CHILD PROTECTION AND CHILD WELFARE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

DISCUSSION PAPER

High-Level Meeting on Cooperation for Child Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region
Beijing, China
4-6 November 2010

1 This paper was written by Ron Pouwels, Diane Swales, Amalee McCoy and Dr. Nancy Peddle to inform and stimulate discussion at the 4-6 November 2010 High-Level Meeting on Cooperation for Child Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region. The views expressed are not necessarily those of UNICEF.
Executive summary

Despite an overall slowing population growth, the Asia-Pacific region still contains over 64 per cent of the global population and some of the most densely populated places in the world. The region is very diverse in terms of cultures, territories, religions, languages and economic development. Such diversity is also reflected in the statistics available for child protection, with birth registration rates ranging from 9.6 to 98.9 per cent; the number of children with disabilities ranging from 14.6 to 38.6 per cent; and the number of women aged 20–24 years who were married before the age of 18 years ranging from 9 to 64.1 per cent. Moreover, 64 per cent of the world’s child labour is found in the Asia-Pacific region.

Following ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by all countries in the region, there has been a strengthening of national laws and policies. With it has come commitment towards realizing child protection rights, such as non-discrimination, freedom from child labour and exploitation (including via the internet), and increasing bilateral and multilateral cooperation and agreements on issues such as child trafficking. The global political context for child protection rights has also been strengthened over the years, including through the appointment by the UN Secretary-General of two Special Representatives – on children and armed conflict and on violence against children – and the work of several UN Special Rapporteurs, including the rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. This is an optimum time to build on global, regional and national commitments for child rights, including the right to protection.

As the significant number of child protection provisions in the CRC indicate, and vast numbers of children experience, child protection issues are complex, diverse and interconnected and include sexual exploitation and abuse, neglect, the criminalizing children in need of care and protection, detention as a first response, the worst forms of child labour, trafficking, corporal punishment, unnecessary institutionalizing, abandonment, exploitation for child pornography, the sale and trafficking of illicit drugs, the sale of children, illegal adoption, recruitment by armed groups and armed forces and violence in homes, schools and communities. Such violations may occur by acts of omission or commission and occur across all sectors of society regardless of wealth quintile or other determinants. From the evidence available, it is clear that the consequences of child maltreatment can result in lifelong inequities for those children who experience any form of maltreatment.

This paper highlights two areas for development in relation to child protection: the critical need for preventing child protection violations in the first instance and the rationale for the building and strengthening of a national child protection system rather than an approach that concentrates on single issues. Through a focus on violence against children, including physical and sexual abuse and neglect, and emerging evidence on the long-term impact of maltreatment on children, the paper also briefly examines the emerging evidence on the costs and impacts of maltreatment on social and economic development.

Building on the work of the UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence Against Children, the paper draws on evidence pertaining to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children as an entry point to the discussion on child protection and the subsequent importance of systematic responses led by national governments and reaching every level of society to ensure every child’s right to realize his/her full potential. Due to the limitations of space, it has not been possible to adequately cite the many positive practices occurring in each country.

---

3 Data in this paragraph is taken from www.childinfo.org, Monitoring the Situation of Women and Children, UNICEF, visited on 28 October 2010.
4 www.unitetheunion.org/resources/international/regions/asia_and_pacific.aspx, visited on 28 October 2010.
of the region. This paper is intended as a starting point to explore many of the related issues that merit further exploration, discussion and research, such as:

- the impact of other forms of protection violations, such as the exploitation of children for commercial benefit and criminal acts, in terms of their social and economic impact;
- the important relationship of national child protection systems with established community-based child protection projects and networks or single-issue service providers;
- the development of national child protection systems in the context of federal or decentralized systems of governance;
- locating child protection in relation to child welfare;
- the critical relationship between social protection strategies and national child protection systems;
- the fiscal space required for child protection systems.

The value of this paper should be interpreted not solely in terms of the content presented but in the questions and issues that are prompted by that content and the emerging agenda that can be taken forward through South-South cooperation.

**Summary highlights**

The paper outlines several critical points:

**The consequences of child maltreatment.** The damage experienced by children is immediate as well as lifelong, with consequences going beyond individual children and directly affecting social and economic development, especially for low- and middle-income countries. Economic and societal costs can include poorer educational outcomes, erratic employment patterns, early parenting, unstable relationships, higher divorce rates, greater levels of drug and alcohol abuse, higher policing, court and prison costs, chronic physical and mental health problems and increased levels of adult dependency. Although estimating the economic impact is still in its infancy in the region, it is reasonable to assume that the total costs to both governments and individuals are considerable and far outweigh the costs of investing in preventing child maltreatment from happening.

**Building a national child protection system.** Given the high levels of child abuse in the region, its debilitating impact and the limitations of an approach that tackles child protection by concentrating only on issues, the paper argues for the building and strengthening of national child protection systems. Such a system provides a more cohesive, sustainable, holistic and cost-effective way to address child protection concerns and results in longer-term impacts; it encompasses the body of expertise and capacity gained from the single-issue developments. A focus on this should be accompanied by a shift from mainly investing in responding to child protection concerns to a greater emphasis on and resource allocation to preventing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation from occurring in the first place.

**The importance of national prevalence data on child maltreatment.** The collecting and analysing of baseline prevalence data needs to be strengthened to provide reliable evidence of the scale and nature of the violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation that children experience and which in turn informs national and local planning as well as budgeting. Core monitoring indicators are also required to measure the performance of all elements of a national child protection system as well as outcomes and results for children. In other words, a rigorous evidence base is a must.

**South-South cooperation.** South-South cooperation is obviously essential in addressing the transnational child protection challenges, such as trafficking and migration. Additionally, because building or strengthening of a national system is a challenging but not
insurmountable task, South-South cooperation can play a significant role in supporting national efforts. This provides an opportunity for countries to help each other in building or strengthening systems, thereby contributing towards the realizing of children’s rights to protection. Such South-South cooperation could manifest in the sharing of expertise for developing and strengthening a social welfare system for children and families, in staff exchanges to build a stronger professional cadre for child protection, in leveraging funding and resources, in providing support to drafting legislation and policies, the sharing of good models for their implementation and enforcement, the developing of indicators for child protection system development and the promoting of regional qualitative and quantitative research to strengthen the evidence base.

**The policy agenda.** The primary task arising from this paper is to ensure that the ‘private troubles’ of children and their families arising from child maltreatment are acknowledged as ‘public issues’. These public issues are critical in the national policy agenda to ensure the realization of children’s rights, social and economic development, the eradication of inequity and disparities and the fulfilment of international targets, such as the Millennium Development Goals.

This paper calls for the requisite political will and commitment to ensure the prevention of, response to and the necessary sanctions against violations of children’s rights to protection. Disparities and vulnerabilities must be confronted, and gains extended to the most-at-risk and marginalized groups of children and their families. In building on the many positive developments at a global, regional and national level, now is the time to focus efforts in respecting, protecting and realizing the right to protection of all children and to first – and foremost – prevent violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation from happening. Prevention of child maltreatment can no longer be delayed.
Contents

Executive summary ........................................................................................................................ ii
Acronyms................................................................................................................................. iv
1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1
2. Why child protection? .......................................................................................................... 2
3. Why a systems approach? .................................................................................................... 12
4. What is a systems approach? ............................................................................................... 12
5. Situational overview............................................................................................................ 18
6. South-South cooperation – examples and opportunities ................................................... 23
7. Conclusions and recommendations.................................................................................... 25
Bibliography and references .................................................................................................... 28
Persons consulted .................................................................................................................... 33
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................ 33

Figures and tables
Figure 1: Impact of neglect ........................................................................................................ 5
Figure 2: Normally developed brain ......................................................................................... 5
Figure 3: Brain after prolonged stress in childhood .................................................................. 5
Figure 4: Prevalence of four types of child abuse and neglect in Viet Nam, by sex .................... 7
Figure 5: Types of abuse experienced by adolescents in six provinces in China .................. 8
Figure 6: Proportion of adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia, reporting experiences of emotional abuse ............................................................................................................................ 10
Figure 7: An effective national child protection system ........................................................... 14
Figure 8: Main features of a national child protection system ................................................ 17
Table 1: Proportion of children aged 2–14 years who experienced physical punishment as discipline ............................................................................................................................... 9
Table 2: Child sexual abuse prevalence estimates, by subregion and sex .................................. 9
# Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>community-based organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMIT</td>
<td>Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAPRO</td>
<td>UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISPCAN</td>
<td>International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>Lao People’s Democratic Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-government organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSA</td>
<td>UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAARC</td>
<td>South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACG</td>
<td>South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Women and Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>South Asia Forum to End Violence against Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAIEVAC</td>
<td>South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (formerly SAF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

The first set of common standards for human rights was created with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The Declaration established the fundamental principle that all human beings, rich and poor, strong and weak, young and old, male and female, of all races and religions and levels of ability, are to be treated equally and with respect for their “inherent worth as human beings”.

While it was held true that children were also ‘human beings’, it was recognized that the period of growth into adulthood, linked to their evolving capacities over the period of childhood, merited special consideration. From this understanding, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) emerged along with two subsequent Optional Protocols. The CRC has been ratified by all nations except Somalia and the United States and thus is the most widely accepted international human rights instrument.

