Including Children

The principles of universality and non-discrimination must govern our interventions for children

A human rights-based approach to development demands that every effort be made to reach all children without exception. The principle of universality, the foundation of all human rights treaties, and the related principle of non-discrimination (on the basis of race, colour, gender, language, opinion, origin, disability, birth or any other characteristic) as expressed in Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, must apply to all actions to support, protect and care for children.

How can we reach the children who are the most vulnerable to ensure their inclusion in essential services and protect them from harm, exploitation, abuse and neglect? How can we ensure that we will know enough about them to guarantee their rights?

A ‘business as usual’ approach will never reach excluded and invisible children

The first answer is that they will never be reached through a ‘business as usual’ approach. Routine development initiatives pitched at the general population, aiming to include as many children as possible, risk failing to reach excluded and invisible children. Understanding their plight and the factors behind their marginalization, and then targeting initiatives towards these children, must therefore form an integral part of national strategies on child rights and development.

The root causes of exclusion and the factors making children invisible must be directly addressed. Even well funded, well targeted initiatives for disadvantaged families and children risk failure if the overall conditions that foster poverty, armed conflict, weak governance, the uncontrolled spread of HIV/AIDS, inequalities and discrimination are not addressed.

All elements of society must recommit to their responsibilities to children, including the creation of a strong protective environment.

ACTION: Governments bear the primary responsibility for reaching out to excluded and invisible children and need to step up their efforts in four key areas:

- Research: Strong research is essential to effective programming, but reliable data on these children is currently in short supply.
- Financing and capacity-building: Legislation and research on excluded and invisible children must be complemented by child-focused budgets and institution-building.
- Programmes: Service reform to remove entry barriers to essential services for excluded children is urgently required in many countries and communities. Packaging services can increase access, as can the use of satellite and mobile services for children in remote or deprived locations.

Other actors also have a role to play. Donors and international organizations must create an enabling environment through bold and well conceived policies on aid, trade and debt relief. Civil society must acknowledge its responsibilities to children and be part of the solution. The private sector must adopt ethical corporate practices that ensure that children are never exploited. The media can become a vehicle for empowerment by providing people with accurate information and by challenging attitudes, prejudices and practices that harm children. Finally, children themselves can play an active part in their own protection and that of their peers.
Second, the root causes of exclusion and the main factors that contribute to making children invisible must be tackled. Eradicating extreme poverty, combating HIV/AIDS, promoting conflict resolution, providing special assistance to and protection for children caught up in conflict, maintaining assistance to children in fragile States, and addressing discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, gender or disability would go a long way towards eliminating the background conditions that foster exclusion and invisibility.

The final requirement is that all duty bearers recommit to ensuring that no child is excluded and that all children are protected and made visible. The primary duty will inevitably fall upon national governments, since they bear the statutory responsibility for providing for and protecting their citizens. But all sectors of global society and national constituencies also have a part to play. Donors and international organizations must create an enabling environment through equitable policies on aid, development, debt relief and trade aimed at including the most impoverished and excluded countries, communities and groups. Civil society, in all its diversity, must acknowledge its responsibilities to children and be part of the solution. The private sector must become a partner for human development by adopting responsible corporate practices and by ensuring that its actions do not harm or exploit children. The media must aid in empowering people by providing accurate information on the exclusion and invisibility experienced by children, and by scrutinizing and challenging behaviours and attitudes, prejudices and practices that harm them. Finally, children themselves should be able to play an active part in their own protection and empowerment - and that of their peers.

Research

Strong research is essential to effective programming

An assessment of capacities, vulnerabilities and needs is the first step in formulating appropriate responses targeted at reaching excluded and invisible children. However, reliable data on excluded and invisible children are usually in short supply, often because of significant practical difficulties for data collection. This inevitably complicates the development of evidence-based interventions.

Detailed situation analyses of the plight of these children, and its root and proximate causes, are vital complements to statistical
Statistical tools for monitoring the Millennium agenda for children

Measuring impact and progress is crucial to ensure that programmes and policies lead to the desired effects on the ground. By supplementing official national data, household surveys provide nationally representative information on the status of individual women and children, allowing for monitoring across a range of social stratifiers. As a result, international organizations, researchers and national governments often use household surveys such as the Demographic and Health Surveys - which gather information through questionnaires that can take from half an hour to an hour to administer. One household survey tool, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), was originally developed to measure progress towards the goals that emerged from the 1990 World Summit for Children. The first round of MICS was conducted around 1995 in more than 60 countries, with a second round of surveys five years later.

