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DOMINICA NGO REPORT

ON THE

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC)

In

DOMINICA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ~~~~~	4
BACKGROUND TO REPORT ~~~~~	4
METHODOLOGY ~~~~~	6
1 GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION ~~~~~	7
Articles 4, 42, 44.6	
a. Measures taken to harmonise national laws & policies with provisions of the Convention	
b. Co-ordinating children`s policies and monitoring the implementation of the Convention	
c. Publicizing th provisions of the Convention	
2 DEFINITION OF CHILD ~~~~~	8
Article 1	
3. GENERAL PRINCIPLES ~~~~~	9
Articles 2,3, 6,12	
a. Non-discrimination	
b. Best interest of the child	
c. The right to life, survival and development	
d. Respect of the view of the child	
4. CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOM ~~~~~	10
Articles 7, 8,13,14,15,16,17,19,37.a	
a. Name nationality and identity	
b. Freedom of expression	
c. Access to appropriate information	
d. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion	
e. Freedom of association and peaceful assembly	

	f.	Protection from privacy	
	g.	Protection from inhuman treatment, torture, or degrading punishment	
5.		FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE ~~~~~	10
		Articles 5,9,10,11,18,20,21,25,27.4	
	a.	Parental guidance and responsibility	
	b.	Separation from parents	
	c.	Family reunification	
	d.	Recovery of maintenance for the child	
	e.	Children deprived of a family environment	
	f.	Adoption	
	g.	Illicit transfer and non-return	
	h.	Abuse and neglect	
6.		BASIC HEALTH AND WELFARE ~~~~~	12
		Articles 6.2, 18, 23, 24, 26, 27	
	a.	Survival and development	
	b.	Disabled children	
	c.	Health and health services	
	d.	Social security and child care services and facilities	
7.		EDUCATION, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES ~~~~~	13
		Articles 28, 29, 31	
	a.	The right to education	
	b.	Aims of education	
	c.	The right to leisure, recreation and cultural activities	
8.		SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES ~~~~~	14
		Articles 22,30,32,33,34,35,37,38,39,40	
	a.	Children in situations of emergency and refugee children	
	b.	Children of minorities or indigenous populations	
	c.	Economic exploitation	
	d.	Drug abuse	
	e.	Sexual exploitation	
	f.	Sale trafficking and abduction	
	g.	Other forms of exploitation	
	h.	Torture and deprivation of liberty	
	i.	Armed conflicts	
	j.	Rehabilitation care	
	k.	Administration of juvenile justice	
		OPINION OF CHILDREN ~~~~~	22

CONCLUSION ~~~~~	22
LIST OF REFERENCES ~~~~~	24

INTRODUCTION

The safety and well being of every child depend on their family and their community and the government has an obligation to provide and guarantee the safety and security of all its children.

Children today are faced with the challenges of survival and the imminent threats it appears on the child today comes from within the family and community so measures and tools are needed for the monitoring of the safety and well being of every child.

The Convention on the Rights of the child (CRC) is the principle international instrument that defines children's right and the government of Dominica on the 28th January 1990 signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and subsequently ratified the Convention on 13th March 1991.

It is within this spirit that we as CCF, a major child Development agency analyze the CRC for Dominica. The rights of every child is paramount to their development within the context of family and community and as this report will highlight rights cannot be seen and properly understand without the understanding of the needs of every child and family. Those needs are crucial and require urgent and meaningful attention.

The lack of financial resources is often given as excuses or reasons for the non-implementation of developmental programmes for children. In most cases the evidence shows a lack of political will from government.

BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

UNICEF approached the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) in June 2003 to provide some information as to the implementation of the Convention in Dominica. The preparation for the report started in July with meetings and dialogues conducted with CCF community based organizations around the island.

Christian Children's Fund (CCF) is an international nongovernmental organisation focusing on child development and assisting more than 4.6 million children worldwide. It is non-sectarian and assists families regardless of race, creed, gender or faith. It has been recognised for its ground breaking approaches to building self-governance, unique child protection programs for children in conflict and emergency situations, early childhood care and development and community based approaches to HIV/AIDS. CCF's comprehensive programmes focus on health and sanitation, nutrition, early childhood development, micro enterprise development, emergency relief and education.

CCF's Mission Statement:

CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S FUND CREATES AN ENVIRONMENT OF HOPE AND RESPECT FOR NEEDY CHILDREN OF ALL CULTURES AND BELIEFS IN, WHICH THEY HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL, AND PROVIDES PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR POSITIVE CHANGE – TO CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES.

In Dominica, CCF's programme has been focusing on education, health and home improvement. CCF has succeeded in the following areas:

- Building of pre-schools and subsidising of pre-school fees.
- Training of preschool teachers (ECD) .
- Providing materials and supplies for the teaching/learning process as well as children's uniforms.
- Providing items such as textbooks, uniforms, stationery bags and shoes at the commencement of each academic year to more than 75% of children in the Carib Territory.
- Meets the cost of bus fares for over 60 students attending secondary schools. Assistance is also given to enable the students to attend computer literacy and remedial classes.
- Works in close collaboration with the Adult Education Division to organise, coordinate and implement parenting and other skills programme.
- Pays the fees for children to be seen by specialist medical doctors and also for the necessary treatment such as spectacles.
- Assist with environmental and general sanitation programmes, such as a pit-toilet project.
- Conduct regular home visitation to observe and monitor the growth and development of the children under 5 years.
- Providing some families with building materials such as plywood sheets and sleeping materials among others to help improve the standard of living.

CCF has been operating in Dominica for approximately 20 years. The programme keeps growing and presently it serves as the regional office for both Dominica and St. Vincent. The agency has a strong early childhood development focus and is presently in its fourth year providing a teacher training programme with an average of 30 trainees annually. These teachers return to their respective communities to serve as advocates of ECD and assist with home intervention programmes and training. CCF's organisational structure indicates that it is already equipped to provide the services that will ensure the successful implementation of the Roving Care Givers Programme in 2004 to be jointly funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, UNICEF and CCF.