The special consideration accorded to children aims to ensure that they, in light of their evolving capacities, will be entitled to live in an environment in which they can fulfil their full potential by ensuring standards in relation to health care, education and legal, civil and social service provision. A principle element of such an environment is that all girls and boys are protected from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, inappropriate judicial responses and unnecessary separation from their families.

Since the adoption of the CRC, the situation for children in the Asia-Pacific region has improved in many ways: They are born healthier, are more likely to survive their fifth birthday and have greater access to education, safe water and basic sanitation.

Tangible gains for child protection, however, are not keeping pace with progress in other areas. Across the region, vast numbers of children continue to experience sexual exploitation and abuse, neglect, detention as a first response, the worst forms of child labour, trafficking, corporal punishment, unnecessary institutionalization and violence in their homes, schools and community. Such violations have persisted over time, despite ongoing efforts.

Within the framework of children’s rights, the objective of this paper is to present an analysis of the situation of child protection and welfare in the Asia-Pacific region, including government responses, and identify opportunities for South-South cooperation. Additionally, the analysis has concluded with recommendations to strengthen child protection, which includes preventing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, establishing responses to and mitigating the impact of such child protection concerns.

The paper approaches this theme in six parts. Section 2 briefly presents some of the evidence that informs the critical importance of children’s right to protection. It highlights the emerging body of research on specific child protection concerns in the region and the cost implications of child abuse. It further provides some definitions and concepts related to and including ‘child protection’ for the purposes of this paper and to encourage a common understanding within and between countries. Section 3 analyses the recommended approach being employed to address child protection concerns, the implications for children and their families, and some of the challenges experienced. Given the diverse, complex and interrelated nature of child protection concerns, the section briefly outlines the benefits of a more strategic and systematic approach to child protection. Section 4 provides

5 Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol to the CRC on involvement of children in armed conflict.
an in-depth description of a systems approach, including the main features of building or strengthening a national child protection system, with a continuum from the primary focus on prevention to tertiary response and mitigation of impact. It outlines the critical role of government leadership and partnership with non-government agencies, civil society and families.

Section 5 provides a regional overview of the situation of child protection and child welfare. It profiles the progress made in the implementation of the CRC as well as its Optional Protocols within the region and some of the challenges faced in realizing children’s right to protection. Section 6 cites examples of the existing cooperation and collaboration in the Asia-Pacific region and outlines opportunities for more South-South cooperation. Section 7 concludes with recommendations for following up. It draws on the evidence of the pervasiveness and complexity of child protection concerns emphasized throughout the paper and aims to provide a framework for further discussion.

2. Why child protection?

It is often a mistaken belief that child protection violations only occur in the ‘poorer’ or particularly excluded sectors of society. Evidence clearly shows that these are endemic in every country in the region and cut across all determinants of age, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, class, socioeconomic status, educational background and rural/urban location. Such violations occur in every strata of society and often in contexts in which it is assumed that children would be best protected, such as in their homes, in schools and in their communities.

However, many of the crucial decisions that create or alleviate protection risks are generally taken within a family or community that itself may be affected by wider societal and economic threats, such as discrimination, stigma, financial stress, illness, conflict or natural disasters. Such threats often erode vital systems of social support and result in family separation or extreme destitution, increasing children’s susceptibility to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Increased vulnerability to protection concerns is more likely within families who have fewer resources to withstand economic ‘shocks’ or risks. Such societal and economic threats may also lead to the perception that economically poor parents cannot be good parents and that their children must be monitored for potential criminality or that the children are better removed from the care of their parental carer and from their social and cultural context, to be provided for by the State or by non-state service providers. These realities are acknowledged in the numerous social protection approaches being implemented in the region.9

Where child protection challenges become transnational, such as in asylum seeking or in some cases of abduction, human trafficking and displacement, no single nation State can

---

7 Violations can take many forms, with examples including: physical abuse, such as through shaking, beating, suffocating and poisoning; emotional abuse, such as through humiliation, ridicule, discrimination, and rejection; sexual abuse, such as cases of rape, sexual touching and exposure to sexual activity; neglect, with caregiver’s unrecognized or willful failure to provide for the basic requirements of a child’s development and survival; and exploitation, such as through, involvement in the production of pornography, domestic servitude and other forms of child labour, the sale of children, and involvement in armed conflict. Certain groups of children are particularly vulnerable, such as children without parental care, children in conflict with the law, children in institutions, children with disabilities, children of minority or indigenous groups, refugee and internally displaced children, stateless children, children affected by migration or those affected by armed conflict.

8 Social protection is generally understood as a set of public actions that address poverty, vulnerability and exclusion as well as provide means to cope with major ‘shocks’ throughout the life cycle.

9 Although social protection is an important mechanism for prevention, due to the limitations of space, it has not been possible to effectively explore social protection in this paper.
effectively prevent or respond in isolation from other nations. Thus, there is a need for inter-state and multilateral collaboration on prevention and response to such concerns. To better collaborate within countries and between countries, it is necessary to have the same understanding of definitions and concepts related to and including ‘child protection’.

For this paper, the following definitions are used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child protection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The term ‘child protection’ refers to all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to prevent and respond to all forms of physical or mental violence, maltreatment, abuse, neglect and exploitation affecting children. Child protection aims to address child rights violations and deficits related to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, including the precursors and repercussions for children who are in conflict with the law or those children who have been victims of or witnesses to a crime. The nature and scale of child protection issues are diverse, multifaceted and interconnected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child welfare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistent with child rights principles, child welfare is understood as consisting of services and institutions concerned with the physical, social and psychological well-being of children, particularly children suffering from the effects of poverty or lacking appropriate parental care and supervision. This could vary from a range of highly specialized services that deal with such problems as physical care and nurturing, emotional and psychological health, family and parent support and services, and child care services to the establishment and implementation of policies, legislation and interventions intended to alleviate child poverty and address the survival, development and protection needs of the poorest and most marginalized children, including through cash grants, fee waivers, health insurance, education and health subsidies as well as welfare services. The general standard of living, the level of education and the financial resources of a country are among the factors that determine child welfare provision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social welfare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social welfare is understood to cover social security and a host of other personal services to provide and promote the well-being of the young, the sick, the elderly and those who are disabled or face other vulnerabilities. Social welfare systems generally have close links with education, health care, employment and housing. However, different types of social welfare systems exist, according to how each society views the government’s role in providing for its citizens.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child protection systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child protection systems operate within the framework of the law and a coherent framework of policies, procedures and guidelines, providing a multisector approach to support the prevention of and response to protection risks and violations, including violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Typically, one ministry or department, such as a ministry of social welfare or its equivalent, interacts with all other sectors, such as justice, education, health and security, to lead and coordinate effective child protection responses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purposes of this paper, the impact of child protection violations will, in general, be termed as child maltreatment rather than identify the various forms, including violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. In 2006, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the

---

10 Adapted from the Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 19.
International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) defined child maltreatment as:

"All forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power."\(^{14}\)

However, it must be recognised that where the terms referred to are general, as in child protection violations or child maltreatment or specific, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, commercial child sexual exploitation, abduction, child trafficking, child pornography, the recruitment of children by armed groups or armed forces, hazardous child labour, neglect or negligent treatment, etc., these acts of omission or commission are crimes against children, often defined as such in domestic or international law and recognized as an offence against the child.

Although the immediate physical effects of child maltreatment can be relatively minor (bruises or cuts) or severe (broken bones, haemorrhage or even death),\(^{15}\) emerging research has established that child maltreatment can have profound and damaging consequences on a child's potential, during childhood and adolescence and throughout adult life.

Studies by the WHO\(^{16}\) and others have found evidence of direct links between child maltreatment and psychological and behavioural problems, including: developmental delay, poor school performance, alcohol and drug abuse, cognitive impairment, depression and anxiety, eating and sleep disorders, dysfunctional relationships and violent and other high risk-taking behaviours, which often bring children into conflict with the law.

Similarly, evidence was found of direct links between child maltreatment and longer-term health consequences, including reproductive health problems such as infertility, sexual dysfunction, sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV), suicidal behaviour and self-harm, cancer, chronic lung disease, irritable bowel syndrome, ischaemic heart disease and liver disease.

Childhood and adolescence is a time of enormous neurological growth and development. Where child maltreatment occurs in young children, it can result in irreparable damage that has a severe impact on a child’s fundamental abilities. For example, figure 1\(^{17}\) illustrates the negative impact of neglect on the developing brain; the image on the left shows a CT scan of a healthy 3-year-old with average head size, and the image on the right shows a similar CT scan of a 3-year-old child suffering from severe sensory-deprivation neglect. The brain of the maltreated child is significantly smaller than average and has an abnormal development of cortex as a result of the maltreatment.


When it occurs, the chronic ‘toxic’ stress exposure that children experience can lead to persistent changes in the brain structure and chemistry. If a child is subjected to stress, such as violence, abuse or threats, complex neurochemical and hormonal systems involved in the ‘fight or flight’ survival mechanism are triggered. Chronic activation of these chemicals can impair cell growth and brain formation and interfere with the formation of healthy neural circuits that support higher thinking functions, among others. Figure 2\(^\text{18}\) shows a scan of a normally developed, healthy brain, whereas figure 3 shows the significant physiological alteration caused by prolonged, severe or unpredictable stress during early childhood. Such consequences result in lifelong disparities and adverse outcomes for maltreated children.

