

# CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY: OVERVIEW OF DEFINITIONS, MEASUREMENTS AND POLICY

WORKING PAPER



DIVISION OF  
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OVERVIEW OF DEFINITIONS,  
MEASUREMENTS AND POLICY**

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**Children Living in Poverty: Overview of Definitions, Measurements and Policies**  
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## **Executive Summary**

Is the issue of children living in poverty recognized by and incorporated into anti-poverty strategies? Who are the children living in poverty? Have governments, civil society organizations, and international organizations identified them and adopted policies to reduce child poverty? Is the situation of girls living in poverty taken into account? Are poverty reduction policies following a human rights-based approach? The objective of this paper is to review the literature available that address some of these issues and present different concepts regarding child poverty, different definitions of children living in poverty and efforts to measure child poverty. The paper also maps some policies and strategies to reduce child poverty. In general, the assessment finds that there is a lack of consideration of children's issues in general and in particular in the anti-poverty strategies. However, several organizations have recently adopted a human rights-based approach to defining children living in poverty. A few governments have actually started to incorporate explicit targets and policies to reduce the number of children living poverty.

## **Resumen ejecutivo**

Es la pobreza infantil reconocida e incorporada en las estrategias para reducir la pobreza? Quienes son los niños y niñas que viven en pobreza? Son identificados por los gobiernos, las organizaciones de la sociedad civil y los organismos internacionales? Se han adoptado políticas para reducir la pobreza infantil? Es la situación de las niñas tomada en cuenta? Se basan las políticas de reducción de la pobreza en el enfoque de los derechos humanos? El objetivo de este trabajo es revisar la literatura existente con respecto a estos temas y presentar diferentes conceptos en relación a la pobreza infantil, sus diferentes dimensiones y los esfuerzos para medirla. El trabajo también ofrece ejemplos de políticas y estrategias para reducir la pobreza infantil. En general, encontramos que una falta de consideración de los temas referidos a la infancia y en particular con respecto a las estrategias para reducir la pobreza. Sin embargo, varias organizaciones han adoptado recientemente un enfoque de derechos para definir a los niños y niñas viviendo en la pobreza. Algunos gobiernos han comenzado a incorporar objetivos y políticas explícitamente dirigidos a reducir el número de niños y niñas pobres.

## Résumé analytique

La pauvreté des enfants est-elle reconnue et intégrée dans les stratégies de réduction de la pauvreté ? Quels sont les enfants qui vivent dans la pauvreté ? Ont-ils été identifiés par les gouvernements, les organisations de la société civile et les organisations internationales ? Des politiques de réduction de la pauvreté ont-elles été mises en oeuvre ? La situation des filles a-t-elle été prise en compte ? Les politiques de réduction de la pauvreté ont-elles adopté une approche fondée sur les droits humains ? Ce document a pour objet de passer en revue la littérature existante traitant de certaines de ces questions, et de présenter différents concepts liés à la pauvreté des enfants, à sa définition et à sa mesure, ainsi qu'aux efforts pour la juguler. Ce document offre aussi des ébauches de politiques et de stratégies pour la réduction de la pauvreté infantile. Au total, l'évaluation met en évidence un manque cruel d'attention portée aux problèmes relatifs aux enfants en général, et dans les stratégies de lutte contre la pauvreté en particulier. Toutefois, plusieurs organisations ont récemment adopté une approche en termes de droits humains afin de définir quels enfants vivent dans la pauvreté. Certains gouvernements ont en outre commencé à se fixer des objectifs et à développer des politiques publiques visant à réduire le nombre d'enfants vivant dans la pauvreté.



# CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY: OVERVIEW OF DEFINITIONS, MEASUREMENTS, AND POLICIES<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The world is falling short in its promise and commitment to ensure that every child enjoys a safe and nurturing childhood. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which came to force in 1989, provides children – in both rich and poor countries – the right to a childhood in which they can learn, play, be healthy, and develop. However, 15 years after the adoption of the Convention and after more than 15 years of market-led economic growth, governments and the international community are still far from fulfilling children’s rights and creating a world fit for children.

According to UNICEF, over half of the children in the developing world live in poverty (UNICEF 2004). Such a level of *child deprivation* is not incorporated into the growing dialogue on anti-poverty policies or in the current debate on the definition of poverty. For instance, the widely accepted monetary approach to identifying and measuring poverty is being challenged by other multidisciplinary approaches; such as the human rights based approach, the basic needs approach, and the capability approach. *However, this debate does not differentiate the concept of child poverty and the different needs and vulnerabilities of children living in poverty.* Not only has child poverty been excluded from the debate, but it has also been invisible in the efforts to measure and tackle poverty. While there are other debates regarding poverty that have significant effects on children living in poverty – such as equity and poverty as well pro-poor policies – this paper focuses on issues that explicitly address child poverty.

Child poverty is affecting the lives of millions of children worldwide. It is a problem present in both poor and rich countries, and needs to be acknowledged and dealt with directly. Conventional poverty reduction strategies that concentrate on generating economic growth to reduce poverty do not recognize that children experience poverty differently from adults and that children have specific and different needs. Thus, conventional poverty reduction strategies, as will be discussed below, are inadequate to addressing child poverty.

Furthermore, there are several terms used to describe the hardships of child poverty; including Child Poverty, Childhood Poverty, and Children Living in Poverty. These expressions aim to refine the discourse on poverty and children. While it is recognized that they have different working definitions, for purpose of style, these terms are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

This paper aims to discuss some issues that deal with children living in poverty. However, since children are particularly dependent on their care takers, this paper will discuss how the situation of the mother, the father, the family, and, in general, the immediate environment have direct and

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<sup>1</sup> The first version of this document was elaborated as a base and conceptual background for the International Conference

strong impact on children's wellbeing. The focus of this document is on child poverty but it is clear that children are not isolated actors, and policies addressed to realize children's rights should be related to policies oriented towards the women, families, and the community.

The paper presents data on recent endeavors to define and measure child poverty. The data show that large numbers of children are vulnerable, and that dealing with their deprivation is a critical priority to combat poverty today and in the future.

In this regard, the purpose of this paper is to provide an overview and discuss how organizations – academic, public, private, domestic, local, and international – are defining, and measuring child poverty and what their proposals are for addressing the special needs of children and reducing the impact of poverty on children.

The paper has three sections and one annex. The first section is a summary of different definitions of child poverty and conceptual frameworks that shape child poverty action plans. The assessment finds that not many organizations have a particular consideration of the issue of children and poverty. However, the few that define child poverty do it as a multidimensional phenomenon that requires direct policy intervention. The research also finds that human rights principles are important factors in shaping child poverty definitions and action plans.

The second section presents two approaches to measuring child poverty. The first is the monetary approach, which uses an income-based poverty line to identify poverty. The second approach is the deprivation approach, which establishes a set of basic services and capabilities and then measures the number of children who do not have access to the basket of services and capabilities.

The third section of the paper presents a mapping of the different policies that explicitly address child poverty. This section begins by reviewing the relationship between the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) initiative and child poverty. In particular, the paper presents the results of several reviews of PRSPs that find that a majority of PRSPs fail to directly address child poverty. The paper also presents some recommendations proposed by UNICEF to make PRSPs more receptive to children's special needs.

This section also includes a set of national initiatives and strategies that are directed at reducing child poverty. These are:

- Cash transfers

- Elimination of user fees for basic social services

- Budget initiatives for children

- Holistic Approach – which calls for countries to orchestrate public services to better address child poverty

- Macroeconomic approach – recognition that macroeconomic and fiscal policies have a great effect on children

- Focusing on children

- Advocacy and Mobilization

These initiatives and strategies represent only a few of the options that governments, civil society organizations, and donors could support in order to directly address child poverty.

Finally, given that many of the issues discussed in relation with children living in poverty are linked with the general framework of poverty, the annex includes a brief discussion on poverty concepts and measurements.

## **1. Defining child poverty**

Child poverty is the poverty experienced during childhood by children and young people. It differs from adult poverty in that it has different causes and effects, and the impact of poverty during childhood has permanent effects on children. (CHIP, 2004; UNDP, 2004). As noted in the previous section, children are vulnerable to deprivation; even short periods of deprivation can impact long term growth. “Children experience poverty as an environment that is damaging to their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual development. Therefore, expanding the definition of child poverty beyond traditional conceptualizations, such as low household income or low levels of consumption, is particularly important. And yet, child poverty is rarely differentiated from poverty in general and its special dimensions are seldom recognized” (UNICEF, 2005a).

This section presents a summary of recent advances in the conceptual and practical areas of child poverty and summarizes the background documentation and debate on the different ways that child poverty is defined and used to shape anti-poverty programs. By exploring the different conceptions of child poverty, this section aims to map the major issues around child poverty and provide readers with an understanding of the unique nature of child poverty. To that end, this section will review different definitions of child poverty and different conceptual frameworks used by some organizations when preparing a child poverty action plans. Overall, these definitions and conceptual frameworks are based on the deprivation of basic needs and on human rights principles.

### **1.1. Definitions of child poverty**

There is no uniform approach for defining, identifying or measuring poverty. The debate over poverty is concerned with different potential causes of poverty and ways by which poverty can be measured and compared nationally and internationally<sup>2</sup>. The monetary approach is the most widely used approach in identifying and measuring poverty. This reduces poverty reduction strategies to increasing individuals’ income levels (Vandemoortele, 2000). Notwithstanding the widespread use of the monetary approach, several development organizations and scholars see poverty as a phenomenon that cannot be defined only in monetary terms. They recognize that poverty is multifaceted and cannot be measured and resolved only through monetary means. In particular, organizations that work on child poverty issues view poverty as a multifaceted problem that requires comprehensive strategies to address its many features.

There are many reasons why the monetary approach is not appropriate for measuring child poverty. The monetary approach, for example, gives little consideration to household structure, gender, and age. It ignores that children’s needs are different from those of adults

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the poverty debate and the major approaches debated in the development field, please refer to Annex I.

(Vandemoortele, 2000; Minujin, 2005). The standard monetary solution of increasing individuals' income level ignores the fact that disadvantaged groups are discriminated against and may not be given proportional shares income (Minujin, 2005). Moreover, numerous studies have shown that within households "the burden of poverty (is) being unequally heaped in accordance with age and gender biases that adversely affect women and children in particular" (Feeny and Boyden, 2003: pg. 6).

Additionally, the monetary approach neglects to note that children's wellbeing also depends on non-market-based goods. The availability of basic services and a safe environment to play is not always based on household income levels. These services are usually not for sale to individuals, but need to be provided through collective action (e.g. by the state or not-for profit providers). Because of these deficiencies, the monetary approach is not appropriate for identifying and measuring child poverty.