A third round of MICS was conducted in more than 50 countries during the year 2005. MICS-3 has collected information on some 20 of the 48 MDG indicators, offering the largest single source of data for MDG monitoring. In addition, the current round of MICS is also providing a monitoring tool for ‘A World Fit for Children’ compact, as well as for other major international commitments such as the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS and the Abuja targets for malaria.

Questionnaires
Household surveys are based on questionnaires that can be easily customized to the needs of a country. For example, the MICS consists of a household questionnaire, a questionnaire for women aged 15-49, and a questionnaire for children under the age of five (to be completed by the mother or other caregivers). The surveys contain many questions and indicators directly related to the causes and implications of a child being excluded or invisible, including birth registration, orphaned and vulnerable children, child disability, age of marriage and questions related to health, education, shelter, water and sanitation, HIV/AIDS and early child development. Each survey takes around an hour to complete, depending on whether optional modules are included, and the responses from each household provide crucial information for planners, programmers and policy makers.

Survey results
Results from the surveys, including national reports, standard sets of tabulations and micro level data sets, will all be made widely available after completion and collation. Survey results for most countries are expected to be completed by early 2006 and will be made available through DevInfo, a statistical database designed to monitor progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. DevInfo facilitates the presentation of data in tables, charts and maps to illuminate where disparities exist, making visible the factors of exclusion and the existence of those who might otherwise go unseen. Data can be accessed at the local level to improve the capacities of local authorities and civil society organizations to assess the situation of children, or databases can be compiled regionally or globally to allow for cross-country comparisons.

Mapping data trends geographically is an immensely useful tool for visualizing disparities across geographical regions. For example, a map can demonstrate the differences between the number of children registered in the capital city compared to the province in which it sits, or the number of girls in school across several provinces, indicating clearly where further efforts are required. Combining data collection, analysis and mapping technology allows researchers to create an evidence base for programmers to use in implementing the most efficient and effective programmes and ensuring that those most in need are identified.

See References, page 93.
often the first step towards gathering comparable data and information in areas where systematic research is in early stages. For example, the consensus around the Palermo Protocol definition of trafficking in 2000 provides a consistent basis for researchers, policymakers, legislators and programme developers across different contexts.¹

Census and household surveys can be immensely useful in identifying factors that increase the risk of exclusion

The results of censuses or nationally representative household surveys such as the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) are being employed by governments and international agencies to construct a clearer picture of how disparities within countries affect children’s quality of life. Statistical tools, such as multivariate analysis, can help uncover significant contributing elements to a particular material deprivation or protection violation such as non-registration at birth. They are increasingly used to identify factors that make some children vulnerable to exclusion and invisibility, and to pinpoint where interventions might be most effective. These analyses have shown, for example, that lack of education, particularly at the secondary level, plays a significant role in whether a girl will be married before 18, and whether, as a mother, her own children will attend school.²

While household surveys are immensely useful tools, they are limited in that some of the most excluded and invisible children and families will be left out – for example, nomadic tribes that have no formal abode, children living outside a household and internally displaced people. Despite these limitations, surveys can illuminate key risk factors that make a child particularly prone to exclusion from essential services. Survey designs should be continually strengthened to ensure that their coverage is as broad and inclusive as possible.

Using household survey data in tandem with qualitative information on the state and condition of children’s lives will provide a more complete picture of exclusion in particular. Quantitative analyses often point to issues or geographical areas where more detailed and qualitative investigation is required. In this regard, pilot studies with small groups of excluded or invisible children and community-led surveys and consultations can make a valuable contribution to understanding the plight of the children hardest to reach.

Many gaps in data gathering and qualitative analysis remain that must be urgently addressed. Key examples include child trafficking, child labour and children caught up in conflict.