Beyond the irreparable damage subjected on the child, the impact of child maltreatment may vary significantly and is affected by a combination of factors,\(^\text{19}\) including: the child’s age and developmental status when the maltreatment occurred; the type of abuse (physical or sexual abuse, neglect, etc.); the frequency, duration and severity of the

\(^{18}\) Figures 2 and 3 were taken from: “Preventing child maltreatment to promote lifelong health”, 26-27 February 2008, Maputo, Mozambique, World Health Organization and the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

maltreatment, the relationship between the victim and his/her abuser;\textsuperscript{20} and the child’s own ability to overcome adversity, understood as the child’s ‘resilience’. \textsuperscript{21}

Currently, there is increasing attention among practitioners and researchers to the concept of ‘resilience’ and which protective and promotional factors can be enhanced to assist parents and children in overcoming adverse circumstances that result from or increase children’s vulnerability to maltreatment. Factors that may foster resilience include personal skills or characteristics (such as optimism and hope, forming and using relationships for survival), generic life circumstances (such as access to good health, education and social welfare services) and abusive-specific protective factors in the environment (such as timely legal actions and the offender acknowledging the abuse quickly and fully).\textsuperscript{22} While obviously preventing child maltreatment should be the primary focus, these factors that may foster resilience indicate that investment in health, education, social welfare and justice systems is equally important and underscore the interdependence of the different rights enshrined in the CRC.

\textbf{Research and evidence from the Asia-Pacific region}

Every year, millions of children globally become victims of violence, exploitation, abuse or neglect, with many experiencing multiple and compounding forms of maltreatment. In 2002, between a quarter and a half of all children globally reported having experienced severe and frequent physical abuse, including being beaten, kicked or tied up by parents; approximately 20 per cent of women and 5–10 per cent of men reported having experienced sexual abuse as children, although disaggregation for regional estimates reveal that the problem may be larger in some parts of the world than in others. According to the WHO in a 2002 report, an estimated 57,000 deaths among children younger than 15 were attributed to homicide worldwide in 2000, which was also recognized as only a small fraction of the total cases of child maltreatment.\textsuperscript{23} WHO further estimated that the risk of fatal abuse is two to three times higher in low- and middle-income countries than it is in high-income countries and that it is higher in countries with large economic inequities than in those where wealth is more evenly distributed.\textsuperscript{24}

Although scientific research on the prevalence and incidence of child violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation is still in its nascent stages in most countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the search for quality data on the scale and nature of such maltreatment, for the purpose of informing appropriate state planning and budgeting, is gaining momentum. Although evidence on the magnitude of various forms of child exploitation, such as child prostitution and child labour, is still difficult to capture, some studies focusing on child abuse and neglect in the home and community have been conducted in the region. It should be emphasized that most scientific research in the region has tended to not investigate the prevalence or incidence of child maltreatment in formal care institutions, justice settings or work environments, although the 2006 UN Study on Violence Against Children well

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Although the concept of resilience is not new, precise definitions remain a challenge. The International Resilience Project uses the following definition: “Resilience is a universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity”, quoted in Groebeg, E.H., 1995, A Guide to Promoting Resilience in Children: Strengthening the human spirit, Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} WHO and ISPCAN, 2006, Preventing Child Maltreatment: A guide to taking action and generating evidence, WHO, Geneva.
\end{itemize}
documents, through grey literature and interviews, that the experience of violence and exploitation in such settings is widespread in this region.

Despite the paucity of such scientific research, what has become apparent from existing studies is that the Asia-Pacific region is no different from other regions in terms of the high prevalence of child maltreatment. It does, however, surpass other regions in global studies with regard to specific forms of abuse, such as child sexual abuse. Country-based studies in the region provide some insight as to the large proportion of children who have experienced child maltreatment.

These findings are likely to constitute underestimates of the actual extent of child abuse, given the well-documented trends in international studies of underreporting due to fear, stigma and social acceptance of the abuse that is involved. Within the available academic literature is a 2010 study on the findings of a survey of secondary school students in Viet Nam that showed that at least one in five children had experienced some form of child abuse or neglect, with almost half of all the responding children reporting they had experienced physical abuse (figure 4).

**Figure 4: Prevalence of four types of child abuse and neglect in Viet Nam, by sex**

A groundbreaking study on child abuse in India in 2007 initiated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development and covering 13 states identified high levels of abuse: two out of three children reported to have been physically abused (more boys reported physical abuse as compared with girls), just over 50 per cent of children reported having experienced one or more forms of sexual abuse (the overall proportion of boys was larger than that of girls), and every second child reported experiencing emotional abuse (equal for boys and girls).

---


In 2006, another study in six provinces in China also demonstrated the pervasiveness of various forms of child maltreatment, with three-quarters of the adolescents surveyed having experienced some type of abuse. This study expressed the extent of the overlapping occurrence of such abuse, with half of all responding adolescents having been victims of multiple forms of maltreatment (figure 5).

**Figure 5: Types of abuse experienced by adolescents in six provinces in China**

Several studies on violence against women and children have also been conducted in the Maldives. A study on violence against women reports that one in three Maldivian women aged 15–49 reported experiencing physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives, including sexual abuse during childhood. A subsequent study on violence against children found one in seven Maldivian secondary school children who reported having been sexually abused at least once in their lives (20 per cent girls compared with 11 per cent boys).

**Physical abuse**

A closer look at the prevalence of particular forms of child abuse in the region further underscores the enormous scale of the problem of child maltreatment. A population-based study on child abuse in Hong Kong (China), conducted from December 2003 to August 2004, was the first of its kind in the territory in terms of the scale and coverage. The survey methodology used interviews with 2,062 children aged 12–17 years. The findings revealed that 45 per cent of the respondents had experienced physical abuse by one or both of their parents, with prevalence being only slightly higher for boys than for girls. Although most cases were described as minor in nature, very severe physical abuse was reported by almost one in ten children.

The population-based Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), supported by UNICEF, also provides some evidence that the physical abuse of children is being perpetrated in the form of minor and severe physical punishment. The modes for such punishment, as conveyed through the MICS questionnaire, were hitting or slapping on the face, head or ears as well as beating with an implement. The surveys have found that the use of physical discipline is widespread in all regions, and that there is no correlation between its use and wealth.

---


quintiles, providing further evidence that child abuse cuts across economic strata. In the Philippines, the 2007 MICS survey indicated that 12.9 per cent of children aged 2–14 years had experienced severe physical punishment as a form of discipline, while a slightly lower 9.4 per cent of children experienced such abuse in Viet Nam, according to the 2006 MICS findings. Minor physical punishment, through such forms as shaking or grabbing, was widespread in both countries, according to the MICS findings.

**Table 1: Proportion of children aged 2–14 years who experienced physical punishment as discipline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minor physical punishment</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe physical punishment</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sexual abuse**

According to a systematic review of global prevalence research on child sexual abuse, published in a 2004 WHO report, studies across the world have indicated a range of prevalence between 2 per cent and 62 per cent. Using existing country estimates weighted by country population, the subregional estimates for child sexual abuse prevalence indicate that the highest estimates are found in East and Southern Africa, as well as in certain countries in East and South Asia. Data from the latter region indicates an alarmingly high proportion of children who have experienced child sexual abuse, at the level of over one in three boys and over two in three girls. The data from several other countries in East Asia and the Pacific also reveals the high prevalence rates of over one in four boys and girls having experienced child sexual abuse.

**Table 2: Child sexual abuse prevalence estimates, by subregion and sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subregion</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEAR-D35</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPR-B36</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although girls are often considered to be at higher risk of sexual abuse, the 2004 WHO report as well as the earlier-mentioned studies from India, Maldives and Viet Nam highlight that boys too are vulnerable. Moreover, the studies from India and Viet Nam indicate an even higher risk for boys than for girls.

There is also a growing body of research in China on the prevalence of child sexual abuse and associated adverse health outcomes. One such survey involved 3,261 students in grades 11 and 12, in four schools in Hubei, Henan, Hebei and Beijing provinces, that revealed that unwanted sexual experiences before the age of 16 years was at a level of 16.7 per cent for girls and 10.5 per cent for boys. Males and females who had experienced child sexual abuse were more depressed and suicidal and drank alcohol more often than those adolescents who had not experienced such abuse. Females who had experienced child

---

32 ibid., Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, 2007 for Philippines and 2006 for Viet Nam.
34 ibid.
35 This is the WHO defined subregion SEAR-D, consisting of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, India, Maldives, Myanmar and Nepal.
36 This is the WHO defined subregion WPR-B, consisting of Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Viet Nam.
sexual abuse were also more likely than others to be anorexic or bulimic, while males who were victims of child sexual abuse tended to be involved in violent behaviour. Similar evidence can be found from a small-scale study in Singapore of 88 female university students that indicated that those who had experienced child sexual abuse had higher levels of emotional distress than the non-abused students.38

**Emotional abuse**

A questionnaire developed by child-abuse experts from 31 countries and field tested in six countries and which used samples of parents with children younger than 18 years, provided further evidence that emotional abuse and neglect of children are common in a variety of contexts and cultures.39 Within a sample of 123 respondents in India, the study found that 94 per cent of parents used psychological discipline with their child, with 39 per cent threatening abandonment, 39 per cent using insults and 28 per cent using public humiliation.

In Malaysia, recent research indicates that the experience of child emotional abuse is similarly common. Most adolescents in the Malaysia study had been insulted or embarrassed in front of others, while more relatively severe forms of emotional abuse, such as the threat of being seriously hurt or killed, were experienced by more than one in six boys and one in ten girls (figure 6).

