the public eye (Interview, August 2003). Such behaviour can be explained by the social stigma attached to disability, exacerbated by the Soviet's policy of school segregation. Parents may also be trying to protect their children from social abuse.

Sharpened gender-based discrimination

Various reports suggest that financial pressures may be leading to the increased discrimination of girls. This takes the form of pressure on girls to marry early, thereby reducing the number of people a family has to feed. However, limiting girls' education implies a risk of long-term poverty. Several commentators also suggest that the rise in bride-stealing may be a way that young men and their families are trying to reduce marriage costs (ADB, 1997).

17 This data is derived from an interview with Galina Molotkova, director of the Pedagogical Institute for Children with Impairments.

18 On the basis of an interview with Rachat Orozova.

19 Chinara Djumagulova, Central Asia Coordinator, Inclusive Education Project, Save the Children UK.

Conclusions

This section has reviewed some of the ways in which children are affected by poverty, and discussed the potential short- and long-term consequences. Analysis of the distribution of poverty in Kyrgyzstan shows that children, particularly young children, more than any other population group, are at greater risk of living in poverty. This undermines their nutrition, health and access to education, and has resulted in increased child labour. There is no reliable evidence of the numbers of children trafficked to work outside the country, or working in prostitution in the country; but anecdotal evidence suggests that it is a growing problem. The next section examines the key policies aimed at tackling poverty in Kyrgyzstan and their implications for children.

4. Tackling Childhood Poverty in Kyrgyzstan

Current policy for tackling poverty in general, and for improving the situation of children in particular, reflect both Soviet era policy and approaches promoted since 1991. As noted earlier, since transition, a pro-liberalisation policy thinking has been dominant. This has been accompanied by a widespread view that economic development and growth will serve to reduce poverty. As *Every Child* (2001:4) found in interviews with oblast governors,

‘many people met in key positions in the Oblast Administrations believed that economic growth was the key to eliminating poverty and all investment should contribute to that goal. The Governor of Jalalabad oblast said that in the poorest families were those that could not adapt to a competitive economic environment as they didn’t have the skills to compete. The governor of Osh oblast proposed solutions to poverty centred on the individual with micro-credit as the means of alleviating poverty’.

As far as children are concerned, such views are often accompanied by social policy thinking which closely reflects Soviet era policy. Children themselves are seen as a vulnerable group, and certain groups of children are perceived to be particularly vulnerable – these include orphans and children in single-parent families, disabled children, and children in conflict with the law. ‘New’ groups of poor children who have emerged since 1991, such as street children, working children or children of migrants, are also the focus of attention. Childhood poverty is thus often seen as a problem of these vulnerable groups.

This section discusses both core development policies and how they may affect children, and specific policies aimed at improving the situation of children.

4.1. Development policy and its implications for children

Economic policy orientation

The Government has declared its commitment to pro-poor economic growth; however, with a few exceptions, the mechanisms of how economic growth will benefit the poor are not specified.

The emphasis on growth as a poverty reduction mechanism reflects an assumption that an overall improvement in macroeconomic indicators will benefit the poor in an indirect way. There is, however, conflicting evidence about how economic growth reduces poverty. Though there is much evidence of poverty reduction through economic growth worldwide, it is also clear that poverty may increase alongside economic growth. For example, UNICEF (2002: 5) reports that, despite economic growth in Kyrgyzstan during the period 1996 – 1999, the number of people living below the poverty line increased.

This failure of growth to reduce poverty was recognised as a major problem with development strategies in the 1990s. For example, an analysis for UNDP of the Araket National Poverty Reduction Programme²⁰ argued that:

There is no explicit concern for pro-poor economic growth, it can only be implied through the emphasis of job creation. The government links employment generation closely to poverty although it should be noted that the registered unemployment rate among the rural poor is much lower than the national average... There are, however, no mechanisms in place to allow regular monitoring of the impact of macro-economic policy on the poor... The direct links between public investment and poverty are even weaker (Reynolds, 1999).

These criticisms have partially been acknowledged in the development of the NPRS which was finalised in 2002.

