Realising the rights of young children: progress and challenges

Early childhood matters

Bernard van Leer Foundation

Contents

As the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) marks its twentieth years anniversary in November, this edition of *Early Childhood Matters* turns the spotlight to progress and challenges in making rights a reality.

When thinking about rights in relation to very young children, the CRC must always be considered in conjunction with General Comment No. 7 (GC7) of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. GC7 sets out authoritatively on how the CRC should be interpreted when it comes to the very young children. We start this edition (p. 3) with a refresher on what GC7 is all about.

Few people were more involved with the development of GC7 than our keynote interviewee, Lothar Krappmann, internationally renowned researcher on childhood matters and a member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child since 2003. He gives *Early Childhood Matters* an overview (p. 5) of what impact the CRC has had so far, and explains the challenges faced by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in ensuring that public understanding of children's rights keeps pace with the changing nature of childhood.

We then move on to Eastern Europe and the plight of young children from the Roma minority. Their relatively low level of participation in education is often viewed as an issue of human capital development – but as the International Step by Step Association (p. 12) explains, viewing the issue

instead through the prism of children's rights shows it in a very different light, especially the unlawful discrimination embodied by segregated schools for Roma children.

There are few more challenging places to implement child rights than in emergency situations: after natural disasters, or in environments of conflict. With examples from Haiti and Gaza, Save the Children (p. 18) depicts how an appreciation of children's rights brings a new perspective to emergency relief work. With the use of Child-Friendly Spaces in emergency zones becoming more common, attention is now turning to defining how emergency relief agencies can most effectively meet the rights of the very young children.

Not all of the rights advocated by the CRC have received equal attention over the last two decades. On p. 24 the International Play Association focuses on the "forgotten article" of the CRC – article 31, which deals with rest and leisure. In particular, the right to free play – that is, play initiated and controlled by children and undertaken purely for pleasure (its own sake), rather than play structured by adults with learning goals in mind – is identified as the most overlooked and

underappreciated aspect of the rights endorsed in this article.

Finding appropriate spaces for play is just one of the many challenges of meeting children's rights in urban environments, the subject of our next article (p. 29). UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities initiative is helping both city-wide authorities and, increasingly, local communities to make urban environments responsive to children's rights. As the world passed a turning point in 2007 when, for the first time, more than half the global population became urban, the challenge of making cities child-friendly can only become increasingly important in the future.

For children's rights to be realised in practice depends on the understanding of a diverse range of professionals, from doctors and social workers to the police and judiciary. The problem is that training in child rights tends to attract only those who are already motivated. On p. 36 Gerison Landsdown and Bo Damsted describe the progress of efforts in Tanzania to put together an early years training curriculum for professionals, drawing out some early lessons learned.

Realising children's rights also depends on recognising children as capable of participating actively in decisions affecting them, even from

Girls aged 5 and 6 playing a traditional game with stones in Bangsa Ardual, Andrha Pradesh, India
Photo: Jim Holmes

a young age. Our next contribution (p. 42) describes how this has been made a reality in a slum area of Rio de Janeiro through the creation of a *Centro Cultural da Criança* (Child Cultural Centre) where children aged 2 to 10 can gather get together *inter alia* to draw, read, dance, sing, play instruments, use computers and socialise.

It may be difficult to explain the concept of child rights in a way that meets with acceptance in local cultures. On p. 49 CHETNA, a long-standing partner of the Bernard van Leer Foundation in India, describe how they go about popularising the concept of child rights in their own particular cultural context by emphasising that

rights are basic needs and also imply responsibilities.

Our final contribution (p. 53) returns squarely to the difficulties of measuring progress in implementing the CRC and GC7 by addressing the question of indicators. Monitoring of any development goal depends on the existence of adequate indicators, but until recently there were no indicators specifically on how well rights were being realised in early childhood. The Early Childhood Rights Indicators Group is engaged in putting this right.

An introduction to General Comment 7: A framework for young children's rights

It is not always obvious, from the text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, how child rights should apply to very young children. In November 2005, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child therefore issued General Comment number 7 (GC7) to explain how the Convention should be interpreted when it comes to young children.

General Comments are formal statements in which the Committee on the Rights of Child explains how the CRC should be understood. The Committee is composed of independent experts elected by countries that have ratified the Convention. Though General Comments are not legally binding, they are widely regarded as authoritative and useful contributions to understanding.

GC7 itself is a 20-page document, accessible through the United Nations website.[1] To give advocates for child rights more in-depth insight into the ideas that informed GC7, the Bernard van Leer Foundation in collaboration with UNICEF and the Committee on the Rights of the Child also put together a book containing extracts from documents which the Committee considered while drafting GC7. The book, entitled *A Guide to General Comment 7*: *Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood*, is available for free in both printed and electronic form through the Bernard van Leer Foundation's website, in English[2] and Spanish.[3]

What, then, are the key aspects to bear in mind when considering how children's rights apply to very young children? In an article in the aforementioned book, prefacing the final text of GC7, three members of the Committee at the time – Jacob Egbert Doek, Lothar Friedrich Krappmann and Yanghee Lee – identified four concerns addressed by GC7 to which the Committee attached "special significance". They are as follows:

1. The Comment clarifies that the young child must not only be regarded as a rights-holder in an abstract sense, but that the young child must also be accepted as an active participant in the routine processes of daily life.

Without the child's contribution, no interaction of the child with other persons can be established, and no relationships can emerge. No person can learn in place of the child; the child alone has to acquire knowledge and ability. The child must discover the world primarily through the child's own activities and insights. Only when the child understands the nature of a healthy lifestyle can the child seek the most agreeable paths to achieve that lifestyle.

Every attempt to find out the best interests of the child must be confirmed by paying attention to the child so as to capture the views and feelings the child expresses in verbal and non-verbal ways. Thus, young children are not only formally entitled to the rights that are vicariously claimed for them by parents or guardians, but should already begin to exercise those rights on their own in a practical sense through their actions and interactions, as well as through the concerns they express both for themselves and for others.

2. The Comment draws attention to the fact that the young child has the ability to communicate views.

The Convention does not restrict the respect it demands for the views of the child to those views that the child states in sophisticated terms. Young children use gestures and facial expressions, laughter and tears to express messages about their interests and wishes, to share their joy and excitement and to communicate their fears and worries.

They may even use very destructive manifestations of inconvenience, distress, or anxiety to attract the attention of parents and other persons

close to them. Care must be taken
to fathom these signals. Thoughtful,
sensitive persons must listen to and
seek to comprehend and respond to the
demands and emotional states of the
child because the survival, well-being
and development of the child depend
on the child's integration through
interaction with others.

3. The Comment stresses that young
   children must rely on others who
   have a responsibility to ensure
   that children are provided with
   opportunities to acquire skills, learn
   about their own talents and realize
   their unique potential.

Young children need support,
communication, shared understanding
and guidance. They can become
extremely vulnerable if their
surroundings do not promote their
participation and help them to build
up their capacities. Their surroundings
cannot provide this encouragement if
the children do not receive sufficient
attention from caring persons, if their
physical needs are not met, if their
cognitive capacities are not challenged,
if their emotional security is not
ensured, or if they are not integrated
within a network of social relationships
in which they can play an active
role, the more so if their rights are
violated through humiliation, abuse, or
exploitation.

Early childhood is one of the most
critical phases in life. Guaranteeing
young children the proper conditions

for growth will save the state and its
services and institutions the expense
and energy required to deal with
individuals who have not been able to
find healthy, productive paths in lives
begun so unfavourably. The investment
in early childhood pays dividends
through the young members of society
who have thereby been able to realize
their rich, natural capacities and enjoy
the satisfactions of self-reliance and
social responsibility.

4. The Comment underlines the truth
   that governments, public services
   and persons who live and work
   with children all share the duty
   to establish the proper conditions
   so that children can realize their
   potential.

This will require a sound institutional
and social environment that allows
interested individuals and groups
to combine their efforts in favour
of young children. A framework of
policies, laws, programmes and other
measures should ensure that the
needs of young children are met to
the maximum extent possible through
available resources.

The Comment strongly recommends
that special plans of action be adopted
for the identification of goals, the

allocation of resources and the
determination of time limits to achieve
these goals. The appointment of a
children's rights commissioner who
has been vested with the mandate
to monitor progress could help
substantially to enhance respect
for children and their well-being,
development and prospects.

Notes
1 http://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/
   GEN/G06/443/80/pdf/G0644380.pdf
2 http://www.bernardvanleer.org/publications/
   publications_results?SearchableText=B-BOK-009
3 http://es.bernardvanleer.org/publications/
   publications_results?SearchableText=B-BOK-009S

"Slow, but steady progress"

Lothar Krappmann is internationally recognised for his research on childhood, focusing on the social, emotional, and moral development of children in family, school, and day care institutions. He has been a member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child since 2003 and the Rapporteur of the Committee since 2007. Here he talks to *Early Childhood Matters* about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and General Comment No. 7.

ECM: As the CRC turns 20 years old, we'd like to ask you to you step back for a moment to reflect on its impact. What would you nominate as the most satisfying achievements of the CRC so far? And what, in your view, are the most frustratingly slow areas of progress?

Lothar Krappmann: The first positive achievement after the adoption of the Convention by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989 was the unexpected fact that within a few years, all but two States became parties to this treaty. Also, the two non-ratifying states – Somalia and the United States of America – at least signed it. We should not forget that this Convention is a demanding treaty covering rights from the civil and the political to the economic, social and cultural. In dialogue with the Committee in Geneva, governments are assailed with numerous questions which refer to all areas of their activities, since the full implementation of children's rights is a cross-sectional challenge.

Thus, it is amazing that the State Parties actually send the reports they are under obligation to submit. Not only European State Parties send their reports, but also quite a number of developing countries have sent third and fourth periodic reports, and obviously use these reports as cornerstones of self-critical monitoring of the effects of their implementation efforts.

In my view it is likewise important that many professionals involved with children have heard of child rights. I am afraid that often they do not know well enough what these rights of the child imply. But at least the notion is spreading across the regions of the world and, to differing degrees, judges, teachers, police, law-enforcement officers, medical staff, social workers and also parents are trained to observe the provisions of the Convention – not enough, but first steps can be observed everywhere.

Many children themselves have learned that they have rights. When children are treated in an unacceptable way, more of them than ever before know that this is against their rights. This awareness has not yet ended the plights of children, but it is a start. More curricula include human rights and child rights; more schools inform children about their rights; more schools give children a voice in matters that concern them – again, not everywhere by any means, and often half-heartedly. But a new sense is spreading across the world of who children are and what provisions are their right.

There are also very concrete changes: Many laws have been harmonized with the Convention, child rights have been included in new articles of constitutions and child codes. In many countries violations of child rights like corporal punishment, sexual abuse and economic exploitation have been criminalized and more strictly prosecuted. Family benefits and child allowances have been expanded. Children without parental care find foster families or family-type homes more often than before. School fees have been waived, special scholarships for girls provided, dropout rates lowered. Many health indicators show positive trends. The juvenile justice system has been separated from the adults' system in many countries.

Almost everywhere one could add a big "but", which would remind of slow progress, ineffective regulations, unsatisfactory quality, and even stagnation and backlashes. Still too many children die at birth or in the first years of their lives; discrimination

against minority and indigenous children remains pervasive; gender parity has not been achieved at all; millions of children are out of school, and millions more are still working under miserable conditions; the number of sold and trafficked children is still at a horrible level; recruitment of children by armies and armed groups has not been eliminated.

However, there are positive developments, and this should be recognized in order to encourage the many child rights activists and their organisations. We are making slow, but steady progress. This progress will hopefully continue despite the hazards of the present economic crisis, frequent natural disasters and seemingly-ineradicable armed conflicts.

This progress is not due only to the monitoring efforts of the Committee. Many UN agencies and organisations, civil societies and their non-governmental organisations, academia and practitioners in many fields have contributed enormously towards the step by step process of making child rights a reality. Although observed progress is often disappointing, there is no alternative to incessantly insisting that the next step is done.

And last but not at all least, we should not overlook that some governments are very engaged, not only in the implementation of child rights in their own country but also cooperating with other State Parties which lack needed resources.

The Committee emphatically tries to be a driving force in the network of all these activities. What the Committee in particular can contribute is the authority of the Convention: It has been given the mandate to explain what is intended by the articles of the Convention, which obligations are agreed upon, and what full implementation of the articles requires to be provided, established or avoided. Thus, the Committee helps child right organisations to act not just as child-friendly petitioners but as advocates and activists who want State Parties to realize what they agreed upon already twenty years ago in the General Assembly of the UN on November 20, 1989.

Considering how the world has changed in the last 20 years, how are the challenges faced by children from a rights perspective different now than then? Is the text of the CRC as relevant today as when it was drafted?

Yes, childhood has changed and will continue to change under the influence of technological and economic developments, which have worldwide impact. Thus, there are new challenges of ensuring child rights which did not yet exist or were not yet recognized in the 80s, when the Convention was drafted. More children now grow up without care by both or at least one parent as a remarkable number of parents separate, leave their hometowns or their countries because

of the labour market, or die because of HIV/AIDS. Also, extended families no longer always function as the reliable safe havens they were before. Thus, more children need foster care, kafalah, adoption, child-friendly homes, and sometimes support for child-headed households. The Committee has to strengthen children's role in such decision-making processes and demand that they are given a voice in reviews of their placements.

Migration has become a huge problem as many children, either following their parents or travelling alone, flee from unbearable living

they ask for protection at national borders. I am convinced that a Convention drafted today would include an expanded article 22, although the UN has since adopted a Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrants.

I could go on to mention several other problems which need focused attention and consistent application of the principles and rights of the Convention to these unforeseen developments. We may think of communication technologies, which were just emerging in the 80s, or electronic media, which have turned

inform the public about their plights. More often than in the first years of the Committee's work, children themselves meet with the Committee when it prepares for dialogue with Governments, to present their perspectives and complaints.

In order to catch up with developments and show how the expanding participation of children in school, community planning and policy development is rooted in the Convention, the Committee had to draft a General Comment on the right of the child "to be heard" (General Comment 12). It is a seminal article. I believe, however, that this article, if the Convention were drafted today, would more explicitly incorporate the right to persistent participation of children in all processes, which affect and shape the conditions in which they grow up and develop.

> "Childhood has changed and will continue to change under the influence of technological and economic developments, which have worldwide impact."

conditions in search of safety, better lives, education or training, but are very often exposed to the dangers of being trafficked, exploited, isolated in camps, or deprived of health services, educational facilities and relationships with trustworthy persons. The Convention obliges State Parties to ensure the full implementation of their rights. But State Parties usually give immigration laws precedence over the obligations under the Convention. General Comment No. 6 was issued to spell out the details of how children's rights have to be safeguarded when

out to be a very mixed blessing, or our better understanding of the necessity to protect children at an early age against the harmful long-term consequences of living in extreme poverty.

But let us not forget that the Convention has also produced changes in the world. The concept of a child is changing: In many countries, at one time it was widely accepted that children should be seen and not heard. Today's children increasingly want to be seen *and* heard! They have formed associations; they have elected speakers; they use the media to

How does the Committee adapt to these changing challenges to ensure that children's rights stay in focus? Is the General Comment the main instrument of doing so, and how effective are General Comments in this respect?

You can see that the Committee is aware that the conditions under which children grow up are changing, and that new insights emerging from social science or experience in the field have to be reflected in the Committee's interpretation of child rights. One opportunity to develop widened or deepened understanding is given by

Days of General Discussion, which are attended by NGOs, State Parties, UN agencies and experts of all kinds, and which stimulate an intense exchange of views on current child-rights topics. The Committee's main instrument, however, is indeed the General Comment. These are elaborated and adopted after thorough consultation with concerned and involved persons and organisations – and in the case of General Comment 12, on the right of the child to be heard, also including with children.

General Comments are carefully read in the network of organisations which are in close cooperation of the Committee, but far less in the worldwide child-rights community. And I am afraid that State Parties hardly take note of General Comments. The Committee also suspects that governments – to which they have to be sent first – do not distribute them, and the Committee has no resources to mail them to the several hundred or thousand organisations which should receive them. They are published on the internet, but seem to be lost amid the flood of other information available online. Often they are not translated. Furthermore, the language in which General Comments are written does not make them an easy read for practitioners, as they include legal interpretations as well as explanations and conclusions at a relatively abstract level because they are written in view of challenges of a general nature and not country-specifically.

Committee members were considering launching General Comments in public events, organizing review articles in journals and newsletters, and doing summaries in a language which would be more easily understood by those who work with children in different fields. The human and financial resources for such activities are lacking, though.

General Comment No. 7, of course, deals with implementing child rights in early childhood. Can you talk us through what the Committee hoped to achieve with General Comment No. 7, and to what extent has it suffered from the problems of dissemination you mentioned?

It is without question that young and very young children also enjoy the rights incorporated in the Convention. The Convention however is relatively vague about provisions which safeguard young children's healthy development, care and education. The drafters of the Convention may have had the idea that young children are best protected and cared for by their families. We have since gained a much better understanding of the impact of the early years on the entire lives of human beings, and have comprehended that State Parties must establish institutions and give massive assistance to parents and families to exercise their responsibilities in situations where young children face

challenges which families alone cannot meet.

Interestingly, governments have never objected to the Committee's requests to establish early childhood care and education facilities and make them accessible for all children, including girls, free of cost – or, at least, free for children who would not attend if their parents had to pay. The Committee used General Comment No. 7 to inform the wider public that young children also enjoy the rights of the Convention and that State Parties have to cater for their rights to health, development and education. The elaboration of this General Comment was made possible by generous support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, which also helped to engage in some follow-up initiatives.