However, like the debate over the exact definition of poverty, there is no set definition for child poverty. In this section we attempt to summarize different characterizations of child poverty used by organizations that directly work with children issues. As mentioned above, these definitions are based on a combination of concepts of the deprivation approach for identifying and measuring child poverty and human rights principles.

## **UNICEF**

UNICEF defines child poverty as the deprivation of social services. In works like the Bristol study, UNICEF has listed a basket of goods and services that it considers essential to ensure children's wellbeing. Thus, UNICEF's working definition of child poverty, presented in *The State of the Worlds' Children 2005*, is:

*Children living in poverty [are those who] experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society*

"This definition suggests that the poverty children experience with their hands, minds and hearts is *interrelated*" (UNICEF, 2005b: pg. 18). For example, material poverty leads to malnutrition, which in turn affects health and education, which in turn may impact a child's long term development. Furthermore, to address the lack of financial resources, children from poor households may be engaged in child labor which may negatively impact a child's cognitive and physical development by depriving the child from school. Children in rich households may not be free of suffering from deprivation. "Living in an environment that provides little stimulation or emotional support to children ... can remove much of the positive effect of growing up in a materially rich household" (UNICEF, 2005b: pg. 18). In essence, UNICEF's definition stresses the multidimensional and interrelated nature of child poverty.

UNICEF's definition also suggests that economic security is only one of the many components to addressing child poverty. "Other aspects of material deprivation like access to basic services, as well as issues related with discrimination and exclusion that affect self-esteem and psychological development, among others, are also central to the definition of child poverty" (Minujin, 2005: pg 2).

Such a definition influences UNICEF's policy recommendations to address child poverty. UNICEF adopts measures that account for the different components of child poverty. Furthermore, as mentioned above, UNICEF is also an advocate of a human rights-based approach to defining child poverty, which holds that elements which contribute to child poverty are children's rights.

## CCF

The Christian Children's Fund (CCF) has endeavored to define child poverty. In 2002 it commissioned a study on the experience and impact of poverty on children (Boyden and Feeny, 2003). As part of this effort CCF consulted with children and their families to learn directly from them how children experienced poverty.

CCF found that the generally accepted usage of poverty – "*The state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possession*" – gives rise to two concepts that are important in rethinking the definition and measurement of child poverty. First, that poverty is relative across times and societies; and secondly, "that poverty is conceived in terms of the ability to purchase goods and services (money) or their ownership (material possessions)" (Feeny and Boyden, 2003: pg. 5). These concepts imply that the widely accepted concept of identifying and measuring poverty through a monetary poverty line is inadequate to measure child poverty, as mentioned above and echoed by the CCF report. Children lack access and control over income, and to gage a child's wellbeing by consumption at the household level is wrong because it neglects that children do not proportionately benefit from a household's income or consumption (Feeny and Boyden, 2003). Additionally, as Arjun Appadurai notes, monetary solutions focus on physical aspects, and neglect the intangible aspects of poverty: feeling of security, lack of freedom from harassment and abuse, social exclusion (Feeny and Boyden, 2003). Thus, CCF sees child poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon that is made up of both tangible and intangible components.

CCF has found that for children poverty is a deeply relational and relative, dynamic and multi-dimensional experience. In particular three elements are interrelated. Poor children are **deprived** of essential materials conditions and services; they are **excluded** on the basis of their age, gender, class, etc.; and they are **vulnerable** to an increasing set of threats in the environments where they grow up. Thus, CCF views child poverty as comprising three inter-related domains:

***Deprivation:** a lack of material conditions and services generally held to be essential to the development of children's full potential.*

***Exclusion:** the result of unjust processes through which children's dignity, voice, and rights are denied, or their existence threatened.*

***Vulnerability:** an inability of society to cope with existing or probable threats to children in their environment.*

**Source:** CCF, 2004 and Minujin, 2005: pg. 3

CCF's definition of child poverty points to its commitment to supporting comprehensive poverty reduction strategies that recognize the unique nature of child poverty, and also encourage a **participatory** approach that includes children's voices.

## **CHIP**

The Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Center (CHIP) is a joint project between Save the Children and the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC). In its document, "Children and Poverty: Some questions Answered", CHIP offers the following definition for child poverty:

*Childhood poverty means children and young people growing up without access to different types of resources that are vital for their wellbeing and for them to fulfill their potential. By resources we mean economic, social, cultural, physical, environmental and political resources*

The following bullet-points detail CHIP's definition of Child poverty.

**Growing up without an adequate livelihood** – i.e. economic, physical and environmental resources needed for survival and development.

**Growing up without opportunities for human development** – social, cultural and physical resources, i.e. quality education and life skills, health and water/sanitation.

**Growing up without family and community structures that nurture and protect them** - social and cultural resources , i.e. having parents/guardians with the time (or ability/desire) to care for them or an extended family/community that cannot cope if parents and guardians are not able (or not there).

**Growing up without opportunities for voice** – political resources, powerlessness and lack of voice often underpins the emergence of poverty.

**Source:** (CHIPS, 2004: pg. 1)

Like UNICEF, CHIP's child poverty definition is multifaceted and stresses that the different aspects of child poverty are **interrelated**; and like UNICEF, CHIP supports comprehensive anti-poverty strategies that address the different aspects of child poverty.

## **CIDA**

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is another organization that uses a human rights-based approach in its child poverty action plan. “This approach is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which views girls and boys as full-fledged persons who are active, able, and necessary participants in their own development and that of their communities” (CIDA, 2004a:pg. 3). Furthermore, CIDA sees human rights violations as the results of child poverty: “Poverty prevents children from reaching their full potential. It denies them human rights—like those related to education, health and nutrition, participation in decisions that affect their lives, and freedom from abuse, exploitation, and discrimination” (CIDA, 2004a: pg. 1). CIDA, like many development agencies, relies on the monetary approach to identify and measure children living in poverty. (CIDA, 2004b: pg. 1).

Even though it relies on a monetary approach to measure child poverty, CIDA supports a human rights-based approach as an effective poverty reduction strategy. “Realizing children's rights is essential to reducing poverty in a sustainable way. And protecting the most vulnerable children — who are often neglected by traditional interventions in health, education, and nutrition — is key to realizing children's rights” (CIDA 2004b: pg. 1).

CIDA, like UNDP, does not provide an exact definition of child poverty. Like UNDP, it also relies on human rights principles to shape its child poverty programs.

## **Save the Children**

Save the Children also makes a strong connection between child poverty and human rights. It argues that fighting child poverty is much more than a development concern, but a human rights concern. Furthermore, like CIDA, Save the Children uses a monetary approach to identify children living in poverty but proposes a human rights approach to design anti-poverty policies that address child poverty. Because there is a link between child poverty and human rights, anti-poverty strategies should be “based explicitly on the norms and values set out in international human rights law” (Save the Children, 2003: Pg. 3).

Save the Children’s human rights-based approach is anchored on the “A World Fit for Children” resolution adopted by the General Assembly during the UN’s 2002 Special Session on Children. This clearly indicates Save the Children’s view that child poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that needs to be grounded on a comprehensive human rights-based approach.

## **IDASA**

The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) is a national NGO that has examined the relationship between children’s rights, state budgets, and poverty reduction. In a 2000 study entitled “*Child Poverty and the Budget 2000 – Are Poor Children Put First?*”, IDASA defined child poverty in terms of four categories of suffering/deprivation. These are:

1. **Insufficient income and income earning opportunities:** Here the study refers to children suffering because they worry about the low level of household income and their own lack of income.
2. **Lack of human development opportunities:** Here the reference is to children not having access to social and basic services such as health, education and sanitation services and being denied access to recreational facilities and to the impact of this lack of access.
3. **Feelings of economic and physical insecurity:** Economic insecurity refers to children's concern about a sudden fluctuation in the households' income and access to public services. Fluctuations are usually tied to adverse economic shocks (unemployment, price changes) and death in the family (from sicknesses such as HIV/AIDS). The impact includes children being taken out of school, child-headed households, street children, and dissolution of the family unit.
4. **Feelings of powerlessness:** The reference here is to children feeling oppressed within the family unit and feeling excluded from or scorned by the community.

**Source:** Streak, 2000, pg. 6-7

IDASA developed its broad definition of child poverty through a participatory effort which first consulted and incorporated the voices of some of South Africa's children on what it means to be poor. Second, IDASA considered the definitions used by international poverty researchers, and lastly, it "drew upon the definition of poverty implicit in the Convention on the Rights of the Child" (Streak, 2000: pg. 7).

## **2. Child poverty measurements and findings**

Poverty is not easily measurable. The multidimensional nature of poverty includes quantifiable variables (such as income, consumption, and access to basic services), but it also includes capabilities variables that may not be so easily measurable – like the capability to participate in society without facing discrimination. This is one of the reasons why development agencies rely on the monetary approach to measure poverty (poverty line). The monetary approach is a very ineffective and, in many ways, counterproductive way to measure poverty<sup>3</sup>:

It ignores the multi-dimensional nature of poverty

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<sup>3</sup> For an extensive discussion of the monetary approach and other approaches to measure poverty, please refer to Annex I.

It uses an income-based poverty-line to identify the poor, neglecting the different characteristics of households

It overlooks the different needs of people- i.e. a disabled person may need more resources to accomplish the same tasks as a healthy adult

It disregards the importance of public services and non-market goods, like education, healthcare, water, sanitation, etc.

This subsection will present the results of some international and national efforts to measure child poverty. It will present poverty measurement efforts from both less developed and developed countries, as well as different methodologies.

## **2.1. Child poverty as severe deprivation – Bristol Study**

The deprivation approach to measuring poverty looks at a set of observable and demonstrable disadvantages. “The notion of deprivation focuses attention on the circumstances that surround children, casting poverty as an attribute of the environment they live and grow in” (UNICEF, 2005b: pg. 20). A team of researchers from the University of Bristol and the London School of Economics conducted an empirical study that established seven measures of basic needs and looked at how children in developing countries are affected by severe deprivations. This study is “the first ever scientific measurement of the extent and depth of child poverty in all the developing regions of the world” (Gordon, *et al*, 2003: pg. 1). The measures of child poverty are based on internationally agreed definitions based on child rights. The measures are: adequate nutrition, safe drinking water, decent sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, and information (Gordon, *et al*, 2003; UNICEF, 2005b; Minujin, 2005).

### **Bristol’s Deprivation Indicators**

1. *Severe food deprivation*: children whose heights and weights for their age were more than 3 standard deviations below the median of the international reference population, that is, severe anthropometric failure.
2. *Severe water deprivation*: children who only had access to surface water (for example, rivers) for drinking or who lived in households where the nearest source of water was more than 15 minutes away (indicators of severe deprivation of water quality or quantity).
3. *Severe deprivation of sanitation facilities*: children who had no access to a toilet of any kind in the vicinity of their dwelling, that is, no private or communal toilets or latrines.
4. *Severe health deprivation*: children who had not been immunized

against any diseases or young children who had a recent illness involving diarrhea and had not received any medical advice or treatment.