The NPRS once again affirms the government's commitment to the creation of a dynamic, market economy as a means of ensuring economic growth and poverty reduction. The key measures to be undertaken include structural reform of the economy and banking system; efforts to improve the investment climate; privatisation of utilities; improvement of infrastructure, including the telephone and communication technologies; small and medium enterprise promotion; tourism development; enhanced regional policies; and public administration reform in support of these measures. More specific measures to improve the position of the poorest are employment creation, and establishing ways of increasing wage levels, including within the state

²⁰ Araket is a predecessor of NPRS which was planned for implementation in 1998 – 2005. The programme has been criticized in many respects, in particular, as having a very limited impact because of poor monitoring and a lack of connections with social bases. It has been superseded by the NPRS..

sector. Microcredit continues to be an important tool for poverty alleviation, despite a mixed record in Kyrgyzstan, and beyond (Reynolds, 1999). There is much evidence that, despite its effectiveness for many poor people, the poorest rarely benefit; often they do not participate, finding interest rates too high or not wanting to become indebted (Johnson and Rogaly, 1997). As intentions, many of these policies may indeed be important in promoting the growth of employment opportunities and poverty reduction; the proof will be in their implementation, and particularly whether they are successfully implemented in isolated areas and create opportunities which the poorest families can access.

At the same time, the government is operating within strict fiscal limits in order to reduce the debt burden. This has, for example, resulted in a reduction in expenditure on education and health during the period 1999 – 2001 (GoK 2002: 83). During the period of the NPRS (2003 – 5), debt management is to be achieved through several strategies, including cutting the Public Investment Programme. It appears that the commitment in the Interim National Poverty Reduction Strategy to ‘fully and timely finance all of the social guarantees of the state and to create favourable conditions for pro-poor economic growth’ (GoK, 2001: 10) has disappeared from the final version, although commitments to enhanced social protection and investment in health care and education remain. Indeed, the NPRS commits to an increased social focus of budgetary public expenditures, and improvements in their targeted impact on the poor.

4.2. Social Protection Policy

Other than promotion of economic growth, improved social protection remains the main policy area aiming to tackle poverty. Since 1991, a range of reforms to the social protection system have aimed to improve coverage to poor families and increase the effectiveness of the support provided. The NPRS continues this set of reforms. One measure was the introduction of the Unified Monthly Benefit, a single lump sum benefit, which replaced the range of benefits available to different categories of low-income families with children. A major concern in recent years has been that benefits are paid in kind (e.g. flour, oil) rather than in cash, and often at rates

calculated below the market value of the goods concerned. The NPRS aims to end this practice and states that by 2005, all benefits should be paid in cash.

Over the last two years, as part of efforts to reform the social protection system, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection has introduced a social passport system, which identifies specific beneficiaries for social assistance. This is intended to help tackle problems of poor targeting of benefits. For example, 'the so-called social privileges (i.e. entitlement of certain categories of the population to obtain some goods and services free of charge or at a reduced rate) and subsidies for housing and communal services ... favour middle and upper income groups than the poor' (Dabrowski, 1999 cited in Reynolds, 1999). Furthermore, poor targeting of social assistance, along with tight overall budgets, has contributed to the problem of very small social assistance payments. It is estimated that improved targeting should release 454 million som which will be reallocated to increase the levels of benefit and other forms of social protection (GoK, 2002: 182).

So far, the social passport system has revealed two hundred thousand families with an average per capita income less than 140 soms per month and 90 thousand families with an average per capita income less than 200 soms per month. These 290 000 families are classified as living below the poverty line²¹ and are thus eligible for benefits.²² Families in receipt of the Unified Monthly Benefit are also eligible for discounts on gas, heating and hot water charges. When electricity tariffs are raised as part of the planned electricity privatisation programme, they will also receive discounts on electricity. By late 2002, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection representatives suggested that 92 per cent of poor families had social passports (Tuchin, n.d). Social passport data have been used for the introduction of another new system – that of social workers' support to the most vulnerable families. This has been implemented with the assistance of Every Child, through the 'Family and Children Support' project. In this pilot project, the social workers successfully helped the target families out of crisis by securing practical help. This included recalculating social benefits, improving information and access to health and education services, securing one-off sponsorship and providing moral support. The system will now be introduced throughout the country.

21 Information from the UNESCO conference, 'Problems and solutions to issues of neglected children', September 9 – 10, 2002, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

22 For further information on how benefit levels are calculated, see Annex 2.

4.3. Measures in the NPRS to tackle childhood poverty

‘We must provide all possible support for the family – the foundation of any strong society’ (GoK, 2002: 4).