Partly in consequence of this, General Comment No. 7 is somewhat better off than some of the others in terms of its visibility and impact. It also had the advantage of being a timely document. UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO issued reports or papers on the relevance of early childhood almost at the same time. They were so pleased

to find this General Comment, which relates their endeavours to obligations under the Convention. There was even an attempt to establish a common platform of these organisations and the Committee, with the aim of strengthening the pressure on governments to prioritize investments in early childhood institutions and programmes. According to my information all these important organisations have strengthened their early childhood activities. The joint coordinating body, however, was not realized.

How would you characterise overall the impact that General Comment No. 7 has had? Among the ideas laid out in GC7, are there any in particular that you would single out as having had an especially strong impact in shaping debates and perceptions, or as having had less of an impact than you'd hoped?

Overall I am rather satisfied with General Comment No. 7 and its reception. It has become an important document in a broad movement aiming at enhancing understanding

of early childhood and establishing a stimulating environment for young children. I think it helps to explain the rights to which young children are entitled, gives a foundation for many activities and has encouraged many who are responsible for young children and service provision to integrate a strong focus on early childhood in policies for children.

When I reconsider which issues might have been explained better in the General Comment to get the message across more effectively, I think of the relationship of school

"There are positive developments, and this should be recognized in order to encourage the many child rights activists and their organisations."

preparation with children's play. Often the preparation of children for school is regarded as more important than the protection of children's free play alone or with peers, which is a source of many social, cognitive and moral competencies. The intention to facilitate school achievement seems to narrow the view of which activities should be promoted. It may also lead to a neglect of the special demands of children from indigenous groups or minorities, because school and preparing for school – sorry to say – often standardizes children's attention, learning processes and their entire lives.

The General Comment is very clear on these issues. It underlines that children should enjoy support for their holistic development. But such concerns often are ahead of the factual developments, since the Committee observes that in many State Parties institutional provisions for young children are not available to the extent that is needed. Existing facilities are found mostly in urban areas. One reason is that more urban parents can afford to pay the fees which are charged. But there are also several states which have integrated one year of preschool education into the compulsory years of education.

Finally, there is no doubt that the Committee on the Rights of the Child pays much more attention to early childhood policies since it has issued the General Comment No. 7. It is important to remember that the drafting of General Comments is also a learning process for the Committee itself.

You were closely involved in a pioneering project in Jamaica to track the impact of GC7 on the realisation of young children's rights. Can you explain how this came about and what main things you have learned from it?

The Early Childhood Commission of Jamaica (ECC) heard of the plan to support and investigate the dissemination of General Comment No. 7 in a country which was determined to strengthen its early

childhood policies, and decided to volunteer for being the pilot country. The Bernard van Leer Foundation provided the resources needed to realize the project.

What has the Committee learned? It seems to be important that not only general information about the existence of a General Comment is given, but that an institution or body with a good status in the country takes over the responsibility for the dissemination of a General Comment. Apparently it is furthermore important that such an institution does not just send the General Comment to all persons and organisations involved in early childhood matters, but also explains how it relates to the country-specific situation. This was the procedure in Jamaica: a group established by the ECC did a survey to decide which of the issues and proposals contained in the General Comment have special relevance with regard to the situation of early childhood in Jamaica.

This informative analysis provided the base for a three-day meeting of almost four hundred caregivers, teachers, social workers and parents, at which they were trained in small groups on the subjects of greatest concern. Participants were introduced to, among other thing, best-practice examples of play, learning of young children, nutrition, participation of children and parents, cultural activities, gender equality, or violence in families. The aim was to enable the caregivers, teachers and all others to put the young

child in the centre of the institution or programme, and make sure that his or her best interests are considered when it comes to health, nutrition, development and learning.

A survey conducted about a year later showed that the staff of children's institutions were highly knowledgeable about child rights, in particular when caregivers, teachers and social workers had participated in the training, but the written action plans which participants in the training had agreed to draft had mostly not been developed. Also, a planned reporting mechanism for suspected cases of violence, abuse and neglect, along with a counselling service, was not in fact established. The conclusion is that more permanent support would be needed to follow up the resolutions made during the days of training. Again, it turns out that transforming a project into a permanent institutional structure is a critical issue.

Anyhow, caregivers, social workers and teachers can learn to meaningfully use the General Comment when it is presented to them in a country-sensitive version. The Committee, however, must take note that its General Comments will not reach the staff of the diverse institutions for children if no such country-specific "translation" is provided. According to its mandate, the Committee primarily addresses State Parties. The Committee has no resources to organize a dissemination process which takes into account the specific

working conditions of early childhood institutions in the diverse State Parties. Who will take responsibility for such necessary intermediary steps?

The Bernard van Leer Foundation deserves our recognition and thanks for helping to identify this bottleneck of dissemination. Since so many strong organisations are convinced that children should have child-rights based conditions of development in their early years, the Committee hopes that organisations will be aware of this crucial requirement and actively take care of disseminating General Comment No. 7 and other Comments in a way which is accommodated to the contexts in which institutions for children work.

Working for inclusion through pre-school education

Children's rights and the Roma

Liana Ghent, ISSA Executive Director, and Dawn Tankersley, ISSA Programme Consultant

The International Step by Step Association[1] (ISSA) and its member NGOs work for Roma inclusion, and to improve Roma children's chances of becoming fully active and productive citizens. This article explores the implications of approaching this work from the point of view of fairness, equity and rights, rather than only from the argument of economic efficiency and human capital development.

Fundamental to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) General Comment No. 7 is the idea that young children should not be seen as objects to whom rights are given. Rather, policies and conditions should be set in place so that they may "exercise" their rights. When the problems faced by children are complex and interlinked, as is the case for Roma children, this can be achieved only with an approach that is multi-sector and integrated.

The Roma are one of the oldest and largest ethnic groups in Europe. Their numbers are estimated at around 10-12 million. Roma populations have historically been subject to discrimination, xenophobia and exclusion. Despite a number of policy initiatives during the last two decades, the living and working conditions of the Roma have not improved much and they remain socially, economically and geographically marginalized.

Young Roma children consequently form one of Europe's most vulnerable groups. They continue to be excluded from quality early childhood services. In many places Roma communities have no buildings to house early childhood programmes. If Roma families do live close to state-supported pre-school institutions, most cannot afford the costs (e.g. of meals) associated with attending them. Furthermore, even if cost and distance were not prohibitive, some Roma parents would choose not to send their children to pre-school institutions, given the general ill-treatment and discrimination they may be subject to.

The low enrollment of Roma children in pre-school education is alarming. Without quality pre-school education, Roma children entering the first grade are less prepared than their peers, and consistently fall behind in their school careers. A UNICEF regional study on education in CEE/CIS[2] shows that in three of the countries with the largest Roma communities (Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania), only a small portion of Roma children have education beyond the primary level; only 10–35% of Roma students enroll in secondary education; and across the region, only 1% attend higher education.

This in turn leads to poor future employment prospects for Roma children, and thus the cycles of poverty and social exclusion are repeated. That education is crucial for breaking

this intergenerational transmission of deprivation is widely recognised. A number of policy documents and guidelines, including the European Commission Communication *Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training*,[3] stress the importance of pre-primary education.

However, this widespread recognition has not always been translated into sound policies. Attempts to improve education for Roma children often involve segregating them into special schools. ISSA considers that this does not meet the requirements of Article 2 of the UNCRC, which requires state parties to ensure rights to every child "without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's, or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status".

Establishing the right to inclusion
Some educators and policymakers claim that Roma children benefit from smaller classes and more individualized attention in special schools, as well as from policies giving economic support to parents of children with disabilities. But many question the way in which Roma children are sent to these schools, either having been labelled as "special needs" students or because they face linguistic barriers to education (their mother tongue being different from the language of instruction, to which most have limited

or no exposure before beginning primary school). Such assessment methods can effectively justify discrimination and segregation, and can thus be considered a serious denial of human rights.

The Open Society's Step by Step Programme and ISSA were closely involved in a case to test this argument in the European Court of Human Rights. Research from the Step by Step Special Schools Project was used by the lawyers who first presented the case in 2000, when it was initially rejected, and again on appeal.

As part of the process of appeal, ISSA together with the European Early Childhood Education Research Association and the Roma Education Fund, submitted in 2006 an Amicus Brief[4] on technical issues related to testing and assessment in education. It stressed: "special schools in Central and South-Eastern Europe are part of an educational context that perpetuates educational segregation of minority groups. Today, special schools represent a lower standard of education from which there are very few opportunities for re-integration into the mainstream, or for progression to higher levels of education, thus limiting children's future employment prospects".

In a momentous decision for Roma across Europe, in the case *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2007 that segregating Roma students into

special schools was a form of unlawful discrimination.[5]

Difficulties with inclusion in practice
Having established the right to inclusion, however, another barrier must be tackled: the fact that teachers and educators are ill-prepared to develop and teach in inclusive environments. Many do not have the skills to work with children and families who do not speak the language of instruction, nor are they able to build upon the competencies which children have gained as a result of their cultural experiences.

This means that even when they do attend mainstream schools, Roma children are often the subject of prejudice, unfair treatment and lower expectations. They may be placed in classrooms with younger children, held back to repeat a school year or punished for not having brought supplies or finished their homework. Similarly, they may not be encouraged or even permitted to sit in the class with children who are from the mainstream population. Teachers may talk about or to them in ways that are patronizing, stereotypical or emotionally abusive. What is more, Roma families and communities often receive blame for their children's lack of success in school.

Another stumbling block towards making inclusion work in practice is that early childhood services for Roma children are often reduced to a focus on "school readiness", neither looking at

the circumstances and needs of Roma communities nor promoting their voice in society. In most cases pre-school programmes for Roma children are neither child-centered nor respectful of the child's language, knowledge or culture.

This is especially true when the sole purpose of the programme is for Roma children to learn the language of the mainstream population. This is an unrealistic goal to achieve in a year or less of pre-school, where acquiring the level of language needed to cope with a school setting has been shown to take up to seven years.[6] Furthermore, research shows that bilingual programmes that support the maintenance and development of the mother tongue, in addition to the acquisition of the new language, have the greatest long-term impact on children's academic performance.[7]

Again, the focus solely on "school readiness" does not take sufficient account of a children's rights perspective. UNCRC General Comment No. 7 calls on state parties to ensure that "all young children (and those with primary responsibility for their well-being) are guaranteed access to appropriate and effective services,

including programmes of health, care and education specifically designed to promote their well-being".

Principles for inclusive pre-schools
As the problems experienced by Roma are generally multi-dimensional and interlinked, an effective approach which improves the educational outcomes of Roma, and their success in and after school, must therefore be multi-faceted and extend beyond the school. Services for early childhood should act as a meeting place for community members, and thus greatly contribute to building social cohesion. Comprehensive early childhood education can model, reflect and teach social inclusion.

For this to happen, ISSA maintains the crucial importance of raising awareness among Roma communities of the benefits of early education. These include laying the foundations for lifelong learning, and ensuring Roma children's success in school, and the smooth transition into employment. At the same time, it is equally important to sensitize the authorities responsible for providing education services to the importance of ensuring that Roma children have equal access to

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Classroom interactions between teachers and children, and amongst children, should promote a positive sense of self and sense of being part of a community.
Photo: Courtesy ISSA - Slovakia

early education services. These need to support community participation, and should respond to the conditions, needs and values of the community.

ISSA believes in the following principles for pre-school education:

- *Pre-schools should be affordable for all families.* Cost has been recognized as one of the main barriers for Roma children accessing pre-school education. Children from Roma families may need subsidies to attend pre-schools.
- *Pre-schools should be close to parents and local communities.* Parental involvement in the everyday working of the school can increase school success. Often, Roma parents do not feel welcome in institutions, and are not included in school activities. Pre-schools must involve parents in a meaningful way, and strengthen links with Roma communities.
- *Pre-schools should be responsive and closely linked with other services.* Pre-schools should work closely with community groups and social services to ensure that efforts are coordinated, and that the school is truly responsive to community needs and interests.
- *Pre-schools should offer flexible programmes that meet users' needs.* Current structures of national pre-school programmes that provide all-day access for working parents are not necessarily what Roma parents need or wish for their children.[8]

- *Pre-schools should be accessible.* Access means having adequate buildings and facilities, and also integrating special needs children directly into mainstream pre-school settings rather than segregating them into separate facilities.
- *Pre-schools should be managed openly.* School management should become more inclusive, more self-aware, and implement school plans and improvements to constantly improve quality.
- *Pre-schools should provide environments that are physically and emotionally safe and secure.* Roma children are often the victims of prejudice and unfair treatment in educational environments. Teacher attitude is one of the most important determinants of teaching quality, and they often have lower expectations of Roma children.
- *Pre-schools should use child-centered teaching methodologies and pedagogy.* Classroom interactions between teachers and children, and amongst children, should promote a positive sense of self and sense of being part of a community. Pedagogy should build on each child's strengths rather than focusing on deficits, and achieve a balance of teacher-initiated group work and freely chosen play activities.
- *Pre-schools should involve parents and community members in a meaningful way.* Family and community members also play a significant role in educating the

child. It is important to develop and strengthen bonds between them and pre-schools through communication and partnership-building; also to work with them to help create home learning environments that support children's development and learning.

- *Pre-schools should ensure that the curriculum reflects diversity.* A good curriculum not only transmits knowledge but also develops skills and instills social values. Within multicultural education, teachers should incorporate knowledge of minority cultures, provide Roma first-language or national second-language programmes as appropriate, and challenge stereotypes and discrimination.
- *Pre-schools should provide stimulating and democratic learning environments.* Children should not only learn about democracy but experience it through participating. Promoting exploration, learning and independence creates a disposition to lifelong learning. Research shows that academic performance is increased by teaching children about rights, responsibilities and the values of civil society.
- *Pre-schools should use formative assessment as the basis for planning learning activities.* Plans should build on children's previous knowledge and be differentiated to provide for individual children's interests, needs, and learning styles. Assessment and planning should be a participative process involving the children

themselves, their families and other relevant professionals including Roma teaching assistants.

- *Pre-schools should ensure that teachers have a strong understanding of child development, learning theory, curriculum content, and knowledge of the families and communities in which they work.* When working in communities where the language of the community may not be that of the instruction, teachers need to understand how multilingualism

> Services for early childhood should act as a meeting place for community members, and thus greatly contribute to building social cohesion.

develops and the importance of strengthening the child's home language while also developing the school language. Teachers should have training in multicultural and anti-bias issues and education for democracy, to understand how discrimination is institutionalized and how to become agents of societal change.

Successful approaches: the ISSA experience

ISSA's work has revolved around raising the professionalism of teachers, sensitizing them to diversity and the values of democracy. As part of this, members of the network

have developed and implemented training programmes and resources that support teachers' professional development, and support parent and community involvement in children's advancement and learning. All this has the goal of providing Roma children with equal access to quality early childhood services.

For over 15 years, members of the ISSA network have been involved in teacher training in both in-service and pre-service programmes. ISSA's best-practice principles for early childhood education are laid out in *Competent Teachers of the 21st Century: ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy*, a network-developed tool that reflects a rights-based approach to well-being and aims to increase the professional competence of teachers in child-centered pedagogy.

One of seven focus areas in this resource is "Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy", which outlines how it is the responsibility of educators to promote "the right of every child and family to be included, respected and valued, to participate, to work toward common goals, and to reach their full potential". Another focus area, "Families and Communities", then goes more deeply into how to work with families, how to recognize and support "the role of the home learning environment and family as the first educational and social setting of a child, building bridges between the school and family/community

and promoting ongoing two-way communication".

ISSA also provides three different but interconnected training modules which stress the need to go beyond mere tolerance of differences, and aim at transforming schools and education systems to be more open to diversity and inclusion:

- *Education for Social Justice: A Programmes for Adults* presents the background to the subject, theory, and activities for adults engaged in any profession;
- *Educating for Diversity: Education for Social Justice Activities for Classrooms* presents classroom-based learning activities for early childhood educators to use in their work with children;
- *Effective Teaching and Learning for Minority-Language Children* presents the background to the subject, theory and activities for teachers of minority-language children who are learning a second language; the module promotes the use of the children's own language and culture in the classroom.

They specifically target the needs of different populations, while increasing practitioners' knowledge and understanding of, and sensitivity to, the complex mechanisms that perpetuate and maintain systems of oppression and inequity. They promote the practitioner's own responsibility and capacity to intervene, challenge and counter the personal and institutional

behavior that perpetuates these systems.

Many ISSA member NGOs have worked in Roma communities to provide training for parents and other community members on how to promote young children's learning and development. Being based in the community and run by parents and other community members, programmes have been developed that are able to build upon what children already know and can do. These use local resources as learning materials, such as stories and games from the community, and are more flexible in establishing partnerships with other social services.

A final successful initiative in advocating equal access for Roma children has been the legitimization and professionalization of the Roma assistant position in schools in various countries. This paraprofessional role builds bridges between the majority population educators and Roma communities. It is seen as a first step in the development of preparing more Roma to become teachers, not only of Roma but also of majority-population children.