5. *Severe shelter deprivation*: children in dwellings with more than five people per room (severe overcrowding) or with no flooring material (for example, a mud floor).
6. *Severe educational deprivation*: children aged between 7 and 18 who had never been to school and were not currently attending school (no professional education of any kind).
7. *Severe information deprivation*: children aged between 3 and 18 with no access to radio, television, telephone or newspapers at home

**Source:** Gordon, *et al*, 2003, pg. 7-8

Child poverty, or severe deprivation, is thus considered the non-fulfillment of any of the indicators (rights) noted above. The study found that 56 percent of children in developing countries – just over one billion children – suffer from one or more forms of severe deprivations. South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa had severe deprivation rates of over 80 percent. More poignantly, rural children in these two regions had severe deprivation rates of more than 90 percent. The following box summarizes the results of the study by deprivation indicator:

### **Deprivation Findings**

Out of a population size of over 1.8 billion children in the developing countries, these were the results of the Bristol study:

1. *Severe food deprivation*: 15 percent of children under five in the developing world are severely food deprived
2. *Severe water deprivation*: Nearly 376 million children, 20 percent, do not have access to safe water sources or have more than a 15 minute walk to water
3. *Severe deprivation of sanitation facilities*: More than half a billion children, 31 percent, suffer from sanitation deprivation
4. *Severe health deprivation*: 265 million children, 15 percent, suffer from health deprivation
5. *Severe shelter deprivation*: More than 500 million children, 34 percent, suffer from shelter deprivation
6. *Severe educational deprivation*: 134 million children aged 7 and 18, 13 percent, have never been to school
7. *Severe information deprivation*: almost half a billion children, 25 percent, suffer

from information deprivation

**Source:** Gordon, *et al*, 2003: pg. 8

These results indicate that the majority of children in developing countries are suffering from severe deprivation (rights violations) that will adversely impact their development. Moreover, while the highest percentage of a single deprivation is 34% (shelter), the holistic view of the child adopted in the Bristol study shows a much higher percentage of children living in poverty, around 50%.<sup>4</sup>

More localized deprivation studies can be effective tools for policy makers. The results of localized deprivation studies can provide clear indications of the exact needs of children living in poverty.

## **2.2. Child poverty as severe deprivation – Young Lives Project**

The *Young Lives Project* is a British Department for International Development (DFID) funded international collaborative study to investigate the changing nature of child poverty. Like the Bristol study, the Young Lives' Project seeks to "improve our understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty" (UNDP, 2004: pg. 5). However, where as the Bristol study aimed to provide a "snapshot" measure of child poverty today, the Young Lives' Project aims to address the lack of information on **changes** in children's wellbeing over time. It is a long term project that aims to follow "nearly 12,000 children and their families over 15 years in four countries" (Ethiopia, Peru, Vietnam and India) (UNDP, 2004: pg. 5).

The project tries to examine all aspects of children's lives, including:

### **Young Lives Indicators**

1. *Access to basic services:* Access to electricity, safe drinking water, and toilet facilities
2. *Access to Primary healthcare and children's health:* Vaccination, prevalence of childhood diseases, distance to medical care
3. *Child caring and rearing*
4. *Child malnutrition*
5. *Literacy and numeracy*
6. *Child work*
7. *Social capital among community*

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<sup>4</sup> I.e. about half the children in developing countries suffer FROM AT LEAST one severe deprivation. There is, however, wide variation about this value by region. In East Asia it is 20 per cent and in Sub Saharan Africa it is 84 per cent. In the latter, moreover, 19 per cent of the children suffer from at least 3 deprivations (Minujin and Delamonica, 2005).

The project sends enumerators every three years to visit the selected children and collect data on the deprivation indicators (MRC, 2001). The first round of data collection found that in all four countries children experienced high levels of deprivations. In Ethiopia, for example, only 34 percent of children aged 7-12 were enrolled in primary school in 2000 despite the fact that close to half the population is younger than 15 years of age” (UNDP, 2004: pg. 5).

The results of the Young Lives’ Project are similar to the results found by the Bristol study. Poor children are suffering from deprivation of basic needs like clean water, quality education, electricity, proper dwelling, etc. Rural children and girls, in particular, are vulnerable to suffering from deprivation (Young Lives, 2004a; UNDP, 2004; UNICEF, 2005b; MCR, 2001). These results, like the ones above, point to the need to develop targeted anti-poverty strategies that address the deprivations suffered by children.

### **2.3. Child poverty and the monetary approach**

There are two methodologies for measuring poverty within the monetary approach: absolute poverty and relative poverty. The former establishes a poverty line and counts people whose income is less than the poverty line poor. The poverty line used by many development agencies (i.e. the WB, IMF) is the US\$1 a day<sup>5</sup>. In 1998, “the number of income-poor in developing countries was estimated at 1.2 billion ... Children represent at least half of the income-poor” (Vandemoortele, 2000: pg. 3).

In a 1997 study of poverty by age groups, Angus Deaton and Christina Paxson used a poverty line that roughly corresponded to the international US\$1 a day poverty line. They studied the percentage of people living below the poverty line in South Africa and found that young adults make up the smallest fraction of people living in poverty, “followed by the elderly (who receive a monthly cash payment from the government), then older and younger children” (Deaton and Paxson, 1997: pg. 14). Similarly, Deaton and Paxson also studied poverty in Ghana, Pakistan, Taiwan, Thailand, and Ukraine. The study followed a similar methodology to South Africa, an absolute poverty line that was equivalent to US\$1 a day<sup>6</sup>. Their study accounted for family size and structure between these countries. It found that children made up a higher percent of the income-poor than either adults or the elderly (Deaton and Paxson, 1997: pg. 14). It is important to note that in their study Deaton and Paxson assumed that household resources are shared equally among all members, which allots more resources to children than in reality. In actuality, this assumption is hard to defend. Therefore, the Deaton and Paxton monetary study is probably underestimating the number of children living in poverty.

The US also favors an absolute monetary approach to measuring child poverty. It defines a poverty line as the amount of money needed “to purchase a defined quantity of goods and services” (UNICEF-IRC, 2005: pg. 6). In the US “the current official poverty measure, originally adopted in the 1960s, consists of a set of thresholds for families of different sizes and composition that are compared to a family resource measure to determine a family’s poverty status” (Iceland, *et al*, 2001:pg. 399). Using this absolute poverty line methodology, 19.9

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<sup>5</sup> Annex I provides a discussion on how poverty lines are created. See Pogge and Reddy on the conceptual limitations and practical problems in the use of the US\$ 1 a day measure as a poverty line.

<sup>6</sup> In Taiwan and Ukraine, the study looked at the poorest quintile.

percent of children in the US live in poverty; the poverty rates for adults and the elderly are 10.9 and 10.5 percent, respectively. In 1997, “children constituted about 40 percent of the poverty population, though only about a quarter of the total population” (Iceland, *et al*, 2001:pg. 399). According to these findings, children in the US disproportionately make up a large portion of people living in poverty.

Unlike the absolute poverty line approach, relative poverty relies on poverty lines that which are a proportion of average income in a given country. “Most other OECD members [i.e. not the U.S.], including those in the European Union, have leaned towards relative poverty lines drawn at a given percentage of median national incomes” (UNICEF-IRC, 2005: pg. 6). UNICEF’s Innocenti Research Center’s 2005 report on Child Poverty in Rich Countries also uses a relative poverty line to identify and measure child poverty in OECD countries. “The principal measure of child poverty ... is a poverty line drawn at 50 percent of current median income for the country concerned” (UNICEF-IRC, 2005: pg. 11). The report argues that by using a relative poverty line, child poverty rates can only fall if children living in low-income families disproportionately benefit more than better-off households from the benefits of economic progress.

Table 1 shows the results of the Innocenti report. It shows that even in OECD countries like UK, Italy, USA, and Mexico, a significant percentage of children are living in poverty. Moreover, out of the 14 countries with data points, only five countries experienced a drop in the number of children living in poverty. Child poverty in the other countries actually worsened.

**Table 1- Percentage of Children Living below 50 percent of Median National Income**

| <b>Countries</b> | <b>% of poor children</b> | <b>% Change In child poverty in the 1990s</b> |
|------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Finland          | 2.8                       | 0.8   |
| Norway           | 3.4                       | -3.2  |
| Sweden           | 4.2                       | -0.2  |
| Belgium          | 7.7                       | 0.2   |
| Hungary          | 8.8                       | 13.5  |
| Luxembourg       | 9.1                       | 0.1   |
| Netherlands      | 9.8                       | 0.3   |
| Germany          | 10.2                      | 1.2   |
| Austria          | 10.2                      | -   |
| Poland           | 12.7                      | 4.7   |

|        |      |       |
|--------|------|-------|
| Canada | 14.9 | -1.3  |
| UK     | 15.4 | -10.8 |
| Italy  | 16.6 | 4.1   |
| USA    | 21.9 | -7.3  |
| Mexico | 27.7 | 8.4   |

Source: UNICEF-IRC, 2005: pg. 11 & 13

Similarly, Jonathan Bradshaw, from the University of York, used a relative poverty line to study child poverty in the UK. He looked at children living in households with income below 50 percent of the national mean household income (Bradshaw, 2002). Bradshaw’s study found that in Britain the proportion of children living in poor households “increased more than threefold between 1979 and 1999/00” (Bradshaw, 2002: pg. 131). Overall he found that Britain’s level of child poverty was by far the highest in the EU. Similarly, he notes that in a study of child poverty in 25, mostly rich, countries, children make up the largest percentage of people living in poverty.

### 3. Policies for reducing child poverty

For a long time, poverty reduction strategies neglected, or simply did not prioritize, the special needs of children living in poverty and the need to adopt direct policies to deal with child poverty. This section explores how different national and international policies are trying to tackle child poverty. First this section presents the link between PRSPs and child poverty. Then it moves on to discuss national and international poverty reduction strategies.

Overall, this section will present information on how different stakeholders in a society – the government, donors, activists, civil society organizations, and the poor (including children) – need to be part of designing a poverty reduction strategy, in order for the needs of the poor, especially poor children, to be effectively addressed.

In this section, interventions to reduce child poverty will be addressed from a multidimensional viewpoint. This means that the aspects of children’s deprivation – such as water, health, shelter, sanitation, and education – will be analyzed integrally and not separately. The strategies presented below will point to the importance of a universal and participatory effort to help develop a national approach to deal with child poverty.

#### 3.1. Policy implications

Some development organizations are endeavoring to highlight child poverty as a large component of national poverty that must be included in the poverty reduction strategy process. As was mentioned before, one of the important aspects of defining child poverty is that it has an impact on poverty reduction strategies, as well as the development of indicators for tracking the success of poverty reduction strategies. All the definitions of child poverty reviewed above go beyond the one-dimensional monetary approach. The definitions above considered “material deprivation (including basic social services), as well as additional essential factors that enable a

child to survive, develop, and participate in society” (Minujin, 2005: pg. 3). The existence of child poverty definitions should encourage policy makers and organizations to directly address the special needs of children.