The agency uses a Project Management Tool system, which allows strict monitoring of all its programmes. The system focuses on three basic components, that is, an Annual Impact Monitoring And Evaluation System (AIMES). That system is based on home visiting to capture data. The second component is a Financial Indicator Tool (FIT). That system is used to monitor the agency's income and expenses. It is able to show important indicators, which are essential for financial operation, and deficiencies in any of these indicators bring up an immediate red flag, which must then be addressed. The final component is a Sponsor Services Indicator and Measurement System (SSIMS). It helps in maintaining an inventory on each child and on sponsors.

CCF'S APPROACH & RECOMMENDATION TO CHILD PROTECTION AND WELL-BEING

Child protection and well being consists of reducing risks to children's holistic well-being, making children's rights a reality, and creating an enabling environment that supports positive development.

ELEMENTS OF CHILD PROTECTION AND WELL-BEING

- Reducing risks to children's safety and emotional well-being
- Promoting an environment conducive to positive development, coping and resilience
- Improving age-appropriate physical, cognitive, emotional, and social competencies
- Fostering a secure and stable environment
- Strengthening family and community care giving structures for children
- Support for children's and youths' voice and agency.
- Integration of child protection activities across humanitarian delivery sectors
- Support for community-driven processes of child protection
- Strengthening local networks that enable child protection, care, and well-being
- Making children's rights reality through programming, education, advocacy, capacity building and influencing policies and practices.

VALUE ADDED BY CCF'S WORK ON CHILD PROTECTION & WELL-BEING

- Wider, holistic approach to child protection
- Emphasis on children's resilience
- Improvements in children's lives
- Increased children's empowerment, voice, and agency
- Increased visibility of children's issues among donors, governments and other actors
- Generalizable, scalable approach
- Improved agency leadership on behalf of children

PROTECTION IN DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTS

- Prevalence of abuse, neglect, discrimination, injustice.
- Gap in protecting children – agency leadership and responsibility
- Integration with poverty initiative
- Reducing vulnerability, shame, stigmatization, marginalisation
- Challenges: programme revolution – monitoring, listening to children, thinking and acting regionally, increased leadership on behalf of children.

METHODOLOGY

This report has been prepared solely on the basis of:

1. Findings from various research documents, literature and reports representing the Convention on the Rights of the Child from NGO`s and government programmes.
2. Consultation and representation with all CCF`s community Based affiliated programmes, through its home and family visits as part of CCF and its affiliates advocacy and lobbying initiatives. Through this first hand information on the progress or lack of, the effective implementation of the CRC is recognized and continues to be a matter for discussions and programme development in our intervention work.

Our concerns are periodically shared and discussed at many forums in which CCF itself initiates or participates. CCF also makes known its views and concerns on child rights issues through press releases, interviews, debates on national radio and TV. It is on this basis that CCF is able to comment on the implementation of the CRC in Dominica and is represented here in this report.

CCF was able to solicit the assistance of one person to do some initial review with persons representing the Legal Department, Ministry of Education (special needs), welfare Department, Child Rehabilitation Centre and one ECD Centre.

The government report served as a reference at sessions critically examining the weaknesses in service delivery as far as childcare and family related issues are concerned.

1. GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Articles 4, 42, 44.6

(A) Article 4: Measures taken to harmonize laws and Policies with Provisions of the convention

Government in the general spirit of this Act has enacted and amended legislation in keeping with the CRC. The process has begun for the introduction of the Family Court in Dominica and that must be recognized as a welcome step in the protection of children and families.

Although the Sexual Offences Act, No. 1 of 1998 does make provisions relating to Sexual Crimes, procurement and prostitution of persons (Section 4 (1), with the increase of cases not being pursued in court due to lack of credible evidence many cases known to involve a parent with information relating to sexual abuse involving their daughter are often thrown out of court due to lack of evidence or key witness backing off at the last minute as a result of receiving substantial financial or other gains by the perpetrator to keep quiet.

RECOMMENDATION

The Act needs to be amended to support cases where it is evidence that the mother of a child, as a result of her poor living condition is put in a very uncompromising situation to protect the perpetrator at the expense of her daughter.

(B) Article 42: **Co-ordinating Children's Policies and Monitoring the Implementation of the Convention**

Although much appears to be said about the CRC it does not appear to be effective in the minds of parents, adults and the public in general. There is still this myth that children have acquired "Rights" from parents and resulted in their authority as parents are being undermined. Parents articulate this concern in the passing of every new law and with all good intentions to protect the child, but they, the parents do not feel any sense of ownership in the process.

What is clearly missing is the political will of government to introduce a ***Charter for Parents*** or the equivalent of a CRC, where the obligations of parents in relationship to the CRC can clearly be juxtaposed clarifying to both children and parents what is their obligation as parents. Parents therefore need to feel that they have the upper hand above children (minors) as far as guardianship, protection and nurturing is concerned and that the Charter should make reference to the CRC and the Well Being of the Child. Child Rights is still confused as child's wants and children continue to use "their rights" as some power against their parents.

Instances do appears with clear contradiction from parents' perception of the CRC where it is evidence that a child who should be in the safety of a guardian and in house is out roaming the streets late at nights and parents have responded that they feel they would violate the CRC or some other law if they appear to discipline the child insisting they return indoors.

RECOMMENDATION

For the CRC to work, there must be test cases made known publicly on national radio demonstrating in a simple way where and how the CRC was initiated and implemented clearly outlining where the child or parents appears to have violated or misinterpreted one of the CRC's Articles on one hand and the opposite where the parent exercise all of her/his parental role and authority using the CRC as support.