**Figure 6: Proportion of adolescents in Selangor, Malaysia, reporting experiences of emotional abuse**40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insulted, including name calling</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>77.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed in front of others</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made to feel like bad or guilty person</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>75.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent said &quot;Wish you never had been born&quot;</td>
<td>27.25</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened to be abandoned or thrown out...</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened to be seriously hurt or killed</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The economic impact of child abuse**

Since the late 1980s, there has been a growing movement in developed countries to estimate the economic impact of violence, including child abuse.41 Much of this research has been established in the United States, where recent estimates of the medical costs, loss in productivity, costs incurred via the legal and justice systems as well as costs due to the

---

41 See for example: WHO and CDC, 2008, *Manual for estimating the economic costs of injuries due to interpersonal and self-directed violence*, WHO and CDC, Geneva
provision of child protection and welfare services have amounted to staggering figures. For example, a study in the United States in 1999 indicated that women who had experienced child maltreatment had annual health costs that were US$97 more than women who had not experienced any maltreatment. Those who had experienced child sexual abuse had costs that were US$245 greater. In addition in 1992, in a study for the Michigan Children's Trust Fund, analysts calculated that child maltreatment cost the state approximately US$512 million annually. Michigan's total estimated annual cost of child maltreatment included direct and indirect costs associated with the following:

- protective services ($38 million)
- foster care ($74 million)
- medical treatment of injuries due to abuse ($5 million)
- special education costs ($6 million)
- psychological care for child maltreatment victims ($16 million)
- juvenile justice system and correction services ($207 million)
- adult criminality ($175 million).

Such figures tend to be in line with other studies in the United States. Although such figures seem beyond the capacity of other governments, it is important to locate them in relation to other expenditures, as Putnam highlights:

“We find an incidence rate for child abuse and neglect that is about ten times as high as the incidence rate for all forms of cancer. There is a multi-billion-dollar research base reliably renewed on an annual basis for cancer treatment and prevention. Nothing remotely similar to this exists for [the prevention of and response to] child abuse and neglect.”

Although health services in many of the developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region cost far less than in the United States, it is reasonable to estimate that the total costs to both governments and individuals are considerable. For instance, in Lao PDR, UNICEF has estimated that an average of 25 per cent of the child population has experienced child sexual abuse, based on subregional estimates published in 2004. Thus, taking into account an average annual population growth rate of 2.5 per cent and conservatively estimating the health services for persons who have experienced child sexual abuse at an additional US$10 per person per year, the total cost to Lao PDR over a four-year period would amount to US$68 million (at 2009 value).

A costing-analysis study conducted by the UNICEF Pacific Office in Vanuatu in 2009, building on child abuse baseline research from the previous year, similarly reveals high estimates of direct, indirect and lifelong costs of child abuse. In 2008, Vanuatu had a total population of 234,000; the total direct costs of child abuse, including emergency and non-emergency medical care, mental health treatment, child welfare services and law enforcement costs, were estimated to be between US$1.96 million and US$3.19 million annually. Indirect costs in the form of adult criminality were estimated at around US$74,000 per year. Lifelong costs

44 Frank Putnam, M.D., researcher at the National Institute of Mental Health, from “Why Is It so Difficult for the Epidemic of Child Abuse to be Taken Seriously?” Handout: “The Costs and Consequences of Child Abuse” by Frank W. Putnam.
46 Swales, D. 2010, PowerPoint presentation on child protection systems.
incurred per year due to child maltreatment were also estimated to be high, at between US$889,000 and US$975,000.47

While such expenditures in the Asia-Pacific region are significantly lower than those expended in the United States in dollar value, such analysis does emphasize the critical need for the strategic investment in nationally driven and locally operationalized, multisector prevention strategies to prevent child maltreatment and its immediate and long-term consequences and costs to socioeconomic development.

Studies on such prevention strategies and programmes underline that they are cost effective. Meta-analysis of 21 studies by the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that, for example, home visitation programmes significantly reduced child maltreatment (median reduction = 40 per cent, range 24–74 per cent) and that programmes utilizing nurses and lasting two or more years are most effective. The related economic analysis found that US$4 was saved for every dollar invested in a home visitation prevention programme.48

3. Why a systems approach?

Every child is entitled to protection, regardless of the harm experienced or the circumstances in which it takes place. However, in the absence of an effective national child protection system, a pattern of relatively short-term popularity for specific issues is continuing. Child trafficking victims and orphans, for instance, evoke mass sympathies and significant funding for popular but often ill-informed responses, such as the construction of large-scale child care institutions – despite global evidence that such institutional care is damaging49 for children, regardless of the level of resources or how well intended. In comparison, physically abused children or those with disabilities are barely acknowledged except through sensationalized media reporting and localized charitable activities for small groups or individual children. This has led to inequities and the creation of parallel ‘systems’ or interventions. Such issue-based approaches are often conducted without regulatory oversight or guidance from government leadership and have inequitable geographic coverage. Analysis of popular issue-based approaches underscores some significant concerns:

- Many of the individual issue-based ‘responses’ are somewhat contradictory in their aims and become redundant very quickly when long-term funding is not secured.
- Establishing increasing numbers of reactive laws and policies is inefficient, especially if these reiterate virtually identical standards, protections and services targeted at only discrete groups of children; they may also contain contradictory priorities and actions.
- Single-issue responses often are located outside the family and community context, which detracts from increased knowledge and capacity in the family and community and marginalizes the child’s primary focus of support and protection.
- The same child can experience a number of different rights violations (abuse, trafficking and exploitation) at the same time or throughout childhood but may only receive a short-term response in relation to a single issue.

49 Browne, K., 2009, The Risk of Harm to Young Children in Institutional Care, Better Care Network and Save the Children UK, London.
• One group of children is not inherently more deserving of protection than another group of children, but they may receive some form of service while others receive none.
• Human and financial resources are not used effectively or efficiently when expertise is channelled into parallel ‘systems’, and a body of comprehensive technical capacity on child maltreatment is not developed.
• While championing their respective causes, child protection advocates and officials often compete against one another for recognition and funding.
• Such competitive funding detracts from the understanding that child protection issues are diverse but interconnected and evolving and that approaches need to encompass those realities.

However, the focus on issues has contributed to the protection of children and produced a wealth of guidance on addressing specific issues as well as provided useful lessons learned on what works and what does not. It is important to recognize that issue-based child protection programmes, services and organizations have a significant value. To avoid losing the expertise that has been built up over the years, these programmes, services and organizations should be incorporated into national child protection systems and not operate in isolation from the national regulatory role of governments.\(^{50}\)

Where national child protection systems are absent or inadequate, it is increasingly evident that interventions are carried out in isolation from other concerns, issues or vulnerabilities and that children are too often served outside the family context.\(^{51}\) Where there is disproportionate investment in response – as opposed to prevention – parallel and duplicate systems are created, coverage is inconsistent and quality is variable. As a result, subsequent costs are high and cost efficiency is low, leading to limited impact in the prevention and reduction of child protection violations overall.

Although many development practitioners and government officials are aware of and affirm the principle that all CRC articles are interdependent, this principle has not been consistently realized in practice. It is thus recognized that broader national child protection systems are ultimately more cost effective and result in long-term impact on all forms of child maltreatment.

Global analysis, clear evidence and systematic practices in many developed countries demonstrate that it is indeed possible to establish effective strategies to address child protection concerns. Many child protection systems in developing countries have proven to be of greater benefit to the diverse range of child protection concerns. Furthermore, systems are seen to be more sustainable and holistic in preventing and responding to child protection concerns and provide the necessary coordination, both within the system as well as with other systems, such as health and education.

4. What is a systems approach?

In terms of national child protection systems, national governments have five primary functions:
• formulate laws, policies, procedures and guidance


- regulate, register and inspect services and service providers
- provide technical support and advice
- provide strategic leadership, coordination and direction
- set standards, provide training and accred and professional staff
- collect, collate and analyse data and plan.

In addition, there are statutory (formal) roles defined within domestic law that solely fall within the purview of government ministries, departments and officers. Governments may also provide some direct forms of service provision or coordinate with private or voluntary (informal) actors to provide services, such as alternative care for children, family support networks, etc. Governments also may formally delegate statutory responsibilities to a private or voluntary service provider, such as a faith-based organization, a non-government organization (NGO), a civil society/community-based organization or a private company through a formal agreement. However, the government would retain the statutory responsibility to ensure such services are provided in accordance with the law and related standards. To ensure cohesion within the collaboration between statutory government agencies, formally designated agencies and voluntary service providers, a clear and strategic national vision and framework that upholds international standards, ensures compliance and promotes accountability to the full extent of available resources is essential.

The local manifestation of a child protection system emerges from a combination of cultural norms, accepted standards of behaviour, history, resources and external influences that, over time, inform the choices a nation State makes regarding its system. It also follows that to be a system, child protection systems will exhibit certain common elements that can be identified, even though they may be adapted differently to each country context.

An effective national child protection system should consist of three interlocking components: the social welfare system for children and families, the justice system and an integrated social behaviour-change component. Such systems and components should be structured in a way that enables them to both prevent and respond to all child protection concerns in an integrated manner. Thus, the national child protection system should prevent violations from happening and protect children in all situations regardless of the nature of the violation or the context in which it occurs, including in emergencies (such as natural disasters and armed conflicts) and in periods of transition.