In both the draft and the final versions of the NPRS, there are sections on ‘Poverty Among Children’. It is encouraging that the problem of poverty among children is specifically acknowledged. However, these sections focus on specific groups of children in poverty. Thus, the key problems facing children in poverty are identified as the issues of alarming ‘social orphanhood’, ‘hidden drop-out’ rates from school, a rising number of working children, and children without family care. The key factors identified as hindering the eradication of poverty among children are inadequate legislation, particularly related to children living in or having left institutions such as orphanages and young offenders’ institutions; ‘neglected children’; the absence of a unified state agency addressing issues of children and childhood poverty; lack of effective monitoring of children and families from ‘risk groups’ (not defined) and therefore an inadequate information base on the numbers of such families, or who they are; and an absence of a special budget for children. The main policy solution to these particular problems is seen as supervision of children of ‘problem families’ (defined as those suffering alcoholism or drug abuse) and taking them into ‘state custody’ if necessary. This is likely to mean foster families rather than institutions, although adolescents may be sent to vocational training institutes.

The fact that poverty is a widespread problem affecting large numbers of children who do not fall into any of these groups is not clearly acknowledged in the analysis of childhood poverty. However, the set of policy initiatives outlined in the NPRS aim to tackle a wider set of poverty problems affecting children through a broader set of measures. The NPRS aims to ‘ensure livelihood activities and support to children’ and to ‘ensure full involvement of families and children in poverty alleviating activities’ (NPRS, 56) by:

- Ensuring families’ self-support and providing targeted support to families unable to support themselves
- Provision of accessible (including free) education and health services

It also aims to increase the involvement of children in poverty reduction activities through peer to peer methods, self-support groups, and ultimately to ‘help raise public responsibility for each child without the involvement of state agencies’ (ibid: 56). Elsewhere, the NPRS also states that mandatory medical insurance will be extended to children (ibid: 13). Despite problems of coverage, this would improve children’s access to health services. Its success will depend on the financial costs to already over-burdened poor families.

The specific measures laid out in the Action Matrix of the NPRS (ibid: 180) for tackling poverty among children are:

- 1) Create social services to support families – currently being tried in Issyk-Ata and Jumgal rayons, and benefiting 233,000 and 52,000 children respectively in poor families.
- 2) Establish a rehabilitation centre for street children within the Mercy Centre in Bishkek.
- 3) Develop a system of financial planning in the area of childhood protection; form a special budget for children.
- 4) Train and retrain social workers; train in areas of family conflict prevention and family crisis resolution.
- 5) Develop a Code on Childhood Protection.

As can be seen, the emphasis is principally on social work. Other priorities for action which should directly help tackle poverty among children and young people include the range of education measures described in section 3; health measures, such as provisions to improve mother and child health, increase the iodisation of salt and maintain high levels of immunisation against key childhood diseases; and employment promotion measures, including a 5 per cent increase in youth employment per year in the three northern provinces and Batken, and a 50 per cent increase in unemployed mothers’ use of microcredit. Of course, if economic policy reforms are successful in promoting pro-poor growth, and if social protection reforms secure improved levels of wellbeing, these will also play a vital part in reducing childhood poverty.

4.4. Legislation promoting the rights and wellbeing of children²³

In Kyrgyzstan there is no unified law regulating the legal status of children. There is also no single system of legal standards concerning the rights of children. These standards are scattered in different general acts and regulations. At best, they are outlined as a separate chapter or article, such as, for instance, in the Labour or Criminal codes. Furthermore, although Kyrgyzstan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on 12 January 1994, national legislation does not conform to this international convention in two ways. Firstly, although under the UNCRC, a child is a person under 18 years of age, a person under-18 who is married is not considered a child (Article 56 Civil code KR); secondly, a person under-18 who is involved in legal business activities or who has signed a labour contract is not regarded as a child (Article 62, Civil code, KR).