Notes

1 International Step by Step Association (ISSA, www.issa.nl) connects professionals and organisations working in early childhood development and education. While its network stretches across the globe, its core members are the 29 non-governmental organisations located in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia that implement the Step by Step Programmes initiated by the Open Society Institute in 1994. ISSA promotes inclusive, quality care and education experiences that create the conditions for all children to become active members of democratic knowledge societies.
2 UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS (2007) *Education for Some More than Others? A Regional Study on Education in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.*
3 COM (2008) 865: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/com865_en.pdf
4 The Amicus Brief may be found at: http://www.issa.nl/news_role.html and at: http://www.errc.org/db/02/D5/m000002D5.pdf
5 Full text of the Grand Chamber Judgment available at: http://www.errc.org/db/02/D1/m000002D1.pdf.
6 J. Cummins and M. Swain (1986) *Bilingualism in education: aspects of theory, research, and practice.*
7 W. P. Thomas and V. Collier (2002) *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement, Santa Cruz, CA:* Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, available at: www.crede.ucsc.edu/research/;;aa/1.1_final.html
8 A longitudinal UK study documents that full-time attendance leads to no better results than part-time provision: K. Sylva, E. Melhuish, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford, B. Taggart, and K. Elliot (2003) *The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the Pre-school Period.*

Save the Children

Supporting children's rights in an emergency

There are few more challenging environments for protecting young children's rights than emergency contexts of natural disaster and conflict, when children are particularly vulnerable and critical support is so difficult to find. This article by Save the Children[1] examines efforts to support the rights of children in emergencies through interventions in Haiti and Gaza, and concludes with recommendations for future emergency programming which gives increased thought and attention to young children under eight years of age.

In recent years, programming and direct services for children have become a much more visible part of emergency response. For example, considerable progress has been made in raising awareness of the role that Child-Friendly/ Safe Spaces can play in emergency situations, and they are fast becoming common practice within child-focused emergency response agencies. Family tracing, children's forums, landmine education and other interventions have also been developed at the beginning stages of an emergency to address children's rights. However, the rights and needs of very young children (pre-birth to eight years old) in emergencies have not been as clearly articulated or addressed.

How does a focus on children under eight years of age in emergencies look? Save the Children implements Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes which address children's rights to survival, protection, education, participation, healthy environments, and nurturing care. Where children's rights are violated, our programming targets that violation and seeks to address the gap in

ensuring children's rights. Addressing and supporting children's rights may look different in various contexts, but we strive to provide ECD programming that is holistic in nature and services that address children's physical, social, psychological and intellectual development, with an emphasis on specific needs arising from the emergency context. Interventions such as Child-Friendly Spaces, parenting groups, home visiting services, health services, informal playgroups, teacher training, preschools, etc., are all examples of ECD programming. Landmine Education programmes are also important for very young children and Save the Children plans to adapt existing landmine education programmes for ECD aged children who are at extremely high risk of being injured by Unexploded Ordnance (UXOS), especially in countries like Gaza and Lebanon where UXOS are disguised as colorful toys.

We have learned that programming for young children living in the midst of natural disasters and conflict settings must also be contextually appropriate and community based. As much

as possible in emergency contexts, Save the Children partners with communities and local government to ensure they are leading the process of needs assessment, programme design, implementation, monitoring, and future planning. Ideally children themselves are involved in this process at every step of the way. Supporting young children's rights also requires networking between different agencies, local NGOs and layers of government to identify and harness what infrastructure still exists, because no single agency can do everything and collaborative efforts to complement the expertise and capacity each entity brings to the table sets the foundation for a stronger infrastructure for services for young children and their families in the future.

The following two case studies provide insight into how a children's rights perspective can inform emergency relief efforts, and shares experiences from Save the Children's work in two recent emergency situations: tropical storms in Haiti, and conflict in Gaza.

Responding to children's needs after the storms – Save the Children in Haiti[2]

Struck by four severe storms in a 3-week stretch from mid-August to early September 2008, all 10 of Haiti's geographic departments were affected by the combined impact of Tropical Storm Fay, Hurricane Gustav, Tropical Storm Hanna, and Hurricane Ike.

Extensive flooding occurred and a major portion of Gonaives, the densely-populated capital of the Artibonite with 300,000 residents, was completely deluged, and access to this region—along with many others—was cut off for many weeks due to high waters, damaged roads, and collapsed bridges.

After each disaster event, Save the Children conducted on-the-ground assessments of health, protection, education, and livelihoods needs in its major intervention areas through staff and partners, including the Haitian Government Civil Protection Agency. Save the Children participated actively in all relevant UN emergency cluster groups convened from the onset. First response included deliveries of

water, food and hygiene kits. Later, sheets, blankets, mattresses, and water purification tablets were added to the distribution list.

Save the Children opened 19 Child-Friendly Spaces, the majority in temporary shelter sites including schools, churches, city halls, warehouses, markets, and tent cities. More than 5,000 children from about 20,000 internally displaced families enjoyed supervised, protected places to express themselves, learn, and heal from their recent trauma.

Two psychologists and 182 social workers—nearly all from the affected regions— were recruited and trained to supervise children. Age-appropriate books, games, sports and nutritious

snacks were provided and age-appropriate psycho-social activities were specifically designed to help children at different developmental levels to cope with anxiety of loss and prepare them for future threats.

To ensure better protection standards in the larger shelter environment where child neglect and abuse was reported, Save the Children trained local civil protection staff and held awareness-raising sessions for 3,800 community members in basic first aid, parenting skills, nutrition, hygiene, and non-violent discipline, as well as strategies on how to reach out and communicate positively with their children during traumatic events.

Using a cascade training model, over a period of 5 days in October and December, Save the Children trained 66 motivated and energetic residents of the temporary shelters, as well as local volunteers. The goal of the training was to have the residents replicate the training formally or informally with their peers in the shelters. These community members later formed Child Protection Committees in their neighborhoods to help ensure ongoing respect for the rights of children.

An innovative partnership with a Haitian telecommunications firm provided 20 free phone banks adjacent to Child-Friendly Spaces for victims to contact loved ones, which were managed by shelter residents to provide jobs. The Child-Friendly Spaces programme also included funding for

family tracing, school reinsertion, and small cash grants.

To decrease children's risk in future disaster events, Save the Children in Haiti plans to promote school-based emergency preparedness activities.

Responding to children's needs in conflict – Save the Children in Gaza
Save the Children[3] has worked in the Middle East since 1953, including Israel, and is one of the largest u.s. nongovernmental organisations in the West Bank and Gaza. In December 2008 and early 2009, conflict erupted in Gaza and children's rights were violated. 431 children were reportedly killed, 1,872 children were injured,[4] and others were separated from their parents in chaotic escape situations.[5] At the height of the crisis, an estimated 100,000 Gazans were displaced into 58 United Nations Relief and Works Agency (unrwa) shelters.

Save the Children responded by providing children and families with essential material relief, food, shelter, medical care, preschool teacher training, parenting education, and access for children to Child-Friendly Spaces to help them rebound from fear and stress. In partnership with community organisations in Gaza, Save the Children opened 23 Child-Friendly Spaces, serving 1,400 children a week. Save the Children and unicef also co-led an un initiative to help restore quality education to children, including rebuilding schools and training preschool teachers to lead a variety of

games to encourage cooperation, self-esteem, confidence and self-expression.

Due to the ongoing Israeli blockade of Gaza in effect since June 2007, however, un agencies and international ngos are facing restrictions on access for supplying children with their medical, nutritional and educational needs, including reconstruction materials to rehabilitate schools, healthcare centers and households. Although schools are open, often repairs cannot be made due to restrictions on construction materials being moved into Gaza[6].

In order to better understand which emergency interventions were especially appreciated by caregivers of young children, Save the Children held focus group discussions. Mothers, teachers and principals all commented on the strengthened relationships between preschools, families, and communities, with parents participating more in their young children's classroom activities and discussing with teachers how to address challenging behavior in troubled children.

One mother from East Gaza said the parenting group sessions were especially helpful, allowing her to better understand the problems her child was grappling with and what games and activities she could play with her child at home when it was unsafe to leave the house. Fathers also became more involved, and parents reported using less corporal punishment at home having understood that there are other positive discipline alternatives.

Teachers in the focus groups reported that they learned to solve behavioral problems for children and became better listeners for the children they served. Teachers said the use of play as a dominant activity to engage and relax children was new and especially useful in making children happier at school and at home. Active learning was one of the new learning methodologies which emerged from the preschool training sessions, and teachers said after the emergency it was very effective in releasing the energy of the children and channeling it positively. Before this, teaching methods had been very traditional.

An added plus was that the social status of the preschool teachers among the community greatly improved and teachers felt proud of their work and more satisfied in their jobs as preschool teachers.

More attention for the youngest children

The case studies above provide a glimpse at a range of programming for children and their families in emergencies while also using more commonly known interventions such as Child-Friendly Spaces. This broad, holistic approach ensures that even young children are among the direct beneficiaries in emergency response efforts. Child-Friendly Spaces are usually open for children old enough to be toilet-trained and younger children may be welcome with adult caregiver supervision. But in practice,

it is the children of primary school age who tend to be the target and focus for activities offered in child-friendly spaces. The under-8 age group, and especially under-4s, tend relatively to receive less attention, perhaps reflecting an assumption that many will be with their caregivers. But in emergency situations, intense stress on caregivers can of course seriously compromise the quality of care and support they are able to provide to their young children.

With this in mind, Save the Children is among a number of organisations which have been engaged in an effort to raise awareness of the needs of young children in emergencies through the Early Childhood Development in Emergencies Working Group (eewg), under the auspices of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development. The working group has produced a position paper which will be published by the end of 2009 and is contributing to a special edition of the Consultative Group's *Coordinators' Notebook* on ecd in Emergencies, also due out at the end of the year.[6] This eewg guidance will emphasize the importance of identifying and addressing young children's needs, and supporting their rights, throughout the phases of an emergency (Preparedness, Response, and Recovery) by:
- *In Preparedness Phase:* Ensuring an Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan exists, which includes information on how young children and their caregivers will be supported during an emergency;

- *In Response Phase:* 1) Ensuring Rapid Assessments include young children and their caregivers; 2) Raising awareness and interest for immediate ECD services among partners and following up with counterparts willing to contribute to the ECD response; 3) Integrating ECD dimensions into emergency humanitarian relief efforts in the first few days of an emergency and ensuring ECD activities are included in fundraising efforts; and 4) Forming an Emergency ECD Coordination Group with national and local ECD leaders, Community Leaders, local and international NGOs, civil societies, relevant ministries and government officials (e.g. Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Department of Social Welfare, etc.), local religious services, protection and education providers; and
- *In Recovery Phase:* 1) Reappraising emergency ECD programmes and assessing with an eye towards future programming; 2) Using the current context (emergency relief and early recovery phases) as entry points to raise ECD awareness among donors and partners; 3) Designing, implementing and sustaining ECD activities for vulnerable populations that have been re-settled; and seizing the opportunity to build back better, to strengthen/reform ECD systems and implement long term response.

Members of the EEWG actively contribute information about how to support young children and their caregivers into commonly referenced resources in emergencies such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) *Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*; the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*; the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) *Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction*; and the *Sphere Handbook, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.*

The wider effects of a focus on young children in emergencies
Focusing on children's rights in emergency situations can have wide and lasting benefits. Most immediately and practically, the existence of early

Active learning was one of the new learning
methodologies which emerged from the
preschool training sessions
Photo: Courtesy Save the Children in Gaza

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childhood development services such as Child-Friendly Spaces, parenting groups, home visiting services, informal playgroups, preschools, landmine education programmes, etc., support children and give them a strong foundation for life learning and success, even in extremely difficult circumstances. Early Childhood Development programming may also offer unprecedented support to parents of young children in the form of information and guidance on caring for and nurturing their young children, even in emergencies. Services which care for children free up parents and caregivers to go about the business of rebuilding their homes, collecting food and water or seeking income, knowing their children are in a safe and stimulating place.

More broadly, by putting the spotlight on young children, early childhood development activities can encourage a focus on hope for the future. Adults who volunteer in ECD services such as Child-Friendly Spaces can find the work very rewarding. The healing effect of working with children in emergencies has not yet been the subject of much research, but is something we hope to learn more about in the future. As mentioned in the Gaza case study, we have also observed that women who are trained teachers and volunteers in ECD centers, preschools, Child-Friendly Spaces, and parenting groups often emerge from the experience with greater self-confidence and higher status in their

local community, as they have come to be seen as experts in providing a valued service.

It is important for agencies who set up ECD activities such as Child-Friendly Spaces to plan ahead for what that space could evolve into as the emergency situation passes and normality returns. Child-Friendly Spaces can become such things as preschools, community centers or parenting support centres where caregivers can come for information, health checks, etc. Which is most appropriate will depend on what infrastructure existed previously and has survived. Such plans of course require close liaison with local communities, government and NGOs.

While addressing the specific needs arising from each context, Save the Children strives in general to provide ECD programming in emergencies that is holistic, contextually appropriate, community based and as participatory as possible, and that addresses children's physical, social, psychological and intellectual development.

Supporting children's rights in emergencies must span the age range of childhood starting with pregnant women, and holistically look across the child's developmental domains and their basic needs for healthy development from water, food and shelter, and medical care, to education, psychosocial support and participation. As seen in the examples above, it is critical that programming address children's rights, while being sensitive

to the context and type of emergency. Interventions must address violated rights across different ages of children and levels and types of services from health, shelter, water, food and education. Working in partnership at all levels, and most importantly with the affected communities in an emergency, we can realize our vision for a world where young children grow up safe, educated and healthy, and better able to attain their rights, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Notes

1   Julee Allen, Education Sector Manager - Save the Children in Haiti; Janet Bauman, Deputy Country Director - Save the Children in Haiti; Maryan Koehler, Coordinator, Education Cluster – Gaza; Lisa Long, Senior Education Specialist, Early Childhood Development - Save the Children USA; Alia Sha'ar, Former Education Cluster Co-Leader for Emergency Program in West Bank /Gaza (currently, Consultant for Education and Youth Programs)*; Mona M. Zakout, Senior Education Program Coordinator - West Bank/Gaza.*

2   Responding to Haiti's Hurricanes: September 08 to April 09 – Six Month Update, April 3, 2009. Save the Children Alliance

3   http://www.savethechildren.org/ emergencies/middle-east-crisis/gaza-conflict/gaza-emergency-factsheet.html

4   Gaza Strip Initial Health Needs Assessment, Gaza, February 16, 2009. Prepared by Health Cluster to World Health Organisation

5   http://www.savethechildren.org/ emergencies/middle-east-crisis/gaza-conflict/gaza-emergency-factsheet.html

6   http://www.savethechildren.org/ emergencies/middle-east-crisis/gaza-conflict/gaza-emergency-factsheet.html

Article 31:
A 'forgotten article of the UNCRC'

Valerie Fronczek, Communications Officer, International Play Association

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – approved by the UN in 1989 and ratified by almost every country in the world – is a benchmark against which a nation's treatment of its children can be measured. It has not only led to great improvements in the protection and enhancement of the basic rights of children through policies, programmes and services but it is also a visionary document that is influencing the way we see children.

This remarkably comprehensive treaty not only incorporates thoughts on children's rights but also demands that the world think more deeply about children's position as citizens and more broadly about their development than is commonly the case. It asks that we look holistically at children's lives and hear their own perspectives on issues affecting them.

As a result it is leading many nations to address elements of children's lives that up to now have been ignored but that represent our fundamental humanity. One of these – at the heart of children's lives everywhere – is the right to play. An important principle of the UNCRC is that its articles are interdependent, interrelated and indivisible. Therefore there should be no "forgotten" articles within it, and certainly not one so basic to childhood.

To counteract this lack of focus on the child's right to play, the International Play Association (IPA) has initiated a number of actions. These are described later, but first let us examine some of the inherent conceptual challenges in understanding and promoting what is arguably the most important of the Convention's developmental rights.

Article 31 encompasses a range of concepts that carry different meanings. These are the child's right to rest, leisure, play and recreational activities and to participate in cultural and artistic life. The unifying concept is 'not

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Article 31

- That every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
- That member governments shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

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working'. However, while each of these is important in children's lives, 'play' stands apart from them in a number of ways. Play is a 'mode of being' rather than an activity and is neither time nor space bound. It is interwoven into children's everyday lives and therefore difficult to programme and even

more difficult to measure. In order for governments and their agencies to ensure free play opportunities (by effectively supporting the conditions where play can take place) a better understanding and appreciation of play is necessary. The UNCRC Handbook (UNCRC 2007) describes play as possibly "the most interesting (of the group of concepts) in terms of childhood in that it includes activities of children that are not controlled by adults". Free play is the focus of this article because it is the component of article 31 least understood and appreciated.

Unstructured or 'free play' – a definition

In spite of the complexity and diversity of play behaviour, there is general agreement by specialists in the field that play is controlled by children rather than by adults, and that it is undertaken for its own sake and not for prescribed purposes. The term 'free play' is often used to distinguish this from organized recreational and learning activities, which of course also have important roles in child development. However, the characteristics of free play – such as control, uncertainty, flexibility, novelty, non-productivity – are what produce a high degree of pleasure and, simultaneously, the incentive to continue to play. Recent neurological research indicates that this type of behaviour plays a significant role in the development of the brain's structure

resilience across adaptive systems (emotion regulation, stress response systems, peer and place attachments, pleasure, learning and creativity) benefits which arise from its very unpredictability, spontaneity, nonsense, irrationality and also from children's sense of control. Adults need to ensure that the physical and social environments in which children live are supportive of their play, otherwise their survival, well-being and development may be compromised."

Barriers to free play
While the industrialized world does face some major problems in providing a suitable range of environments and sufficient time for children to play freely, the majority of the world's children face hazards such as polluted water, open sewer systems, over-crowded cities, and dangerously congested streets as well as degrees of social insecurity.