Any definition of child poverty has practical implications for policy advocacy and programs. The following are a few of the possible direct applications:

1. **Influence the nature of policy dialogue** on poverty reduction. For instance, poverty reduction policies would need to account for a broader definition of poverty, and for children’s experience of it.
2. **Influence policy debates on social sector spending.** For example in dialogue on social and economic policy issues, would need to consider the effect of liberalization, privatization, globalization, etc. on the well-being of children and families.
3. **Influence the design of indicators.** The socio-economic and demographic indicators that capture information on children need to be informed with the alternative definition.

Source: Minujin, 2005: pg. 4

### **3.2. PRSPs and child poverty**

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) is an initiative led by World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) as part of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. PRSPs are intended to be the product of a national dialogue about poverty that incorporates the voice of the government, civil society organizations, the private sector, and the public. The aim of a PRSP is to create a detailed national roadmap that identifies the poor, their needs, and a strategy how to meet those needs.

The PRSP process has considerable significance for poor children in developing countries. However, this is often not reflected when poverty reduction policies and programs are put into practice because they do not specifically prioritize children and improve children’s future opportunities. “Children feature more prominently in poverty analysis than in policy action” (Marcus and Wilkinson, 2002: pg. 38).

To address PRSP’s inadequacy with confronting child poverty, it is recognized that the PRSP approach should be guided by the following core principles:

**Multidimensional approach:** PRSPs should recognize the multidimensional nature of poverty, embracing all relevant policies and providing a coherent framework for them. Building a PRSP that takes human rights into account could bring together diverse social actors to promote wider debate and empower the poor, rather than simply directing development efforts at poor people (UNICEF, 2004; CHIP, 2004a; GDI 2002).

**Focusing:** children and young people need policies that recognize their needs and rights to survival, protection, development and participation - without discrimination. Children and young people should be located within demographic and poverty profiles that frame PRSPs and provide support for particularly vulnerable groups (Save the Children, 2003; UNDP, 2003)

**Voice to the children:** without exception, the perception of children's and youth's social reality is fundamental throughout the whole PRSPs' process because they are holders of rights and not simply the object of social measures (Heidel, 2004).

**Active participation:** it is basic to promote broad-based participation of the poor, of civil society organizations, of governmental institutions at national and sub-national levels and by the private sector at all operational stages to design, implement and monitor the PRSP process (GDI, 2002).

**Partnership-oriented and country-driven:** PRSPs should be designed by the developing country itself in co-ordination with development partners. The poverty reduction strategy to be designed by the partner should be developed in a joint effort, not only with the donors but also with diverse social groups in the country. PRSPs should be owned by the developing country, prioritizing in such a way as to make implementation feasible, in both fiscal and institutional terms, and building of national capacity to manage the development process (GDI, 2002, World Bank, 2004).

While there is considerable diversity among PRSPs, with regards to child poverty, there are a number of commonalities in the kind of analysis employed, the kinds of strategies given highest priority, and the policy areas and issues which receive little attention (CHIP, 2002). “The general policy orientation in all strategies tends to emphasize growth, social services, and improved governance. Faith in the power of growth alone, or almost alone, to reduce poverty is strong. In some countries this is not tempered even when the historical record, referred to in the PRSP, shows that poverty has increased or failed to fall during periods of strong economic growth. This is of particular concern both because the poorest groups often do not benefit even

where better-off poor people do, and because growing inequality can have numerous destabilizing consequences. On the basis of existing evidence, most poverty reduction strategies appear weakly redistributive” (CHIP, 2002: pg. 45).

Heidel (2004: pg.17) indicates that “almost two thirds of all poverty reduction strategy papers (do) not contribute to the implementation of the rights of the child simply because they practically **ignore** the living and working conditions of the majority of children and youth.” Thus, at least some donor assistance should be carried out outside the PRSP process. It is essential to re-direct the PRSP process so that it contributes to a sustainable reduction of poverty and strengthening the rights of the child.

According to Caroline Harper “it is one thing to know the policy areas that are important for addressing childhood poverty and intergenerational transmissions. Acting on that knowledge, however, appears more difficult.” Mainstream policy recommendations all too often lead to or entrench childhood poverty. However, this is almost always ignored. The role of the IFIs in promoting or condoning cuts in funding for education, improving childcare or providing comprehensive income support during periods of economic austerity has not been consistently recognized in their own evaluations.<sup>7</sup> As a result of this, basic services remain severely underfunded in spite of their significance for children. Harper adds: “Apart from failing to prioritize interventions whose impact is well proven, specific policies for children have generally been marginalized. They are often equated with marginal aspects of social policy, rather than seen as an essential element of combating chronic poverty” (UNDP, 2004: pg. 4).

It is clear, then, that public expenditure management reforms are important in complementing effective PRSPs. This would ensure that the revenue-raising and expenditure choices be both affordable and sustainable. Indirectly, policies and reforms, such as good governance, do benefit children. They can channel resources to high priority programs and interventions which support child poverty reduction. Of course, it is important that appropriate institutions are able to implement the intended interventions efficiently and effectively.

Studying the ways in which I-PRSPs and PRSPs deal with social protection issues in countries where Save the Children UK works, Marcus and Wilkinson (2002) indicate that there is considerable variation as to the extent to which childhood poverty is considered an important issue, and the way it is conceived. For instance, “Albania’s is the only strategy to make an explicit link between broad economic or social trends and child well-being. Most others discuss children either as members of ‘vulnerable groups’, e.g., orphans or street children, and their situation is not explicitly connected with broader policies or trends. None of these strategies discuss child labor, other than in the most limited fashion. Policy for tackling childhood poverty

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, World Bank, 2004, IMF, 2004, and World Bank, 2005. However, “For most PRSPs, increased social sector expenditure is a hallmark feature and is in the main directed towards the health, education, and water and sanitation sectors. However, it is important to note that tight fiscal policies and debt relief programs frame most PRSPs, as the latter are often developed in compliance with conditional lending requirements. While fiscal policy restraint is prudent in respect of medium term affordability and sustainability purposes, it constrains the extent of social service expansion” (UNDP, 2003: pg. 6).

is based on supporting family incomes and access to health and education services, with, in some places, provision for orphans or other ‘especially vulnerable children’. In most cases, there is insufficient detail to analyze the likely effectiveness of these policies. Nonetheless, it seems clear that few countries are prioritizing childhood poverty reduction, despite its important contribution to reducing both current and future poverty (Marcus and Wilkinson, 2002: pg. 48).

Another example of how PRSPs deal with child poverty is the review of PRSPs in Southern Africa commissioned by Save the Children Sweden. That review focused on child poverty and child rights, and the role of civil society participation in formulating and implementing national PRSPs. The study recommended that, along with economic growth, PRSPs should promote the development of healthcare, education, and other social services. The study also noted the importance of good governance, social protection, and the importance of special consideration to gender, the environment and HIV/Aids issues.

Moreover, PRSPs are not very encouraging in respects to incorporating gender issues. A review by the World Bank’s Gender Division of 15 I-PRSPs and 3 PRSPs completed by early 2001 found that “less than half discussed gender issues in any detail in their diagnosis of poverty. Even fewer integrated gender analysis into their strategy, resource allocation and monitoring and evaluation sections. Gender issues were, predictably, better integrated into the ‘health, nutrition and population (the reproductive sector) and to some extent in education (a quasi-social sector)” (Kabeer, 2003: pg. 205).

Child rights are not incorporated either (Monroy Peralta, 2004). While some might argue that the objective of the PRSPs is poverty reduction and not child rights, it is clear from the previous paragraphs that this position is untenable. The bulk of the interventions required to reduce poverty (in its many dimensions) are closely related to child rights (see also the annex). Their absence indicates a low likelihood of success in reducing poverty. Recent studies in (Bolivia, Nicaragua and Tanzania) analyzing the actual trends of child poverty in countries with long lasting (at least 4 years) PRSPs show no improvement, except in Tanzania (Kayani and Papenfuss, 2005, Ayalew et al, 2005, Badame et al, 2005).

Overall, the reviews of the PRSPs indicate that the PRSP process needs to put more effort in highlighting issues around child poverty. The guidelines proposed by organizations like UNICEF, CHIP, Save the Children, GDI, and UNDP to help the PRSP reduce child poverty, are good to help the PRSP process recognize child poverty, incorporate the needs of poor children, and design poverty reduction strategies that help alleviate the deprivation of children living in poverty.

### **3.3.Strategies to reduce Child Poverty**

There are many initiatives and policy strategies at the disposal of governments and civil society organizations to help reduce child poverty. These can range from direct cash transfers to individual children and families to public investment in social services that benefits entire communities. Below is an overview of some of the initiatives and policy strategies available to address child poverty. These particular initiatives and policy strategies were selected because there are practical experiences of their adoption by governments and civil society organizations.

### 3.4. Cash transfers

Social assistance payments, or cash transfers to low-income families with children is one of the several strategies of alleviating childhood poverty. Barrientos and DeJong (2004) explore if cash transfers make significant contributions to eradicating child poverty. In their study, they compare different types of cash transfer programs, and found that:

targeted conditional programs are vertically efficient (there are insignificant leakages to the non-poor) but they score less well on horizontal poverty reduction efficiency (i.e. they do not reach all the poor)

on the other hand, they also find that family allowances, are less vertically efficient, but achieve almost perfect horizontal efficiency.

Source: CHIP, 2004

Barrientos and DeJong found that, overall, families that benefit from cash transfer programs are free to use transfers to meet some of their basic needs (Barrientos and DeJong, 2004: pg. 11)

Several countries are examining ways to increase cash transfers and to use them more effectively to help the poorest families with children. “Tajikistan for example, is planning to revise its Cash Compensation Program to focus on the poorest 20 percent of families with children aged 6-15. (Similarly,) several of African PRSPs mention measures to support orphans financially” (CHIP, 2002: pg. 39). These policies recognize the importance for families with children to have monetary resources.

Moreover, according to UNICEF-IRC’s “*Social Monitor 2004*”, cash transfers have played an important role in supplementing family income in many countries of Eastern Europe. For example, “among the CEE/CIS countries Hungary provides all families with children with one of the most generous family allowances, irrespective of income. In Kazakhstan as of 2003 a childbirth benefit is paid for all newborn children for a period of 15 months. In Romania, there was a marked increase in the levels of universal family allowances in the late 1990s, although, these only account for a small component of family income. In contrast, family allowances that were previously available on a universal basis in same countries are now means-tested. This is the case in Poland and in Serbia and Montenegro” (2004: pg. 11).