At numerous CCF parent training sessions the CRC comes up more as an obstacle and foe rather than a friend and tool clearly defining the rights of children to education, health etc. The issue for some parents is that health, education and shelter are normal prerequisites that they normally wish to offer for their kids and poverty and poor living conditions with high unemployment appears to be what is preventing them from instinctively providing for their children. In other words, the CRC, they have been told was signed and ratified by governments and their poor living conditions is as a result of government poor management but yet they are lectured to daily on their poor parenting skills and care quoting the CRC as if it is their fault. That fault should rest at the doorsteps of the policy makers, the government.

The feeling is that the family as a unit is not articulated strongly enough as an important institution in national development plan, and families, in particularly poor families, continue to see themselves isolated from the government national plan. For example a child's education becomes formal at age five (5) which is a clear contradiction to the CRC's definition of a child. This policy to recognise a child starting formal education at five demonstrates to families that between birth and 5 years old a

child's education at that age is irrelevant and parents are left to fend for themselves in the crucial ECD stages of their child on their own.

(C) Article 44.6: **Publicising the Provisions of the Convention**

The publication of the report does not attract much public awareness and anticipation that it should. The publication of the report is left to the government agency to take on that role. The report is not published with a government fanfare as a report on the **State of Its Children**.

2. **DEFINITION OF THE CHILD**

Article 1

Under the Children and Young persons Act, the child means every human being below the age of 14. The OECS Initiative is looking at Family Law, which will redefine the child to every human being 18 and below.

Concerns continue to arise in the following areas of education and access to education other than formal academic education. The process of reforming education has been talked about with documents available offering guidance for implementation. There still are children below the age of 18 who are not academic and therefore not performing to the required standard at high school and often are left to drop out of school. There is no enthusiasm to have operated technical schools for children between the ages of 13 – 18.

There is still the old adage that secondary school is purely academic and children continue to be pushed to see them through an academic process and system rather than accommodating them where their strength lies, which is within a technical school learning practical skills preparing them for some level of employment. Many of these children drop out semi literate, poor reading and writing skills with low self esteem not sure where is it to turn as they approach adulthood in the world of employment and income.

3. **GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

a. Article 2: **NON – DISCRIMINATION**

Whereas the education Act makes provisions for all children to attend school from 5 years old, children who are physically and mentally challenged and with other forms of presenting disabilities still feel discriminated against because of the lack of service on the island generally. CCF has a register, which it updates regularly of children (5-18) who are unable to attend primary school because those schools lack specialist teachers and these children are left at home to be cared for by their parents and grandparents.

Generally the practice of institutional discrimination is non-evidence, it is the lack of political will to institute such services for the care and welfare of these children, which is evidence.

RECOMMENDATION

CCF would also like to see some mandatory practice in the registering of all children at birth. There is evidence to support that at the point of common entrance registering some children have been found not be registered at birth.

b. Article 3: **BEST INTERST OF THE CHILD**

The best interest of the child can be best implemented where the need appears to be the greatest. In the absence of children's home it is a fact that due to the lack of financial support and the political will children continue to remain in unsavory care facilities which IS detrimental to their inertest, welfare and care.

As long as children do not have a voice and that they are unable to vote, the needs of children in addressing their care where it hurts most goes unnoticed by the policy maker as priority is focused elsewhere in the ***best interest of the state***. Children therefore are seen as a liability and not a resource to be fully respected and prepared for to participate in nation building as a citizen.

There is currently one service on the island, which attempts to offer a rehabilitative and care programme for juveniles which is vastly under resourced, under staff, the children live is uncomfortable and unsanitary condition. The environment does not auger well in the ***best interest of the child*** despite the fact that numerous reports and representation made to government by CCF and other interest groups.

c. Article 6: **THE RIGHT TO LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT**

Dominica upholds the fact that every child has an inherent right to life. This right is protected and enshrined in Law.

d. Article 12: **RESPECT OF THE VIEWS OF THE CHILD**

Many forums do exist which encouragers respect and positive participation of expression and views of the child. Youth forums, through the National Youth Council, Youth parliament and the Youth Division are avenues geared at offering space and opportunity for their development of shared opinions and views. It is critical though that these views do not go unnoticed and unheard which may lead to the frustrations for youth that they are not listened to.

4. **CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS**

A. Article 7 & 8: **NAME, NATIONALITY AND IDENTITY**

The registration of a child's birth to be duly registered and the registration of a child's name do not in practice meet with e spirit of the Convention. The Law makes for registration within 14 days (chap. 35:30, section 16) and registration of a child's name within 12 months Section 23 (1). In other words a child is registered at birth but 12 month is allowed to pass, according to the law before the parent(s) can name that child.

RECOMMENDATION

The law should be amended to ensure dual and completed registration at the point of birth and before departure from the hospital, clinic or place of birth.

The records in the Birth Books in which births are recorded, show that a fairly large number of children are not registered. There is no enforcement of the law to make parents register their children as is required.

The law does not determine that paternity is determined by scientific methods. Some fathers are taken to court, the magistrates decide based on the information he/she get in the courts that the father is a 'putative father'. Once he is judged a putative father he must maintain. However, for single persons, putting the name of the father on the birth certificate is voluntary. If the father of his own will doesn't put his name, then the child carries the mother's surname.

Recommendation

Scientific methods should be adopted in identifying the blood father of a child and should not be determined and decided by the fact that one is judged as a putative father.

B. Articles 13, 14, 15,16, 17,19, 37.a: **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

The Dominica child has certain available avenues, which encourages dialogue and free expression.

Article 37.a: **PROTECTION FROM INHUMAN TREATMENT, TORTURE OR DEGRADING PUNISHMENT**

The laws are in place to protect children from all forms of inhuman treatment and its practice. The concern here is in relation to the excessive corporal punishment administered at home by some parents. While the use of that level of punishment will remain with us for a long time, the focus during parenting training sessions is to promote effective communication skills and dialogue in understanding the child and the parent's role. CCF view is that the more that that is promoted the less we expect parents to use the rod.