Children's rights can be classified as civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights. In relation to poverty, economic and social rights arguably have the most direct bearing. Children over 14 years of age have direct economic rights. These are the right to work, the right to freely choose their field of work, the right to security of work and the right to go on labour strikes provided by the Kyrgyz Constitution (Articles 16, 28, 30). Children's economic rights are also indirectly protected. For example, Article 8, of the law of the Kyrgyz Republic on 'State aid in the Kyrgyz Republic' states that a non-working mother has the right to monthly aid until her child is one and a half years old, and makes provision for financial assistance to families with children under-16 living on below the guaranteed minimum income level. More generally, children's wellbeing is protected by law in provisions such as Article 137, of the Labour Code of the Kyrgyz Republic which gives women with children under three, the right to refuse night work and over time.

One may dispute whether social policy in Kyrgyzstan does in fact guarantee children's rights to education and healthcare. For example, one could argue that a combination of limited service provision in isolated areas, the financial costs to families of key services, and the uneven

23 For a detailed listing of relevant laws, please refer to Annex 1.

application of exemptions from charges, effectively mean that children's rights are violated in this area. Thus, complying with the spirit and letter of international conventions, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as well as good poverty reduction policy may require further efforts to extend services to all children.

New Generation Programme – state programme for the implementation of children's rights in Kyrgyzstan

Developed in 2001, the New Generation programme is intended to oversee the implementation of children's rights in Kyrgyzstan within the framework of the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF). Specifically, it aims to provide co-ordination of relevant government and NGO activities working to improve child wellbeing, with an emphasis on improving the situation of the following groups:

- children under-5
- gifted children from poor families
- school children and students in general education
- children in extremely difficult situations
- young families (with parents aged under-22) for the first three years
- families with many children
- families with disabled children
- dysfunctional families
- impoverished families with under-age children
- foster families and guardians.

Measures to be undertaken under the framework of the New Generation programme include improving the legislative framework with regard to children; working to ensure that state budget allocations promote children's rights; encouraging co-financing support by local businesses; a range of measures to improve access to and quality of education and health services; support of poverty reduction among vulnerable families; and a range of public education and awareness

campaigns. In total, the programme consists of 175 measures to be implemented over the period 2001 – 2010. Although many of these measures are incorporated in the NPRS, this is nonetheless an ambitious target.

4.5. Activities of NGOs

A wide range of NGOs is actively working on issues of childhood wellbeing in Kyrgyzstan. They focus particularly on research and action to support vulnerable groups of children – specifically, street children and disabled children – as well as the protection of children’s rights in general. Discussions with these organisations suggest that their emergence and activities strongly reflect the focus of funding from international sponsors. Much of the focus of their work is on providing services for these marginalised children; there is arguably too little focus on tackling the causes of their disadvantage. There is strong collaboration between government and international organisations around these activities.

Conclusions

Poverty reduction policy in Kyrgyzstan gives highest priority to promoting economic growth. While this is certainly vital for reducing poverty among families, it is critical that policy intentions such as promoting regional economic development, and agricultural and small enterprise development are implemented effectively, as well as measures aiming to stabilise and strengthen macroeconomic wellbeing. Without these, such growth as takes place is unlikely to reduce poverty among families and children. The NPRS puts a strong emphasis on investment in health and education, both of which are vital for longer-term poverty eradication, and breaking poverty cycles. A wide range of measures are foreseen; effectively prioritising and implementing these will be vital for the NPRS to fulfil its potential to children in poverty, as will support from the international community that avoids escalation of debt, but helps to ensure that priority anti-poverty measures are implemented.

Within the framework of wider poverty reduction measures outlined in the NPRS, measures specifically aimed at supporting children in poverty focus on particular vulnerable groups and are oriented towards social work. While this is understandable in the context of the wider NPRS framework, it is important that poverty among children and families is not seen simply as a problem of these groups that is to be solved by social work; a wider set of measures related to strong livelihoods and social services is essential. This is particularly important given that most NGO programmes, given their financial constraints, understandably focus on specific groups, and on social work or family support measures.

5. Preliminary Conclusions for Research and Action

This literature review has attempted to establish what is already known about childhood poverty in Kyrgyzstan. It has focused on the dimensions of childhood poverty; factors leading to poverty among children; evidence that intergenerational poverty cycles exist or are beginning to develop; and how policy and practice aim to tackle poverty in general, and among children in particular.