The national child protection system should promote attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviours that ensure children’s well being and protection, and affirm children’s human rights, as set forth in the CRC, its Optional Protocols and other relevant international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The national child protection system and its components are driven by a singular mission: to prevent abuses from occurring in the first instance, and thus protect children from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. As illustrated in figure 7, the three components converge to protect children within the parameters of a legal and policy framework.
While individual systems vary, depending on the country context, there are cross-cutting features that shape all national child protection systems: i) laws, policies and procedures; ii) social welfare and justice structures and services; and iii) social behaviour change. These common features are outlined below:

1. **Laws, policies and procedures**

   Every nation is governed by a broad range of laws that can be defined as a system of rules, usually enforced through a set of institutions. Such a legal framework shapes politics, economics and society as a whole in numerous ways and serves as a primary social mediator of relations between the State and its citizens and between people. Whether contained in a consolidated child rights statute, strategic national plans, sector-based laws or as a chapter of existing penal or labour codes, those laws that focus on safeguarding children from maltreatment form the foundation of the national child protection system.

   To ensure that laws and policies are implemented and delivered effectively across the various interconnected components, they have to be harmonized, streamlined and developed in consultation with stakeholders across the national child protection system. Moreover, accessible processes and procedures must be established, including guidelines, protocols, codes of conduct, data collection and analysis, recruitment procedures, communication-flow and information-management mechanisms, referral and complaint mechanisms and monitoring mechanisms.

   Processes and procedures also guide how the national child protection system components function and interact, how they are managed and coordinated at every level and mainly refer to the day-to-day operational dynamics of the system. Processes and procedures are crucial for the various actors within the national child protection system to act in a coordinated, cohesive and predictable manner, in line with defined laws, policies and standards for the care and protection of children and in keeping with the rights and best interests of the child.

2. **Social welfare and justice systems – structures and services**

   Social welfare and justice systems, structures and services are the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ of the national child protection system. These structures refer to the organization of institutions, including the different ministries, departments and agencies as well as their mandates, lines of accountability, responsibilities, capacities (human, financial and physical) and services.
provided, including for children, and the supporting monitoring and coordinating bodies. Social welfare and justice structures support different strategies, which include preventing, responding to and mitigating child protection violations.

From an understanding of an ecological framework of child development, children’s care, protection and access to justice takes place within a complex range of interacting individual, family, community, institutional and societal factors. A child and family welfare system that focuses on the best interests of the child must function in the context of all the factors that form the framework of the child’s life, including the birth family and extended family, the community and across other systems and disciplines, such as education and health care. On this basis, education and health care providers have a critical role in child protection, care, welfare and justice concerns and are acknowledged as having distinct links to a national child protection system.

The justice system and structures provide an independent oversight of any matters relating to children, particularly for which any formal decision is taken in respect of a child. The involvement of formal court decisions or other formal processes is necessary to ensure that the needs and rights of the child are best served, often against the competing priorities of others, such as in cases of adjudication during adoption, parental custody, property and inheritance, or other such issues that directly affect the child’s life. The justice system must also ensure that a child’s needs are met and rights are respected, protected and realized when he/she is in conflict with the law, including when the child is accused of an offence or has been a victim of or witness to a crime. In all such cases, actors in the justice system may interact with social welfare services to determine the circumstances, needs and best interests of the child and also may refer the child to social welfare providers when he/she is found to be in need of care, protection or other support needed to ensure the child’s best interests.

3. Social behaviour change
Social, cultural and behaviour change is an inherent part of life whereby knowledge, values and practices are continuously shifting and have a direct impact on individuals, communities, organizations, institutions and society. The behaviour of individuals, groups and institutions is largely based on the views, attitudes, demands and practices that promote and permit, sanction and constrain what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Therefore, where the legal framework and policies change and social welfare systems act to prevent, respond to and mitigate the impact of child protection violations, a critical feature of a national child protection system must be to affect behavioural, institutional and societal change to promote and ensure children’s rights to protection, care, welfare and justice.

Strategies and approaches by social welfare systems would involve reinforcing those behaviours and actions that are in the best interests of children as well as changing the behaviours and corresponding actions that people believe will benefit children but which are actually damaging to both them and society, such as corporal punishment and the placement of children in inappropriate forms of care.

Levels of systems operation
Within a national child protection system, the components and respective actors function within a continuum of different operational levels in relation to children, families and society. Such levels can be categorized as primary, secondary or tertiary (see figure 8).

The first such level, the primary level of prevention, is where norms and standards are set to promote the knowledge, skills and understanding of society at large to ensure that children’s rights to care, protection, guidance, nurturing and development are met. This primary level of prevention relates to ‘universal’ strategies to prevent the violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children across society. This means that such strategies are generally applied to the population or strata of the population as a whole and not in relation to particular
groups or individuals. The primary level should be the focus for the system, for which sufficient resources are invested to ensure the most cost-effective and viable outcomes for children and society. Initiatives that fall under primary-level prevention include awareness-raising campaigns on positive-parenting practices; curricula in schools that promote life skills education and self-protection skills; information provision on child protection laws and procedures; training of professional staff to ensure knowledge and skills on child maltreatment, prevention and response; and community service programmes to promote inclusion and civic responsibility.

The secondary level of prevention targets the vulnerabilities, needs and issues relevant to particular groups of children or families whom research and evidence have shown to be particularly at risk, excluded or marginalized in their society. Secondary-level actions for prevention are designed to address specific groups and are not for general application to society as a whole. Nor are they sufficiently tailored to the individual needs and circumstances of individual children. Such groups may include families who earn less than a specified level of income, young parents, child-headed households, children living on the streets, families with members living with HIV or AIDS, migrant families and families with children with disabilities. Services designed for specific groups may include group work for parenting skills training, home visitation services for new parents, after-school and day-care provision for children of working parents, cash transfer schemes, outreach services for youth, drug and alcohol programmes for parents, child-mentoring programmes and respite care for parents of children with disabilities.

The tertiary level of prevention targets those children who are in high-risk situations or who have already experienced maltreatment. The tertiary level demands immediate actions to be taken in relation to the child, often where laws, policies and standards are breached or rights violated. However, the tertiary level can actually be viewed as consisting of two parts. The first addresses the particular needs and circumstances of individual children and their families who are highly vulnerable to experiencing violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation. It includes such services as individual and family counselling, therapeutic interventions, intensive parenting skills or care-giving skills training and substance abuse-treatment programmes.

Figure 8: Main features of a national child protection system
The second part of tertiary prevention – and the most commonly understood component of the national child protection system – consists of statutory interventions, which involve actions by delegated officials or agencies, in accordance with the law, to stop or prevent a child from experiencing severe maltreatment. It may include removal of a child and placement in alternative care, removal of the perpetrator, issuance of a restraining order or behaviour bond, etc. Removing a child from the family home or the home of the primary caregiver should only be undertaken by those with the authority or delegated authority to do so and only as a last resort and where sanctioned by court authorities prior to or immediately following the child’s removal.

In conclusion, building and/or strengthening a national child protection system requires a long-term vision and can take time to fully realize. Ultimately, the focus of attention on the prevention of child maltreatment will have substantial benefits for children and for society, as emphasized with the socioeconomic benefits of prevention as a priority approach cited in section 1.

5. Situational overview

The Asia-Pacific region is one of extreme diversity, including in relation to population size, governance systems, economic and development status, religion, language and culture. Such diversity is also reflected in the statistics available for child protection, with birth registration rates ranging from 9.6 to 98.9 per cent; the number of children with disabilities ranging from 14.6 to 38.6 per cent; and the number of women aged 20–24 years who were married before the age of 18 years ranging from 9 to 64.1 per cent. Moreover, 64 per cent of the world’s child labour is being experienced in the Asia-Pacific region.

Although such differences are important, in themselves they are not a barrier to having a common understanding and commitment to realizing children’s rights, including their rights to protection from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. As Ncube points out, the CRC does not give primacy to local cultural norms; but Ncube rightly joins with others, such as Freeman and Nussbaum, when he states “...the rights granted to children should, in their localization and implementation, bear the local cultural fingerprinting without, however, extinguishing the essential core of the right itself.”

Thus, the building or strengthening of a national child protection system must be rooted in the cultural context in which it is to operate and should encompass approaches that recognize and respond to the specific risks and strengths, or ‘assets’, in that social or cultural context. Such an approach involving the mobilization of community and cultural assets underpins – and should be a core element of – a formal child protection system. In addition, some strategic alliances should be in place between the different structures, processes and components of a national child protection system and communities, local children’s advocates, external agencies, institutions and organizations, all of which are contributing to the aim of realizing children’s rights to protection.

---

52 Data in this paragraph is taken from www.childinfo.org, Monitoring the Situation of Women and Children, UNICEF, visited on 28 October 2010.
53 www.unitetheunion.org/resources/international/regions/asia_and_pacific.aspx, visited on 28 October 2010.
Such a ‘cultural assets’ approach does mean that it may be more difficult to draw direct comparisons of what constitutes a ‘good practice’ between countries because each child protection system would be unique in its development and delivery. However, it does offer an enormous potential for a plethora of models and development approaches to inform how children’s rights to protection can be realized.