Recommendation

The Child Abuse Prevention Unit needs to be properly manned. There is neither trained counselor nor psychologist available to offer that service. In addition to child abuse manual procedures, there should be more policies to guide care and protection. Concerned that when a young person(s) have been abused physically or sexually, insufficient after care is given to that child or young person.

5. **FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE**

- a. Articles 5, 9 10, 11, 18, 20, 21, 25, 27.4

Although there are supporting laws for the protecting of children it is a fact that the parents are responsible for the upbringing and development of their children. It is a fact therefore that the current socio-economic factors often prevent families from providing adequate care for their children. Some families do find it extremely difficult to meet the high costs of high school textbooks and education in general.

- b. Article 20. The existing alternative care Centre (OYQ) is not adequate and with the best intentions to offer quality care and a home away from home the service, short term and long term, of every resident child and participant in the daily programme need to be reviewed and upgraded to address the real rehabilitation needs of every child. Of concern are, a) the staff level is poor, b) the majority of support staff are not trained social workers, c) the management team itself is weak and inadequate both in numbers and training to adequately offer the necessary service, d) there are no trained child psychologists, or specialist (behavioural or otherwise) assigned to the centre to assist in the rehabilitation of these children. The Centre operates on the hope that the children will eventually learn something from being placed at the centre when they move on.

As an NGO, OYQ receives a subvention from the government and the Board of Directors is non operational and ineffective and has been so for over five (5) years now. Professional supervision and monitoring of the service is therefore poor and ineffective and there has been some concerns about the security of the children as far in house practices of abuse among young boys have been raised. A CCF commissioned Review of operations at OYQ (2001) has as one of its recommendations that, “ Meetings between Welfare and OYQ staff should be re-established and take place not less than every 3 month”.

Government has neglected OYQ in not reviewing and developing its services to an acceptable professional level. Despite the economic situation of the country OYQ has never been on the government’s agenda as a Centre in need of rehabilitation and review itself. CCF has had no official response from government on its findings. In the meantime concern will continue to grow about the effective services administered to the children of OYQ.

RECOMMENDATION

The Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs under which OYQ falls should take the lead in collaborating with its NGO partners in improving the standard of care at OYQ.

Presently adoption is being done through the Welfare Division. There are no safe guards to check on the children, most of them are never seen in this country after adoption.

Foster care system does not adequately respond to children who have to be taken away from homes. The fact that our juveniles still have to go to the adult prison when the law makes provision for training school.

- c. Article 10. **FAMILY REUNIFICATION**

The laws don't have specific guidelines on the rights of unmarried fathers. The OECS Reform on Family Law is presently considering specific guidelines in terms of establishing paternal rights of fathers of children born out of wedlock.

Recent amendments to the law seem to be linking access to the child with maintenance of the child.

Recommendations

- i. In Dominica more needs to be done to make fathers more responsible for the care and upbringing of their children, too much is left to the mothers particularly those in common law relationships and visiting fathers. A policy on shared responsibility for the care of children should be adopted, so that the burden of taking care of the children does not fall solely on the mother. The absence of the father's role in the upbringing of the children is having serious negative impact on too many children in Dominica.
- ii. The Adoption Board needs to be in place, so that adoption can be done through the board set up, where the procedures are more rigorous.

6. BASIC HEALTH AND WELFARE

In general children have reasonable access to primary health care island wide. The services are structured to ensure that the services is decentralised making easy for all families to have access to a health care clinic within close proximity of their homes. There are however some areas, due to the terrain where families struggle to access this service and some have complaint that upon arrival there are no medicines to treat their ailment.

Services at some districts where they serve isolated villages and communities levels are however limited in the service they offer and often children and families are referred to the main hospital in Roseau, or depending on the area to Portsmouth or Marigot. Families' first choice will always be at the main general hospital in the city of Roseau.

A. Article 23: DISABLED CHILDREN

There is a lack of services and provisions for disabled children in Dominica. Many children with disabilities who are born into families and reside mainly in the remote rural villages and communities are often not sure and understand the cause and nature of their children's disabilities, These children exist in exclusion and live a life of fear, ostracism with the label and stigma attached to disability socializing out of the home rarely happens.

In the city of Roseau there are two main Centres offering services for special needs children. The Alpha Centre and the school for the Hearing Impaired, the latter a government operated institution for children with severe hearing loss. The Alpha Centre is an NGO and offers services to children who are developmentally and mentally delayed. No provision is made for the education of children with sight impairment.

CCF is taking the lead to assist on going efforts by government and existing NGO programmes to address the concern of lack of care and services from a level of home care and through an institution in one rural community. The government of Dominica has responded positively by leasing a piece of land with an old derelict building, which CCF hopes to renovate, through fund raising activity to offer multiple services for children and parents. This is a partnership venture and initiate in collaboration with the community.

7. **EDUCATION, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES**

Dominica promotes “Quality Education for All”, according to the Education Development Plan: 2000-2005. The focus is access to education for all children of school. The Education Act was amended in 2001 to recognise and include Early Childhood Development programmes with the establishment of a technical support Unit. The Act recognises that formal education begins at age 5.

The Education Development Plan (EDP) address Universal Secondary Education (USE) as a National Policy to be fully implemented by September 2005. While the Government of Dominica is attempting to make secondary education assessable to all children, the programme is academically bias, i.e. it does not make provision for the technical and vocational skills, and therefore no provision is made for many children who should be pursuing these skills.

Leisure areas need to be sufficiently developed within the school system to enhance children’s physical and mental development.

Cultural activities in Dominica continues to be expressed freely island wide with the Cultural Division taking the lead in organised activities. These activities do offer the opportunity for children to participate at all sections of cultural activity.