By far the most serious constraint to children's free play globally – because it has a direct bearing on all others – is the lack of appreciation of its value by most adults and this of course includes governments. The historic view that play is a frivolous pastime, coupled with the growing emphasis worldwide on measurable academic and skill achievement at increasingly younger ages, combine to provide a formidable systemic barrier to children's free play, and this permeates all domains of childhood.

and chemistry. Emerging research suggests that child-controlled play may in fact represent a vital evolved behaviour that is necessary for optimal physical and emotional functioning.

**The importance of play
– and of understanding play**
While the original intention for the inclusion of article 31 is understood to have been rooted in concern for working children, the IPA (instrumental in the inclusion of the word 'play' in the UNCRC) has always held a much broader view; recognizing the full range of benefits of play for all children worldwide. Research has

established that play contributes to brain development, creates flexibility, enhances creativity, and builds resilience to stress. The connection between play and children's well-being has been made with some authority by numerous researchers. Ultimately the opposite of play is not work, it is 'no play'. And no play can be devastating for children.

In a recent IPA Concept Paper (IPA and BVLF forthcoming) which examines the value of play within the UNICEF (2008) categories of Provision, Protection and Participation, the authors conclude that "play has an essential role in developing children's

The seemingly non-productive nature of play presents problems in these times when policies and programmes are so dependent on 'outcome measurement'. Consequently, standardized, content-based curricula even for preschool are emerging in many parts of the world. While many early childhood educators accept 'playful learning' this does not always mean accommodating extended periods of child-controlled play. The irony is that the very 'purposelessness'

A variety of studies have shown that children worldwide put great emphasis on their ability to play outside with their friends in their immediate local neighbourhoods. The UNESCO Growing Up in Cities programme, a participatory research project in many cities throughout the world, has identified lack of play space as a key problem.

An over-arching concern is the lack of participation by children in planning for play and in community planning generally. The details of actual

learning, to obesity reduction, and other forms of social control. Adults have a great responsibility to ensure that we do not – even with the best of intentions – turn children's play into something else. Play is not a tool for conformity.

**Compliance with Article 31:
the role of government**
UNCRC signatories are obliged to develop comprehensive implementation strategies for all articles of the Convention. (National NGO coalitions have a role to play to ensure that article 31 is accommodated in these and that article 31 is included in national reports to the UN Committee.)

It is important for senior government to identify the relevant key departments and agencies responsible for children's play, as these are often politically and geographically removed from the national government, and to ensure that they are involved in the development of a comprehensive and cross-jurisdictional implementation plan embracing a diverse range of play opportunities for children of all ages and abilities.

> "In supporting children's right to play, attention must be paid not simply to the external expressions of play, but to the conditions in which 'playfulness' thrives."(IPA and BVLF forthcoming)

of play, its spontaneous and apparently frivolous nature is its core value, the element that produces flexibility, creativity and social competency.

Another threat to children's free play time is the safety of local neighbourhoods. Children's independent access to the kinds of natural environments that foster rich play experiences is declining due to real and perceived safety issues and rapid urban development. In the industrialized world, parents are increasingly choosing to create organized play and recreational programs thereby reducing children's free play options.

barriers to play in children's lives are best known to children themselves, yet they are rarely consulted or involved in planning. For the first time in history more children live in cities than in rural settings. Social and physical planners need to draw upon children's experience to help produce "conditions in which playfulness thrives" – a key ingredient of child friendly cities.[1]

Many of the above 'obstacles to play' would be ameliorated if curricula in all relevant disciplines worldwide incorporated the benefits of play for children's health and wellbeing. Also, adults are constantly usurping play for all manner of things from academic

It is also important for governments and key relief and development agencies to ensure play opportunities are available in situations where children are living in difficult circumstances.

In all cases article 31 action should be integrated with other UNCRC implementation strategies.

The role of play in community development – some examples
The following are just a few examples of the role of play in the lives of children in three different geographies and circumstances, and very short descriptions of how programmes have been able to nurture "conditions in which playfulness thrives".

In Tamil Nadu, India
Many families in post-tsunami southern India were living in humanitarian camps set up after the wave came ashore. In addition to the shock from the level of the disaster and grief over the loss of so many loved ones, children were coping with the additional loss of their communities, their schools, places of worship – and natural spaces for play.

The International Institute for Child's Rights and Development (IICRD) and partners launched a 'Seeds of Recovery' programme[2] to support the healing and recovery of approximately 6,000 children and their families in over two hundred communities on the Tamil Nadu coastline. The programme demonstrates the importance of play and participation as entry points for children's recovery.

The IICRD has worked with children in similar conditions following natural disasters, war and conflict and found that encouraging play and creative expression, strengthening connections with the natural world, and encouraging children's meaningful engagement in community rebuilding are critical ingredients to normalizing children's lives, reinforcing resilience and fostering psychosocial healing.

In such cases participatory action research lead by children resulted in critical reflection on ways in which young people and community assets could be matched to develop creative, nature based play spaces which in turn became civic spaces for greater child and family involvement in community rebuilding.

'Seeds of Recovery' community projects were later recognized by UNICEF and other UN agencies assisting post-tsunami recovery as a "good practice" in linking community development to humanitarian assistance, with children's play and creative community engagement being key ingredients to this success. Children literally played their way to recovery.

In Cairo
"Especially in crowded squatter settlements and in residential areas in the middle of cities, space is a significant issue. Municipalities should seize and protect every available piece of land to make recreational opportunities available for children and their families. Unused railroad beds, creeks, informal markets, pedestrian pathways, can all be cleaned and upgraded at low cost to make them available for safe play. If the municipality cannot afford to upgrade land, it should allow local groups to develop it for recreational use.

In Cairo, with the assistance of community development associations, residents cleared several small garbage dumps to create green areas and space for children's play. The local associations collect a small fee for maintenance." (Bartlett 1999)

In London
'Play Days' are popular in Europe, and children's play, for a period of time, becomes an integral part of the local community. In London the children's NGO London Play promotes diverse outdoor play provision through community engagement. These include: adventure playgrounds which provide children with challenging play opportunities; turning residential streets into spaces where children can play and even re-creating permanent 'play streets'; and local communities securing the opening up of school playgrounds in evenings, weekends and during holidays. London Play has also created a popular mobile natural play project, demonstrating that sand, water and wood can provide endless hours of outdoor play for children."[3]

Bringing the "Forgotten Article" to life: IPA action
In May 2008 IPA entered a partnership with seven other international organisations to propose that the Committee on the Rights of the Child organize a day of discussion and/or develop a general comment on article 31 of the UNCRC – for the purpose of elaborating on its meaning and

increasing state accountability with regard to compliance.[4]

While this request is under consideration, IPA, together with national and international partners, is initiating a series of Global Consultations on Children's Right to Play – the first being held in Johannesburg in January. The purposes of the project are to:

- mobilise a worldwide network of article 31 advocates;
- harness expertise in raising awareness of the importance of play in the lives of children;
- gather specific material which can help inform a General Comment and,
- formulate practical recommendations for governments with regard to compliance.[5]

Conclusion

Play is a key factor in children's well-being. As such it is not a luxury to be considered after other rights have been addressed but understood as an essential and integral part of children's everyday lives and therefore central to the UN Convention as a whole. Social policy stems from attitudes and values. IPA urges all those working with and for children to first value play and then to take concrete steps to help protect, support and promote the child's right to play. With concerted effort national and regional play policies will begin to emerge throughout the world.

Play is the essence of childhood. A world without play is not a "World Fit for Children".[6]

Notes
1. See www.childfriendlycities.org
2. See www.iicrd. "Seeds of Recovery" project in partnership with the Indian NGO ASSEFA and Save the Children, Canada.
3. See www.londonplay.org.uk
4. Request to the UN CRC for a General Comment on article 31: IPA partner organisations: International Pediatrics Association, World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (OMEP), World Leisure Association, International Toy Library Association, Right to Play International, European Child Friendly Cities Network, International Council on Children's Play.
5. For further information see www.ipaworld.org.
6. "World Fit for Children" is a statement made at the conclusion of the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children, in May 2002.

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Action research to improve local administrations'
capacities to fulfil children's rights

Is my city or community child-friendly?

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This article summarises how the Child Friendly Cities (CFC) approach may effectively contribute to the fulfilment of the rights of children, and particularly of the youngest ones, at the local level. It moves on to describe innovative action research supporting cities and communities to engage in a participatory process of self-assessment and monitoring that may contribute to better policies and programmes for children.

For the first time in history, in 2007, the urban population in the world exceeded the number of rural inhabitants (Cities Alliance 2007). In 2002, it had already been estimated that approximately half of the world's children lived in urban areas, mostly in low- and middle-income countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (UNICEF 2002). Besides providing a range of opportunities and services, urban settings expose children to risks that may hinder their healthy development. Pollution, contamination, and inadequate drainage and sanitation systems have significant impacts on the incidence of respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases that are among the most common causes of death among children under 5 years of age. Services like secure housing, caregiving facilities and access to education are often inadequate in low-income urban settlements. Traffic, noise, and pollution may prevent children from playing and interacting. In some neighbourhoods, crime and violence may threaten children's safety and freedom (Bartlett 2002).

In the early 1990s, in response to the high pace of urbanisation and the living conditions of many children in urban areas, cities of different sizes began to develop initiatives aimed at implementing the newly approved United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The trend toward decentralised government contributed to interest in enhanced local responsibility. Policy development at the local level started to be seen as a key strategy for the realisation of children's rights. In 1996, UN Habitat and UNICEF launched the Child Friendly City Initiative (CFCI) at the UN Habitat Conference on Urban Settlements (Habitat II). For the first time, the well-being of children was acknowledged as the ultimate indicator of a healthy habitat, a democratic society and good governance (CFC website)[2]. The CFCI took the shape of a movement, gathering a wide range of partners, and flourished alongside other experiences such as UNESCO's Growing Up in Cities and UN Habitat's Safer Cities. A CFC Secretariat was created in 2000 at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Italy, to serve as a focal point, document practices, identify lessons learned and provide a common reference as well as guidance for the CFC Initiative and movement.

Towards the realisation of child rights at the local level

A CFC refers to a city or system of local governance that is committed to fulfilling the rights of children. Gradually, the term has been extended to include communities in different settings. In a CFC, the ideas is that all children, without discrimination, participate in decision-making processes; have access to basic services, such as education, health, and water and sanitation facilities; enjoy a pollution-free environment in which to play and interact; and are protected from abuse and exploitation. In a CFC child well-being is pursued by all policies and programmes. Becoming child-friendly is a process which unfolds through a number of steps, defined in the CFC Framework as nine key components (commonly known as building blocks): the development of a plan of action/strategy; the existence of a suitable legal framework; the establishment of a coordinating mechanism overseeing progress; the creation of a monitoring system; the production of a regular report on children; the promotion of awareness raising efforts; the presence of an independent voice for children;

and the allocation of resources for children. Child participation is the ninth element and is cross-cutting in a cfc (unicef irc 2004).

Early childhood and Child Friendly Cities communities

Early childhood development entails integrated access to education, health and nutrition, as well as care-giving services so children may have a good start in life. At least 200 million children under five around the world are not fulfilling their

> Indicators for health, schooling, and protection have showed significant improvements in cities and communities committed to becoming child-friendly

potential for development because of poverty, malnutrition and the lack of stimulating, nurturing environments (unicef 2006). Policy development and good governance at local level help to realise the rights of the youngest children through integrated strategies for early childhood development, building on national level plans and policies.

Experiences of cfcs worldwide have proven the effectiveness of the approach for the realisation of children's rights. Indicators for health, schooling, and protection have showed significant improvements in cities and communities committed

to becoming child-friendly. Impact on indicators, particularly relevant to children under five, is documented from the cfc experience implemented by unicef Brazil, in coordination with municipal authorities of the semi-arid region and the central government. The Seal of Approval rewards local governments for action supporting the fulfilment of children's rights and the Millennium Development Goals. Positive competition is triggered among cities to obtain the prestigious unicef Seal, which is granted upon good performance in the area of social impact, public policy management and civic participation. In 2005, municipalities participating in the "Seal" competition were found to perform better than non-participating municipalities. During the two-year timeframe of evaluation, the infant mortality rate in towns registered in the competition had decreased by 16.4% compared to 12.1% in non-participating towns; and late neonatal mortality had decreased by 8.5% against 1.6%. In addition, malnutrition rates among children aged 0 - 2 declined from 9.2% to 6.8% and access to early childhood education went up from 56 out of 100 children aged 0–6 to 63.5 out of 100 children (Buvinich et al., 2008). Evidence from The Philippines concluded that in child friendly *barangays* (local administrations), children and women had greater access to basic services than in other neighbourhoods (Racelis and Aguirre 2005).

Central to the CFC approach to planning is the perspective of children. This is difficult with children except when redesigning small-scale spaces with which they are already familiar. But the parents of these children can contribute greatly to planning for this age group and their perspective is also usually missing.

A renewed vision for research on CFC and child rights

The CFC Secretariat promotes knowledge brokering on the issue by documenting good practices and a wide range of initiatives, identifying and disseminating lessons learned. One of the products of these efforts is the CFC Framework, which reflects the richness of a wide variety of initiatives in different regions and settings (UNICEF IRC 2004). The framework has been further developed based on experiences documented in journal articles and other publications, and websites. Insights into child participation in city planning, the relationship between children and the environment and other topics have been identified and shared (Children, Youth and Environments website)[3].

Analysis of a variety of experiences has led to a focus on existing monitoring mechanisms used within CFC initiatives. Monitoring is a key component of certification systems established as part of CFC strategies in different countries. A certification approach grants the "child friendly" recognition/label to

cities and communities that have met minimum requirements, based on a city or community's performance attained in relation to pre-defined indicators of child well-being. These are generally grouped into domains that correspond to specific rights: health, education, play and recreation, protection and safety, environment, participation, etc. Other components include rights awareness, policy management, cooperation, etc. In France, Spain and Switzerland, tools such as questionnaires, quizzes and scoreboards, containing the set of well-being indicators, have been developed by evaluation committees to guide the monitoring and assessment process. Although the monitoring process involves a cross-sectoral effort by the city's administration to complete the questionnaire or collect the data according to the indicators, very little room is left for the city and the community to engage in a process of self-criticism and analysis. In addition, it mainly consists of top-down assessment methods, with little involvement of parents and children. Finally, these processes tend to rely on quantitative indicators, taken from available statistics, which may be limited at the small area level and are usually applicable to the nationwide context without being representative of local settings.

Through a review of current tools and methods used, practitioners and researchers have acknowledged the need for instruments that enable

communities and cities to assess their child friendliness and to monitor their progress in improving the situation of children. The needed tools should allow for a participatory approach involving children, including the most marginalised and excluded ones. In addition, experts agreed that a universal set of template tools was required; these would have to be easily adapted to different settings (UNICEF 2008; UNICEF IRC/CERG 2008).

To help bridge these gaps, Child Friendly Cities and Communities Research was initiated in mid-2008 by UNICEF IRC, in partnership with Childwatch International, a network of research institutions focusing on children's rights, and with other offices of UNICEF, including the Adolescent Development and Participation Section in UNICEF Headquarters. The research is being coordinated jointly by IRC and the Children's Environments Research Group (CERG)[4] based at the City University of New York, and with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation and other partners (Childwatch, UNICEF IRC and CFC websites)[5].

The goal of the research initiative is to improve the conditions of children living in cities and communities of different types, by increasing capacity of cities and communities to monitor and assess the situation of children and the level of progress toward realisation of children's rights. In terms of direct objectives, the research will sensitise stakeholders and communities to

children's rights; generate a breadth of data on children in selected cities/communities, particularly qualitative data often neglected by official sources; and engage the community, including children, in the assessment and monitoring of performance. Concretely, universal template tools assessing the fulfilment of children's rights and the relevance of the governance structures and services, will be produced for adaption to local settings.

The research process, scheduled to end in the second half of 2010, started with a review of existing monitoring and assessment tools to ensure an innovative product. The tools were designed in a draft format and developed with input from of a consultative group of experts. The tools were adjusted during a pilot phase to the specific needs of two countries (Brazil and The Philippines) before being tested to enrich the templates.

Selected cities and communities in eleven countries were invited to participate in the research after the completion of the pilot phase. The countries represent a variety of contexts in terms of location, setting and size: Brazil, the Dominican Republic, France,

India, Italy, Jordan, The Philippines, Russia, South Africa, Spain and Sudan.

Based on the use of the assessment tools the aim is to generate: a) a toolkit, including a set of indicators, for communities and cities to self-assess their degree of child friendliness, and a related guidebook; b) a description of mechanisms used by local governance structures in the self-assessment process and c) data on the situation of children, based on a range of children's rights indicators, and the availability and quality of services in participating cities.

Enhancing local governments' capacities

The research relies on a highly participatory approach that is promoted through:

- Child friendly community assessment tools that measure the degree of a city's or community's child-friendliness, by measuring the degree of fulfilment of children's rights, through the perspective of parents, professionals, and children themselves.
- Governance assessment tools for assessing the capacity of local government structures and processes to promote the fulfilment of

Child friendly cities and communities can contribute to the realisation of children's rights at the local level.
Photo: Peter de Ruiter

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children's rights, by involving city officials, parents, and children.

Through the instruments, detailed qualitative local data on the conditions of children in the selected cities and communities may be collected to supplement the existing quantitative statistics from censuses and surveys that are available to local governments. In this way, good governance with regard to the fulfilment of children's rights may be fostered through civic participation as well as through a better understanding of the real needs of children, which may shape planning and policy development.