• Child trafficking: In the field of child trafficking, there is no single research methodology that is universally applicable and reliable, although the action against trafficking formulated by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) specifically includes expanded efforts to collect and share data.³

• Child labour: The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) of the International Labour Organization has successfully used rapid assessments to gain local snapshots, but these are not easily comparable across locations. In practice, information is gathered from multiple sources, and programmes tend to be quite small.⁴

• Children caught up in conflict: There has been a high pitch of international concern about child soldiers and other children caught up in conflict since the landmark UN report on the subject by Graça Machel in 1996.⁵ But firm estimates on the number of child soldiers have been difficult to obtain. The latest approximations, announced in a statement from the then UN’s Special Representative on Children in Armed Conflict, Olara Otunnu, to the UN Security Council Meeting on Children and Armed Conflict held in February 2005, suggest that over 250,000 children are currently serving as child soldiers.⁶

Lack of firm quantitative data is not an excuse for inaction by policymakers

While data collection and analysis are certainly important, it is also imperative to
take judicious action based on human rights principles in areas where quantitative data is still lacking. The absence of an updated estimate of the number of children involved in armed conflict, for example, is not a reason to delay programme development and expansion of capacity to address the known needs of those children, or for governments not to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Efforts must proceed on simultaneous tracks, both to learn more about children who are excluded or less visible through quantitative research and through further and more detailed qualitative assessments of their situation and circumstances.

Enforcement, monitoring, evaluation and follow-up are also vital to ensure that legislative, programmatic and budgetary efforts effectively reach those they seek to benefit. Given the current dearth of knowledge on how to provide access to quality essential services for the most excluded and invisible children and their families, it is important that any lessons learned from experience be scrupulously evaluated and documented. And because most strategies to reach such groups require special efforts over and above the norm, they require rigorous monitoring to ensure that the target group is being reached.

**Legislation**

**National laws must match international commitments for children**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child commits governments to guaranteeing the rights of all children. Ratification of this international convention, its Optional Protocols and other international legislation that protect the rights of children and women means little, however, unless their principles are enshrined in national law. This process of reforming national legislation to meet the standards established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been important in making more children visible.
In Latin America, for example, ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has involved changing the prevailing legal doctrine of ‘irregular situation’, which was codified in legislation enacted across the continent in the 1920s and 1930s. Under this system, children could be accused of ‘antisocial behaviour’ or criminalized simply for having no material resources, and then be deprived of their liberty by a judge ‘for their own protection’. The doctrine was clearly incompatible with the principles of universality and non-discrimination that undergird the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Legislative reform was initiated to eliminate this legal approach towards children. These changes are still in progress and have potentially profound implications for juvenile justice and social protection, and for keeping children visible.

In 2003, the Philippines adopted an act against trafficking in persons that incorporates into domestic law the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The law imposes higher sanctions for trafficking in children and includes provisions related to the rights of victims of trafficking by requiring the Government to make available appropriate social services for their recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Legislation that entrenches or fosters discrimination must be altered or abolished

Many national laws exist that entrench and encourage exclusion. Among these are laws determining the legal age of marriage. In keeping with the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an increasing number of national laws fix the minimum age for marriage at 18 – a threshold also suggested by both the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Yet the majority of nation states – including many industrialized countries – allow marriage at younger ages. Particularly discriminatory are national laws that enshrine a younger marriageable age for girls than for boys.

In other cases, new legislation is required to ensure that the rights of boys and girls are fulfilled. For example, at the end of 2004, Bangladesh passed the Births and Deaths Registration Act, marking the first time the country had recognized birth certificates as legal proof of age. As only 7 per cent of children in Bangladesh are registered at birth, the change in law must be accompanied by capacity building, social mobilization and budgetary allocation to finance the registration of children if the law is to have the intended effect. The benefits of the legislation will facilitate the implementation of other laws requiring proof of age, such as issuance of passports, registration of marriage and the preparation of voters’ lists. In addition, to ensure that the new legislation has positive outcomes for children, there is also the need to review other legislation – such as on education, marriage and labour laws – to guarantee compatibility.

Changing legislation is vital if entrenched prejudices are to be challenged

Positive examples from around the world show how legislation can improve the position of disadvantaged children and adults. Legislation on the rights of physically disabled people in industrialized countries, for example, has in recent years transformed their access to many public buildings and resulted in a more inclusive approach by schools. Antidiscrimination legislation enhances the rights of women and children. But enacting a law against discrimination – whatever the basis – is only a beginning, a necessary prerequisite that requires consolidation through rigorous monitoring, enforcement and active campaigning on behalf of the communities suffering the discrimination.