The world’s largest population of children lives in the Asia-Pacific region – 35 per cent of the world’s children live in China and India alone. Given the sheer numbers of the child population, the implications arising from the lifelong debilitating impact of child maltreatment have enormous consequences for human capital and social and economic development, as noted in section 1. There are many examples of positive developments, efforts and activities that have taken and are taking place (cited further on), challenges confronting children, their families, governments and societies nevertheless persist:

1. Challenges

In the Asia-Pacific region, many children still lack access to proper health care, nutrition and education. In addition, those services that have been available in some contexts have been eroded by the impact of armed conflicts and political violence over the past 20 years. Further, the region is very prone to natural disasters: such as the Indian Ocean tsunami (Indonesia, Maldives, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand), earthquakes (China, Indonesia, Pakistan) and flooding (China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippines). These disasters have also eroded and diverted resources, capacity and previous investments in basic services for children.

While education and health care provision for children are perceived as crucial services and critical to a government’s agenda for economic growth, state provision of social welfare, and in particular child protection services, have, in many respects, been excluded from the mainstream political agenda. As a consequence, ministries responsible for child protection are often typified by low budgetary allocations, limited human capacity, diffuse and often confusing mandates across diverse agencies and an insufficient staff cadre. This, in turn, results in the challenge of fulfilling their mandate, including to provide a functional child protection system throughout the country.

As throughout the world, violence against and abuse, neglect and exploitation of children is under-reported in the region. This is mainly due to guilt, shame, stigma or fear of retaliation as well as acceptance of violence as inevitable and normal. Although good practices, such as child help lines, have emerged in the region, children also continue to lack access to trusted adults to report the violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation. These challenges are further compounded by societal attitudes in relation to the status of children. Societal values often perceive that issues concerning children are the individual ‘private troubles’ of the family, rather than ‘public issues’.

Additionally, across the region there is a limited but growing understanding that certain societal behaviours are harmful to children. Challenging these traditional practices and societal attitudes is additionally complex in the region due to socioeconomic factors, such as gender, class, economic status and in some places caste, which are deep-rooted.

Finally, although there are common factors known to affect children’s vulnerability across the world, some of them are more prevalent in the Asia-Pacific region, including:

- Distinct dimensions of stigma, cultural attitudes and practices, which result in certain groups of children being particularly vulnerable to maltreatment, including: children

---

with disabilities, those from minority groups and other marginalized groups or castes, migrant children, child domestic workers and refugee and other displaced children.

- Economic development in some countries has prompted a need for workers but also opportunities for labour migration, which has both increased adult and children’s vulnerability to exploitative labour and trafficking and has also increased the number of children living without parents.\footnote{UNICEF, 2009, 
South Asia in Action: Preventing and responding to child trafficking: Analysis of anti-trafficking initiatives in the region, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.}
- The benefits of the development of tourism have also brought a parallel growth in commercial child sexual exploitation and the production of child pornography, both online and offline.\footnote{Frederick, J., 2010, Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Boys in South Asia: A review of research findings, legislation, policy and programme responses, Innocenti Working Paper, UNICEF, Florence, Italy.}

2. Positive developments

In many countries, established structures are promoting children’s rights, such as human rights commissions and ombudsperson offices (such as in India, Indonesia, Maldives, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand). Additionally, ministries (such as in India and Indonesia) and high-level governmental mechanisms (such as in China and Sri Lanka) have been mandated to coordinate activities on children and promote synergies across sectors, strengthen data systems on children and advocate for higher visibility for marginalized children.

Clearly, there is a genuine recognition and commitment on the part of many governments in the region to address the situation of children’s rights, including rights to protection. Although government, civil society and community strategies are not necessarily located within a national ‘vision’ or commitment to a national child protection system, substantial developments have been realized in the areas defined as common features of a national child protection system:

a. Laws, policies and procedures

The Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child note that in efforts to harmonize national legislation with the CRC, countries in the Asia-Pacific region have reached unprecedented levels of legislative, policy and institutional reforms on a broad range of areas related to child protection, from early marriage, infanticide, discrimination in the caste system to sexual exploitation, child labour and child trafficking. In addition, many countries in the region have or are working towards a ban on corporal punishment in various settings,\footnote{Tables presenting the progress towards prohibiting all corporal punishment for East Asia and Pacific and South Asia can be found at: www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/pdfs/charts/Chart-EastAsia-Pacific.pdf and www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/pdfs/charts/Chart-SouthAsia.pdf - accessed 26 October 2010.} while some countries have already drafted administrative directives that prohibit physical punishments in some settings. This is also recognized as a priority area by the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) and driven in part by children’s recommendations.\footnote{SACG, 2010, Children Say Stop to Violence!, Report of the Children’s Consultation for the third SAIEVAC Ministerial Meeting of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children, June 20-23, 2010, Kathmandu, SACG, Kathmandu.}

There remains a need to significantly intensify actions to realize the full scope, breadth and interdependence of children’s rights, specifically those of protection. The Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child offer useful guidance on particular areas for development, including:

- ensuring full implementation of existing child protection laws and policies, which are already in line with the CRC
- enforcing laws
- establishing accessible reporting and complaints mechanisms

\footnote{SACG, Kathmandu.}
• establishing independent Human Rights Commissions
• harmonizing religious principles, customary and domestic laws with international standards
• ending the widespread impunity for acts of violence against children and child maltreatment.

b. Social welfare and justice systems – structures and services

Although a small proportion of child maltreatment is random and isolated, most of it is perpetrated by those who are part of children’s lives and whom it is assumed will best protect them, such as a parent, relative, family friend, neighbour, schoolmate, employer or teacher. As a result, abuse and maltreatment are often effectively hidden from others and not directly disclosed by children. It is thus important to acknowledge the role of education and health care providers as a first point of contact for children who have been maltreated. Health and education providers can offer potential places of safety and help to identify concerns and make appropriate referrals when child maltreatment is suspected or has taken place.

In addition, the role of primary-level accessible health care, school health and guidance services and early childhood development initiatives, such as the public-private health collaboration to address the privatizing of health care to ensure continued widespread access for the poorest (Bangladesh and India), child and mother health centres to reduce maternal, under-5 and infant mortality rates and improve the nutritional status of children (Afghanistan), education and health services that are free and part of the social security mechanism (Bhutan) and the ‘one-stop shop’ multidisciplinary service for victims of violence and sexual abuse in hospitals (Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Philippines and Thailand) form critical components of an effective multisector child protection system.

Although the primary functions of these sectors are not specifically child protection per se, they do fulfil a substantial preventive, protective and promotional function within a cohesive national child protection system. Thus, in building a national system for child protection, research can focus on how such roles are realized through the different sectors. For example, in East Asia and the Pacific, the Child-Friendly Schools Initiative identified that the protective element of its work was comparatively weak in comparison with other components. A mapping exercise was undertaken in six countries to identify the systems in place at the national, provincial/regional and local levels to safeguard children in schools. This mapping exercise revealed that none of the education ministries had child protection policies for their staff, but that those that had codes of conduct for teachers often did not effectively disseminate these to staff at local level. Only two countries had mandatory reporting guidelines for cases of child abuse identified within the school environment.

Similarly, it is important to recognize the continuum between child welfare and child justice. While it is recognized that adolescent ‘acting out’ is part of the normal development in teenage years and is generally short term in nature, where such behaviour becomes chronic, involves violence or is a ‘survival-based’ offence (such as stealing food or breaking into buildings to find somewhere to sleep or bathe) or is perpetrated by pre-adolescent children, concern should be addressed first to the child’s ‘needs’ and not the ‘deeds’. As explained previously in this paper, such behaviour is generally indicative of some form of child maltreatment or dysfunction within the family. Thus, the relationship between children and social welfare systems and the justice system is crucial for a child protection system.

Many countries have begun to put in place culturally appropriate diversion and restorative justice programmes (Cambodia, Maldives, Mongolia, Pacific island states, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Thailand, Philippines and to some extent Afghanistan and Indonesia), or have established specialist police units and courts for juveniles (such as Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pacific island states, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Viet Nam and most countries in South Asia). Many countries are working with
justice officials to specifically address child protection issues within the scope of the justice sector. Much of this involves the whole range of actors within the justice sector, including the police, court officials and clerks, the judiciary, and ministries of justice, and the social welfare sector, including alternative care providers, community-based organizations, social workers and para-social workers.

Countries are also beginning to raise awareness of children’s protection rights and issues and further develop the professional capacity of individuals (such as the police, magistrates, health care workers, teachers) through in-service training. Additionally, many countries are working to build a cadre of professionally skilled staff through social work education and accreditation (such as Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Pacific island states, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam) and to build or strengthen social work services for children and families within a child protection system. Government social workers have a particular role in relation to child protection in that their focus is the child and the family and the best interests of the child. Social workers are officers of the State and have an official mandate that allows them to conduct particular duties within the law, such as to refer families for particular services or support, instigate the removal of a child from the family, act in an official capacity in court proceedings and prepare assessment reports and recommendations to the court.

As noted previously, evidence-based solutions drawing upon local contexts are generally most effective for prevention capacity, such as the local initiatives termed ‘Days of Tranquillity’ and ‘Days of Peace’ in the war zones of Sri Lanka and Philippines, which showed that parties to conflict can set aside their differences to safeguard children’s health. While other countries (such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal and Philippines) have introduced promising primary-level social support programmes, such as conditional cash transfers, emergency social funds and other innovative schemes to overcome financial barriers to accessing maternal health services, education fees for children, support for books and school supplies and support to children without parental care.