To do so, the review examined the conceptual literature on childhood poverty and poverty reproduction, and existing research on poverty and wellbeing in general, and childhood wellbeing in particular, in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia by both local and international scholars. It also examined the main directions of poverty reduction policy and practice in Kyrgyzstan, and their implications for children. This review is based on interviews and discussions with representatives of relevant ministries and agencies, international organisations and NGOs, as well as an analysis of documentation. The main conclusions are highlighted in bold.

The review regards poverty in childhood as a certain crucial stage in the life cycle when opportunities missed may be impossible or very difficult to make up for in the future. Certain groups of children, such as street children, are particularly vulnerable to harm or missing opportunities. However, what is rarely appreciated is that the problem of childhood poverty is much more widespread, affecting at least 50 per cent of Kyrgyzstan's children, and 65 per cent of the youngest children in rural areas. **This calls for concerted action to raise living standards and improve access to quality services across the board, rather than focusing only on specific vulnerable groups. It also suggests that families with young children may require additional support.**

This review has found that **there has not been a consistent focused analysis of childhood poverty or intergenerational poverty cycles.** The National Statistics Committee carries out a large-scale regular survey of household poverty which analyses income and expenditure. Internationally-funded studies, such as Demographic and Health Surveys complement this with more detailed information about human development. The general picture of poverty that these primarily quantitative analyses yield, was presented in Section 3 and demonstrates that children, specifically rural children under 10 years of age, are the poorest age-category in the country.

This may reflect the general difficulties faced by young families in establishing themselves, the widespread poverty and lack of opportunities in rural areas and, possibly, the larger families found in rural areas.

Qualitative studies have shown that poor families face difficult choices about whether to prioritise children's long-term welfare or the family's immediate survival. For example, although qualitative research suggest that many families make enormous sacrifices to send their children to school, for some, attending school regularly is now impossible. However, the ways in which families' strategies for coping with poverty and vulnerability affect children have not been systematically explored. Qualitative studies also suggest that the social networks on which poor families depend, may be shrinking; this implies that state social protection, as well as the activities of community-based organisations and NGOs are vital for preventing destitution. Although there is no documented evidence of intergenerational poverty cycles, the deprivation that many families face means that such poverty cycles are a real possibility. However, available data do not make it possible to infer more than this about childhood or intergenerational transmission of poverty. **Establishing whether such cycles are emerging, and if so, under what circumstances, is therefore a priority for filling gaps in existing knowledge.**

There is no clear evidence about which sections of the population have inherited poverty from the Soviet era, and which have become poor since independence. This is one of the key knowledge gaps which CHIP's primary research will address. This analysis may also help to clarify the importance of individual or family-related factors, such as disability, single-parenthood or large families, and of more structural factors, such as access to useable assets (land, livestock, capital), to markets, and educational and employment opportunities. Understanding **the reasons underpinning long-term and severe poverty should aid effective prioritisation of actions to help tackle persistent poverty.**

In terms of actions aiming to alleviate or prevent childhood poverty, there appear to be two general trends. On one hand, national anti-poverty policy primarily aims to reduce poverty through macroeconomic growth. Although the importance of pro-poor growth is mentioned,

anti-poverty policy does not fully acknowledge that there may be structural constraints (including limited functioning of markets, lack of access to key useable assets, problems of ensuring adequate care for children, or discrimination based on age, gender or ethnicity), which permanently exclude certain groups of the population from benefiting from growth. This review did not come across any systematic analysis of social exclusion; rather, Soviet era categorisations of vulnerable groups, with some additions, such as street children, tend to be repeated. With a lack of research on this area, there is a lack of specifically directed interventions. Therefore, CHIP's research should attempt a deeper analysis of who is structurally excluded from, or disadvantaged by economic growth, and why, as a basis for recommendations for helping those groups avoid exclusion and preventing them from being caught in intergenerational poverty cycles.

The other general trend that this review has identified is a focus of many NGOs, and much government and international organisations' actions, on aiding 'vulnerable' groups of children – street, working, disabled and migrant children. Although it is encouraging that the NPRS mentions childhood poverty as a specific concern, it largely focuses on these vulnerable groups. The assumption is that other children will benefit from wider development processes. While this may well be the case, it is not always so, and in some cases, policy choices such as privatisation lie behind the emergence of these disadvantaged groups.