The CFC assessment tools are simple and may be used by a community facilitator with limited experience. The approach aims to ensure that the perspectives of all children, including the marginalised and vulnerable, are taken into account without discrimination. The tool consists of a chart listing key indicators of a community's fulfilment of children's rights such as "children can walk to a safe place in which to play" which children then fill in using graphic symbols. These can be completed by children aged 8 to 18 as well as by parents. It is important to highlight that the involvement of parents is also an innovative aspect in CFC-related monitoring tools. Their inclusion is particularly important to ensure that the rights of younger children are taken into account. The overall community is

also invited to participate in the review and discussion of the data.

The tools, designed from a rights-based perspective, attempt to reflect the full breadth of the UNCRC by focusing on its four key domains: survival, development, protection and participation.

The community tools assess the degree of fulfilment of children's rights, looking into equal access to basic services (health, water and sanitation, education, social services), the right to protection, to leisure, to live in a family, to have the highest standards of living, and to participate in community life. More specifically, they aim to collect data on the following key aspects:

- Families and parenting – life in the biological family (safety, resources, parents' time for care, child rights knowledge) and existence of alternative care options;
- Home environments – adequate living conditions at home (water, sanitation, electricity, garbage disposal), secure housing, and a safe environment;
- Health and social services – including specialised, mental and emergency services;
- Early childhood and educational services – equal access to primary and pre-school, including for children with disabilities, and excluded and minority children; the school environment and facilities in terms of health, quality of education, safety, protection, nutrition,

recreation, respect for cultures and involvement of parents;
- Safety and protection – both safety from hazards, such as pollution and traffic, and protection from abuse and exploitation;
- Work, play and recreation – play facilities and spaces, as well as time dedicated to work and play;
- Community solidarity and social inclusion – community buffers, cultural life, opportunities for participation in the everyday community's life;
- Community governance – children's participation in planning, decision-making, and implementation of initiatives.

The second participatory set of tools, on governance, complements the community assessment tools and is designed to measure the adequacy of structures and processes of local governance for children. The governance tools engage municipal officers, NGO staff, parents and city and community officials in assessing the availability and relevance of structures and processes for responding to and interacting with children. These tools are designed to maximise participation of community members, parents and city officials.

Together, these instruments are intended to serve as a general, valid universal framework that may be modified and made relevant to cities in different cultures. They will be applicable beyond the scope of the IRC/

Childwatch–CERG research and will contribute to a new way of building "child friendliness".

Conclusions and the way forward

Child friendly cities and communities can contribute to the realisation of children's rights at the local level. Locally collected data shows the impact of the CFC approach on the realisation of children's rights. A key challenge is assessing and monitoring the progress and performance of CFCs. As has been discussed, a new research initiative, through a partnership between UNICEF IRC and Childwatch International, aims to bridge a gap in the tools available for assessment and monitoring. It further aims to increase the capacity of cities and communities to self-assess their degree of child friendliness. Central to this process is the child rights approach, with the provisions of the UNCRC as a benchmark for assessing child friendliness. Also, key is a bottom-up approach that fosters civic participation.

The research will allow data to be gathered on the real needs of children in selected cities and communities and will trigger the involvement of children and parents, as well as government and NGO professionals in the process. However, expectations for the research go beyond this. Once refined and enriched by the research process, the assessment tools will be available for all cities and communities around the globe interested in improving the living conditions of children. This may be the beginning of a new generation of child friendly cities and communities.

Case studies

The Philippines

In the Philippines, the CFC approach, promoted by the Child Friendly Movement – a nationwide intersectoral partnership – has brought the national plan of action on children the *National Framework for Plan Development for Children – Agenda* 21 down to the local level. Child friendly municipalities have to fulfil 24 goals and indicators in the areas of survival, development, protection and participation in addition to ensuring four 'gifts' to children: a local development plan, an investment plan, a code on children and a state of the children report. Those cities that have promoted the four 'gifts' and have performed well in terms of the indicators are granted the child-friendly label through a 'Presidential Award'. Cities of different sizes, including urban communities, may participate in the competition. Thanks to the Award, an increasing number of municipalities have ensured the four 'gifts' are delivered. Furthermore, a 2006 UNICEF study showed that CFCs provide more attention to excluded groups compared to non-child friendly municipalities.

Source: UNICEF IRC and Institute of Philippine Culture, 2005.

The Dominican Republic

The Child Friendly Municipalities initiative envisions a process of self-declaration by municipalities committed to becoming child-friendly. Essential requirements for the CFC label are: the establishment of legal mechanisms; the formulation of a municipal programme on children's rights; the development of a strategic plan of action on municipal development; the creation of mechanisms for effective participation of citizens and particularly children; the establishment of a specific department or unit dealing with child protection; and a minimum investment of 5% on children. So far, 115 municipal settings (94 municipalities and 21 municipal districts) have joined the initiative and have declared themselves child-friendly.

The strengths of the initiative were highlighted by a 2006 assessment and include the establishment of governance structures recognising children's rights, the role of youth participation councils, capacity building efforts and participatory planning processes as well as participatory budget revisions.

Source: www.unicef.org/republicadominicana

The Greater Amman Municipality

The Greater Amman Municipality started implementing a CFC approach in 2004 when, based on the Mayor's recommendation, the Municipal Council established an Executive Agency for a CFC that oversees the implementation of programmes for children and ensures inter-sectorial coordination at the local level. In the following year, a policy document – *Policy and Priorities for Children* – was developed through a participatory approach with the aim of making Amman child-friendly. The strategy outlined actions to enhance the quality of life for children, especially excluded ones, particularly by focusing on the areas of health, protection and safety, culture, informal education/ school drop-outs and child-built environments. Child participation has been one of the strengths of the initiative, culminating with the election of four municipal councils for children, a process that has mobilised approximately 29.000 children.

Source: Speech by UNICEF Jordan at the Consultation on Child Friendly Cities Initiative: Proposed research and future directions for UNICEF, Geneva 21–23 January, 2008.

Notes

1 Note from the authors: thanks to David Parker, Pamela Wridt and Marco Kools.
2 Child Friendly Cities Website, www.childfriendlycities.org
3 Children Youth and Environment, www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/
4 Children's Environments Research Group, http://web.gc.cuny.edu/CHE/CERG/about_cerg/index.htm
5 Childwatch International, www.childwatch.uio.no, UNICEF IRC, www.unicef-irc.org

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Promoting young children's rights through the development of sustainable education for key professionals

Gerison Lansdown and Bo Damsted, Child rights education for professionals (CRED-PRO)[1]

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has achieved near universal ratification. However, in most countries, understanding of the rights it establishes, and how to ensure their realisation remains limited in most countries. Children continue to experience widespread neglect and violation of their rights caused by people with responsibility for their implementation.

Achieving respect for the human rights of children requires action at many levels – legislation, policies, resources, services, data collection, awareness raising[2]. In addition, professionals working with and for children need education on the implications of child rights and how to ensure implementation in their day-to-day work. Unless, and until, this happens, the sustained cultural change necessary to ensure respect for children's rights will not happen. In its examination of States Party reports, the Committee on the Rights of the Child consistently emphasises the importance of introducing systemic education and training on child rights for doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, psychologists, child care workers, nursery staff, police, and members of the judiciary, and others (Hodgkin and Newell 2007).

Although a multitude of workshops, seminars, and child rights courses is offered in most countries, in general, these courses are optional and tend to attract the already motivated. What is needed is child rights education embedded into the pre-service, and in-service and continuing professional development of all relevant professionals. The principles and standards of the CRC need to inform the philosophy, culture and values underpinning professional education and practice.

Developing an early years curriculum in Tanzania

In particular, there is a widespread failure to acknowledge implications of human rights for young children. Yet the first years of life are a period when fulfilment and protection of those rights are of extreme significance – when the failure to listen to the child, protect him or her from violence, provide stimulation, or ensure adequate nutrition, shelter and care will have the most detrimental impact on development and long-term life chances. Understanding the rights of young children and what actions are needed to promote the environments that will ensure their realisation, is therefore an urgent priority.

Identifying the need

In response to this need, the Bernard van Leer Foundation invited an international initiative, CRED-PRO (Child Rights Education for Professionals)[3], to visit Tanzania towards the end of 2007 to explore potential interest in developing a child rights curriculum for professionals working with young children. The curriculum would respond to recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its General Comment on Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood. The recommendations say: "It is essential that [professionals working with young children] have sound, up-to-date, theoretical and practical understanding of children's rights and development" and encourages governments to "undertake systematic child rights training for children and parents, as well as for all professionals working with and for children".[4]

It was an opportune moment as the Tanzanian Government had recently adopted an Integrated Early Years Strategy which included commitment to training professionals working with young children. Discussions with government and civil society organisations showed that such training was not currently available in Tanzania and that stakeholders thought development would be positive. The MS Training Centre for Development Co-operation, a regional training institution based in Tanzania, expressed willingness to lead the co-ordination, administration and advocacy necessary to move the initiative forward.[5] On the basis of this interest, the Bernard van Leer Foundation agreed to fund CRED-PRO to develop and support the initiative over a two-year period.

Building support

It is one thing recognising the need for child rights training: it is another committing participation over

two years to make sure it happens.
Significant efforts were made to
identify major stakeholders and enlist
them in an Advisory Committee.
Invitations were extended to three
government ministries involved in
the Early Years Integrated Strategy;
institutes of education and social work;
human rights, child rights and early
years NGOs; UNICEF; UNESCO; religious
organisations; and professional bodies.
Overall, a committee of 35 individuals
was formed and a first meeting took
place in Arusha in March, 2008.

Agreeing the focus

The first challenge was determining the
focus of the curriculum. In Tanzania,
there is no 'early years' profession and
only a limited number of pre-school
centres, mainly run by the private
sector. However, many professionals
have contact with young children
(health workers, nurses, community
development workers, pre-primary
and primary teachers, doctors, social
workers, and nursery nurses), so it
was decided to develop a generic
early years' curriculum suitable for
adaptation to a range of professional
training fields in order to:

- Support professionals in building
  parent/family capacity for good early
  child care (recogniszing parents as
  primary carers of young children);
- Raise awareness of the Convention
  on the Rights of the Child and
  the African Charter for the Rights
  and Welfare of the Child and their
  relevance to child professionals;

- Promote insight into how policy and
  practice can be improved to increase
  respect for the rights of children;
- Enhance understanding of the value
  of children's own contributions
  towards realisation of their own
  rights;
- Encourage commitment to
  development of advocacy roles for
  professionals.

It was also agreed that the Advisory
Committee would:
- Develop a child rights curriculum
  for early years professionals of
  relevance to the social, economic,
  and cultural context in Tanzania;
- Train a cohort of 'champions' to
  promote and advocate for the
  curriculum;
- Develop a strategic plan for
  sustained implementation of the
  curriculum.

Drafting the curriculum

CRED-PRO engaged an international
expert in early years issues who
drafted the curriculum with the
advisory committee, building on
an existing five- module CRED-PRO
framework (for details of the five
modules, see on page 39). Meanwhile,
consultations with children were
undertaken to elicit their experiences
of respect for their rights. The
Advisory Committee then met to
review materials and identify changes
needed to ensure relevance for
Tanzania. It was decided to introduce
a narrative to the five modules, taking

the story of two twins from birth through to eight years of age, and highlighting experiences encountered.

A sub-group of the Committee was made responsible for incorporating proposed amendments and producing a second draft.

Introducing the curriculum

The curriculum was introduced to key stakeholders through two approaches. First, a one day meeting was organised for government officials, policy-makers and representatives from key training institutions to familiarise them with the curriculum and to highlight the need to embed the curriculum into existing training courses. Second, a 'training of trainers' was held for targeted professionals and NGOs working with young children to build a cohort of advocates.

Achieving sustained implementation

The curriculum will only benefit the children of Tanzania if it is successfully incorporated into existing training courses for professionals working with and for young children. It needs to provide the value base of all training in order to build a culture in which the rights of young children are respected – both by individual professionals and in the design and delivery of all children's services. The final stage of the initiative, therefore, is to identify potential entry points for curriculum implementation, for example, in pre- and in service training, multi-disciplinary courses, and NGO training,

and to develop strategies to monitor and support optimum impact of the process.

Lessons learned to date
Strong lead partner
Developing a sustainable programme of child rights education is time consuming and demanding. Introducing training on children's rights requires considerable persistence and fortitude to manage the predictable resistance. The lead partner role thus is vital and requires:

- Leadership and programme management capacity to drive the process;
- Administrative capacity to co-ordinate the process;
- Knowledge of and commitment to children's rights and curriculum development.

Identifying a competent and committed lead partner is critical to success. It is a demanding role which has to be actively sustained throughout the process.

Ownership within the country
The role of an external body such as CRED-PRO is to be a catalyst, provide tools for initiating the process, and provide guidance in managing the process. However, it can only be a starting point. The curriculum must be developed and owned by the country concerned. The building of national partnerships across the relevant professions is imperative. The

partners must be involved in reviewing and adapting the curriculum, but also in mobilising active support amongst the potential advocates for its incorporation and application.

Ownership by professions
Active involvement of professionals themselves, ideally through their associations, is a key factor to success. In Latin America the process was led by paediatricians. They are more persuasive advocates for the curriculum than any external agency could be. Meeting this objective has proven harder in Tanzania, where there is no early years profession as such. Children under eight years potentially have contact with a wide number of different professionals and few of them have a professional body to represent them. In their place, the advocacy lead has been taken, primarily, by INGOs and NGOs working with young children, but with the active involvement from the key institutions providing training for teachers and social workers. It remains to be seen how much of a barrier or advantage this proves to be in engaging those professionals when the curriculum is taught.

Consultations with children
It is not possible to produce a meaningful child rights curriculum without understanding the issues from children's perspective. The process therefore needs to build in time to implement a consultative process with children. In South Africa a consultation

CURRICULUM FOR CHILD RIGHTS EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN THE EARLY YEARS – AN OVERVIEW

Zawadi & Upendo's story: The babies are born. What do their families want for these children's lives?	Zawadi & Upendo's story: at the baptism – who amongst the family, friends and community will protect these children? Do they both have the same rights? What rights do they have?	Zawadi & Upendo's story: at the Clinic. Zawadi has a cognitive impairment that makes it hard for him to express his needs. How to support him to participate in decisions?	Zawadi & Upendo's story: at school. Upendo is physically abused by a teacher. Her family's experience trying to get redress.	Zawadi & Upendo's story: Zawadi is not accepted into school because of his developmental delays. What role do adults have to advocate for inclusive education?

MODULE 1 >>>

Module objective:
To introduce the concept of child development, rights & needs to professionals working with young children.

Learning outcomes

Participants are able to:
- Envisage what children need to grow up as healthy, educated and effective adults. (Understand the concepts of childhood and child development)
- Understand the relationship between a child's needs and their rights.
- Appreciate that children's needs are universal.
- Start to identify the role of adults in protecting the best interests of children.

Child rights discussed

Module 1 is an exploratory overview of the broad range of children's needs and the consequent rights of children.
The foundational principles underlying Child Rights are:

1. The right to life,
2. The right to be heard,
3. Non-discrimination and
4. The best interests of the child.

These are both the human rights of children and general principles which must inform the implementation of every other right in the UNCRC.

MODULE 2 >>>

Module objective:
To identify the assets within Tanzania that promote the protection of children's rights.

Learning outcomes

Participants are able to:
- Identify who is responsible for upholding children's rights
- Understand that all children have rights irrespective of gender, background, disability, location
- Map the protective safety nets for children that exist in Tanzania.

Child rights discussed

Key principles of the Convention The roles of key 'duty bearers' Specific rights discussed in this module - The right to health & healthcare, privacy & confidentiality.

MODULE 3 >>>

Module objective:
To identify my responsibilities as an adult working with children in protecting their rights.

Learning outcomes

Participants are able to:
- Challenge their personal assumptions about the capacity of young children to participate in decisions affecting them.
- Become more conscious of how their individual behaviour affects the realisation of child rights.
- Identify how to behave differently to better protect children in situations when their rights are being violated.
- Reconcile dilemmas when children's rights may seem incompatible with adults' rights.

Child rights discussed

Specific rights discussed in this module - The right to receive respect for the child's dignity, evolving capacities, views, and privacy.
Deepening our understanding of the roles of the primary duty-bearers - both family and the State.

MODULE 4 >>>

Module objective:
To understand how a system or institution can serve to impede the realisation of children's rights and how to promote more services that respect the rights of children

Learning outcomes

Participants are able to:
- Understand & apply the concept of early childhood systems
- Identify the critical shifts and links that are needed to prioritise the needs of young children
- Identify opportunities to influence systems to better uphold a developmental CR approach.
- Creating a child rights charter for our organisation.

Child rights discussed

The right to protection from violence, neglect and abuse, The right to information, The right to education, The right to play, The right to support for parents to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities.

MODULE 5 >>>

Module objective:
To encourage commitment amongst professionals working with children to advocate for their rights

Learning outcomes

Participants are able to:
- Understand what advocacy is and why they should advocate for child rights
- Map the system in which children live and identify the impact of public policy on children's lives
- Develop strategies for advocating for change in policy and practice at a scaleable level.