Although families and communities may be a main focus of risk for children’s protection, they are also the greatest source for preventing risks to their protection through established cultural practices for childrearing and social support. Tapping into this, governments are complementing their national child protection system and enabling it to be more effective and beneficial to children. In various countries, these close-working relationships have already been established between government and community groups (such as in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines and Thailand). Other countries have tapped into individuals at the community level to act as agents of change. For example, the Community Welfare Volunteers in Solomon Islands build on the strengths and resources already available in communities in undertaking prevention-oriented activities; at the same time, they are linked to the formal social welfare system for tertiary-level response and support, if and when required. While much more research is required to enhance known protective factors in the home, school and community, findings from existing research have already informed emerging practices and policies, offering locally based and more inclusive support to children and their families.

c. Social behaviour change
While acknowledging the need to promote existing beliefs and behaviours that support children’s well-being and protection is critical, changing negative attitudes, beliefs and behaviour towards children that are not compliant with child rights standards is a central concern for a national child protection system. Since the ratification of the CRC, attitudes towards children across the region have evolved to where children are now more and more perceived as actors in their own development. Children have also had opportunities to address and speak out on issues of personal concern through regional forums, such as the SAIEVAC, the ASEAN Children’s Forum and the Mekong Youth Forum.
Many countries have initiated information-sharing and public-awareness campaigns on child rights and, particularly, the right to protection (such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Lao PDR, Pacific island states, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand); for instance, the easy reference booklets on the new trafficking law developed for children, communities and law enforcement staff in Indonesia, the user-friendly Handbook on the Prohibition of Child Marriage (2006), which simplifies the content and provisions of the law against early marriage in India, and awareness raising on unexploded ordinance in Lao PDR and Sri Lanka. Other successful interventions include effective communication, social mobilization strategies, parenting programmes, participatory action projects designed with local political, religious and community leaders (such as Malaysia on child sexual abuse and Mongolia on commercial sexual exploitation of children) and awareness-raising campaigns in schools (such as Bhutan’s School-based Parents Education and Awareness Programme against corporal punishment).

Change in behaviour and attitudes related to children’s protection are often not easy to achieve. Experience has shown that change does not readily happen through a simple programme communication initiative; rather, a comprehensive process of and support for social change at multiple levels needs to occur to challenge long-standing and deep-rooted attitudes and practices. In the Pacific, the governments of Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have developed comprehensive, multi-year Communication for Social Change plans addressing child protection concerns, combined with strengthened ways of measuring and documenting positive change over time, including through Most Significant Change stories that serve as a monitoring technique.

Partnerships have also been developed between governments, civil society and print and electronic media to use behaviour change programmes to support the implementing of policy mechanisms, legislation, capacity-building initiatives, services and information-management systems. Such collaborations have primarily targeted specific issues, such as trafficking, sexual exploitation and child labour. There are also numerous examples of the active participation of children in behaviour-change programmes, such as through child rights clubs in communities and schools. In Bangladesh and India, for example, children are actively involved in raising awareness on the harmful practice of early marriage.

6. South-South cooperation – examples and opportunities

South-South cooperation has experienced a growing trend, both globally as well as in the region. However, the main areas of focus of South-South cooperation have been trade, finance and macro economic development, leaving sectors such as child protection largely unexplored territory. This therefore leaves room for exploring opportunities to enhance South-South cooperation in child protection, which should not be limited to transnational challenges, such as trafficking, migration, conflict and natural disasters.

In the Asia-Pacific region, South-South cooperation is most visible within regional groupings, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the South Pacific Forum. The establishment of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children by ASEAN and the SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia are two examples. With regard to child protection, there are a number of South-South cooperation initiatives within regional groupings related to specific issues. This is particularly evident on the issue of child trafficking, most probably because of its cross-border nature:
SAARC Convention on Combating and Prevention of Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution, 2002, which calls for the promotion of “cooperation amongst Member States [emphasis added] so that they may effectively deal with the various aspects of prevention, interdiction and suppression of trafficking in women and children; the repatriation and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking and prevent the use of women and children in international prostitution networks, particularly where the countries of the SAARC region are the countries of origin, transit and destination”.


The Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT), established in 2004 when Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam joined hands in the battle against human trafficking in the Greater Mekong subregion. The COMMIT memorandum of understanding explicitly bases its definition of trafficking on the Palermo Protocol, and the initiative is bound by principles enshrined in human rights documents, such as the CRC.

The Bali Process, established in 2002, brings together participants from over 50 countries in Asia, the Pacific and the Middle East, as well as numerous international agencies, to work on practical measures to combat people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crimes. The Bali Process is co-chaired by the Governments of Australia and Indonesia, with activities approved at the ministerial level and subject to annual review by senior officials.

More recent initiatives are moving beyond the issue of trafficking and present opportunities for cooperation within a broader child protection perspective. The SAARC Regional Strategic Framework on the Protection, Care and Support of Children Affected by HIV/AIDS in South Asia (2007) addresses the protection of children holistically, focusing on access to services, the improvement of policies and legislation, supporting the capacities of families, promoting community-based responses and emphasizing social mobilization.

The South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC), which consists of representatives from the eight South Asian governments, approaches the issue of violence against children from a child protection systems perspective. SAIEVAC has been tasked with monitoring governments’ commitments and follow-up actions regarding ending violence against children and was an outcome of regional consultations for the UN Study on Violence Against Children. The recently established Governing Board will supervise and oversee SAIEVAC’s work and is made up of representatives from all governments in the region, children, the South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Women and Children (SACG)62 as well as civil society. This initiative demonstrates a consolidated effort of different stakeholders, including governments and children, to work together to coordinate, standardize and monitor progress annually and find solutions to end violence against children.63

There are not many examples of South-South cooperation on child protection between countries, and most of them are related to child trafficking, such as the bilateral meetings on the rescue, repatriation, rehabilitation and integration of trafficked children between India and Bangladesh. However, an interesting example of South-South cooperation is the visit in 2008 of the Bhutanese Dratshang Lhentshog’s (National Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs)

---

62 SACG is an interagency group consisting of UN agencies and international NGOs working against violence against children in the South Asian region. It has provided SAIEVAC with technical and financial support. For more information on SAIEVAC see also: www.saievac.info.

63 Save the Children, 2010, Stepping Up Child Protection: An assessment of child protection systems from all countries in South Asia, including reflections from Central Asia. Save the Children Sweden, Regional Office for South and Central Asia, Kathmandu.
Child Protection Experts Committee to Thailand to learn more about the child care and development practices in religious institutions.

While there are a number of positive developments mentioned in section 5 (situational overview) that could be further explored for South-South cooperation, the following are some suggestions to enhance South-South cooperation in the area of child protection:

- **National child protection systems.** Taking into account that child protection systems are context specific, explore the development of a shared model of approaches to child protection and child welfare services that focuses on prevention and encourages the mobilizing of local resources and cultural assets.
- **Indicators for system development.** Develop a set of (common) indicators for child protection system development that can measure outcomes and results for children.
- **Qualified staff.** Enhance inter-country exchange and the sharing of good practices to develop a professional cadre of qualified staff working in child protection and their role in multisector approaches towards preventing and responding to child protection concerns within a systems-based approach. This could also include the mentoring of staff in a less-advanced country by those from a more-advanced country.
- **Inter-sector delivery.** Explore the possibility of establishing a regional forum on inter-country exchange on inter-sector delivery of child protection services across technical disciplines, such as among social welfare, law enforcement, justice, health and education.
- **Data collection.** Support a regional-level assessment on child protection data collection, management, analysis and monitoring to encourage inter-country dialogue on good practices in gathering and using child protection data.
- **Research.** Promote regional qualitative and quantitative research and experimental studies, including through the establishing or strengthening of links between government research institutes and academic institutions, to identify the prevalence of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation; evaluate new and existing practices and approaches; share lessons learned from good and emerging practices and approaches; and support the scaling up of evidence-based programmes that have proven to work to obtain better outcomes for children across the region.
- **Legislation and policy.** Share legislation and policies that have been recognized as in line with the CRC and other relevant international instruments for protecting children, such as CEDAW, as well as good practices in implementing and enforcing them. Provide support to the drafting of such legislation and policies.
- **Participation of children.** Promote participation of children as an integral part of South-South cooperation.
- **Leveraging resources.** Leverage funds and resources both within the region as well as with bilateral and multilateral donors in support of building and strengthening a national child protection system, with a focus on prevention. This is also required to implement the suggestions outlined above.

### 7. Conclusions and recommendations

Since the Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force 20 years ago and its ratification by all countries in the Asia-Pacific region, significant progress has been made in the realizing of children’s rights in the region. Among other positive developments, there have been unprecedented levels of legislative, policy and institutional reform on a broad spectrum of child protection issues, the capacity development of professionals, the establishment of diverse partnerships with the aim to enhance the protection of children among the different actors (government, NGOs, communities and children), awareness
raising about children’s protection rights, culturally appropriate diversion and restorative justice programmes and South-South cooperation, particularly within regional groupings.

However, across the region, vast numbers of children continue to experience the impact of sexual exploitation and abuse, neglect, detention as a first response, the worst forms of child labour, trafficking, corporal punishment, unnecessary institutionalization and violence in their homes, schools and community.

With a focus on child maltreatment, the evidence within this paper clearly challenges the common perception that child protection concerns are primarily a ‘private trouble’ for individual children and their families. The emerging evidence and analysis reinforces the obligations enshrined in the CRC to ensure that all children have the care, protection, assistance and means to achieve their “full potential”, in that if child maltreatment is not prevented then children may be damaged and disadvantaged for life and never realize their inherent potential. Further, the burden of economic, social and development costs arising from the maltreatment of individual children has a direct and substantial negative effect on all other areas of development. Thus, the ‘private troubles’ of children and their families must be acknowledged as ‘public issues’ for society.

