THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION

A strong, comprehensive child protection system is the first step to prevent and respond to violence and exploitation against children and women and improving safeguards for all vulnerable children.

CHILD PROTECTION

Child Protection is a component of the UNICEF Ethiopia country programme that is contributing to the efforts of the government of Ethiopia to build and strengthen child protection systems, including the empowerment of youth and reducing the HIV incidence amongst the most at risk adolescents. UNICEF Ethiopia supports interventions that prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse against children.

ISSUE

Based on Ethiopia’s population of 73.9 million (CSA 207) Ethiopia’s children (age 0-19: 41.9 million) make up 56.6 per cent of the population whilst young people (ages 15-29: 20.8 million) are about 28.1 per cent of Ethiopia’s population. Although there is no breakdown available, it is estimated that the 2012 population is 84.3 million (CSA 2011).

The protection of children is crucial to their survival, health, and wellbeing. Unfortunately, millions of children are exploited, abused and are victims of violence. There is no standardised birth registration system in the country, making children that do not have an official identity vulnerable to neglect, abuse and trafficking. In Ethiopia, more than 90 per cent of children remain unregistered.

A survey by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Central Statistics Agency and the ILO showed that about 84 per cent of the country’s children are engaged in activities that may be regarded as child labour. The survey found that 52 per cent of children are involved in productive activities, more than 80 per cent of whom (12.6 million) below the age of 15 and 90 per cent of them coming from rural areas.

The overall number of children living on or off the street in the capital, Addis Ababa is around 12,000.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs estimated that 90,000 females were involved in commercial sex work, approximately 20 per cent of whom were aged between 12 and 18 years. The commercial sexual exploitation of children appears to be increasing in urban centres.

The International Office of Migration estimates that at least 1.2 million children are victims of trafficking in Ethiopia every year. Research also indicates that over a quarter of nearly 50,000 women and children involved in prostitution are victims of trafficking.

HIV prevalence in Ethiopia is one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. National prevalence is estimated to be 1.5 per cent (4.2 urban and 0.6 rural). HIV is most prevalent in women aged 15 to 24. While the epidemic appears to have stabilized in larger urban centres, smaller towns are now hotspots for transmission. This is largely due to the fast-improving road network.

Children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia are at greater risk of exploitation, abuse and neglect, and are therefore in need of special protection. School attendance for orphans aged 10–14 is 34 per cent.
With over-reliance on institutional care and inter-country adoption to provide alternative care services for children without parental and adequate care, over 12,000 children find themselves in child-care institutions. These children are exposed to physical violence and often have psychological problems. From 2008 to 2012, Ethiopia sent over 26,100 children for international adoption. The number of inter-country adoptions has raised concerns about the best interests of the child in these cases and due diligence, where Ethiopia has not ratified the Hague Convention on Inter country Adoption and there very limited safeguards in an unregulated system.

UNICEF remains committed to supporting the Government of Ethiopia to expand the full range of family-based alternative child care options for children without parental care and to ensure that the highest standards of the public sector response in the endeavour are maintained.


Children in conflict with the law find themselves imprisoned with adult inmates, although efforts are being made to divert them from the criminal justice system into child-friendly rehabilitation programmes.

The Ethiopian Constitution took into account the recommendations of a study group on ‘Enabling Communities to Abandon Harmful Traditional Practices’, and devoted a separate chapter to various harmful practices in Articles 561 to 570. This legislative measure against the violations of women’s and girls’ rights during such practices as female genital mutilation played a key role in the success of several prevention measures.

Ethiopia’s high vulnerability to both natural and man-made hazards may adversely affect investments in poverty reduction and food security if these risks are not managed adequately. Among the chief hazards Ethiopia faces are drought, flooding, disease outbreaks and inter-communal conflict. The country is also a major destination for refugees fleeing conflict, poverty and disaster in neighbouring countries. Too often, the host communities in Ethiopia that provide the principal support to refugees are already among the most vulnerable.

**Disaster Risk Reduction** In line with its Core Corporate Commitments, UNICEF aligned its contributions to disaster risk reduction, response and recovery with the Government’s approach. In addition to supporting emergency response and recovery for disaster-affected Ethiopians, UNICEF strengthened national disaster risk management strategies and institutions at the federal, regional and lower levels of government, and assisted with risk profiling, early warning, preparedness planning and community-based risk reduction and natural resource management. Disaster risk management is the UN’s single biggest area of investment in Ethiopia. Included in efforts to provide child protection services to refugee children are family tracing and reunification, community alternative care support, psychosocial support and strengthening 55 community care structures in four regions.