Traditional practices, although not entrenched in law, can also harm children and need to be addressed at the national level through legislation. Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is one such practice. In countries where FGM/C persists, where governments have taken a strong lead, running public education campaigns and pointing out the
INCLUDING CHILDREN

appalling health risks involved, the incidence has been reduced – though, again, legislative direction from the top must be supported by active promotion by civil society and echoed by grassroots support.

The very strong lead taken by the Government of Burkina Faso over a 13-year period, for example, seems now to be making a difference. Burkina Faso started major public education campaigning against the practice in the mid-1990s and then formally outlawed FGM/C in 1996. Before the practice was outlawed, around two thirds of girls were being mutilated. The law stipulates that anyone performing FGM/C risks a prison term of up to three years, which can rise to 10 years if the victim dies of the procedure. A national telephone hotline that people can phone anonymously to report violations or when a girl is threatened with being cut was established. Strong advocacy and a clear legislative lead has succeeded in reducing the incidence of cutting of girls to 32 per cent, according to the latest UNICEF estimates.9

Domestic law reform, though necessary, needs to be supported by social policies, institutional changes and budget allocation to be truly effective in reaching excluded and invisible children. Changing legislation does not conclude the legal reform process, and attention must be paid to ensure that the institutions and capacity for implementation are established. Duty bearers must be made aware of the law, people should know their rights, and the mechanisms to implement and enforce them need to be established.

Financing

Legislation and research must be supported by budgetary allocations, institution building and reform

Stronger legislation and better and more extensive research on excluded and invisible children will mean little if the financial resources to implement and enforce new laws and policies are not forthcoming or inadequate to fulfil commitments to these children. Few countries currently incorporate a children’s rights perspective into their budgetary processes – and few donors demand it when working with countries on poverty-reduction strategies or similar policy frameworks. Financing deficiencies may be the result of constraints on the overall resources available, lack of information and knowledge about demands for financial resources, practical obstacles in the budget process or lack of political will. In Zambia, for example, although the share of the national budget apportioned to children increased steadily in the decade preceding 2001, the percentage of these funds that was actually spent declined (see Figure 4.2) – suggesting a lack of capacity to implement programmes for children. Children, who lack a political voice, have limited ability to bring pressures to bear on national budgetary processes.

Child-focused budgets draw growing interest across the world

On a more optimistic note, there is growing worldwide interest in child-focused budgets. In most cases, this does not imply a children’s budget separate from the main financial programme outlined by a government. Instead, it entails detailed and expert analysis of mainstream budget measures in order
Monitoring the effectiveness of budgets in meeting children’s rights in South Africa

While monitoring government budgets is a relatively new area, experience is already showing how such analysis can uncover whether sufficient resources are being dedicated to realize children’s rights and if they are being used effectively. One example is in South Africa, where the Children’s Budget Unit of the Institute of Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) - an independent public interest organization committed to promoting sustainable democracy - focuses on conducting research of the government’s budget and disseminating its findings.

In the initial phase of South African democracy, the Children’s Budget Unit (CBU) tracked the government’s ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights of the Child. Since then the focus has shifted to how well the government is realizing these rights. In the first 10 years of democracy in the country, the CBU identified significant progress in South Africa in funding programmes to provide services to vulnerable children, including a child support grant for children up to 14 years old who pass an income-means test; primary school feeding plans to promote child nutrition; a programme to provide free basic health care for young children and pregnant mothers; a means-tested health-care provision for all children; and a programme that identifies and assists children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS.

The CBU also identified key areas where considerable work was needed, such as the underfunding of non-governmental organizations that deliver critical services to vulnerable children; the extension of the child support grant to cover children aged 15-18; the need to make clear the government’s obligation in funding 100 per cent of statutory services; and the development of norms and standards for early childhood development.

The CBU has also assessed the 2005 budget, indicating the areas where it considers progress has been made and those where challenges remain. One positive focus of the budget was that it aims to strengthen economic growth, which the CBU indicates will help children by increasing the incomes of vulnerable families. It also allows for more direct investments in social infrastructure, social services and grants to address poverty and vulnerability at the household level, and additional investments in child-specific social services and grants. Despite these improvements, significant gaps remain. It was far from clear that additional funds allocated in the budget for extending delivery of welfare services are sufficient for addressing the service needs of excluded children and their families. In particular, there was no new funding for non-governmental organizations, which puts increasing pressure on provincial budgets to make up shortfalls, and no mention of extending the child support grant to cover children 14-18 or clarification on the Government of South Africa’s obligation to pay 100 per cent of statutory services for children.