Recommendation

Section 43 of the Education Act 11, of 1997, makes provision for the appointment of attendance officers to enforce compulsory attendance of children, this has not been enforced as a result many of our children are falling through the cracks.

Parenting programmes for parents to form part of the Health and Family Programme.

Teachers to be trained before they are assigned to classrooms.

8. **SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES**

a. Article 30: **CHILDREN OF MINORITIES OR SPECIAL GROUP**

The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989. The Convention reaffirms the fact that children, because of their vulnerability, need special care and protection, and it places special emphasis on the primary caring and protective responsibility of the family. But, even at this basic level of welfare, the conditions in which Carib Indian children live do not conform to these

principles. As this article reveals, they are the subjects of neglect, abuse and exploitation. Furthermore, their right to have a voice in their own development is violated and their cultural beliefs and practices as indigenous peoples remain virtually unrecognised by the governments and mainstream societies of Dominica and St. Vincent in which they live.

A small but significant number of Carib Indians, the indigenous peoples, also live on the island. In Dominica, Carib reside in a 'reservation', that is on land under common title held in care by the Carib Chief and managed by the Carib Council, the local government administrative body in the Carib Territory. English is the official language, but a French patois is widely spoken in Dominica and even more so in the Carib Territory.

Lands in the Carib Reservation do not belong to the individual or families, but are managed by the Carib Council, the local government body there. In Dominica, the development of lands and the farming industry is constrained by this pattern of land ownership. Carib people are unable to obtain financial assistance in the form of loans from the major banks because they do not individually own the lands.

The main income activity of the Carib people in Dominica is agriculture with bananas as the main crop followed by coconuts. The Caribs of Dominica, mainly the women, are also engaged in other small income-generating activity, for example weaving, basket making and root crop production.

A major contravention of the CRC is that Carib families are discriminated against by the commercial banks and other lending institutions, which deny Carib families access to loans to enable them to compete with other nationals in development and investment opportunities. The Carib communities are not seen as economically viable for any kind of major investment programme and this has become exacerbated recently with the drastic decline in the banana industry. The communities continue to be a place for token investment that has not transferred into real development opportunities and prosperity for the area. The location of these communities seemingly isolated and with poor infrastructure, unskilled labour, poor human and other resources, continue to place Carib families in disadvantageous position compared to other communities on the islands.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD)

Over the past two years, the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) has been monitoring services for children under five years of age in both Carib Indian communities as far as their development is concerned. It is clear that services geared to that age group are minimal. As families struggle to survive, children's education is under-resourced. There are no nursery services in Carib communities in either country to supplement family care and nurturing to children three years old and younger. Some children (46 %) aged 3-5 years old attend Pre-School periodically, where parents who are part of the CCF programme receive assistance with school fees. Those who are not part of the programme are unable to attend because they cannot pay for the service and governmental assistance for children is not a priority in that area. There is heavy dependence on CCF and other NGOs funding and services.

In the absence of early childhood development programmes, Carib children face problems later on. Without mental stimulation and development in their earliest years, they are unprepared for primary education and this leads later to low achievement, high drop out rates (25%) (CCF 1999) and functional illiteracy.

In Dominica the CCF conducted a survey (CCF 1999) on Carib children between the ages of 10-15 years old. Despite the relatively high enrollment figures, many are weak and performing badly in the following areas:

Reading	62.8%
Writing	65.5%
Spelling	76.6%

It is well known that early childhood education can increase the return on primary and secondary school investments. It can raise participants' productivity and income levels and reduces social costs in such areas as school repetition, juvenile delinquency, drug abuse and neglect.

A total of 40% of boys and 39% of girls (CCF 1999) under five years of age do not have access to formal care, meaning that they are left in the care of unsupervised persons who themselves are not adequately trained and equipped to look after children. Most times, from CCF's observations through unannounced visits, young children are left at home on their own. Very young children are often neglected and left in the care of other small children as young as four, five and six or, alternatively, in the care of aging grandparents who are unable to provide adequate care and protection. Young children follow others as they disappear from their immediate home safety and explore their surroundings, at the same time being exposed to serious risk of being abused, hurt or injured.

The ineffective care, lack of protection and inefficient services for the children of indigenous and minority groups continues to create a climate of absolute poverty in these isolated communities. Carib Indian children not only feel and live the impact of this social neglect, but psychologically believe that they were born into and are fated to live in these circumstances. CCF continues to promote the concept of the early childhood services in poor Carib communities targeted at the well being of the child. As well as delivering services to children, projects are designed to educate caregivers, and to inform and persuade the public of the need for interventions.

QUALITY OF LIFE

There has been a rapid deterioration in the standard of living among all Carib People. This is reflected in poor housing and health standards, poor performance and underachievement at primary school, high drop-outs rates at secondary school and children being kept at home to care for their younger siblings while parents are at work. In Dominica, in particular, the Carib Territory is one of the poorest and most neglected areas, with no running water in about 75% of the area, high unemployment rate, poor educational facilities and poor quality nutrition.

Housing and Living Conditions

In the Christian Children's Fund survey (CCF 1999), the housing and living conditions were broken down into four main categories: vulnerability, conditions and comfort/overcrowding. These are critical areas in the home, which have an impact on the health and quality of life of Carib Indian children and their families.

Vulnerability:

Homes in the Carib areas are inspected and examined regularly to check whether they are hurricane proof and how exposed children and families are to danger in case of a disaster. Even in the absence of hurricanes, strong winds and rain from tropical depressions and storms constitute a threat.