In Brazil, around 68 percent of households receive some kind of cash transfer from the government, which accounts on average for 30 percent of their incomes. However, the distribution of these social security benefits is unequal because it is highly concentrated on the most affluent households. Although, “assistance programs like Bolsa Escola are well focused on the most vulnerable population, the budget devoted to these programs is still a minuscule share of total social spending”, as indicated by Siqueira, Nogueira, and O’Donoghue (2003; pg. 11).

Bolsa Escola provides cash assistance to poor families with children aged 6-15 conditioned on the children attending school. It is a large national cash transfer program which started in 2001. It originated out of a number of successful local programs and the Guaranteed Minimum Income Program (PRGM), a small national program, which were begun a few years earlier. It gives the equivalent of roughly US\$6 per month per child up to a maximum of three children per family or US\$18. The national treasury transfers the funds to the mother. She must have an account set up

in her name. Alternatively she can use an electronic card to withdraw the money from the Caixa Econômica Federal or at thousands of other outlets. A national poverty map and an education census are used to determine the number of potential beneficiaries in each municipality. The beneficiary families are chosen by local committees. In 2001 US\$680 million were allocated to this program to cover 10.7 million children from 5.8 million families. By December 2001 8.2 million children were enrolled (Morley, 2003: pg. 22).

Bolsa Escola is estimated to have helped reduce the dropout rate from 10 to 0.4 percent and to increase enrolment in higher education. Concurrently, there has been a decrease in the employment rates of children aged 10 to 14 by 31.2 percent, reflected by a 36 percent decrease in the number of street children in Brasilia (Pólis, 2002).

Similar to the Brazilian Bolsa-Escola, the PROGRESA-Oportunidades program was created to reduce poverty in Mexico through specific policies regarding food, nutrition and health care policies. Since 1997 the program has reduced teenagers' involvement in work by 12-20 percent, reduced the incidence of illness among 0-5 yr olds by 12 percent and reduced rates of stunting.

Belik and Grossi (2003) indicate that PROGRESA-Oportunidades is a second-generation program to reduce poverty because it has changed how public resources were incorporated in the planning and implementing social protection policies.

it transfers resources directly to the beneficiary public;

the transfer is made directly to the female members of the household;

the transfer is conditional on beneficiary actions, concerning education (keeping children in school), health care (basic care for the whole family) and nutrition (classes in the community, public health assistance).

SOURCE: Belik and Grossi, 2003, pg. 12

Parker and Scott<sup>8</sup> (2001) point out that “according to World Bank authorities, the traditional poverty combat programs were not effective in Mexico due to public system corruption in resource transfers, misdirected focus resulting in wasted resources, and excess control of the beneficiary public.”

In reviewing a number of programs addressing child poverty in Mexico, South Africa and Chile, Barrientos and DeJong suggest that:

developing countries ought to consider developing cash transfer programs within integrated childhood poverty eradication programs

due attention be paid to the key role played by households in ensuring that transfer programs are effectively addressing child poverty. An implication of this is that poor households should be regarded less as clients and more as the main agents of change.

Source: CHIP, 2004

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<sup>8</sup> cited by Belik and Grossi (2003: pg. 12 )

### **Other successful examples of income protection programs:**

In **Hungary**, in the mid-1990s, without family allowances, child poverty would have been 85 percent higher, while in Poland it would have been a third higher.

Without **Kyrgyzstan**'s social protection system, 24 percent more people would be living in extreme poverty. As poverty is concentrated among families with children, many of these would have been children.

In **Nicaragua**, the *Red de Proteccion Social* managed to stop food consumption declining in poor families during a coffee price shock that seriously undermined poor people's livelihoods. It has also increased school enrolment by 22 percent and attendance by 30 percent.

In **Bangladesh**, children participating in the *Food for Education* program (now reoriented to provide Cash for Education) have 20-30 percent higher enrolment rates and stay in school between six months and two years longer than non-participating children.

CHIP (2004b): pg. 2

### **Elimination of user fees**

There are various issues involved with user fees. They are onerous for the families, yet they provide too little revenue. Often, it is more costly to administer the funds collected through user fees than the amount of these funds. Exemption schemes and waivers are prone to be abused as well as to create marginalization and ill will among the population. The problem with user fees is that the poorest and most vulnerable people may not be able to pay them, and not have access to basic services. In many countries where user fees were removed, public services became more accessible for the poor. This was the case in Malawi, Uganda, and Tanzania in primary education.

This is not a problem only in developing countries. For instance, Toronto (Canada) has a high proportion of children living in low-income families. Over 45,000 children are enrolled in licensed child care programs across the city; of these more than half are subsidized. Of the 24,216 budgeted subsidies, 77 percent are used by single-parent families. "The average child care cost of \$7,188 is well beyond the reach of this average family, and even the \$1,400 average user fee they must pay (\$5.36 per day) represents a significant strain on limited financial resources. Clearly, subsidized child care plays a major role in maintaining the employment and income security of parents. It is both a beneficial and cost-effective alternative to social assistance. After user fees are subtracted, the subsidy is approximately one half of the value of a social assistance benefit for a single family with one child" (Toronto, 2005)

## **Budget initiatives for children**

As a political process, national budgets are financial embodiment of a government's policy goals. Moreover, they are the product of a multidimensional negotiation. In order to influence the annual budgetary cycle to increase allocations to the basic social services which reduce child poverty, various actors need to be engaged in different aspects of the budget process (although not all actors need to be involved at every stage). This results in the need for broad-based initiatives. In general, "the rationale for undertaking budget initiatives for children is to: Analyze and influence the budgeting process so that budgets realize children's rights; influence the social content of economic and fiscal policy; engender social mobilization, consensus, inclusiveness and participation; and monitor public expenditure and governance" (Gore and Minujin, 2003: pg. 4). Thus, according to Gore and Minujin (2003), prioritizing children's rights in public expenditure requires political will and progressive financial commitment from the government, but not a separate budget for them.

Different efforts show how budgeting can be implemented in different contexts:

Given the desperate squeeze on resources faced by most countries in the 1990s, the **20/20** attempted to secure additional resources needed for children. This could be achieved by restructuring existing spending as well as from new resources. The additional resources needed to ensure basic services for all – primary health care, primary education, reproductive health and family planning and the provision of safe water and sanitation for all – could be obtained if developing countries, on average, allocated 20 percent of their national public expenditure to these basic services and donor countries, in turn, allocated an average of 20 percent of their aid budget to the same priorities (Jolly, 2005: pg. 3).

**PRSPs** can play an important role in integrating social and economic policies and representing them in the budget. Equally, budget initiatives can play an important role in PRSPs giving visibility to integrate gender and children's concerns. The absence of human rights principles and weak budgeting can result in ineffective anti-poverty strategies (Gore and Minujin, 2003).

Budgeting issues are critical in addressing child poverty. Allocating budget resources to child poverty programs would increase the government's commitment to reducing child poverty.

### **Examples of factors of success in budget initiatives:**

#### Budget analysis skills are key:

Technical expertise in budget analysis is essential to advocate for, negotiate, participate in and support informed decision-making on public expenditure issues. This implies developing analytical tools that are tailored to the country context. Without concurrently strengthening the technical capacity of state actors, budget analysis remains an academic exercise.

#### Empowerment begins with quality of information:

Across countries, a common finding regarding budgets is that they are

complex, unclear and difficult to access. Technical analysis needs to be clearly presented and strategically distributed to a wide and interested audience (for example, educators, media, parliamentarians, etc).

Transparency and participation are interdependent:

Effective participation requires not only access to information and the capacity to analyze it, but also opportunities to challenge and act upon it, i.e. to hold government accountable and to influence policy.

Realizing children's rights requires rethinking institutional processes and policy-making:

Budgets need to be situated in the broader context of how policies are made and implemented. The question of integrating social policy in macroeconomic policy, instead of regarding it as an add-on to macroeconomic goals, is an area of study which has the potential to change the basis of policy decisions so that outcomes are more equitable. Socio-economic and political issues in fiscal policy, decentralization, legislative and institutional reform, etc, are all pertinent to the realization of children's rights.

Effective advocacy requires understanding the politics of budgeting:

This implies dealing not only with the mechanics of budgeting, but understanding the interests of, and developing strategic alliances with, state actors, media, academia, etc.

Gore and Minujin, 2003: pg.18

Jamaica is an example of a country that prioritized social spending. Despite suffering negative macroeconomic shocks and instability during the 1980s and 1990s, it endeavored to maintain the level of spending on basic social services as a share of public expenditures. This helped achieve universal enrolment for children 6-12 years old towards the end of the 1980s, and 97 percent enrolment among the 12-14 age group by 1999, and "infant mortality remained constant at 24 per 1,000" (ICC, 2000: pg. 14).

### **3.5.Holistic Approach**

"The positive synergy between actions in different social dimensions, such as shelter, health or education, is very well documented" (UNICEF, 2002: pg. 13). Policy makers need to recognize and leverage the link that policies in different social dimensions have. Such a "holistic consideration of children's issues allows the exploitation of synergies and complementarities in the basic elements that constitute strategies to reduce poverty, such as interventions on education, health, nutrition, and water and sanitation. It is very important to explicitly integrate all dimensions that poverty presents and all their interaction effects among the policies and programs that influence child poverty" (CHIP, 2002).

Additionally, providing basic social services directly and inexpensively addresses failings in the rights constitutive of poverty. Providing basic social services of good quality to all children is the foundation on which they can live in dignity. “Ensuring universal access to an **integrated** package of basic social services is one of the most efficient and cost effective contributions to poverty reduction” (Vandemoortele, 2000: pg. 23). An integrated comprehensive approach is what is needed. Focusing on one dimension of child poverty at the expense of another will result in suboptimal results.

The need for integrating services is based on the interdependence of the many dimensions of poverty: lack of safe water and sanitation increases the incidence of diseases, which in turn exacerbate malnutrition. This also can compromise brain development and the capacity to learn. Sectoral approaches run the risk of failing to capitalise on these kinds of connections (ICC, 2000; pg. 12).

Although no consensus exists on the appropriate set of policy measures to tackle child poverty, Vandemoortele (2000) indicates the following areas for potential improvements in the impact of social programs:

- programs of early childhood care and development;
- female teachers, toilet facilities and elimination of gender stereotypes in educational materials to retain girls in schools;
- adequate budget allocations for essential drugs, spare parts for hand pumps, teaching materials and textbooks;
- procurement of generic drugs;
- more reliance on nurses and other medical staff than on physicians;
- elimination of school and health fees for basic services, and minimizing other out-of pocket costs for users (e.g. uniforms);
- automatic promotion in primary education, provided quality is maintained;
- use the mother tongue, especially in the early years;
- multi-grade teaching and multiple shifts in low-density areas; and
- accelerated learning programs for over-age pupils.