Such analysis is extremely effective in outlining to governments and advocates for children’s rights where further action and financial resources are urgently required. But effective budget analysis requires specialized skills and knowledge. Along with undertaking research on government budgets, the CBU also builds capacity in budget analysis. In partnership with four South African youth organizations, the unit is teaching and assisting young people from all walks of life to build their capacity to monitor local- and provincial-level budgets, empowering South African children to improve their own lives, both now and in the future.

See References, page 93.
geographically excluded, such as the children of the rural Sierra and the jungle. Children living in high-risk situations, on the streets or working in hazardous conditions were also, in effect, invisible to policymakers. The research team therefore designed a methodology for ‘visualizing children’, the starting point of which was not only gathering data effectively but also then processing the indicators. The methodology involved upgrading the use of information technology and training staff in the relevant institutions.11

There is also increasing interest in budget processes that involve children’s participation. One of the best examples of this is the children’s budget in the Brazilian city of Barra Mansa. The city has a children’s participatory budget council of 18 boys and 18 girls who have the task of ensuring that the municipal council addresses children’s needs and priorities. These representatives had previously been elected by their peers in their neighbourhood and district assemblies. This council determines how a proportion of the municipal budget – equivalent to around US$125,000 a year – is spent on addressing children’s priorities, and its child councillors also participate in other aspects of government. The elected children learn how to represent their peers within democratic structures, to prioritize actions based on available resources, and then to develop projects within the complex and often slow political and bureaucratic process of city governance. Other cities in Latin America are being inspired to follow Barra Mansa’s example as its success becomes better known. Among the other cities around the world that are experimenting with participatory budgeting for children are Córdoba in Spain, Essen in Germany and Tuguegarao City in the Philippines.12

Reaching excluded and invisible children will require greater and more targeted financing for services to support them

Including excluded and invisible children is likely to cost more money per child, largely because of the obstacles these children face. Programmes that are more narrowly and specifically targeted, through careful research and project design, are inevitably likely to cost more than general initiatives. It is also costly to expand existing initiatives to meet the particular needs of these children. But the higher unit cost for extending a service to these children is justified on the grounds that they have benefited less than other children from past public expenditures on essential services. This is acknowledged by the Government of Namibia, which concluded that: “Marginalized children are entitled to their share of the educational budget. As they have been denied their educational rights earlier, the additional costs of including them must be accepted.”13

The resources required to reach excluded children may also result from better targeting of public funds towards the priority needs and rights of children, harnessing the same amounts of money but directing them in a more cost-effective way. In South Africa, for example, a costing exercise of the Child Justice Bill projected its impact on various government departments, illustrating how savings generated by implementation of the bill, through reduced costs of legal representation due to decreased numbers of children going to trial, could be reallocated to ensure respect for the rights of children in conflict with the law. The bill expanded the legal mechanisms to avoid detention before trial by redirecting children to programmes that contained an element of restorative justice and increased the range of sentencing options, including alternatives to imprisonment.14

Budget initiatives can also serve to raise public awareness of discrimination. Developing Initiatives for Social and Human Action (DISHA), an Indian organization of tribal and forest workers in Gujarat, studies the codification of sectors, programmes and schemes in the state-level budget and analyses the levels of social expenditures in the poorest areas relative to other areas. The analysis demonstrated that these areas were being neglected, and the findings were disseminated in the local language and distributed to members of the legislature, the press, opposition parties and public-cause advocates. The government was encouraged to address the analysis of socio-economic conditions and expenditures in the tribal areas. The analysis led to increased allocations and expenditures in subsequent budgets.15
Capacity building

Capacity building empowers marginalized children, families and communities

Marginalized groups are often excluded from power within the political system. Removing the obstacles and strengthening their capacity for political participation is, therefore, a requirement for their inclusion.

In Latin America, indigenous peoples are becoming increasingly involved in representing their own interests and defending their rights on the national political stage. Indigenous children and young people are playing an important role in countries like Venezuela, where the Fourth National Meeting of Native American Youth took place in the province of Amazonas in August 2003. The Encuentro involved 62 young people from 17 different indigenous groups who focused on cultural identity, identifying the key aspects of life for each indigenous group, and electing a new board of directors for the National Network of Native American Youth.