Child rights discussed

Right to education on the basis of equality of opportunity, Non-discrimination, Equal rights and inclusion for children with disabilities.

was undertaken to explore children's experience of the health professions and a wealth of information was revealed. The children commented that nurses and doctors did not always seem to care about them or their health. Even when they were in pain, many felt that there was no one to tell. Because they were children, they found it difficult to

Understanding the rights of young children and what actions are needed to promote the environments that will ensure their realisation is therefore an urgent priority.

ask for help when they needed it. They often felt lonely and frightened at night. Many also expressed fear because doctors and nurses sometimes shouted at them, or treated them roughly when, for example, changing bandages. Lack of privacy and respect for their dignity was another major concern. They highlighted lack of information provided by doctors which left them feeling unnecessarily anxious and lacking control, commenting that: "It makes us sad when we ask the doctor or nurse what is wrong and he won't tell you". Clearly, better communication and greater respect would enable children to get improved treatment and recover more quickly.

Role of government and red tape

Government is the primary duty bearer in respect of the implementation of the UNCRC. However, the role it plays in curriculum development varies across different countries and depending on the profession concerned. Teacher training is often controlled by governments, whereas government involvement in medical training is virtually non-existent in Western Europe and the US, but significant in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Engagement of government, therefore, needs to reflect assessment within the country as to its role in influencing or determining the particular professional curriculum. In Tanzania, where adoption by the government of an Integrated Early Years Strategy includes a commitment to developing training for professionals, all three government ministries responsible for the Strategy needed to be involved to have any chance of success. It was important to invest time to meet key ministers and officials, providing them with information, maintaining regular contact, engaging with their concerns, and making a positive case for child rights education.

The attitude of governments towards child rights training obviously varies from country to country, but some arguments which can be effective are:
- The Committee on the Rights of the Child consistently presses governments to introduce child rights education for professionals

in its Concluding Observations. When governments next appear before the Committee they will be asked what action they have taken to implement the recommendations. This international scrutiny can serve as leverage for change.

- It is not possible for governments to fulfil their obligation to implement the Convention unless practitioners throughout the country are familiar with it and begin to reflect its principles and standards into daily practice.

- There is a growing evidence that where professionals respect children's rights it leads to enhanced outcomes for children. For example, evaluations of rights-respecting schools, where children are listened to and not hurt or humiliated, indicate lower drop out, improved attendance, better behaviour, higher academic attainment, and improved relations both between children and between teachers and children. Safety of children necessitates not only a recognition of their right to protection from all forms of violence, but a commitment to creating space for children to be heard and to develop strategies for their protection. Professionals cannot achieve these changes without training and support.

Identifying entry points for the curriculum to achieve sustainability
To institutionalize the curriculum into training of all professionals, it is important to detail further who, what, where and how it will be taught. This must be a decision for each professional group and individual country. For some, it will be possible to incorporate modules into post-school or undergraduate training. Another alternative is to develop it as a required component of compulsory professional education, or an in-service, post-qualifying diploma. It is worth giving time to analysing the potential entry points as this will affect the format of the curriculum, and the nature of the advocacy needed to ensure impact.

Conclusion
Realisation of children's rights takes time. It is a complex process necessitating change at many levels – in attitudes, in laws and policies, in resource allocation, in awareness and understanding and in cultural practices. It is important to recognise the role that professionals working with children can contribute towards that process. However, they cannot be expected to fulfil a role in ensuring that their individual practice, as well as the systems within which they work, serve to promote children's rights, unless they are provided with the training and support to help them understand both what that means and why it is necessary. The work being developed in Tanzania will help contribute to a better understanding of how to move that process forward and apply the lessons learned across to other countries in the region.

Notes
1 Gerison Lansdown is an international children's rights consultant and co-Director of CRED-PRO; Bo Damsted is Director of Training for the Tanzanian national partner, MS-TCDC.
2 See, for example, Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 5, General Measures of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (articles 4, 42 and 44, para.6), *CRC/C/2003/5 November 2003.*
3 CRED-PRO is an international initiative, based in the International Institute for Child Rights and Development, University of Victoria, to facilitate and support the sustained development of such child rights training.
4 Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.7, Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood, CRC/C/GC/7, November 2005.
5 See www.mstcdc.org for information about the organisation.
6 For details of the five modules, see below

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Centro Cultural da Criança
Where rights are taken seriously!

Claudia Ceccon, Researcher, Centro de Criação de Imagem Popular, Brazil[1]

This article focuses on Rights of the Child, as they are experienced as part of non-formal educational practice at the *Centro Cultural da Criança* (cccria – Child Cultural Centre), working with children aged between 2 and 10 years old in a slum in Rio de Janeiro. The article sets the practice within the context of Brazilian reality, explains the methodology used, raises relevant legal parameters and gives examples of how children exercise their rights at the Centre. It also encourages readers to reflect about the challenges this project poses to educators and children, as well as to the institution that includes it.

After a great deal of public discussion, Brazil approved a Rights of Child and Adolescent Law – *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* – in 1990. Among other important rights, it established (Article 54, IV), that young children are entitled to education and that it is the State's obligation to provide nursery (0–3 years 11 months old) and pre-school (4–6 years old) education.

With the approval of a general educational law – *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases* – in 1996, early childhood education became the first step in the Brazilian educational system. It was defined as "the integral development of the child up to 6 years in its physical, psychological, intellectual and social aspects, completing the action of the family and the community". Five years later, however, census data (IBGE 2001)[2] indicated that only 10.6% of children aged 0–3 years old and 57% of those aged 4–6 years old had access to education. To this day, in 2009, the challenge of increasing access to quality education for young children remains.

Upon reaching 4 years of age, Brazilian children are entitled to attend school part time – four hours per day. During the rest of the day, the child's family is responsible for the child. In the poorest communities, where many adults work full time, this means either staying at home alone or under the supervision of brothers/ sisters, generally children themselves, or hanging out on the streets, with all the risks that entails, from domestic to outside violence.

In some poor urban neighbourhoods the children are often victims of the constant battles between police and drug dealers. Things aren't much safer at home: of 1169 episodes of violence against children1 verified by the NGO ABRAPIA[3] in its 1998/99 study in Rio de Janeiro, 93,5% were committed by relatives (half of them their own mothers); the study also noted that 82% of the children who had suffered sexual abuse were 2–10 years old.

The project we describe takes place at *Morro dos Macacos*, in the impoverished Northern Zone of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The area, far from downtown and the middle and upper middle classes well known Copacabana and

Ipanema, is part of a complex of slums with an estimated population of eleven thousand.[4] The community is subjected to violence of every nature – lack of public services, absence of any city administration, drug dealing, invasions of rival gangs and police brutality.

Community groups are the expression of resistance. They try to foster a culture of peace, mainly among children and youth, and to provide services that are in demand. Although the local community centre – the NGO CEACA-Vila[5] – created and maintained, since 1978, with extraordinary dedication, a full-day nursery school, called *Patinho Feliz*, the lack of attention to children before and after school remains an unsolved problem. This situation inspired a Rio-based NGO, *Centro de Criação de Imagem Popular* (CECIP)[6] to create a safe space for children, where they could play and have access to cultural goods that would otherwise be out of their reach. CECIP's mission - education, communication and training of agents of change – met a new challenge. In partnership with the local community centre and with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the Children's Cultural Centre was conceived, a new type of facility, completely different from a traditional afterschool programme.

The CECIP Early Childhood Education team's suggestion of building a cultural centre directed at children up to 10 years old, involved the community in its planning. Teenagers were trained to conduct a survey: they did listen and register what the children thought such a Centre should be. Their views were taken into account in the planning. The Children Cultural Centre (CCCria) opened in 2006 as a dynamic and safe place, where autonomous children are free to play, draw, read, dance, sing, learn to play instruments, use computers, and socialise.

In the first year, the challenge was to build the centre, adapting run-down spaces and creating new ones according to the architectural design. Architects and engineers helped as volunteers and the community centre administered the construction, hiring local community workers. A colourful, pleasant, spacious place emerged, a new community landmark with a tower resembling that of a castle. It was built on the second floor of the nursery. Two hundred children can be served, in two shifts, in addition to the 2- and 3-year-old toddlers at the nursery who regularly go upstairs to enjoy the resources.

While construction was taking place, the planning of an innovative methodology was in the works as well, designing what the centre would offer: educational activities, certainly, but socialising would be different from that of other places the children were used to. The children would be active and responsible participants – with freedom to choose the activities they liked most and to decide how much time to spend on them. That meant creating, with them, new codes for sharing the responsibility for respecting the limits

of room occupation, the rights of other children and the adults who facilitate the smooth running of activities.

During the planning stage, principles and values were established. The basis of the project was that children must be respected as subjects with rights. One of the principles is the right to participation: *"to believe in everyone's ability to act and decide, expressing their own autonomy"* (CECIP 2009, p. 48). The autonomy concept aligns with the definition that Kamii attributes to Piaget: *"(...) the individual ability to keep self-control – both at a moral and an intellectual level. Autonomy is the ability to think by oneself and decide what is right and wrong on a moral level, and what is false or true on an intellectual level, considering all the relevant factors, regardless of reward or punishment"*. Citizenship is another principle – living in society demands that individuals know their rights and respect those of others. A third principle is the importance of playing.

CECIP's Early Childhood Education team discussed these innovative concepts during monthly training sessions. Most of them lived in the community and had varied experience with children and with some form of art.

How are the principles experienced at CCCria?

The best way to demonstrate is by giving an example: in the first year, some children questioned the coordination. If the Centre was open to children from 2 to 10 years old, they

expressed passionately, it would not be fair to send them out on their 10th birthday, since one is still 10 until the last day, before turning 11. They won. The Centre started to receive children from 2 to 10 years, 11 months and 29 days. When the child turns 11, though, there is no way around this rule: sadly, he/she has to leave and is encouraged to move on to other projects for teenagers.

Right to autonomy: voice and turn

Children at the Centre are free to enter the rooms whenever they wish to – depending on space availability. Through a window at the door, they can see what is going on inside. At the door, coloured tags match the number of places available. Whenever the child enters the room, he/she picks a tag and puts it into a basket. The tag is replaced at the door when leaving the room. If there are no tags, the child knows there is no place in the room at that moment, so he/she either waits or looks for another room. This strategy helps to exercise autonomy in an organised way.

Juliana shows me a drawing, heads to the door, and, before leaving, hesitates about replacing or not the tag at the door. She decides not to and explains to the educator: "I am going out to give the drawing to Auntie Ana, and will be back in a moment".

The girl thus demonstrates she understands and interprets the rule – if she is coming back in a moment, in her mind she still occupies her

place. Replacing the tag is therefore not an automatic procedure; it rather symbolises the occupation of a given space at a given time.

In some rooms, a more structured schedule is necessary due to the nature of activities – such as English or computer lessons. Children know there is a limit to the number of places and they have to be there at a determined time. From the beginning, they programme their other interests according to the schedule of these lessons.

Researcher: What do you do when you arrive at the Centre?

MIRA *(7 years old): First, I get my badge. I wait for Aunt Gina, then I go to the drum room, the English room, the playroom, the book room... and dance room, and then the last one, the arts room.*

Researcher: And how do you choose? How do you decide what to do or where to go?

MIRA: *Well, I want to do something every day. Today I arrived at the Centre and I wanted to go to the playroom. When I want to read a book, I read. When I want to draw, I draw.*

The child decides without adult intervention. The educator, inside the room, always suggests an activity, but the child is the one who chooses to

participate or not. In the art room, for example, some children may be working with the educator on a project building a camera made out of milk cartons, while others do something else – like drawing or painting. The educator intercedes when asked, or in case of conflicts. But children can leave whenever they wish – for example, to drink water or to go the bathroom – without having to ask permission.

Julya and Maria, two 8-year old girls play together at a table in the playroom. I ask if the setting is of an office and they say no, it is a beauty parlour. Under the table, there is a box filled with nail polish. A group of boys arrive and sit at the other tables. A dispute for chairs immediately follows, children push each other, and the quiet is replaced by agitation. A girl picks some objects and then grabs the box. Julya and her friend protest with the educator, who is busy at the other side of the room. Although very upset, Julya keeps quiet for a while. Suddenly, she stands up to leave for the art room. "There's too much noise in here!"

This kind of autonomy is a great differential for cccria. The Centre works to enable children's moral and intellectual autonomy, to expand their critical thinking and their ability to be independent, fair, true and ethical, as well as to reflect upon the consequences of their actions. The way adults organise rooms and activities, and interact with the children also provides autonomy. Socialisation among children of different ages promotes self-reflection, since they interact and help each other all the time.

Ariana, 5 years old, is colouring a sheet of paper. She uses all the space to draw vertical thick coloured lines. The educator puts a pot of play dough on the table and she immediately takes all to herself. Another child at the table looks at her and says: "Ariana, you have everything!" The girl stops to reflect, sighs and distributes a little bit to her friends.

Of course, being only 5, Ariana is still learning to share. Nonetheless, she understands she cannot have everything – it wouldn't be fair, and she accepts to hear that from her colleague, changing her attitude accordingly.

Right to play
Playing is a core value at the Centre, where imagination and enjoyment are

constantly stimulated. In the playroom, besides the many games and dolls, there are costumes which the children use to become many different characters and imagine all sorts of different worlds and possibilities. In the library, they read, listen to stories and tell them, as well as transforming them into theatrical plays.

Ariana picks up a book – The three little pigs – and sits with her friends. She picks up puppets and they put on a puppet show. One child says one of the characters likes to play and hit the children. Everyone laughs. Ariana decides to play the wolf. The educator picks up the book and reads the story to the children, who repeat what they hear and dramatise the story with the puppets. When the wolf blows the houses, Ariana laughs and enjoys herself.

The three piglets are sometimes four, or they are not piglets: what is most important is to play with words. Some children have formed a rap group called The Pepper Group and use the library to rehearse their raps, which they later on present to the community. The words talk about the environment and the rights of the child.

An outside patio is also available for the children to play. Before snack time, all of them must be in one room or another. After snacking, they may choose one of the rooms or play on the patio. All the fun happens in a 60-m^2 area. There is a lot of laughter, running and screaming, but there are also a few

fights, conflicts and general rowdiness. The biggest lesson derives from listening to children's claims. Talking and negotiating lead to healthier and more sympathetic relationships.

Right to get along, with rules that make sense
The Centre's rules, not very different from outside rules, are divided into what *can* and what *cannot* be done. The children say they *can*: "play, talk, be friends, run, draw, read, learn to speak English, use the computer". They *cannot*: "fight, curse, hit, bite, be messy".

What makes these rules different is the fact that they were created with the children, using their own words, and are in constant construction and re-evaluation in order to keep making sense to them. The rules are displayed on pictures and posters prepared by the children themselves, and have to be clear and fair enough to be followed by everyone, without rewards, punishments or threats. With a hundred children interacting freely, conflicts do happen and rules are broken – this means there is a permanent reconstruction – a task that represents a great challenge for educators.

In a culture where the strongest is in charge, either at school, at home or in the community, children have to learn a new logic and make choices not out of fear, but because actions are correct and consensual. Adults also need to learn the new logic and act accordingly, pondering their actions and bearing

the principles of the Centre in mind. Adults put their reflections into words in monthly meetings, when they exchange doubts and practices, and figure out collective solutions.

Institutional challenges
Sustainability with quality
Sustainability is a permanent challenge. The Centre exists thanks to several partnerships. The search for resources and funding to maintain a staff of 14 and to provide for children's materials and food and the maintenance of the building is a heavy burden.

Another type of sustainability is methodological. The methodology cecip implemented differs from other after-school programmes. However, due to high staff turnover – three times in less than two years – it is more difficult to maintain the principles and ideals that make the Cultural Centre so unique. Publishing the principles was an important step, but keeping them alive and working demands a continuous effort.

Learning and interacting with other projects
There is an interest in observing if cccria's methodology influences the methods of institutions, such as ceaca-Vila and cecip that have other large projects. People at cccria feel the methodology is currently restricted to its space, not yet reaching other projects.

It was also observed that it was difficult for some children to make the transition from cccria to other programs after their 11th birthday. Missing the freedom and self-rule they had at the centre, some children have a hard time moving on to more traditional settings. In order to adjust they feel they have to let go of some of their acquired autonomy.

Educator challenges
Encouraging autonomy having only experienced heteronomy
How is it possible to provide an experience of autonomy – be self-ruled, always considering the well-being of others, think for oneself and question authority – if one has only known heteronomy? The educators have limited personal experience with autonomy. Most of them were raised heteronymous – where someone tells you what is right and wrong, what you can and can't do – and you obey, do as you were told. According to Kamii, the pursuit of autonomy is a lifelong challenge. The educator must make an effort to change, and this only happens if he/she first deeply understands the methodology, agrees with it, and then is supported as he/she translates the methodology into daily actions. At cccria, the educator is a facilitator whose role is to enhance overall learning, listening with affection and helping children's participation, analysis skills and decision-making. Although moments of frustration follow those of progress, nearly all the educators say they have grown professionally and personally in the project.

Children's challenges
Transition between rules at different places
At home and at school children must follow imposed rules they do not understand and did not create. In the Centre, most of the 'outside' rules also apply, but are the result of a joint effort and are expected to be followed because of their fairness. Children's freedom of movement inside the Centre and adults' trust in their ability to make good decisions reinforce the sense of autonomy and competence. The affective relationship with understanding educators increases children's feelings of belonging.

A cccria mother told us an interesting story: her three sons decided to change the rules at home. To decide who would get things first – a meal, a bath or whatever else – they would now stand in line by *order of arrival* and not *by age,* as they were accustomed to doing. The mother certainly thought that was strange, but the children were just transferring a way of doing things they learned at cccria to their own home, because they thought it was fair way to proceed. It takes a great deal of communication between Centre and the family to understand the deeper meaning of this simple change in routine.

At school, the child may be frustrated if he/she, differently from the Centre, has to ask permission to go

to the bathroom or to have a drink at the water fountain and a non-affective and distrustful adult says "No". It is a challenge to make third parties participate and accept that a child with autonomy learns and socialises better.