Source: Vandemoortele, 2000: pg. 10

### **3.6. Macroeconomic Policies**

Macroeconomic and fiscal policies have a great impact on child well-being in general and child poverty in particular. The policies linked with globalization – free trade, privatization, increase in debt burden – have impacted children’s lives and prospects.

Reducing child poverty requires direct interventions by both international organizations and national governments. The latter need to fully own their development plans and strategies, i.e. they should avoid following blindly the latest fad or the one-size-fits-all prescriptions of the IFIs.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See, among others, Standing (2000), Fine (2001) and Stiglitz (2002).

The reproduction of inequalities in spite of growth needs to be addressed squarely by macroeconomic policies. This is crucial in linking inequality and poverty reduction to growth. Given the ratchet effect which leads to large increases in poverty during recessions and only mild reductions (at best) of poverty during recoveries, stabilization which do not rely on unemployment or low wages are also important for poverty reduction (Sadoulet; De Janvry 1996, McKinley, 2001). Thus, an essential element to reduce child poverty and increase the well-being of children is the creation of stable employment for parents and care-givers (FitzGerald, 2005).

These strategies and national development plans, as mentioned above, provide an opportunity to less developed countries to define macroeconomic goals and policies that addresses domestic poverty. They need to take into account that “the macroeconomic reforms designed by the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) (call for) non-inflationary budgetary policies and monetary restraint”, which reduce social services and may not be in-line with what is best for reducing poverty in a country (Schneider, 2003). For example, cuts in education, health care, and other social services may impact children in a way that may propagate the poverty cycle.

In order to design macroeconomic strategies in such a way so that they contribute to strengthening of human rights in general and in particular the rights of the child, Heidel calls for a Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) which investigates the impacts of liberalization, deregulation and privatization, lays open potential trade-offs and places more importance on critical sectors (Heidel, 2004). “The PSIA must pick up on civil society knowledge and be shaped by the experiences of marginalized and socially excluded groups. Since children and young people make up large parts of these groups their experiences must shape PSIA and particular importance should be placed upon the connection between poverty and the access to the rights of (children). The PSIA must include a special section on the impacts of macroeconomic strategies and economic measures on the rights of the child. Only on the basis of a coherent PSIA can criteria for a ‘Pro-Poor Growth’<sup>10</sup> be extracted” (Heidel, 2004: pg. 50).

### **3.7. Focusing policies on children**

Although some organizations and governments often defend narrowly targeted programs in pursuit of efficiency, budget and flexibility, those strategies and plans that aim to ensure basic social services should guarantee universal access.<sup>11</sup> Vandemoortele indicates that “the relative advantages of targeting depend on the type of goods and services. The merits of a narrowly targeted fertiliser subsidy or micro-credit scheme, for instance, are very different from those of

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<sup>10</sup> Heidel indicates that a ‘Pro-Poor Growth’ concept is central, despite the lack of an internationally accepted definition. He says “the UNDP, at least, has formulated essential elements for ‘Pro-Poor Growth’, which include the sufficient allocation of capital to marginalized population groups, programs for rural development including land reform, policies to raise agricultural productivity and programs aimed at reducing income polarization” (Heidel, 2004: pg. 23).

<sup>11</sup> For instance, Cuba, like many other high achieving countries (Mehrotra and Jolly, 1998) has made child health and education a priority. Since 1960, the government has provided supplementary nutrition for pregnant women and young children. “Doctors are required to serve in rural health services to make basic health services available to all. The under-five mortality rate has fallen from 54 per 1,000 in 1960 to 8 in 1998. The Early Education Childhood Care for survival, Growth and Development (ECCSGD) covers 99 percent of the population between 0 and 6 years old, and primary school attendance is also 99 percent.” (ICC, 2000: pg. 13)

targeted vouchers for primary education. Generalizations about targeting, therefore, are of little use” (Vandemoortele, 2000; pg. 11)

Narrow targeting has important hidden costs, five of which deserve to be highlighted:

costs of mis-targeting, due to the difficulty in identifying the poor and/or vulnerable groups;  
costs of failing to reach the poorest, as the non-poor seldom accept to be by-passed by special subsidies;

administrative costs of narrow targeting, which are at least twice as high as for untargeted programmes. They also create opportunities for mismanagement so that extra outlays for oversight and control add to the costs;

out-of-pocket costs: narrow targeting frequently requires beneficiaries to document their eligibility, which involves expenses such as bus fares and other costs. They can easily exclude the poorest — who already resent the social stigma associated with means testing and are less informed about special programmes;

cost of non-sustainability: once the non-poor cease to have a stake in narrowly targeted programmes, the political commitment to sustain their scope and quality is at risk. The voice of the poor is usually too weak to maintain strong support. Benefits are often allowed to erode over time by not adjusting their nominal value for inflation.

SOURCE: Vandemoortele, 2000; pg. 11-12

Regarding basic social services, the human rights approach dictates that the principle of universality takes priority over that of selectivity. Universal access creates a social shock-absorber in times of crisis. Basic social services do trigger a virtuous circle of social and economic development. Thus, access to these services will empower the poor. The notion of participation is central to the human rights approach to development because the poor become engaged subjects of development, instead of being considered passive objects by the policy-making elite. They become strategic partners, rather than target groups. “Universal access to basic social services will build the solid foundation for meaningful participation” (Vandemoortele, 2000: pg. 23).

### **3.8. Advocacy and Mobilization**

A number of civil society organizations have revealed that there has been a lack of consultation on the core economic conditions, and little opportunity to examine alternatives poverty reduction strategies in most developing countries. This also applies to the PRSP process, precisely at the time when “the World Bank and other advocates of (structural) adjustment policies have increasingly acknowledged that many of these (structural) adjustment measures have generated losses among the poor. In fact, it concerns the connection between (structural) adjustment programs and growing poverty and inequality” (SAPRI 2002: pg. 185).

Many civil society organizations (CSOs) are now stepping up their advocacy for alternative development and anti-poverty strategies. They reject the IMF and WB’s policy conditions because they claim that there is nothing intrinsic to the policies assessed that will eventually work their magic in the market and reduce poverty and inequality (SAPRI 2002). For instance, Save the Children argues that it is critical for child advocacy groups at international, regional and

local level to become stronger advocates and participants in PRSP processes, so as to ensure that alternative anti-poverty strategies that focus on children's rights are prioritized and appropriately resourced in the development planning and resource allocation processes.

Southern Africa's PRSP report (Save the Children Sweden, 2003) proposes a number of recommendations to child advocacy organizations and child rights actors:

- to build local capacity on economic and development literacy to raise awareness and participation, particularly child participation, in PRSP processes;
- to undertake research and analysis on the implementation, monitoring and review of PRSP processes;
- to increase advocacy efforts, and their impact, regarding the importance of PRSP processes to reducing child poverty and enhancing child rights in the region;
- the bilateral and multilateral co-operation must contribute to the empowerment of children and young people and their organizations so that they are in a position to participate relevantly in the PRSP process.

**Source:** Save the Children, 2003

## 4. Conclusion and policy recommendations

Over one billion children suffer from at least one severe deprivation and over 600 million suffer from at least two deprivations (Gordon, *et al*, 2003). These findings indicate that children are growing up in conditions where their rights are violated and without the resources or services to develop into healthy, productive, and free adults who are able to realize their full potential in life. In order to realize children's rights and to tackle poverty, poverty reduction strategies cannot ignore the special needs of children.

The following points are some steps that can be taken to ensure that child poverty is a main consideration of poverty reduction strategies:

**Child poverty must be recognized** as a unique phenomenon that requires direct intervention. Indirect solutions have failed to address the special needs of children.

**Increase the efforts to measure child poverty.** The Bristol study and the Young Lives' Project, presented above, need to be replicated and expanded in order to get a better picture of the needs of children living in poverty. Moreover, such studies taken at the national and regional level can serve as invaluable inputs in designing local poverty reduction strategies. They can point to the areas in which children are most in need of help.

- Additional research efforts that analyze:
- the implication that national anti-poverty policies have on children
- the impact of child poverty on girls. As mentioned above, there is limited research that analyzes the relationship between child poverty and girls
- the impact of pro-poor policies to reduce child poverty

- the relationship between anti-poverty policies that account for gender and those that account for child poverty
- the policies that seem to be effective in reducing childhood poverty
- multi-dimensional policies and implementation strategies to address child poverty
- Continue developing anti-poverty policies that link Human Rights to poverty issues. UNICEF's human rights-based approach discussed in section 1 is a powerful strategy to highlight the moral aspect of anti-poverty programs, the legal obligation, and the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. A human rights-based approach to poverty, as will be further discussed in the annex, highlights the importance of a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, and long-term strategy to combating poverty.
- Incorporation of Human Rights principles in PRSPs. As just mentioned, a human rights based approach to poverty reduction is an effective way of identifying the economic and social rights of the poor. PRSPs can adopt human rights principles as the benchmark from which the deprivation of people can be measured, in particular, the rights of traditionally marginalized groups like children.
- Governments and donors must adopt the reduction of child poverty as an explicit government strategy. Countries need to recognize child poverty as a problem and adopt explicit policies to address it.
- Adoption of a participatory approach in designing poverty reduction strategies. The PRSP initiative was intended to incorporate the voices of the different stakeholders of society. Children are, and should be considered, major stakeholders. Children living in poverty are the best suited to provide direction as to their needs. Children must be given a voice.

**Governments must take ownership of their poverty reduction strategies.** The intention of the PRSPs is to give less developed countries the power over their own destinies. To that end, international organizations – IFIs & donors – should be included in discussions about PRSPs, but they should be on equal footing as the other stakeholders – government, civil society organizations, the private sector, the poor, etc.

**Address the link between child poverty, conflict, health issues, and natural disaster situations.** HIV/AIDS is having a disastrous impact on children all over the world. The pandemic is causing millions of children to be deprived of basic needs. Similarly, children in conflict and disaster situations are vulnerable to suffering and deprivation. Accounting for these vulnerabilities would ensure that they are not neglected

**Improve coordination of anti-poverty programs.** Coordination of anti-poverty programs can help leverage synergies and increase the effectiveness of anti-poverty projects.

**Reduce inequality levels** to help improve universal access to basic services and goods.

**Recognize the importance of Pro-Poor Growth policies to reducing child poverty.** As mentioned above, an essential element of Pro-Poor Growth is the creation of stable employment for parents and care-givers. Children are a marginalized, under-analyzed, under-represented, and often over-looked group that requires the explicit attention of government policies.

Analyze the link between **macroeconomic and fiscal policies and children.** As mentioned in the paper, macroeconomic policies, such as neo-classical structural adjustments, have

negative effects on children. Better understanding of the relationship between macroeconomic policies and child poverty, can help develop anti-poverty strategies that can directly address child poverty.