Building capacity at the local level is essential to the success of initiatives to further the rights of children. Communities play a significant role in identifying their most vulnerable children - and, where possible, in distributing the goods and services to them. In societies with strong traditional systems of mutual support, as in much of Eastern and Southern Africa, villagers may be able to reach out to orphans and other vulnerable children with relatively little help from outside. In Swaziland, for example, a system of volunteers provides protection, and emotional and material support. They intervene in cases of child exploitation and sexual abuse, provide comfort to victims, consult with relatives and sometimes talk to the abusers or inform the police.16

Programmes

Programmatic interventions are no substitute for addressing the root causes of marginalization and discrimination, or for creating a strong protective environment.
Nevertheless, there are many strategies that facilitate reaching children who are at risk of being excluded or suffering protection violations that must be enacted as interim solutions. These will respond to their immediate needs as well as pave the way for future action to reduce their exclusion in many dimensions.

One of these strategies is providing exemptions and subsidies for marginalized communities and families, including the adjustment of service standards in line with their particular situation. Direct subsidies or stipends to individual children and families have been offered to encourage children to attend school rather than be sent to work. In Brazil, for instance, families are paid a monthly stipend of about US$8 for each child who attends school under the National Programme for the Eradication of Child Labour. School feeding programmes are another method often used to bring hard-to-reach children into the education system.

**Removing entry barriers to essential services will encourage usage**

Reform is often required to remove entry barriers to essential services. These barriers can include the failure to provide services in the local language, prejudice among staff, or the requirements to produce identity cards or proof of address in order to access services. For example, more than 85 per cent of Bolivians living in rural indigenous communities lack the official documentation that would allow them to inherit land, register their children in school or vote. In countries with historical or current repression by the state, marginalized peoples might be reluctant to come into contact with government-related bodies. Lack of knowledge or trust and cultural distance may also prevent people from knowing that a service exists, what its benefits might be, or that it is free or affordable. Removing these barriers can be an effective strategy to reach and include marginalized children and families, as illustrated by the decision of the Government of the Dominican Republic in 2001 to eliminate the requirement for children to produce birth certificates in order to enter school. Social mobilization campaigns to publicize services and their benefits can spread accurate information about the available options.

**Packaging services together increases access**

Another way to make services more user-friendly is to package them, creating a single location where multiple services can be accessed. In southern Sudan, for example, child immunization programmes have been combined with campaigns to vaccinate cattle against rinderpest. This combination was particularly successful as young children typically lived in the cattle camps and the logistics of keeping the two different vaccines cold were similar. In like manner, efforts to make schools the centre of communities by locating water points at schools both decrease the additional distance that girls must travel to get water and can help bring those girls to school.

**Satellite and mobile services provide services to children in remote or deprived geographic locations**

In some places, satellite services may be required as a stopgap measure until comprehensive services can be provided. In Sarawak, Malaysia, remote from the mainland, it is currently too expensive to maintain permanent health clinics. Health care on the island is provided through a combination of outreach and community-based services. Since the road network is poor, mobile health teams usually travel along the rivers or by air in a ‘flying doctor’ service that is complemented by village health assistants who are trained in first aid, health promotion, disease prevention, curative care and community development, with a particular focus on infant and child health. The Government provides incentives in the form of recognition certificates, logistical support and further training opportunities.

Satellite and mobile facilities are often very important in reaching poor families or those living in remote areas, many of whom are currently excluded from essential services. The distance to services is often cited as the reason women give birth at home and children are not registered, taken to the doctor...
The Child Rights Index: Assessing the rights of children in Ecuador and Mexico

In Ecuador and Mexico, national observatories focused on children and adolescents are working to ensure that the rights of children are met in practice. In both countries, the participation of different sectors of civil society has been an essential element in promoting a national consensus aimed at the universal fulfillment of child rights.

In 2001, Ecuador’s Observatorio por los Derechos de la Niñez y Adolescencia (Observatory for the Rights of Children and Adolescents) took the first successful steps towards the establishment of the Child Rights Index, which measures the degree of fulfillment of rights to survival, health, adequate nutrition and an education during every phase in the lives of children and adolescents. The Observatorio recently led an effort to commit local elected authorities to implement actions that would raise the Child Rights Index in their communities.