Another potential problem of this approach is that it tends to tackle the outcomes – a group of disadvantaged children – with relatively little emphasis on tackling the varied causes of their problems, which are often related to wider social and economic trends. A related trend is the emphasis on social work through action in support of disadvantaged children living with their families. Though social workers undoubtedly provide important practical, emotional and moral support, this must be seen as part of a network of actions needed to tackle childhood poverty. **If social work becomes the main response to childhood poverty, there is a risk that this focus will entrench a view of childhood poverty as a problem of individual families with difficulties (risk families), and could draw attention away from necessary economic and social investment.**

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Annex I. Review of relevant laws

Family Code of the Kyrgyz Republic. Laws closely connected with children

Article 54. Right of the child to live and be brought up in the family

1. A child is a person under age of 18.
2. Every child has the right to live and to be brought up in the family, right to know his/ her parents, to receive their care, to live in a family. If a child does not have parents or his/her parents are deprived of rights to bring up their child, guardianship bodies take care of the child.
3. Article 56. Right of the child to protection. A child has the right to protection of his/her interests and rights. Parents or guardians deliver protection for a child. A child has the right to protection from parent's abuse or from guardian's abuse. In case of violation of these rules, the child can appeal to guardianship bodies, or, if aged 14 years or more, can appeal to court.
4. Article 57. Right of the child to express his/her opinion. A child has the right to express his opinion in any family issues concerning his interests, and has the right to be heard in court.
5. Article 77. A child can be taken away from the family in case there is a danger for his/her life or health. In case there is danger for child's life or health guardianship bodies have the right to take the child away from the family. In case of taking the child away, guardianship bodies immediately inform the public prosecutor.
6. Article 84. Levy and usage of alimony for children left without parental care. For children without parental care alimony is requested in accordance with the articles 81-83 and paid to guardians or to child's personal account if a child is in orphanage or other institutions (educational, medical). When the child leaves an orphanage, the money is transferred to the bank (personal account) in the place where s/he was born.
7. Article 121. Detection and issuing of a social order to children left without parental care. Guardianship authorities are responsible for children's rights in the following cases: when 1) parents died, 2) parents are deprived of their rights for their children, 3) parents are not able to function, 4) parents are sick, 5) parents refused to take their children from maternity homes. Guardianship authorities maintain records and further control future of children in terms of giving education and social protection.

Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on state social assistance

Article 3. Concepts used:

State aid is monthly assistance to people on a low income.

Total income is a sum of money, received during the accounting period by the members of the family in the form of revenue from their production activities, revenue from their properties and current transfers (pension, stipends, aid, material aid and other compensations).

Average per capita total income is total revenue of the family, calculated for one month or year in calculation for each member of the family.

A low income family is a family, where each member has revenue which is less than the guaranteed minimum level of consumption.

Defining needs is research of every source of income of the family, which is necessary for designating monthly state aid.

Article 7. Persons who have the right to receive monthly assistance:

- a) Children under the age 16
- b) Students of initial professional educational institutions until they reach the age 21
- c) Non working retired people
- d) Unable to work people
- e) Low income families

Article 8. Amount of monthly assistance to low income families or citizens

A citizen or family gets monthly assistance when their total revenue is less than the guaranteed minimum level of consumption.

- a) Aid to children until they achieve age of 16.

-Monthly assistance when a child is born - 300 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC).

-Aid to mothers who gave birth to twins- 100 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC). This lasts until twins reach the age of 3.

-Aid to mothers who gave birth to triplets or more - 150 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC). This lasts until children reach the age of 16.

-Aid to non-working mothers - 100 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC). This lasts until her child reaches the age of 1.5.

-Aid to students, non-working retired people, unable to work people. Aid for them is calculated depending on their total incomes.

Article 10. Persons who have the right to receive monthly social assistance.

- a) Disabled children with cerebral palsy, HIV and AIDS until they reach the age of 16
- b) Children disabled from birth of I, II, III disability groups
- c) Disabled children of I, II, III groups-if they don't receive a pension
- d) Aged people if they do not receive a pension
- e) Mother heroines if they do not receive a pension
- f) Children whose parents died

Article 11. Amount of social assistance to disabled children until they reach age of 16.

- a) Disabled children with cerebral palsy - 200 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC).
- b) Disabled children - 150 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC).
- c) Disabled children with HIV, AIDS - 150 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC).