These are only a few policy recommendations to help ameliorate the pandemic of child poverty. The first step of dealing with child poverty is recognizing that it is violation of children's rights. Then to acknowledge that it is a problem that is threatening millions of children, and the future of millions of adults. Such acceptance will help governments and the international community adopt policies that will help create a world in which the promises and commitments made to children in the CRC are realized.

## **5. Annex - Different approaches to poverty**

While poverty reduction is the key objective of many development initiatives and plans, there is no uniform approach for defining, identifying or measuring poverty, nor is there a consensus on what “poverty reduction” really means. For example, some organizations hold that the goal of Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) should be to increase the monetary income of individuals; others argue that PRSs should aim to increase an individual’s access to work, education, health, transportation, and other basic services. This section will present a panoramic overview of poverty concepts and approaches to defining, identifying, and measuring poverty.

The definition of poverty plays a significant role in formulating anti-poverty strategies. Before conceptualizing a poverty reduction project, a project team must know exactly how poverty is being measured, how to identify the target population, how they plan to reduce poverty, and what indicators will measure the project’s success. Different poverty approaches have unique definitions of poverty and call for specific poverty indicators. Poverty indicators serve an important role in designing anti-poverty strategies. According to T.N. Srinivasan (UNDP, 2004b) poverty indicators have three important purposes: First, they serve as a yardstick to illustrate the extent of poverty and profile the poor. Second, poverty indicators are useful to evaluate the different factors of poverty and put together policy interventions. Lastly, poverty indicators can be used to help mobilize international support for anti-poverty initiatives. Thus the poverty approach, which determines how poverty is defined and which indicators are used in a PRS, has a significant impact on anti-poverty projects.

International organizations agree that poverty is a multi-faceted phenomenon – economic, political, social, and so on – but there is no consensus as to how poverty should be measured and which indicators should be used to determine the success of anti-poverty strategies. Thus, the discussion is usually cast in terms of income poverty.

### **5.1. Single and multi-dimensional approaches**

As mentioned above, this section provides a broad view of different poverty measurements and methodologies. The first distinction between the various approaches is whether they are uni-dimensional or multi-dimensional. The monetary approach, which will be described in detailed below, is a uni-dimensional approach and is the most used approach among international development organizations, such as the World Bank (Boltvinik, 1998). It uses income level to identify and measure poverty. Money, either represented by an individual’s income or consumption levels, serves as the universal yardstick assessing poverty. “This is achieved by national accounting systems at the cost of measuring only those objects which the economic process measures in terms of value: commodities or bought-use values (i.e., use values acquired through the market)” (Boltvinik, 1998: p. 5). As a consequence, income level is the only indicator used by the monetary approach to assess poverty.

Multi-dimensional approaches, such as the basic needs, capability and human rights approaches, use a broad set of indicators to identify and measure poverty. This type of approach holds that monetary measures, while highly correlated with deprivation and unfulfilled needs, is not able to effectively identify the poor or guide PRSs. Instead, multi-dimensional approaches create a list

of rights, needs, or capabilities that is used to ascertain whether an individual is poor and what a PRS needs to address in order to reduce poverty. Thus, instead of calling for policies that may concentrate on increasing individuals' income or consumption level, the objective of multi-dimensional approaches is to ensure that the basic needs and rights of the poor are met – such as access to public services, infrastructure, shelter, food, and so on.

### **Absolute and Relative Poverty**

Another major concept in the poverty dialogue is the distinction between absolute and relative poverty.

*Absolute Poverty* measures the number of people living below a certain income threshold (poverty line) or the number of households with no access to certain basic goods and services, such as food, shelter, water, sanitation, or health. Needs are considered to be fixed at a level which provides for subsistence (Wratten, 1995).

*Relative Poverty* measures the extent to which a household cannot reach a standard of living similar to the average or the majority of the population of a given country. It is an indicator that measures whether an individual or household's income is low *relative* to other sectors of society; it does not imply that the basic needs are not being met. Relative poverty measures are also used as indicators of social inequality (Boltvinik, 1998).

In terms of flexibility and applicability, the relative poverty allows for adjustments in the poverty line and in the minimum resources needed to live in a society. It reflects the view that poverty imposes withdrawal or exclusion from active membership of society (Wratten, 1995: p. 14). Absolute poverty, on the other hand, does not describe the extent of income inequality within a society nor the fact that needs are socially determined and that they change over time. Consequently, the absolute definition has to be adjusted periodically to take into account technological and social developments; i.e., improved methods of sanitation or child primary health care.

Advocates of the relative definition argue that absolute poverty ignores or underestimates certain relative forms of social needs, and establish poverty lines that may or may not be able to effectively identify and measure poverty. In essence, the polemic is whether the poverty threshold is arbitrarily defined by governments, international organizations or researcher, or whether it has a social objective existence.

### **5.2. Monetary approach**

The monetary approach to identifying and measuring poverty is the most commonly used methodology by international development agencies. It defines poverty as the shortfall in income from a poverty line. The approach first identifies a basket of goods and services that is defined to be the minimum requirements for individuals or households to live a decent and independent life. The approach then prices out the different components of basket at market price, “which requires identification of the relevant market and the imputation of monetary values for those items that are not valued through the market (such as subsistence production and, in principle, public goods)” (Laderchi, Saith, and Steward, 2003: p. 6). Lastly, the monetary approach then sets a poverty line from which the poor are identified. The poverty line, in

essence, states that anyone with income or consumption levels below the identified poverty line is living in poverty. The poverty line is the only indicator used by the monetary approach to identify and measure poverty. Non-income indicators - such as health, education, and citizenship rights - are not considered by the monetary approach when identifying or measuring poverty.

There are two main arguments supporting the use of the monetary approach to poverty. First, there is the minimum standard of living argument, which states there is a certain basic income that is regarded as essential for individuals or households to have the freedom to live a decent and independent life. “Secondly, the use of a monetary indicator is often invoked not because monetary resources measure utility, but because it is assumed it can appropriately proxy other aspects of welfare and poverty” (Laderchi, Saith, and Steward, 2003: p. 7).

A widely used implementation of the monetary approach is the \$1-a-day international poverty line. It was established by the World Bank by analyzing the 1985 poverty lines of the 33 countries, which were then converted to US dollars using the PPP exchange rate available for each currency at that time. The analysis found that the poverty lines of the poorest countries for which such a line existed clustered around \$1-a-day in constant 1985 PPP dollars (UNDP, 2004b). In 1990 the World Bank (WB) released a study that provided global poverty counts based on the \$1-a-day (1985 PPP). The WB’s study was instrumental in establishing the \$1-a-day as the absolute international minimum income below which individuals are considered poor.

Nanak Kakwani, of the UNDP’s International Poverty Center, released a research study that questioned the validity and utility of the \$1-a-day poverty line. He argued that even though each country has a normative poverty threshold, specific to each country’s minimum living standard to which everyone in that society should be entitled to, a common international poverty line plays an important role in monitoring poverty levels. Therefore, an international poverty line does have utility. At the same time he argued that \$1-a-day was an “eye-balled” statistical solution which had little relevance to a person being able to meet the basic needs to live a decent and independent life. Moreover, Kakwani argues that the \$1-a-day poverty line does not reflect changes in inflation rates, in the goods bundles used to create the 1985 poverty lines, or in the PPP exchange rates. Furthermore, the \$1-a-day analysis also included the poverty lines of Developed Countries like Australia and the United States, which skewed the results of the poverty analysis. Kakwani concludes that the \$1-a-day international poverty line is not very valid or effective at measuring poverty.

To adjust for these short falls in the \$1-a-day poverty line, Kakwani used the national poverty lines of 19 low-income countries, to come up with an updated poverty line of \$1.50-a-day. Kakwani went on to calculate a second international poverty line based on caloric intake. The result was a \$1.22-a-day poverty line. Under the adjusted poverty lines the number of poor roughly went from 1,098.4 million people under the \$1-a-day, to 1,384.9 million using the caloric \$1.22-a-day poverty line, to 1,885.0 million using the late 1990s poverty line analysis of \$1.50-a-day (UNDP, 2004b). Such increase in the number of poor reduces the success rating of the international finance organizations at reducing poverty around the world.

Another proposal was recently made by Pritchett (2003). He acknowledges that there is something seriously flawed with an “international” poverty line which does not count as (income ) poor large segments of the population which, given their income, would be considered poor if

they were living in another country. Thus, he recommends the World Bank to adopt an income poverty line which is the weighted average of the declared poverty lines of all its shareholding countries. Countries should declare what they propose as the poverty line which need not coincide with, but cannot be lower than, their own national poverty line. Pritchett estimates that such a line would be roughly ten times higher than the US\$1-a-day- line.

Besides the lack of adjusting to new conditions, there are other criticisms to monetary approach to poverty. Critics state that monetary approach concentrates too much on individuals, and not on social solutions. Poverty lines, in general, pay more attention to the private resources of individuals and/or households, than to publicly provided goods and social income (i.e. schools, clinics, and the environment). Policy recommendations based on the monetary approach thus propose biased solutions that focus on generating private income for individuals and not on generating goods and services that would benefit society as a whole (Laderchi, Saith, and Steward, 2003).

### **5.3. Basic needs approach**

The “unsatisfied” basic needs approach is a multidimensional poverty measurement that regards poverty as the inability to satisfy a socially defined set of needs that allow an individual to be able to actively participate in society. Individuals who are unable to satisfy these needs are considered poor. There are two different definitions of needs: first, there are those needs whose satisfaction depend primarily on economic conditions and are called material or structurally determined; secondly, there are those needs that depend primarily on non-economic conditions and are called nonmaterial or agent-determined.

Income poverty lines do not consider the role of externalities and publicly provided goods and services in helping individuals achieve a decent and independent life. The basic needs approach, on the other hand, looks at the contextual situation of individuals, at the goods and services available to them, and at a broad set of variables that may influence the realization of a minimum standard of living.

Another aspect of the basic needs approach is that human needs change throughout life. Demographic variables – such as gender, age, and disabilities – impact the basic needs of individuals. Both the changing relation between resources and needs through the life cycle may cause individuals and households to fall, temporarily or permanently, into poverty. This is easily measurable both at the household and individual level within the basic needs approach<sup>12</sup>.

An essential issue with the basic needs approach is what elements to consider as basic needs. There is general agreement that the list of basic needs must be socially defined and should be sufficiently flexible to adjust to different country and culture specific contexts. A list of generally proposed basic needs includes such things as:

- water
- sanitation

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<sup>12</sup> The Bristol study on child poverty mentioned in the text is an example of such an application of the basic needs approach, where the list of elements to be included as basic needs can be mapped into child rights.

food  
shelter  
health  
education

There are two types of methods to measure poverty with the basic needs approach. The *Direct approach* attempts to verify the factual satisfaction of needs comparing need by need with a normative threshold. In this situation unsatisfied basic needs can be observed directly. Certain threshold or standard to compare the results is required. For instance, the caloric intake of a child can be measured against a normative quantity to ascertain whether the child's nutritional basic need is being satisfied.