**NATIONAL STRATEGIES**

Ethiopia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and one of its three Optional Protocols that deals with the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The country is also a signatory to the African Union Social Policy Framework articulating the requirement to develop a national social protection plan. The draft social protection policy, when implemented, will represent a major transformation in the way Ethiopian society cares for its most vulnerable, including children.

The Tigray regional government, with the support of UNICEF and other partners, is moving ahead with innovative social protection initiatives. The region launched a pilot community based social cash transfer pilot programme targeting an estimated 3,400 vulnerable households in two woredas that are without labour and using Community Care Coalitions (CCCs) as an entry point. The CCCs are community-based committees providing social welfare/social protection support to vulnerable children, women and the elderly. They bring together different individuals, groups and associations to mobilise community resources in order to support poor households.
Meanwhile, a new approach to Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Policy is developed and it seeks to address issues such as government capacity; coordination and cooperation among development partners and among government branches, and the lack of a coherent, comprehensive approach to DRM.

ACHIEVING THE MDGS: PRIORITY INTERVENTIONS

In 2012, UNICEF ushered in its new Country Programme (2012-2015). The Programme will focus on reaching the MDGs and national targets, with an emphasis on reaching marginalized communities, including those in pastoralist and agro-pastoralist areas.

MDG 6 aims to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. While Disaster Risk Reduction is not explicitly linked to the MDGs in its operation, it would be even more difficult to achieve progress in poverty reduction unless the impact of disasters is reduced.

UNICEF will support programmes related to: (i) HIV prevention and care; (ii) child-focused social welfare system development; (iii) national social protection system development; and (iv) disaster risk reduction and respond to emergencies in Ethiopia.

UNICEF’S CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL POLICIES THROUGH ADVOCACY

Against a backdrop of increasingly diverse and complex partnerships, UNICEF continues to perform an important convening role in the areas of protective environment and disaster risk reduction.

The legislation on Registration of Vital Events containing provisions covering the establishment of various Federal and Regional structures at all levels for conducting an effective birth registration process throughout the country has been enacted by the parliament in June 2012. UNICEF is advocating for preliminary steps in the registration process beginning with the development of a national strategy and plan of action governing the implementation of the proclamation. Specific interventions aimed at building the technical and institutional capacity of the responsible federal and regional government bodies, development of model certificates, guidelines and tools, and setting up data management system on birth registration are parts of the programmatic engagements on the subject. Creation of strong linkages for birth registration, in particular with health extension workers and social workers, is also promoted.

UNICEF supports federal and regional governments to establish and expand child-friendly justice systems and restorative justice mechanisms for all children who are in contact with the law, whether they are victims, witnesses or offenders. The support provided for the strengthening of the national legal aid system and promotion of programs on diversion and alternatives to detentions are newly emerging intervention areas.

It is expected that the demand for UNICEF to play a leadership role in these and other key child protection issues, such as alternative care and justice for children, will only increase in the coming years.
Strategic partnerships in Child Protection

- UNICEF strengthened its relationship with the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, working on a number of child rights issues including supporting finalization of the 4th and 5th CRC Reports and the development of family based alternative care options.

- UNICEF has also supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in the development of the Social Protection Policy and social welfare systems.

- UNICEF works with the Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit (ENCU) in the Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Sector (DRMFSS) in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to strengthen national capacity to prepare for, respond to and mitigate the impact of natural disasters.

Lifting burdens from weak shoulders

For a child to lose a parent is painful enough. But when it leads to exploitation and a fight for food and survival, protection is critical.

Community care structures or groups are at the forefront of efforts to address social protection and social welfare issues in many parts of Ethiopia. The mobilization and strengthening of such grassroots structures has become a reflexive programming response in many settings, particularly in low resource areas. These structures are a vital means of mobilizing community based efforts around the social welfare provision of basic and essential services such as food and health care of its members that are poor and destitute and have “slipped” through the safety net of the extended family. These structures work alongside with local Kebele /Tabia (sub district or administrative division) administrative structure and social welfare extension workforce to plan, identify, prevent, and respond better to significant social protection risks, mobilize resources and communities around wellbeing issues, monitor child protection concerns and provide a base of local support and action to reduce the abuse and exploitation of children in their communities.