Alternative Childcare

Fast Facts

- Children living on the streets in Addis Ababa: 10,706
- Children in residential care: 9,000
- Proportion of child ppn/national ppn: 52 per cent
- UNCRC: Ratified
- ACRWC: Ratified
- Optional Protocols on Inter-Country Adoptions: Not Ratified

Issue

Ethiopia is estimated to have a population of over 88 million (CSA 2007 census extrapolated to 2014) of which more than 52 per cent is under the age of 18. The population is primarily rural with 82 per cent of the country residing in rural areas. Ethiopia has extensive levels of poverty and ranks 173rd out of 187 in the 2012 Human Development Index.

In Ethiopia, there is a growing number of children without parental care. However, the country has not yet established a formal system of community/family-based alternative care. The protection of children without adequate parental care is crucial to their survival, health, and wellbeing. Without a system of safeguards thousands of children are at risk of exploitation, abused and violence. It is suspected that sexual exploitation, abuse and child trafficking in Ethiopia is not decreasing, but reliable statistics are lacking.

In 2010 the Addis Ababa BOWCYA worked with Street Invest London to conduct a head count of street children and counted 10,706 children living in Addis Ababa’s streets. The majority of these street children (67 per cent) were boys above the age of 6.

Around 9,000 children are living in child-care institutions. Research has shown that institutions are poor environments for children, lacking the personal attention required to help them develop properly. Institutions are particularly damaging to the health of infants and young children, who may even develop disabilities due to lack of social and intellectual stimulation. Without proper care, these children are also vulnerable to neglect and abuse. Around 3,450 children were placed in inter-country adoption in 2011 alone, which reflects a gradual decrease since 2009. The reliance on inter-country adoptions is worrying, as Ethiopia has not ratified the Optional Protocols to the UN CRC or Hague Convention on Inter country Adoption (1993) and there is a lack of safeguards in the unregulated system. Recent reforms, encouraged by UNICEF, are promoting local community/family-based alternatives for these children, including kinship care, domestic adoption, foster care, guardianship arrangements and small group homes with family-like environments.

National Strategy

The Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA) is currently leading efforts to strengthen alternative care in Ethiopia. At the policy level these reforms are geared at addressing some of the systemic and institutional loopholes in the practice of ICA. The ministry is also steering the development of community-based alternative care services.

See also http://www.unicef.org/crc/
for children without adequate parental care, and the development of Alternative Care Regulations and Service Standards to improve accountability of service providers, as well as the quality and effectiveness of alternative child care service provision.

As stated above, Ethiopia has not yet signed and acceded to the Hague Convention on ICA yet. As an initial step towards building a ‘Hague friendly’ or Hague aligned system, the GOE is preparing to conduct a Country Assessment to review the situation of inter-country adoption, and map out major areas of reform. These will include: (1) revision and adoption of necessary laws, (2) development of service and accreditation standards, and (3) establishment of an independent central authority to oversee alternative child care programs and processes including those for inter-country adoption.

Alternative Care Regulations will be drafted in accordance with the domestic legal framework and the mandate bestowed to the MoWCYA as per the enabling statute of the Ministry. They will be designed in such a way that establishment and operation of alternative child care programs is managed in a transparent, accountable and standardized manner. The Service Standards will be comprehensive and detailed enough to address specific technical issues and processes involved in the continuum of child care. They will cover technical procedures to be adhered to, including but not limited to minimum standards relating to eligibility, recruitment, placement, assessment, training, matching, supporting, supervision, and monitoring and reporting of alternative care services.

The above described reform efforts are strongly inter-linked and must be developed in close coordination with each other. This coordination will be ensured by the MoWCYA. It is expected that the Country Assessment and the Alternative Care regulations development will commence soon. In the meantime other interventions are already underway to set up an alternative care data management system, to prevent family separation and child abandonment by strengthening community care structures, and ensure the deinstitutionalization, family tracing and reunification of children. The MoWCYA is assisting its regional bureaus to assess the quality of care in child care institutions, close institutions that do not meet minimum standards, de-institutionalize children in the institutions which are being closed, expand family-based alternative care options, and conduct communication activities such as radio programmes to inform the public of the alternative care continuum and the importance of family-based alternative care options. And in collaboration with other sectors, programme efforts are made to develop a child-focused social welfare system which includes strengthening of child-friendly justice systems and processes and establishment of a social welfare workforce to coordinate services for children without adequate parental care.

Guiding Standards & Legislation

Ethiopia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). The country is also a signatory to the African Union Social Policy Framework which has informed the development of a draft National Social Protection Policy (currently draft and submitted to the Council of Ministers for endorsement). The new Social Protection Policy reflects a major transformation in the way Ethiopian society cares for its most vulnerable, including children. As stated under the Social Protection Policy’s Focus Area Four, the aim is to protect and care for those that lack the capacity to protect their rights before the law, specifically children, women, the elderly, and the disabled.