Article 12. Amount of social assistance to children disabled from birth.

- a) Children disabled from birth, I group – 200 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC).
- b) Children disabled from birth, II group - 150 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC).
- c) Children disabled from birth, III group - 100 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC).

Article 13. Amount of social assistance to disabled people who don't have the right to receive pension.

- a) Disabled people, group I - 150 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC).
- b) Disabled people, group II - 100 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC).
- c) Disabled people, group III - 50 per cent of monthly guaranteed minimum level of consumption (GLMC).

Article 14. Amount of monthly social assistance to aged people who don't have the right for pension.

The following people have the right to social assistance at the rate of 70 per cent of GLMC:

-Men of 65 years of age.

-Women of 55 years of age.

People living in highly mountainous areas receive 100 per cent of GLMC.

-Men who achieved 55 years of age.

-Women who achieved 50 years of age.

Article 15. Amount of social assistance to mother heroines.

Mother heroines are eligible for social assistance to the value of 150 per cent of GLMC

-at 55 years of age.

-those living in mountainous areas are eligible for this assistance at 50 years.

Article 16. Amount of monthly social assistance to children in families where the breadwinner died and who do not have the right to receive a pension - 100 per cent of GLMC. Children who lost both parents - 150 per cent of GLMC.

Table of State Benefits, 2002 and 2003

Monthly Benefits

Type of state benefit	From 1.4.2002 to 1.4.2003 Guaranteed minimum level of consumption. (GMLC) – 140 som per month	From 01.04.2003 Guaranteed minimum level of consumption. (GMLC) = 140 som + 20%
Social benefits		
To disabled children suffering from Bogaert-Bertrand cerebral paralysis	300% of GMLC - 420 som	300% of GMLC +20%-504 som
To disabled children	225% of GMLC - 315 som	225% of GMLC +20%-378 som
To children suffering from HIV and AIDS	225% of GMLC - 315 som	225% of GMLC +20%-378 som
To children disabled from birth, I group	300% of GMLC - 420 som	300% of GMLC +20%-504 som
To children disabled from birth, II group	225% of GMLC - 315 som	225% of GMLC +20%-378 som
To children disabled from birth, III group	150% of GMLC - 210 som	150% of GMLC +20%-252 som
To disabled of I group	225% of GMLC - 315 som	225% of GMLC +20%- 378 som
To disabled of II group	150% of GMLC - 210 som	150% of GMLC +20%-252 som
To disabled of III group	75% of GMLC - 105 som	75% of GMLC +20%- 126 som
To aged citizens	105% of GMLC - 147 som	105% per cent of GMLC +20%-176.4 som
To aged people in mountainous area	150% of GMLC - 210 som	150% of GMLC +20%-252 som
To mother heroines	225% of GMLC - 315 som	225% of GMLC +20%-378 som
To children in case of loss of bread winner	150% of GMLC - 210 som	150% of GMLC +20%-252 som
To orphans	225% of GMLC - 315 som	225% of GMLC +20%-378 som
Uniform monthly allowance		
Lump sum aid after birth of child	300% of GMLC - 420 som	300% of GMLC - 420 som
Aid to twins	100% of GMLC - 140 som	100% of GMLC - 140 som
Aid to triplets or more	150% of GMLC - 210 som	150% of GMLC - 210 som
Aid to children until age of 1, 5	100% of GMLC - 140 som	100% of GMLC - 140 som
Unified Monthly Benefit	Size of aid =(GMLC- average per capita income of the family) x number of family members eligible for unified monthly benefit	

The Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre (CHIP) is a collaborative venture between Save the Children Fund and the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC). CHIP is working with both researchers and advocates, north and south, to produce research, and influence policy and practice on childhood poverty in the wider context of chronic poverty.

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CHIP aims to:

- Deepen understanding of the main causes of childhood poverty and poverty cycles, and increase knowledge of effective strategies to tackle it in different contexts
- Inform effective policy to end childhood poverty, ensuring that research findings are widely communicated to policy makers, practitioners and advocates
- Raise the profile of childhood poverty issues and increase the urgency of tackling them through anti-poverty policy and action
- Work globally to tackle chronic and childhood poverty in transition and developing countries.

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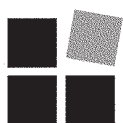
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