Traditionally, houses in Dominica are made of local wood. Many are poorly constructed with the four sides propped up with logs to strengthen and protect them from strong winds. Many of these houses are also a fire

and health hazard. In a study conducted for the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) to provide information for a comprehensive and integrated development plan for the Carib Indian Territory, an estimated with 82.9% of homes were unsafe (McKenzie Architectural and Construction (MAC) Services). The CCF (1999) study indicated that 72.8% of homes are unsafe and only 15.3% safe. In the event of a hurricane many houses are damaged and destroyed beyond repair and families become homeless, having to share homes with family members and friends for a considerable length of time.

Conditions:

In terms of health and sanitation within the homes, approximately 70% of houses are in poor and dilapidated condition (CCF 1999, MAC Services 2000). This indicates that the houses are infested with rodents, bugs, cockroaches and other insects, creating unhygienic surroundings which contribute to serious asthma attacks and other related respiratory and health illnesses.

In addition, the majority of houses are a danger to health and human life because of broken and falling windows, old roofs, broken and weak flooring, and weak pillars due to rotten wood or broken concrete. Only 13.6% (CCF 1999) and 11.4% (MAC Services 2000) of households were identified as 'good' in this respect.

Comfort and overcrowding:

CCF data confirm that 86% of homes in both Carib communities is overcrowded, compared to the national figures of 51%. The MAC Services study (2000) records a staggering figure of 91.45% of homes in the Carib Reservation in Dominica as constituting an uncomfortable environment. UNICEF's Community Baseline Survey in Dominica (UNICEF 1998) confirms that about a third (31%) of the houses in the Sineku area of the Carib Territory have one room, 37% of the houses have two rooms, while 20.7% have three, and 6.9% have four rooms. The survey concluded that, 'since more than half of the houses have only one or two rooms which are bedrooms and living/dining areas, it can be assumed that there is a high degree of over-crowding. This has negative implications for privacy for both adults and children in these households, and can create situations which are conducive to abuse' (UNICEF 1998). This information confirms fears of serious overcrowding in the homes of indigenous children.

Health

Overcrowding at home has a direct impact on children's health. Children literally sleep on the floor on what is commonly known as 'bedding' (old clothes and pieces of cloth spread out on the floor). This is a practice, which health practitioners believe is a major contributing factor to asthma attacks, and other related respiratory illnesses. The CCF survey (1999) reveals that in at a national level, 28.65% of heads of households do not have any knowledge of ARI (Acute Respiratory Illness). It should be noted that this data captures 'knowledge' only and there has been no system to monitor 'practice'; that is, how well a parent or guardian responds in the event of a child having an asthmatic attack. It is, however, recognised that ARI is a significant cause of absenteeism from school among Carib Indian children in Dominica.

There are also reported incidents of a serious reoccurrence of worm infection and skin problems among children, which, according to community health nurses, present in the form of fungus infection and ringworm in the head. Community health teams in both Carib communities confirm that the fact that about 62% of Carib families live in a one-bedroom house is a major contributory factor to the spread of fungus infection.

Malnutrition among children, those who are five years old and under in particular, is also prevalent among Carib children, 5% of that age group. The health team and CCF's data (1999) reports the impact of this on the children in the areas of poor growth and development, poor performance at school, high reported illnesses, and absenteeism due to related illness. It is further confirmed that the numerous cases of gastroenteritis among Carib children are a related problem. The UNICEF (1998) baseline survey of Sineku, a Carib community in Dominica, concluded that there were 'inadequate water and toilet facilities and, therefore, the river becomes the receptacle for waste matter as well as being the main source of potable water for cooking, washing and bathing'.

Most parents are impoverished and unable to meet the costs of medicine. They are not motivated, under the tight economic conditions in which they live, to take their children to the health Centres for medical care and attention. Government have not made a point of duty and a responsibility to positively target social development towards the care and need of the child in the Carib Territory. Children, in particular Carib Children, have therefore been marginalised from mainstream development policy and practice in Dominica.

EDUCATION

The low rates of educational achievement and performance among Carib children in Dominica have been known for some time now. Although some of those children who fail may be able to attend a privately run school, this is beyond the financial resources of most Carib parents. In addition, absenteeism is very high, estimated at approximately 25% (CCF 1999). As Figure I reveal there are many factors that contribute to poor education among Carib Indian children.

FIGURE I: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POOR PERFORMANCE, UNDER-ACHIEVEMENT AND IREGULAR ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL OF CARIB INDIAN CHILDREN

Not well clothed for school: uniform - 42.4%, shoes - 34%

No access to nutritional lunch - 71%

Children poor in the following: reading - 62.8%, writing - 65.5%, spelling - 76.6%

If return home for lunch percentage unlikely to return to school after lunch break - 21.6%

Percentage of children who walk long distances to school (within and outside of the Carib area) - 42.8%

Percentage of children hungry upon arrival at school due to long distance walk, did not have breakfast or a combination of both - 56%

Average percentage of children absent from school due to rainfall as a result of having to walk long distance in the open to school - 52%

Average percentage of children who miss school due to accompanying parents/adults to work in the fields at some times in the week to reap harvest - 28%

Average percentage of children who miss school, are late for school or walk to school due to lack of bus fare - 42%

Average percentage those miss schools as a result of some form of abuse - 46%

(Source CCF 1999).

With reference to a Carib Indian community in Dominica, a UNICEF sponsored baseline survey concluded that: 'Manifestations of this poverty in Sineku is seen in many forms. For example, there is limited access to

education - children have long distances to travel to get to school, and parents have limited financial resources and cannot always pay bus fare' (UNICEF 1998).