The Revised Family Code (RFC) of Ethiopia (2005) provides the framework for governance of both domestic and inter-country adoptions. The RFC captures a number of important issues including but not limited to: rights and responsibilities of parties in adoption proceedings, role of the court and other government and non-government actors, and guideline principles on the placement of children into domestic or inter-country adoption. However, the Revised
Family Code barely addresses other forms of alternative child care, other than adoption, and even the provisions on adoption, do not fully align to international and regional standards.

The National Alternative Child Care Guideline (2009) is the sole instrument that sets minimum standards on alternative child care services. It calls for government to prevent unnecessary separation of children from their families by strengthening social services and social welfare and alternative care responses within the country. The national guidelines acknowledge that some residential care will be needed for some children. However, the emphasis and priority is on developing and supporting family-based care alternatives. The guideline particularly addresses the management and operation of alternative child care options including community-based child care, reunification and reintegration programs, foster care, adoption and institutional care. It sets minimum standards pertaining to issues of eligibility, recruitment, placement, assessment, and training, matching, and monitoring and reporting. The Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA) is entrusted with the responsibility to oversee the enforcement of the Alternative Child Care Guideline at national level. However, the guideline does not effectively respond to the growing demand for comprehensive standards and tools to ensure quality and standards of alternative care services. As a ‘guideline’ it lacks the legal authority to serve as a regulation with force of law to ensure adherence to the guideline and accountability of care givers.

UNICEF’s contribution

The UNICEF vision and approach is to create a protective environment, where girls and boys are free from violence and exploitation, where laws and practices minimize children’s vulnerability and address known risk factors, and where children themselves are equipped to build their own resilience.

The contribution of UNICEF’s efforts to government of Ethiopia through its Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, regional bureaus, Federal First Instance Court, parliament and other relevant institutions, including community based organizations in its child care reform process include the following:

1. UNICEF is a key partner of the Ethiopian Government in matters pertaining to child protection policy and intervention development. The Government of Ethiopia has requested technical assistance from UNICEF to take initial steps at building a ‘Hague friendly’ system which include - conduct country assessment that will inform the establishment of an independent central authority in line with the Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption reform processes that will include accession to the Hague will require strong advocacy yet but want to get the system in place including new accreditation standards and procedures for agencies and child care institution. In addition, UNICEF provided technical assistance to the ministry of women, children and youth affairs in the developing accreditation tools for child care institutions and in addition currently supporting government to develop regulations, service standards and tools on the appropriate use of alternative child care. UNICEF provided technical and financial support to the National Social Protection Platform led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and Ministry of Agriculture to finalize the National Social Protection Policy of Ethiopia, conduct a validation meeting with key federal and regional stakeholders, and incorporate the feedback received from stakeholders during the validation meeting into the final draft Policy. The Policy will be the main reference document to guide the social protection regulatory framework and implementation of interventions. Ongoing support is being provided for the development of a National Social Protection Strategy.

UNICEF has drafted a bench book on ICA procedures for best practices for each step of the adoption process. This is informed consent, role of the child in providing their opinion
according to evolving capacities and Ethiopian law, the subsidiarity principle and best interest determination.

2. Strengthening care system including the development of a cadre of social welfare workforce at community level. There are increasing programme efforts by UNICEF and the government of Ethiopia to develop a child-focused social welfare system looking at strengthening the child-friendly justice work nationwide, developing the continuum of care including standards, referral networks and service delivery, establishing and strengthening the social welfare workforce. It has been apparent that the establishment of an efficient, child sensitive social welfare workforce to work at the community level is necessary and urgent. UNICEF is continually supporting the Ministry of labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education to increase professional capacity, with specific focus on social work, within key national-level structures mandated with children. Through provision of technical assistance and training, these government structures will lead the development of a core group of professionals and para-professionals with knowledge, skills and tools necessary to oversee a child-sensitive social welfare system, improve service delivery, and collaboration with key actors involved in child welfare responses at regional and local levels.

3. Strengthening community based child protection systems- UNICEF Ethiopia is engaged in supporting the government to find family based solutions for over 10,000 children without parental and adequate care. To support this effort, the Government of Ethiopia has requested technical assistance from UNICEF to support national and regional level GOE institutions to support assessment of existing child care institutions, assessment of the children in these institutions, family tracing and reintegration and development of kinship, foster care, domestic legal adoption, supervised independent living as a family-based option for the children that do not have family options available.

4. UNICEF in coordination with MoWCYA is working towards the establishment of a national alternative care management information system that better tracks children within the continuum of care system and service delivery to vulnerable children and other information necessary to help inform policy and social welfare programming responses. This data system in now functional in five regions and will soon be established nationwide and MOWCYA will host this data depository system.

5. Improving coordination structures and building partnerships to improve service delivery, information sharing through the Ethio Alternative Care Network. UNICEF in collaboration with other stakeholders such OAK Foundation continues to support such structures both at federal and regional level.

**Partnership Analysis**

UNICEF works closely with other key partners engaged for the development of a child-friendly social protection system in Ethiopia. These partners include USAID, PACT, the Hague Secretariat responsible for the Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry adoption, International Social Services-Geneva, the Better Care Network, and partners on the National Social Protection Platform such as the World Bank and Save the Children.