The achievements in the area of child protection have mainly come from a concentrated focus on individual protection issues. However, despite these achievements, single issue-based approaches alone cannot support the full realization of children’s rights to protection. The current predominant strategies of resourcing issue-based programmes face common difficulties in terms of: achieving national coverage; a lack of cohesion across sectors and within agencies; conflicting, competing and often duplicate aims; and short-term, small-scale funding allocations. The strategies focus primarily on reactive responses and have little time or no opportunity to evaluate long-term efficacy or to build substantive, knowledge skills and capacity in the workforce and society. In strengthening or building national child protection systems, the available expertise that has been developed from an issue-based approach can be integrated and used within the policies and practices of a national child protection system.

Given the perspective that child protection concerns are not deemed to be ‘core’ to economic growth, existing ministries and departments related to child protection and social welfare are often disenfranchised from mainstream economic and development planning and chronically underfunded – despite serving the most vulnerable and discriminated populations. They are often without sufficient staff or infrastructure to operate effectively at a local level in order to mobilize and establish primary prevention systems and strategies.

Due to ongoing budget restrictions within the different systems and components of a national child protection system, staff members often have to focus on accessing external donor funds to carry out basic service provision; thus, driven by competing donor priorities and interests, which are often limited to specific issues or topics, they experience further limitations on their capacity to undertake the strategic planning, lobbying and advocacy necessary to affect increased political commitment for systematic change that will then promote and fulfill children’s rights to protection. This form of what can be termed as ‘crisis management’ in relation to child protection concerns is compounded by a lack of effective infrastructure to collect accurate evidence on the nature and scale of violence against and abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. It then detracts from the necessary strategic focus to influence political will for resource allocation. The lack of accurate prevalence data and scientific and costed research from the Asian and Pacific context is, in part, at the root of the marginalizing of the protection and welfare sector agencies.

Governments generally encounter significant challenges in determining budget priorities and allocations, particularly in a resource-poor context. As pointed out in this paper’s analysis, although a coherent national child protection system will incur substantial costs, they will be
a minor fraction of the direct and indirect costs currently expended on the repercussions of child rights violations and the subsequent drain on human capacity, societal cohesion and the future generations of children who continue to experience violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Strategies to build and resource other systems within governments have been extremely successful and are perceived as essential investments, as demonstrated by investment in health and education provision. Despite the positive developments summarized in this paper, enormous gaps continue to exist between international standards for child protection rights and political commitments, national laws and policies and what children experience on a day-to-day basis. To plan for and ensure that the resources that are available are used to maximum efficiency and effectiveness, the following suggestions should be pursued:

- **Strengthen baseline data:** There needs to be reliable evidence of the scale and nature of the problems confronting children and their families. This requires both qualitative research as well as the gathering of statistically valid, population-based data to inform national and local planning and budgeting.

- **Develop core monitoring indicators:** There needs to be consistent monitoring over time to determine whether the system components are ‘fit for purpose’, whether the child protection system is having the intended impact, which strategies or services achieve the greatest impact and whether the same or better results could be achieved more cost-effectively.

- **Build a rigorous evidence base:** Evidence-based child protection strategies, policies and programming require systematic documentation, monitoring, analysis and review to channel lessons learned and good practices into subsequent policy and programming processes. Coherent and standardized data collection, analysis, monitoring and evaluation tools across all elements of a national child protection system will contribute to more appropriate strategic planning, implementation, resourcing and delivery and, ultimately, benefits for children.

- **Build and strengthen a national child protection system:** Investment in other systems, such as a health system and an education system, are widely accepted and understood as essential to national development outcomes, as is government leadership in these areas. Political will and donor commitment need to be mobilized to adopt a similar ‘sector’ approach to child protection, with the aim of harnessing all necessary resources, including skilled human resources, in order to: i) establish prevention strategies, thus reducing protection violations in the first instance, ii) support those families and children who may be at risk and iii) provide the necessary support and interventions for children who are at immediate risk or have suffered significant harm.

The development of coherent, analytical and monitoring processes will take time, but some findings can be used from evidence already established in other countries. Such evidence can be used to raise the knowledge and understanding of governments, their political representatives and donors regarding the long-term implications of child protection violations on societal development and economic stability. Thus, a primary task is to ensure that the ‘private troubles’ for children from the effects of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation are acknowledged as ‘public issues’ and accorded the requisite political will and commitment to ensure a strategy for the prevention of, response to and necessary sanctions against violations of children’s rights to protection.

We cannot wait for the next five-year plan or next year’s budget allocation or a donor round of grant giving – it will be too late for many children, too late to prevent the lifelong damage, fear, pain and despair experienced. Prevention of child maltreatment can no longer be delayed.
Bibliography and references

Documents


Browne, K., 2009, The Risk of Harm to Young Children in Institutional Care, Better Care Network and Save the Children UK, London.


Keeping Children Safe Coalition, 2006, Standards for Child Protection, Tool 1, Keeping Children Safe Coalition, United Kingdom.


Save the Children, 2010, Stepping Up Child Protection: An assessment of child protection systems from all countries in South Asia, including reflections from Central Asia, Save the Children Sweden, Regional Office for South and Central Asia, Kathmandu: Nepal.

Save the Children, 2006, Why Effective National Child Protection Systems are Needed: Save the Children’s key recommendations in response to the UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children, Save the Children.
United Nations Development Programme, 2009, Enhancing South-South and Triangular Cooperation: Study of the current situation and existing good practices in policy, institutions, and operation of South-South and triangular cooperation, Study commissioned by the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, UNDP.


World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010, Preventing Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Against Women: Taking action and generating evidence, World Health Organization, Geneva.


Meetings and workshop
The South Asia Forum for Ending Violence against Children (SAF) organized the third Ministerial Meeting in Kathmandu on 23 June 2010. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the new organizational structure for ‘The South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC)’, future plans for collaboration with SAARC and a work plan to end violence against children. The consultation was hosted by the Nepal Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, current SAF Secretariat, 20-23 June 2010 Kathmandu. The report of the meeting can be found at: www.saievac.info/editor_uploads/File/SAIEVAC%20Report%202010.pdf


UNICEF EAPRO Workshop on Systems Building Approach, 5-6 August 2010, Bangkok.

Statements and CRC Concluding Observations
Governments from the region of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2010, Bangkok Statement on South-to-South Cooperation on Disability.
Senior Officials’ Meeting on South-to-South Cooperation on Disability at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand on 19 and 20 August 2010.


CRC Concluding Observations – East Asia and Pacific Region
Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam

CRC Concluding Observations – South Asia
Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka

Websites
Work Plan of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children’s (SAIEVAC)
SAIEVAC has developed a work plan with specific actions to end violence against children, which was recently endorsed by the ministers and other government delegates from the South Asia countries in the SAIEVAC Ministers Meeting in June, 2010: www.saievac.info

UN Study on Violence Against Children
In 2003, on the request of the General Assembly and by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN Secretary-General appointed Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro as the
independent expert to conduct an in-depth study on violence against children. The study focused on the nature and extent of violence against children in five settings: the home and family, schools and educational settings, care and justice institutions, places of work and the community. The study made recommendations for each of the five settings on which it focused. The study is available at: www.unviolencesstudy.org

**UNICEF Child Protection Strategy**

The UNICEF Child Protection Strategy, adopted by its Executive Board in June 2008, "defines the contribution of UNICEF to national and international efforts to fulfill children’s rights to protection and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals..." The strategy focuses on building and strengthening of a national child protection system and social change. The strategy is available at: www.unicef.org/protection/files/CP_Strategy_English.pdf

**UNICEF data**

UNICEF collects, analyses and publishes data from countries and regions around the world. Three recent publications are:


Further data can also be accessed at www.childinfo.org. Monitoring the Situation of Women and Children, UNICEF.

**Integrated Strategy Against Violence**

The Council of Europe Policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence aim to promote the development and implementation of a holistic national framework to safeguard the rights of the child and to eradicate violence against children. The Strategy is available at: www.coe.int/.../children/.../Guidelines/Recommendation%20CM%20A4%20protection%20of%20children%20

**Other websites**

Better Care Network (BCN)
www.crin.org/bcn/

Childs Rights Information Network (CRIN)
www.crin.org/

IRIN
www.irinnews.org/

International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN)
www.ispcan.org

PreventionWeb, news & articles 2009
www.preventionweb.net

South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children
www.saievac.info
Persons consulted

Jasmina Byrne, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre
John Frederick, independent consultant
Radha Kamath, Save the Children
Zubedy Koteng, UNICEF Indonesia
Rasha Sekulovic, Plan International
Guy Thompstone, Child Frontiers

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to an inter-agency reference group which provided their time, expert advice, feedback and documents: Guy Thompstone of Child Frontiers, Rasha Sekulovic of Plan International, Asia Regional Office, Tamara Tutrijevic Gorman of World Vision International, Asia Pacific Regional Office, Dominique Pierre Plateau of Save the Children – Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Radha Kamath of Save the Children – Regional Office for South and Central Asia, and Patrizia Benvenuti of UNICEF Nepal. Additionally, we would like to thank staff in UNICEF EAPRO and ROSA as well as Country Offices who provided feedback to several drafts.

Any errors remain the authors’ own.