CHILD ABUSE

The incidence of child abuse is reported to be high among the Carib Indians and is likely to be closely related to prevailing perceptions of children and childhood. We can make reference to a recent survey, which questioned adults in a Carib community in St. Vincent about their views on children. Specifically, the researchers were attempting to capture the influence that adults' perceptions, attitudes and behaviour have in the moulding and development of children, including their own. The survey revealed that when parents were asked to describe their children, 'almost all words were negative'. The researchers further revealed that 'adults were more readily thinking of bad characteristics of children than good characteristics...adults sometimes called their children, "hardened", and "wicked"' (Durbow and Bozoky 1996:22). The survey also revealed an alarming picture of parental perceptions and expectations of boys when asked to describe competent and positive traits in children. The survey concluded that parents change their expectations for adolescent boys once they have failed the common entrance examinations, suggesting that for adolescent boys, completing home and other menial chores becomes more important than performing well at school (Durbow and Bozoky 1996).

Informal interviews with community health team personnel in Dominica reveal evidence of referrals and treatment to cases of physical and other abuse. Domestic violence is common and is generally perpetrated by fathers or stepfather towards their mothers or extreme physical violence towards children by both parents. In other words, in total violation of the CRC, many Carib children continue to suffer at the hands of their parents through physical and mental violence and maltreatment, a critical concern being the incidence of serious physical punishment, or 'beating', and sexual abuse both within and outside the home.

Carib children continue to suffer both mentally, physically and psychologically from all forms of abuse either as the unfortunate victims or as innocent witnesses. Community health officers report incidents of traumatised children who visit the health Centres as a result of abuse and are scared to share their feelings with others. Those that do communicate their experiences, reveal the following:

FIGURE II: CARIB CHILDREN'S REPORTS ON THE IMPACT OF ABUSE

Sexual abuse:

Withdrawn

Reserved

Self Blame

Frightened

Bad and rotten

Unworthy

Shameful

Unwanted

Lack trust in others

Suspicious of all men

Guilty

Anger

Scared of relationship

Why me?
What have I done?
Sleepless nights

Physical Abuse:

Poor communication
Difficulty in taking initiative
Scared
Frightened
Scared to discuss with other parent for fear of being punished
Psychological scar
Difficulty in communicating
Unloved
Fear
Reserved
Shy

Incest:

Feel like a dog
Vomit
Sick
Feel to commit suicide
Unable to disclose it
Unable to share my feelings and anger with another
Repressed
Try to forget that it occurred
Nightmares
I thought my daddy/uncle loved me
My own home no longer feels a safe place
Sleepless nights

Emotional - Mental (intimidation, no praise, telling off, etc.)

Broken down
Go into my shell
Unmotivated
Unable to perform
Reserved
Unwanted
Intimidated
Nervous
Sad
Angry
Scared
Unable to sleep
Feel like no one's child

Lack confidence in self

Neglect:

Unwanted

Lost

Abandoned

Worthless

No value

Insecure

Poor

Abandonment:

Thrown away

Rejected

Lack Motivation

Hurtful

It is also noted that children do not get the love, hugs and praises from their parents so important in helping to boost their self-confidence and trust. The physical abuse applied appears to be over forced as most parents see this as the first and only effective way of communicating to their young ones. From all reports, children are severely beaten in the homes and this results in constant loud cries and shouts for over ten minutes as the punishment is enforced. It is also a spectacle for neighbours and passers-by that stand and watch the in-house show. This of course is humiliating and degrading to the child and the family, not mentioning the psychological scars, which will remain with the child for a long time if not life.

Schoolteachers also report that children are not performing because of high level of violence in the homes. On a daily basis, children report at schools, health Centres and at the CCF's community offices about incidences in which their fathers 'beat up' their mothers openly in their presence. Those children are traumatised and in fear of returning home at the end of the school day. In 2002 a child intervened in a domestic violent case involving the beating up of her mother by her father. The father in protest of the child's intervention cut off four of her fingers murdered the mother and later his body was found about two miles away in his banana field, where he committed suicide.

RECOMMENDATION

The Carib Council as the local government authority in the Carib Territory to play a more meaningful role in:

- a) The protection and security of children
- b) Establish within its offices technical and social workers to undertake casework and other related family matters.
- c) Taking the lead in promoting child rights issues.

b. Article 34: SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL ABUSE

The government, through the Welfare Division has demonstrated its committed in the fight against all forms of abuse on children. Although is a national condemnation of child sexual abuse there is still a level of sensationalism and emotion to the issue in addressing the real causes of sexual abuse in particular.

There is an apparent weakness in the system in following up cases and as a result victims, children, supporters in general become very disoriented in making themselves available to support the pursuance of cases because of the delay involved in, a) early detection, b) timely response to cases, c) lack of welfare officers appropriately placed to follow up on cases, d) lack of welfare and social services in the outer villages/districts, e) availability and access to professional workers in pursuing cases.

Abuse within the family is often kept secret especially the cases of incest and with the restructuring of services and the availability of officers, island wide would make it easier in the detection and follow up .of cases.

RECOMMENDATION

The government needs to as a matter of urgency restructure and decentralise the welfare service structure and system to ensure national coverage of services for children and families.

c. Article 35: **SALE, TRAFFICKING AND ABDUCTION**

The Hague Convention on child abduction is developed, but has not been ratified. The Convention is presently going through a series of discussions.

D. Article 40: **JUVENILE JUSTICE**

The law is there but not instituted. The physical place of safety for juveniles on remand is not enforced. Juveniles who offend are not supposed to be kept with adult prisoners, but this is what is being done at the present. The Government training schools for juveniles who offend have not been made possible. The alternative to institutional care is not in operation.

There are not many alternatives for dealing with juveniles who offend , work has started on Restorative Justice targeting juveniles and community service.

Recommendation

The Government to pursue aggressively its Restorative Justice programme, which is geared to target juveniles, and a community service programme.

OPINION OF CHILDREN

On October 8th 2003 ten (10) children from the GrandBay Primary School participated in a CCF sponsored focus group meeting to discuss and share their thoughts and feelings of children who live in poverty.