Orderly participation and expression of desires

The Centre focuses on children's participation in all decisions affecting them. Because this notion is not replicated elsewhere, it is a challenge to make other institutions, like school, understand the vast possibilities that participation entitles. Helping children to organise themselves demands time and patience, but it has been successfully achieved at the Centre. Immediately after inauguration, children discussed every issue and rule – first in general assemblies, later in class assemblies. When this started to become less interesting, they opted to discuss a given idea in small groups and later on pass it to others in a signed petition, demanding that it be put into practice. Whatever the way they choose to make their voices and concerns heard, the important lesson is for adults to listen, question, and show them the changes they are helping to make.

For example, in July 2009, during the school holidays, two children stormed into the CCCria main office asking the coordinators to organise a holiday camp at the Centre. The coordinators expressed doubts – did everyone really want such a camp, or was it just a desire of the two who were standing

there? Both children went from room to room to explain their request and to gather support. The concept was enhanced, a list of tasks was made and the coordinators received a complete plan for the camp. Of course, the camp took place, and it was a success.

Every day, children show their competence, creativity, affection and responsibility. If in the beginning their participation was a hypothesis, a belief, an educational bet held by a group of educators, it is now an accomplished fact and an inspiration for those who want to learn from it.

Notes
1 Note from the author: Thanks to CECIP staff, for their suggestions. And to Mariana and Thomaz Chianca, for reading and enhancing the text.
2 http://www.observatoriodainfancia. com.br/IMG/pdf/doc-99.pdf
3 ABRAPIA: Agencia Brasileira para a Proteção à Infância e Adolescência (Brazilian Agency for Child and Youth Protection).
4 http://www.ensp.fiocruz.br/portal-ensp/ noticia/index.php?id=4196&saibamais=8038
5 http://www.ceaca.org.br/index.html
6 Founded in 1986, CECIP is an autonomous non-profit civil society organisation that seeks to democratise access by all layers of Brazilian society to quality information on their basic rights, thus fostering a conscientious, active and participative citizenry. See www.cecip.org.br

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Promoting the rights of young children in India

Minaxi Shukla, Deputy Director, and Indu Capoor, Director, CHETNA, India

CHETNA has been working for two and a half decades to raise awareness of child rights in India among decision-makers in government, NGOs and community-based organisations. This article has three parts: first, it surveys the current situation regarding child rights in India and identifies stumbling blocks to further progress; second, it discusses CHETNA's approach to promoting a rights perspective; and third, it summarises some recent specific activities.

In India it is believed traditionally that the well being of children depends on the values of "*daya, dana, dakshina, bhiksha, ahimsa, samya-bhava, swadharma and tyaga*" – in essence, self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and consideration for others[1]. Although India's constitution gives equal rights to all citizens, and defines citizens as including children, children have generally been considered as passive recipients of welfare measures rather than as active holders of enforceable rights.

Progress has been made over the past two decades in advancing the idea of child rights, but its pace has been unsatisfactory. Some indicators have improved, such as infant mortality, child survival, literacy, health and school dropout, although in certain areas only marginally. New initiatives include hot cooked meals in schools, efforts to universalise Integrated Child Development Services and the launch of the National Rural Health Mission, as well as significant new policy pledges.

Still, much remains to be done. Every year in India more than 1,200,000 newborns die within their first month. Inequality of outcomes is rife. Infant mortality is 20% worse in scheduled castes than the national average (IPPS and Macro International 2007). Mortality is also higher among girls, as the cultural preference for male children manifests in girls receiving less food, insufficient or delayed medical care, lack of attention and stimulation causing emotional deprivation, and insufficient investment of resources.

Malnutrition remains a major problem among infants and pre-school children, as judged by stunting, wasting and micro-nutrient deficiencies such as anaemia. Malnourished children also become more susceptible in adult life to the post-transition lifestyle diseases which increasingly afflict India, such as obesity and diabetes. Malnutrition is seriously and adversely impacting the country's development and medical expenditure.

So what factors stand in the way of faster progress towards realising child rights?

- **Public understanding:** A study by CHETNA in Ahmedabad revealed that 40 per cent of teachers, 70 per cent of parents and 90 per cent of children interviewed did not know what children's rights are. There is not even

a common definition of "child" in India. In national child labour laws, a child is a person below 14 years, while in various other laws a child is below 16 years or below 18 years.

- **Policy-makers' attitudes:** Most decision-makers still view children as needing to be controlled, rather than as being able to participate in decisions about their best interests. The fact that children do not vote works against them receiving more

specifically for child development. NGOs have often taken the lead, and a disturbing trend has emerged of government handing over its child rights responsibilities to NGOs.

CHETNA works to build support for promoting child rights by mobilizing politicians, the judiciary, media, bureaucracy and the general public. There are many initiatives across the country following the rights-

sessions we encourage participants to think about the differences between needs and desires – for example, it could be argued that a child needs a computer to have access to information, but as this is not a basic need like nutritious food, childcare support or school education, it is not considered a right.

Our training sessions also point out that rights, unlike needs, imply responsibilities. We use the idea of teaching responsibilities as well as rights to help participants to realise that child rights can be a win-win proposition. For example, we point out to teachers that child-to-child methodologies and child participation involves sharing responsibilities. It is not about losing or gaining authority.

> It is clear from India's recent experience that economic expansion alone is not sufficient to advance child rights, and greater public action is needed. When approached with worked-out solutions, the government is more likely to listen.

interest or funding. Even when appropriate policies are in place, there is a large gap to implementation, as most programme implementers have little idea of how to translate welfare-based programmes into rights-based approaches.

- **Fragmented responsibilities:** Various ministries and departments are responsible for law-making, resource allocation, implementation and monitoring of policies affecting children, and there is little coordination between them. Many state administrations do not bother to spend government funds allocated

based approach, which need to be showcased as examples and discussed by practitioners and policy-makers at the national level. It is clear from India's recent experience that economic expansion alone is not sufficient to advance child rights, and greater public action is needed.

CHETNA's approach to child rights
CHETNA defines children's rights as being the most basic needs which in all fairness everyone should have, or basic necessities which are necessary for children's physical, mental and emotional growth. In our training

We find that much of the resistance to child rights comes from a misunderstanding that it implies giving children free rein to demand whatever they like. Often participants worry that children may demand expensive foods, for example, because "it's my right to choose what I want to eat". We tackle this concern by explaining that child rights are about honestly and truly engaging with the child and sharing the limitations of a situation, whether economic or cultural, and not about giving them anything and everything they want.

We also often encounter a perception that not all children are capable of exercising rights. Some teachers, particularly from rural, tribal areas assume that child rights may be fine

for more sophisticated urban children, but their own children are not smart enough to take responsibility. We try to change their perceptions by pointing out their children's typically broader base of knowledge about such things as natural resources, flora and fauna and traditional health practices, which can become a foundation of self-esteem on which to build the children's confidence to become partners in decision making.

Through the various workshops and training sessions we run, we are trying to touch the hearts of participants, to encourage empathy through role-plays, and to plant the seed of a different way of thinking. It is very important to sensitise people from all sectors of society because there are so many interlinking influences on the situation of children – the attitudes of parents and family members, government and the corporate sector, voluntary organisations and local caste leaders all have important roles.

We must also recognise that it's not realistic to expect change to come immediately. When we talk about pre birth sex selection and elimination of girl-children, for example, some mothers say that their own experiences in society as women make them less willing to bring girls into the world. Such attitudes can change only as part of a gradual cycle of many different stakeholders thinking and bringing change.

Engaging with government is a matter of offering support rather than seeking conflict. When we run pilot projects in the field, we know they must be documented in a way that can demonstrate to government what impact it can have and what it costs. We also propose to provide necessary training for the people who would implement the programme. When approached with worked-out solutions, the government is more likely to listen.

Having said that, we do also play the role of monitor, along with other voluntary organisations. We have played a key role in Gujarat state and at national level in developing an NGO report on implementing the Conventions on the Rights of the Child, to provide an alternate view to the reports the government will be producing. Ultimately, as taxpayers we fund government. They serve the people, and our role is to encourage and help them to serve the people better.

Campaign on the girl child's right to survival

The 2001 census revealed there are 33 million women and girls missing in India, because of female infanticide and prebirth sex selection.

In 2005-2006 CHETNA facilitated a campaign to create awareness among various sections of society on gender equity and the girl child's right to survival. The campaign reached an estimated 200,000 people through house-to-house contact, neighbourhood meetings, street plays, *bhavai* (a traditional form of play with music), rallies, road shows, elocution and essay competitions in schools, open dialogues, CD shows, media campaigns, social audit and public meetings, posters, pamphlets, caps, bags, stickers, kites and postcards.

We conducted research studies on pre-birth sex selection in urban and rural areas in and around Ahmedabad city and in Mehsana district of Gujarat state. The evidence collected, from parents, teachers, the medical fraternity and children, was used to advocate for the girl child in the National Plan of Action for Children and State Plan of Action for children in Gujarat and Rajasthan states, and in the XI Five-year plan of the Government of India. CHETNA also organised consultations with the corporate sector, Members of the Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament in Gujarat State.

The government of Gujarat subsequently launched a state-wide campaign, "Beti Bachao" – Save the Daughters. In 2006, CHETNA developed a poster exhibition on the concerns and rights of Girl Child in English and Gujarati languages. Currently CHETNA is involved in further developing strategic communication approaches such as developing a website in Gujarati language and providing technical support to NGOs and government in creating mass awareness for to improve the environment for girls.

The Child-To-Child approach

CHETNA firmly believes that children have immense potential to contribute to their health and development and

that of their families and communities, if provided with appropriate knowledge and skills and timely guidance and support. The Child-to-Child (CTC) approach is a rights-based approach to children's participation in health and development that enables children to learn and link their learning with taking action to promote health, well-being and development.

CHETNA has pioneered the initiation of CTC in India and has been involved in promoting and mainstreaming the CTC approach since 1984. Since 2004, CHETNA has been recognised as one of the five Resource Groups of the International CTC Network. An action research in Ahmedabad during 2005-07 with about 1300 disadvantaged children brought about a significant improvement in the health knowledge and self-esteem of the children and the teachers, with stronger parent-teacher interaction.

Bal Mitra (Friend of children)

A scaling-up of the CTC project, this project is based on the Child Reporters Initiative, a concept developed by UNICEF to encourage children to observe and report on matters affecting them and suggest solutions. Its aim is to foster a culture of child participation in communities, schools and government. CHETNA implemented this project in the Valsad district of Gujarat State. Children's capacity was enhanced to identify issues, engage with adults and present their findings at appropriate forums such as village governing

bodies. This initiative received the Banyan Tree Value Challenge Award at the 2008 Asian Forum for Corporate Social Responsibility.

Mainstreaming child participation

As an international resource group, CHETNA enhances capacities and supports community based organisations, develops and disseminates learning resource materials, and advocates for children's participation in health and development in India and South East Asian region. International courses and National Consultations have been organised to focus on the need to recognise children's concerns and rights for participation as a crucial investment for social development.

Documentation and dissemination

CHETNA documents approaches and experiences gained through its projects in the form of learning resource materials, and disseminates them widely. Some of the recent materials include[2]:

- "Child Friendly Police", a sensitization material for police officers of Gujarat State;
- A set of eight booklets on child rights, including information and indicating role of key stakeholders for actualizing Child Rights;
- "My Rights, My Responsibilities, learning to teach child rights", a training manual containing seven modules on child rights;

- A poster exhibition on the rights of the girl child;
- A range of promotional material (greeting cards, paper cap, lamp shades, t-shirt etc.) on child rights in English, Hindi and Gujarati languages;
- "World without tears" – a reader for children to learn about their rights in an interesting story form.

Notes
1   Bajpai, A. Who is a child? Centre for Socio Legal Studies and Human Rights, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.
2   The first three resources listed here are available to download through the Bernard van Leer Foundation website, www.bernardvanleer.org.

References
International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Macro International (2007). National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005–06: India: Volume I. Mumbai: IIPS.

The early childhood rights indicators
A tool to monitor the Convention on the Rights of the Child and raise its profile globally

Ziba Vaghri, Adem Arkadas, Emily Hertzman and Clyde Hertzman,
Human Early Learning Partnership, Canada

Early childhood is a time of special importance for physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. It is a time that has a huge influence on who the child becomes. These years are marked by extremely rapid development of the brain and other key biological systems.

Many adult health problems – including obesity, depression, heart disease and non–insulin-dependent diabetes – have their roots in the early years. Later literacy and numeracy skills are also affected by how a child develops in these years. To improve the health of their population and decrease inequities in health, it is critical for societies to invest in their children's early development (Irwin, Siddiqi and Hertzman 2007). This investment should include a system of universal protection, respect and fulfilment of the human rights of young children.

Human rights are an intrinsic prerogative of all human beings independent of the environment surrounding them (Chapman 1993). Human rights are protected by an international system that includes a series of treaties, each with its respective monitoring body, agreed amongst the signatory countries. But what does it mean for young children to have human rights? It means that every child should enjoy a safe and nurturing childhood in which they develop and grow to their full potential free from violence. Basically, children have the right to enjoy their childhood to the full; the right to have good

health, to learn and to play. Young children have the same rights and freedoms as all other children, but they are particularly vulnerable due to their age and special developmental needs. Because of these special needs, their survival and development require special attention to their early environments. Therefore, despite the above-mentioned concept that rights exist independent of environments, fulfilment of young children's rights cannot be separated from the nature of environments where they grow up, live, and learn. As a result, a universal safeguarding system is required to guarantee the realisation of young children's rights in countries across the globe.

The United Nations' Convention on the Right of the Child (referred to here as the UNCRC or the Convention) is this universal safeguarding system that was adopted in 1989. The Convention is the most widely agreed legally binding international human rights document in the world, with 193 signatory countries. It provides a comprehensive framework that can protect and fulfil the rights of young children.

The Convention has a monitoring body – the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (referred to hereafter as the Committee). The Committee oversees a system of regular State reporting and provides guidance in the form of General Comments on the implementation of UNCRC. These are authoritative interpretations of the provisions in UNCRC[1]. It is noteworthy

that the Convention defines early childhood as the period below the age of 8 years.[2]

Monitoring the implementation of early childhood rights

What is monitoring and why is it so important and germane to the realisation of the UNCRC? In this context, monitoring "is a broad term describing the active collection, verification and immediate use of information to address human rights problems. The term includes evaluative activities at the UN headquarters, as well as first hand fact gathering at country level".[3]

In light of this definition, it is important to note that State Parties to the Convention are under an international legal obligation to submit periodic reports to the Committee on their progress towards implementation of the Convention (article 44 of the UNCRC). The Committee also has the prerogative to guide governments to implement and to report implementation of children's rights properly. The Committee has thus far adopted 12 General Comments for these purposes.[4]

One of these is General Comment 7: Implementing Rights in Early Childhood (GC7). It was drafted and adopted in response to the observation that young children under the age of 8 years were often entirely overlooked in States Parties' reporting of progress. The implication of this has been that States Parties have often neglected their obligations towards young children, regarding them more as objects of care and need, than as rights bearers and active social participants. While GC7 represents authoritative guidance to State Parties in fulfilling their obligations to young children, without a corresponding operating framework of indicators, it has had very limited practical value and as a result has remained underutilised (Child Right Information Network 2009).

At this point, one needs to ask a set of questions as to how rights in texts can be transferred into rights in practice. Is the status of treaty ratification alone a good indicator of the realisation of a right? The existing evidence indicates no consistent associations between ratification of human rights treaties and health or social outcomes (Palmer et al. 2009). What seems to be the problem? Why can't these treaties, prepared with good intentions and based on a sound knowledge base, be conducive to improved rights status? What are the obstacles? Does the problem stem from the gap between the theory and practice, or is the problem due to the lack of a tool that is sensitive enough to detect and measure relevant change? With respect to the former problem, stringent requirements for ratification of treaties, improved accountability mechanisms to monitor compliance of states with treaty obligations, and financial assistance to support the realisation of the right could be a part of the solution. As to the

latter problem, we are hopeful that development of a tool to assist with monitoring the realisation of young children's rights and identifying and understanding the areas in which progress has been made, could be very helpful in an environment of good faith. We have undertaken several initiatives that strive to test these propositions.

As one of the leading international NGOs that has helped develop GC7 and has worked towards implementation of the UNCRC for young children, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, in close cooperation with Committee, led a study to answer some of these questions. Their aim was to evaluate how GC7 would be received by State Parties and how General Comments have been interpreted since 2005. One of the main components of the study was consideration of early childhood indicators based on GC7 in Jamaica, the pilot site for the study.

During the course of the study, the Committee requested a group of researchers, the WHO, UNICEF, and child rights advocates from several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to elaborate on a framework of indicators based on this pilot study. As a result, the Early Childhood Rights Indicators Group[5] (herein the Group or GC7 Indicators Group)was formed. The Group sought to address the issues by creating a monitoring tool comprised of sets of indicators that State Parties could use to assess the rights environment and the implementation

of rights in early childhood in their countries as part of their reporting. This framework, completed in May 2008, addresses specific rights that are upheld in the UNCRC and elaborated in GC7. It also addresses the following underlying and cross-cutting themes:

- the need to recognise young children as rights holders and active social participants,
- State Parties obligations to provide appropriate and adequate support for caregivers of young children,
- the need for integrated service provision in support of holistic approaches to child development,
- the need to support and empower the evolving capacities of young children,
- empowering and positive education, preschool, and play experiences,
- freedom from social exclusion by virtue of young age, gender, race, disability etc,
- freedom from violence and understanding of the particular vulnerability of young children.