In contrast, the *Indirect approach* measures the resources (not only income but, in a more general sense, entitlements and public goods) that a household commands, and compares the magnitude and composition of these resources with the resources required to meet their basic needs. In essence, what this approach identifies is the *potential* to satisfy human needs.

#### **5.4. Capability approach**

Unlike the one-dimensional monetary approach and similar to the basic needs approach, the capability approach to poverty is a multi-dimensional methodology, championed by Amartya Sen, that judges an individual's capabilities and freedom "to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value" (Sen, 1999: p.87). It acknowledges the linkages between low-income and poverty, but it sees poverty as the deprivation of basic capabilities, not as lowness of income, and therefore looks at a broad set of factors that influence an individual's capability and freedom to live a decent life; where basic capabilities are "the ability to satisfy certain crucially important functionings up to certain minimally adequate levels" (Sen, 1999: p. 41).

There are three major arguments in favor of the capability approach to poverty. The approach concentrates on deprivations that are *intrinsically* important to identifying poverty (unlike low income, which is only *instrumentally* significant). Second, there are influences on capability deprivation – and thus on real poverty – *other* than low income (income is not the only instrument in generating capabilities). Finally, the approach recognizes that the impact of income on capabilities is contingent and conditional; in other words that different individuals, communities and countries may need different levels of resources to achieve the same capabilities (Sen, 1999: p. 87-88).

These three aspects point to the multidimensional and achievement oriented nature of the capability approach. Sen does not provide a list of basic capabilities, but there have been attempts at creating an objective and non-culturally bias list. According to Laderchi, Saith, and Steward (2003), the most influential list of basic capabilities was put together by M. Nussbaum (2000). Her list tries to reach an "overlapping consensus" of what it means to be a human being and what capabilities individuals need to live a decent and independent life. Her list includes:

Life: normal length of life  
Health: good health, adequate nutrition and shelter  
Bodily integrity: movement; Choice in reproduction

Senses: imagination and thought, informed by education  
Emotions  
Practical reason critical reflection and planning life  
Affiliation social interaction protection against discrimination  
Other species respect for and living with other species  
Play  
Control over ones environment, politically (choice) and materially (property)  
Source: (Nussbaum, 2000)<sup>13</sup>

Nussbaum’s basic capabilities list can be used as indicators to identify the level of poverty and the needs of the poor, to design a PRS that will address the exact needs of the poor, and to establish success criteria by which anti-poverty strategies can be evaluated.

A major argument against the capability approach is the difficulty of converting a set of basic capabilities into a set of measurable indicators. “The crucial issue is, of course, that capabilities represent asset of potential outcomes and as such are problematic to identify empirically” (Laderchi, Saith, and Stewart, 2003: p. 18). Efforts must be taken to identify replicable methods that can measure achieved capabilities. A participatory evaluation effort, which includes the poor, may be the most effective tactic to assess the effectiveness of anti-poverty strategies at providing individuals with the basic capabilities to escape poverty.

## **5.5.Poverty and human rights**

The human rights-based approach to poverty endeavors to integrate human rights concepts, analysis, values, and language into the poverty reduction dialogue. The approach holds that the objectives of anti-poverty strategies should be guided by the international human rights laws and values (OHCHR, 2002). Because international human rights laws have been formally recognized by almost all countries and are reinforced by legal obligations, the human rights-based approach provides a compelling and explicit normative framework to guide national and international policies and anti-poverty programs (OHCHR, 2002: p. 1).

One aspect of the human rights-based approach to poverty is empowering the poor. The concept of rights gives the poor the power, as rights-holders, to claim from their governments the policies that will improve their lives. “Poverty reduction then becomes more than charity, more than a moral obligation – it becomes a legal obligation” (OHCHR, 2002: p. 1). This has important implications for the politics of policy and the implementation of programs, e.g. universality, avoidance of clientelism, etc.

In order to contribute to the empowerment of the poor, the human rights-based approach includes several salient features: accountability, the principles of non-discrimination and equality, and the principle of participatory decision-making processes. These features aim to ensure that anti-poverty strategies are more than window-dressing, that marginalized groups are not excluded, and that the poor are included in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies. This is a holistic approach. By ensuring civil and political rights, the poor will be more empowered to demand that their government adopt anti-poverty strategies that will

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<sup>13</sup> as presented in Laderchi, Saith, and Stewart, 2003

help them live a decent and independent life. Thus, these are considered “instrumental” rights, i.e. rights which help in the fight against poverty, but which do not define or constitute poverty.

As for identifying the poor, i.e. for measurement and analysis, the human rights-based approach looks at constitutive (of poverty) rights. In other words, a person is considered poor when these rights are not fulfilled.<sup>14</sup> The list of these rights may differ from one country to another, but based on empirical observation, OHCHR developed a common set which applies to most countries:

- Being adequately nourished
- Avoiding preventable morbidity and premature mortality
- Being adequately sheltered
- Having basic education
- Being able to appear in public without shame
- Being able to earn a livelihood
- Taking part in the life of a community

This list resembles the basic needs list and Nussbaum’s list of basic capabilities. As it is the case with these lists, this list can be used to identify the poor, to learn more of their exact needs, and to evaluate the success of poverty reduction strategies. Moreover, implicit in the definition of poverty based on the non-fulfillment of rights is the assumption that governments have the legal responsibility to fulfill these rights, as the ultimate duty bearers.<sup>15</sup>

## **Gender and Poverty**

Men and women experience poverty differently. According to the statements of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, “the gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty has continued to widen in the past decade, a phenomenon commonly referred to as ‘the feminization of poverty’” (Division for the Advancement of Women, DAW-UN, 2000)

Households have been restructured in the last years as consequence of demographic and socio-economic changes. In both developed and developing countries, there has been an increase in the number of female-headed households.

Many studies have shown that in developing countries rural women have been forced to undertake multiple piece-rate jobs, domestic services, and other informal sector activities. This means longer hours for women, very poor working conditions with no worker rights and extremely low pay, without the security of being able to produce food for household consumption. In the developed world, women suffer reductions in social services, increasing

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<sup>14</sup> Some rights can be simultaneously instrumental and constitutive.

<sup>15</sup> The human rights approach recognizes that governments, especially in Less Developed Countries (LDCs), have limited resources, and it allows for the progressive, staged, realization of a poverty reduction strategy. However, it does stress that governments must commit to a poverty reduction strategy that explicitly sets out to progressively meet the human rights entitled to the poor.

unemployment, and decreased worker benefits. Overall, the world has witnessed an increase in women's responsibilities in their homes and communities, and a decrease in their access to resources.

“For poor women exposed to domestic, community or state-sponsored violence – psychological and emotional as well as physical and sexual – escape from poverty is especially difficult. Women and girls are most at risk of persistent poverty in contexts where gender-based discrimination is chronic, severe, and overlapping with other forms of marginalization such as age, marital status or ethnicity. The cycle of maternal and child malnutrition, morbidity and mortality is one of the most significant means through which poverty persists over generations: a vicious cycle of low investment in women and low investment in girls. Gender discrimination in access to health, nutrition, education and security exacerbates this process further.” (CPRC, 2004; pg. 21).

Social isolation is a central experience of women living in poverty. Isolation is a consequence of material scarcity, discrimination, gender roles, lack of access to health and other social services, disabilities and impairments, and immigration. These factors cause women stress, depression, and low self-esteem that result in the lack of ability, desire, and resources to leave their homes.

Poverty reduction strategies targeting women have greater impact than just helping women escape poverty. Households headed by women appear to do better at distributing resources within the household. Even though male-headed households earn more income, there is evidence that show that female-led households are better off in other respects, besides income, because of women’s apparent greater emphasis on welfare-enhancing consumption practices (Gonzalez de la Roca and Grinspun, 2001).

### **Poverty and Exclusion**

Social exclusion has a strong connection with the various dimensions of poverty. Some use the term “social exclusion” as a fashionable synonym of income poverty; many others prefer to state it as a broader term beyond the monetary approach to measure poverty, including polarization, differentiation, and inequality. For instance, UNDP conceptualized social exclusion “as lack of recognition of basic rights, or where the recognition exists, lack of access to political and legal systems necessary to make those rights a reality”; and “in Scandinavia the socially excluded are taken to be the ‘poorest of the poor’”. (Burchardt, Le Grand, and Piachaud, 2002: p 3). In high income countries, where the debate about exclusion was started, it was realized that in spite of a sufficient income to afford a minimum basket of goods and having access to publicly provided goods was not sufficient to ensure that all members of society, especially immigrants and their children, to enjoy full participation in all that society provides (networks and interaction, culture and leisure or political participation and voice). Thus, a broader concept than poverty was needed.

Empirical approaches to operationalize the concept of social inclusion – according to a specific or a general conception of it – are built on the tradition of the monetary approach of measuring poverty. However, social exclusion has added some new highlights to the concept of poverty. It

has given emphasis to agency and process. In this regard, Room (1995)<sup>16</sup> develops these interrelations and points out three steps in the movement of income poverty to social inclusion:

from income or expenditures to multidimensional disadvantage;  
from static to dynamic analysis;  
from resources at the individual or household level to local community.

Another key topic that divides the social exclusion debate is the issue of who is doing the exclusion. According to Burchardt, Le Grand, and Piachaud (2002), exclusion is a result of a lack of agency: it is the outcome of the system (unintended or at least beyond the control of any individual or organization), while the socially excluded lack the opportunity to remedy their situation. This position supposes that the exercise of agency by some, acting to protect their own interests, excludes others. On the other hand, some indicate that all notions of social inclusion have to contend with the possibility of voluntary or self-exclusion.

### **Poverty and Equality**

Economic and social equality is an ethical concept grounded in the principle of distributive justice. Equal living conditions and access to the same opportunities reflects a concern to reduce unequal opportunities with membership in less privileged social groups, such as the poor; disenfranchised racial, ethnic or religious groups; women; and rural residents. Obviously it is a complex and important issue to which we cannot do justice in a few paragraphs.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that while poverty implies inequality (as some are poor and others are not), inequality need not imply poverty. While every member of a society may have more than enough for their own survival, decent living and a minimum of social participation (i.e. not to be considered poor by any of the approaches mentioned above), other members may enjoy many more material goods. Also, while poverty can be considered shocking and unjust by many and almost nobody would argue against attempts to reduce poverty, the situation is very different with inequality. Some people may even argue that some degree of inequality is actually good.

Unfortunately, this has implications for policies. Many of the policies to reduce poverty (redistribution of assets, provision of basic social services, progressive and redistributive taxation, minimum wages, etc) are the same ones to be used to reduce inequality. Then, the little support for the latter, prevents advances in the former.

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<sup>16</sup> Cited by Burchardt, Le Grand, and Piachaud, 2002 page 5.

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