Here are some questions for the filmed interviews. Before asking the questions, interviewers engaged in lengthy and relaxed conversation with the children, to get them to relax. The questions were open, requiring dialogue and conversation to get to the real answers:

1. Faces of poverty:
Are there poor children here in this village?
Who are the poorest children here in this village? How do you know that they are poor? What do they look like?
How do the poor children feel?
2. Causes of poverty:
Why are children poor here in this village?
3. Resources:
What do people do here to try to be less poor?
Who helps people here?
4. Gifts:
What do children do to help their families here in this village?
What can children do to help their families here in this village?
How about the poorest children? What do they do to help their families?

CONCLUSION

The poor quality of life experienced by Carib children is attributable to multiple factors including social and ethnic marginalisation, geographical isolation, socio-economic conditions of unemployment and poverty and cultural patterns of child abuse and neglect. As the UNICEF sponsored report concluded: 'Like other indigenous populations across the world, Sineku and the rest of the Carib Territory have suffered from social and economic marginalisation which has resulted in poverty' (UNICEF 1998:63).

If the CRC is to ensure child survival, development, participation and protection and that to achieve its full aim in protecting and caring for our indigenous Carib Indian children, As signatories to the CRC, the government of Dominica must make firm commitment to have the various agencies concerned with child rights and development adequately staffed with resource persons. The policies designed for mandatory interventions in the cases of child abuse and domestic violence must be persuasive and supportive by nature and not punitive. They must also address the needs of poor families surviving in the conditions of socio-economic deprivation experienced in Carib communities. The promotion of collaboration with Caribbean NGO partners and government agencies is essential as there are similarities in problems experienced by Caribbean children.

Policies and programme must not be imposed from above but must involve communities and be understood and embraced by children, their parents and adults who affect their lives. In summary then, as the CCF has recognised, policies for Child welfare must be holistic and participatory, taking into consideration the child's indigenous culture, home conditions and community environment, and acknowledging the disparity between the

social and economic hardships rural and indigenous children grow in comparison with their peers in the urban and city areas.

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CRC – DOMINICA 2004

ABSTRACT

In the Caribbean there has not been satisfactory representation for children who live in and experience some level of poverty. The structure of the family appears to be under threat and is being undermined by external forces notable the foreign cultures who promote values and attitudes that is beyond the expectation and reach of many of our families. Families aspire to catch a piece of the action and the affluence of advertised lifestyles on the TV. With the limited opportunities for parents and their families mothers migrate to neighboring islands, the youth migrate seeking greener pastures, contributing to the brain drain of our young minds and those who are left are unskilled and forced into anti social activities resulting in confrontation with the law.

Overall many interest groups, including CCF, with some level of success and recognition have advocated for the plight and needs of Dominica's children. It is therefore fair to say that although this is so, with the marginalisation, poverty and poor living conditions of many families in Dominica representation at an international forum should bring their concerns to the fore.

The objective of this report is to develop an awareness on aspects of the Convention on the Rights of the child has not effectively serve and protect our children. The report also raises insights into the impact of suffering and lack of opportunities due to ineffective social policies, community programming and government intervention.

Major findings highlighted in the paper include:

- There are policy guidelines on child abuse but these are not being implemented, especially from the police standpoint. There are long delays in prosecution, court hearings and dispensation when the matters come up for hearing
- Presently adoption is being done thorough the Welfare Division. There are no safe guards to check on the children, most of them are never seen in this country after adoption. The Adoption Board needs to be in place, so that adoption can be done through the board set up, where the procedures are more rigorous.
- Foster care system does not adequately respond to children who have to be taken away from homes. The fact is that our juveniles still have to go to the adult prison when the law makes provision for training school.
- The Education Development Plan (EDP) address Universal Secondary Education USE) as a National Policy to be fully implemented by September 2005. While the Government of Dominica is attempting to make secondary education assessable to all children, the programme is academically bias, i.e. it does not make provision for the technical and vocational skills, and therefore
- The laws of Dominica make provision for compulsory education for 5 to 16 years. Section 43 of the Education Act 11, of 1997, makes provision for the appointment of attendance officers to enforce compulsory attendance of children, this has not been enforced as a result many of our

children are falling through the cracks no provision is made for many children who should be pursuing these skills.

- Because of the economic situation in Dominica, the state cannot afford the cost of providing the facilities required to help the disabled child enjoy a full and decent life. No provision is made for the education of children with sight impairment. The education of children with disabilities lies in the hands of non-governmental agencies.
- The physical place of safety for juveniles on remand is not enforced. Juvenile who offend are not supposed to be kept with adult prisoners, but this is what is being done at the present. The Government training schools for juveniles who offend have not been made possible. The alternative to institutional care is not in operation. There are not many alternatives for dealing with juveniles who offend, work has started on Restorative Justice targeting juveniles and community service.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Analysis of this data gave compelling evidence of the concerns and the extent on the contravention of the rights of children in Dominica.

The task ahead for all players, advocates, lobbyists and government, in addressing the needs and rights of our children is to begin to recognise the key to the development of this country is in our human resource our children, and we must take a collaborative approach in identifying the core of the problems as exists and to further identify mechanisms whereby priority would be given ensuring that, as beneficiaries the survival and protection of all children would be our goal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A concerted effort must be made to have parents and the public in general more aware of the needs and rights of our children
- A holistic approach must be taken in planning and addressing the needs of every child with the development of an Early Child Secretariat to monitor and implement ECD programmes and practices.
- A planned investment programme addressing the needs and survival of the family as the main institution and safety for the every child is crucial in the development, implementation and practice of the CRC.

Collaborative work with child care NGO's need to be strengthened in identifying the strengths recognizing their specific areas of work with children and families with government to examine the potential of utilizing and buying their service to deliver care and programmes to families if it is seen that they do it best in absent of government financial and human resources. This will greatly assists in ensuring that effective programmes will be targeted to the felt needs of those children and families in the greatest need.

FRANCIS JOSEPH