Organisational framework of the indicators
The indicator framework includes 15 sets of indicators that are based on existing UNICEF and health indicators; but also proposes new configurations of administrative data that could be used to gauge the implementation and enjoyment of rights in early childhood. These indicators are arranged within a hybrid model that combines elements from the structure of the UNCRC

reporting guidelines, the format of UNICEF's Multiple Information Cluster Surveys and the structure of the WHO Right to Health framework.

The indicator sets proposed in the framework are organised according to the clusters of the Committee's reporting guidelines (Committee on the Rights of the Child 1994). Under each cluster heading there is a rationale for the indicator sets that provides appropriate references to relevant articles in the CRC and paragraphs of GC7. An overarching key question is also given in each rationale that provides the foundation for the indicator. Following rationale statements, there is a table in which each foundation question is unpacked into sets of questions that are divided into sections titled: Structure, Process and Outcomes. Structure, as an indication of commitment to take action, refers to the existence of institutions and policies aligned with the UNCRC and the realisation of the particular rights in question. Process refers generally to efforts made and actions taken following on from commitment, and thus to specific activities, resources and/or initiatives in pursuit of rights realisation. Outcome refers to a resultant and measurable change either in the 'rights environment' or directly in early childhood development measures. Within these tables, we also identify potential sources of information and propose one or two measures, which may be the most effective and

parsimonious means to describe the specific achievement with regard to the rights under consideration. Within each table we also delineate the relevant Duty Bearers and provide references to sections of the Reporting Guidelines. The GC7 Indicators Framework was finalised early 2008 and presented to the Committee. The Committee was pleased with the work done and the developed indicators and encouraged the group to pilot test them in a few countries. Over the last year the Early Childhood Indicators Group has worked on developing an implementation manual for these indicators (Vaghri et al. 2009). Information on the implementation manual is given below. The group has also identified six countries; two from each income level (low, medium and high income), to pilot the manual and will be embarking on the first pilot in Tanzania in the autumn of 2009.

The Manual of Early Childhood Rights Indicators
The implementation manual is an easy to follow and user-friendly guide that will help the States Parties to assess whether the rights of their children are being upheld. It promotes better data collection, more careful analysis of data, more complete monitoring and, as a result, much more comprehensive reporting of early childhood rights. In short it is not only a tool for governments to fulfil their obligation for periodic reporting to the Committee in a very descriptive and thorough manner, it is also an efficient institutional self-assessment tool and an inventory check list for them to become aware of what is already there and what is not but needs to be, in terms of policies and programmes, to facilitate the realisation of the UNCRC.

The manual is written in a concise, clear, and understandable way. It includes examples and checklists for each set of indicators; employs rights-language; shares knowledge, practice and coverage; and provides examples of written policies in the form of policy papers.

The manual is based on the Committee's structured reporting guideline that delineates eight clusters under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).[6]

The framework for indicators addresses the
need to recognise young children as rights
holders and active social participants
Photo: Jon Spaull

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The focal point of each indicator set in the manual is a flow chart that walks the report writer(s) through a series of questions about existing policies and programmes. Then it moves on to ask whether or not these have resulted in any outcomes. These can be any change in the environment of a particular right or in the state of early child development, as measured by valid indicators. In cases where the country's answer to a given policy/ programme question is negative the flow chart provides examples of model policies/programmes from countries across the globe. A conscious attempt has been made to include as many examples from resource poor countries as possible. These examples are often followed by website addresses or additional information. These examples and additional information are meant to serve as a strong starting point for governments in their journey to fill in existing gaps in their systems.

Conclusion

Early childhood is a critical stage of growth and development that has the potential to influence an individual's health, education and economic potential throughout life. However, although State Parties are aware of the importance of early childhood, they often overlook their obligations during the early years largely because of the perceived invisibility of very young children and their families. The UNCRC clearly recognises this and outlines the elements in children's immediate

as well as distant environments that are conducive to the full achievement of their developmental potential. Despite the existence of strong and clear guidelines, the task of monitoring UNCRC implementation in early childhood has remained a challenge, in part due to a lack of monitoring tools. With the advent of GC7 and the GC7 Indicator Framework, rights in early childhood no longer need to remain a mystery or invisible. The GC7 Indicators Group has developed a comprehensive series of guidelines and indicators through which the enjoyment of rights and the rights environment of the world's youngest and most vulnerable citizens can be understood and monitored. Field-testing the Framework is an essential step toward building an internationally recognised child rights monitoring tool. It is our belief that upon pilot testing, the global deployment of such a tool will result in building efficient child rights monitoring systems in countries across the world.

Notes

1   UNCRC Articles 43–45.
2   Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2005). General Comment 7: Implementing Rights in Early Childhood, para 4.
3   Adaptation of the "monitoring" definition of the University of Minnesota, Human Rights Library at http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/monitoring/chapter1.html#D2 (accessed on 25.8.2009)
4   All general comments can be found at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm
5   Members are: Adem Arkadas, International Children's Centre (ICC), Ankara; Caroline Arnold, Aga Khan Foundation, Geneva; Clyde Hertzman, Emily Hertzman, Lori G Irwin and Ziba Vaghri, Human Early Learning Partnership, Vancouver;

Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague; Alan Kikuchi-White, SOS Kinderdorf International, Geneva; Lothar Krappmann, Committee Member UNCRC, Geneva; Nurper Ulkuer, UNICEF, New York; Mary Young, The World Bank; Louise Zimanyi, The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, Toronto
6   Overview of the reporting procedures CRC/c/33 adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child at its seventh session on 24 October 1994.

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Child Right Information Network (CRIN). *2009*. The use of concluding observation for monitoring the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. c/o Save the Children UK. Geneva, Switzerland.

Irwin, L., Siddiqi, A. and Hertzman, C. (2007). *Early Child Development; a Powerful Equalizer*. The final report submitted to the World Health Organisation. Available at: http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/globalknowledgehub/documents/WHO_EcD_Final_Report.pdf

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United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (1994). *Overview of the reporting procedures, basic reference document number CRC/C/33, Paragraph 5*. http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CRC.C.33.En?Opendocument

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News from the foundation

2009 is a significant year for the Bernard van Leer Foundation. On November 11th, we mark our 60th anniversary with events in The Hague aimed at raising the profile of our work in early childhood. And in July, we welcomed on board a new Executive Director.

Lisa joined the Bernard van Leer Foundation from the Ford Foundation, where she had worked since 2000, most recently as Acting Director of the Governance and Civil Society Unit. She has a long and distinguished career working within civil society, foundations and governments on cross-cutting social and economic issues, has degrees from the University of Michigan and the Institute for Social Studies in The Hague, and has published books and articles on the topics of globalization, global civil society and NGO accountability. An American national, she is married to a Dutch national and has two children of primary school age.

Oscar van Leer Fellowships
As part of the Foundation's 60th anniversary events, we will be pleased to present the inaugural Oscar van Leer Fellowships to six talented young journalists from developing countries in which the Foundation has active grantmaking programs. The Foundation had initially planned to offer three fellowships, but decided to increase the number after being overwhelmed by the response. Over 350 applications were received. The six inaugural Oscar van Leer Fellows are Kanina Foss from South Africa, Namita Kohli from India, Carmen Matos from the Dominican Republic, Erick W Ndung from Kenya, Nick Oluoch from Kenya, and Tatiana Velasquez from Colombia.

They were selected by a committee consisting of Radio Netherlands journalist Ginger da Silva, former chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Jaap Doek, communication expert Annemiek Hoogenboom, early childhood development expert Elly Singer, and the Foundation trustee Peter Bell. The fellowships commemorate Oscar van Leer, the son of Bernard, who gave the Foundation its focus on improving the life chances of disadvantaged young children. They aim to increase the quantity and quality of media coverage of issues affecting young children. The six fellows will return to the Netherlands in early 2010 for a four-week training course on journalism and children's issues tailor-made by the Radio Netherlands Training Centre.

Recent publications
Online Outreach Papers 7
Jewish-Arab schools in Israel: parents' perspectives and children's realities
In this paper, University of Jerusalem anthropologist Zvi Bekerman studies the Hand in Hand Centre for Jewish-Arab Education

Online Outreach Papers 8
Maintaining a respectful climate for young children in schools: no trumpet solo – let the orchestra play!
This looks at how Person to Person: Association for the Advancement of Human Dignity, a foundation partner in Israel, is tackling cultures of violence in elementary schools by shifting school values towards mutual respect and dignity rather than authoritarian approaches.

Working Paper 53
There are alternatives! Markets and democratic experimentalism in early childhood education and care
A joint publication with Bertelsmann Stiftung, in which Peter Moss of the University of London challenges the hegemony of the market model in early childhood education and care and discusses "democratic experimentalism" as an alternative

Working Paper 54
Too young for respect? Realising respect for young children in their everyday environments
This paper looks at the routine disrespect shown to young children in everyday life and examines case studies from Germany and Israel to show what respect for young children looks like in practice.

All publicaitons are available to download free of charge in PDF format from www.bernardvanleer.org/publications

In memory of Jim Smale
This issue of ECM is dedicated to the memory of Jim Smale, who died in June aged 68 years. Jim edited *Early Childhood Matters* for many years and was largely responsible for giving the publication its current format.

A message from the Executive Director

There couldn't be a more challenging time to begin to lead a privately endowed foundation than in the midst of a global financial crisis. But challenges also imply opportunities. Three months after taking over as the Executive Director of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, I would like to take a moment to share with you what I have learned so far, and how the foundation intends to carry forward its work.

I want first to thank the many experts in early childhood who have been generous in sharing with me their knowledge and clarity of purpose since I began my new role. One such expert is Paul Connolly, author of the foundation's recently-published Working Paper 52, which shows how by the age of just three children already understand their status in society and have internalized feelings of superiority or inferiority. By the time they are six, the habits of discrimination are mimicked and ingrained.

If you are an early childhood specialist, you will already know this. But it is news to many of the friends, parents and journalists with whom I talk over the dinner table. Their reaction is always the same: an urgent desire for more practical knowledge about what we all can do to keep the youngest members of our global society from repeating the patterns of older generations.

The messages we have to share about early childhood are emotionally powerful. We must bring them into the public limelight clearly, consistently and passionately. The youngest members of our societies have no voice, do not vote, and are often invisible. They need advocates.

As a privately endowed foundation, we can use our resources to create new advocates. One rich source of potential advocates is the business community. The Bernard van Leer Foundation has its roots in the corporate world, and already works successfully with private sector leaders in South Africa and Brazil. As we mark our 60th anniversary in November with events in The Hague, we will launch a new quest for partnership with corporate leaders in the Netherlands.

Private sector engagement is needed because, in an era of financial scarcity, governments cannot be expected to act alone. Nobody understands the case for economic returns on investment more instinctively than corporate leaders, and the evidence for economic returns on investment in early childhood is compelling – as established notably by Nobel Laureate James Heckman, our interviewee in the previous edition of *Early Childhood Matters*.

Journalists, too, are potentially key advocates for young children. They play a vital role in informing public debate and can bring stories of children's realities to the attention of the public in compelling ways. Therefore we will also mark our 60th anniversary by awarding, for the first time, fellowships to six talented young journalists to hone their skills in covering early childhood.

As the foundation comes to the end of its current three-year strategic plan, we are looking anew at the work we support to determine how we can in future achieve greater impact with fewer resources. We are revisiting the fundamentals of our mission by asking ourselves and our partners: what are the most urgent and under-addressed problems facing young children worldwide?

We already know that the next generation is greatly compromised by poor health, lack of educational opportunity, violence and discrimination. Our goals and strategies in the coming years will derive from a clear identification of the root causes of these problems, and a systemic analysis of how and where we can create the greatest leverage to resolve them.

Our future geographic range will also be determined through this strategic planning process. By 2010, our grantmaking will be oriented toward greater impact in fewer countries. And while we review our current programs, further financial support for projects in 2009 will only be undertaken in countries in which our operations are already systemic: the Caribbean, Mexico, South Africa, India, USA, Peru and Israel. Worldwide outreach will continue through global networks and the robust publications we publish or support, including *Early Childhood Matters* and *Early Childhood in Focus*.

As well as the 60th anniversary of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, November 2009 marks of course the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As described by Lothar Krappmann in this edition of *Early Childhood Matters* (p. XX), progress in realising children's rights has so far been slow but steady. We are determined to play our role in making sure that the urgency of children's rights and needs is taken up by more advocates, and the right of all young children to reach their full potential becomes a reality from the very start of life.

Lisa Jordan

Further reading

Websites

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is a body of experts who monitor the implementation by State Parties of the Convention on the Right of the Child.

The Committee holds regular sessions each year to review States Parties' reports on progress made in fulfilling their obligations under the Convention and its Optional Protocols.

www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/index.htm

CRIN

CRIN is a global network coordinating information and promoting action on child rights. CRIN presses for rights, not charity, for children and is guided by a passion for putting children's rights at the top of the global agenda by addressing root causes and promoting systematic change. Its guiding framework is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

www.crin.org

Early Childhood in Emergencies Working Group

The Early Childhood in Emergencies Working Group (EEWG) works under the umbrella of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development. The EEWG is co-convened by UNICEF and Save the Children and includes more than 100 organisations and individuals working in early childhood, emergencies and other related fields.

The purpose of the EEWG is to analyze and synthesize information gathered from research, case studies, successful practices and tools from the fields of early childhood and emergencies.

www.ecdgroup.com/emergencies.asp

Council of Europe: Commissioner for Human Rights

The Commissioner for Human Rights is an independent institution within the Council of Europe, mandated to promote the awareness of and respect for human rights in 47 Council of Europe member states.

www.coe.int/t/commissioner

Eurochild

Eurochild is a network of organisations and individuals working in and across Europe to improve the quality of life of children and young people. Eurochild's work is underpinned by the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It currently has 98 member organisations in 34 European countries (both within and outside of the EU).

www.eurochild.org

NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a network of 80 international and national non-governmental organisations, which work together to facilitate the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It was originally formed in 1983 when members of the NGO Group were actively involved in the drafting of the Convention.

www.childrightsnet.org

The African Child Information Hub

This is a platform for the exchange and dissemination of information and networking among organisations, experts and advocates for the rights and welfare of the child.

www.africanchildinfo.net

Publications

A guide to General Comment 7: Implementing child rights in early childhood
Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2006.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to all children under 18 - but its implementation poses particular practical challenges when it comes to young children. This book is a guide to implementing child rights in early childhood. It is based around the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment no 7. It contains extracts from the papers submitted to the committee at the time of the Day of General Discussion which preceded the General Comment, and other relevant material. General Comment number 7 of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child explains how the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) should be interpreted when it comes to young children.

www.bernardvanleer.org

Young children's rights and public policy: Practices and possibilities for citizenship in the early years
Glenda MacNaughton, Patrick Hughes, Kylie Smith
Children & Society, vol. 21, no 6, 2007

There is a growing belief that young children should be involved in decisions that affect them. This belief has its foundations in a new model of the young child, in a new concern with young children's rights as citizens and in new knowledge about the significance of young children's early experiences. This article examines the increasing interest in involving young children in policy-making and its rationale. It then presents two case studies from Australia of consulting young children in policy-making, to show what consulting young children can offer children, policy-makers and the wider community.

www.wiley.com/bw/journal.
asp?ref=0951-0605

UNNHCR Guidelines on determining the best interests of the child

The principle of the best interests of the child has been the subject of extensive consideration in academic, operational and other circles. How to apply this principle in practice, however, often remains challenging for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partners. Among others, the Guidelines describe a formal mechanism –designed as part of a comprehensive child protection system- to determine the best interests of the child.

www.unhcr.org/protect/
PROTECTION/4566b16b2.pdf

International Interdisciplinary Course on Children's Rights

The International Interdisciplinary Course Children's Rights in a Globalized World: From Principles to Practice wants to make an active contribution to the proliferation and promotion of the CRC and its underlying values and aims at critical refection on children's rights. The course is jointly organized by Ghent University, the University of Antwerp and the University College Ghent.

Next edition will take place in Ghent-Antwerp (Belgium) on September 2010

www.iccr.be

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Bernard van Leer Foundation

Investing in the development of young children

The Bernard van Leer Foundation funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development. The foundation was established in 1949 and is based in the Netherlands. Our income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist, who lived from 1883 to 1958.

Our mission is to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We see this both as a valuable end in itself and as a long-term means to promoting more cohesive, considerate and creative societies with equality of opportunity and rights for all.

We work primarily by supporting programmes implemented by partners in the field. These include public, private and community-based organisations. Our strategy of working through partnerships is intended to build local capacity, promote innovation and flexibility, and help to ensure that the work we fund is culturally and contextually appropriate. We currently support about 140 major projects. We focus our grantmaking on 21 countries in which we have built up experience over the years. These include both developing and industrialised countries and represent a geographical range that encompasses Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

We work in three issue areas:

- Through "Strengthening the Care Environment" we aim to build the capacity of vulnerable parents, families and communities to care for their children.
- Through "Successful Transitions" we aim to help young children make the transition from their home environment to daycare, preschool and school.
- Through "Social Inclusion and Respect for Diversity" we aim to promote equal opportunities and skills that will help children to live in diverse societies.

Also central to our work is the ongoing effort to document and analyse the projects we support, with the twin aims of learning lessons for our future grantmaking activities and generating knowledge we can share. Through our evidence-based advocacy and publications, we aim to inform and influence policy and practice both in the countries where we operate and beyond.

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