In Mexico, the Consejo Consultivo de UNICEF Mexico (Advisory Board), composed of prominent citizens from various walks of life including the business community, academia, politics, media and entertainment, has been a key actor in sensitizing public opinion and mobilizing society around the issue of child rights, specifically through the construction and publication of the Child Rights Index. The Advisory Board, in partnership with UNICEF Mexico and the Observatorio Ciudadano de Políticas de Niñez, Adolescencia y Familias (Citizens’ Observatory of Policies on Children, Adolescents and Families), an NGO, set up the index in 2004.

Since the challenges children face in their physical, emotional and intellectual development vary with their age, the Mexican and Ecuadorian indices are sensitive to children’s developmental stages. To account for the changing priorities in the fulfillment of children’s rights, the indices are calculated for three developmental stages – early childhood (0-5), school-aged children (6-12) and adolescents (13-18).

The indices measure the extent to which the country is fulfilling the rights of children and adolescents in survival, health and education, and help reveal where social, economic or cultural barriers prevent the exercise of children’s rights. They measure aspects of the welfare of children that are sensitive to changes in social spending and interventions, and sum-

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### Child Rights Indices in Ecuador and Mexico: Parameters employed to assess survival, health and education in early childhood

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rights</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Policy priorities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The right to survival.</strong></td>
<td>Under-five mortality rate.</td>
<td>Guarantee universal access to maternal and child health care, including prenatal care and care during childbirth.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mortality rate of women from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The right to a healthy and safe development.</strong></td>
<td>Low weight for age.</td>
<td>Guarantee healthy residential environments, including decent housing, safe water and sanitation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mortality due to malnutrition.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The right to intellectual and emotional development and the right to education.</strong></td>
<td>Preschool non-attendance.</td>
<td>Guarantee universal access to early education and stimulation, including information services and support for parents.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mother’s education.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Illiteracy rate in women over age 15.</td>
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*Note:* The table is a compilation of indicators from the Mexican Child Rights Indicator and the Ecuador Rights of Children Indices related to the early childhood period of the life cycle.

*Source:* Child Rights Indices for Ecuador and Mexico.
marize large amounts of information into one single measure to provide a comprehensive view of the situation. After compiling data from various sources, the indices convert all indicators to a scale of 0-10, with 0 representing the worst values of the indices for each indicator and 10 indicating that the right is being fully exercised by all children. A simple average is calculated for each right considered, and the final result is the average of the resulting figures.

The indices in Ecuador and Mexico provide a tool for society to measure and track progress over time. They also serve to identify disparities in children’s well-being within the respective countries. According to the Mexican Child Rights Index, in aggregate terms there has been gradual improvement in the fulfillment of the rights of the country’s children. The index stood at 4.68 in 1998, 5.25 in 2000 and 5.71 in 2003, with the majority of the states also showing improvement. But the index also illustrates wide disparities between states and points out that those with the lowest levels of fulfillment of rights also have the highest percentage of indigenous populations. Similarly low scores for provinces with the largest indigenous populations were observed in Ecuador, where the probability of children’s rights remaining unmet, as measured by the index, was nine times higher in the impoverished provinces of Cotopaxi and Chimborazo than in Galápagos, the province with the highest score. Significant gaps were also observed between urban and rural areas. Overall, the index for early childhood showed improvement in Ecuador, increasing from 3.4 to 3.6 between 2002 and 2003.

To improve the index rating, governments must take swift and decisive action in partnership with families and communities, civil-society organizations, the media and the private sector. The union of their efforts is essential for ensuring the sustained application of public policies for reducing the number of preventable children’s deaths, decreasing malnutrition and guaranteeing access to preschool education for children. There are already a number of encouraging signs that such partnerships are forming. In the states of Michoacán and Zacatecas in Mexico, for example, the government has taken the initiative to launch a ‘social dialogue for children’, aimed at building broad-based consensus on goals for fulfilling child rights (including improvement of the index), and promoting the support of all sectors of society for concrete actions to achieve these goals.

In the province of Carchi in Ecuador, the index rose from 2.8 to 3.9 after actions were taken by a local assistance programme. The under-five mortality rate fell, and school enrolment in the first grade of basic education increased. The local programme was scheduled to be discontinued but, thanks to the positive impact it had on the situation of children and the timely intervention of the Observatorio, the government decided to give this type of initiative a permanent budget.

See References, page 93.
or immunized. Outreach efforts and door-to-door campaigns are effective strategies used for immunization that might be expanded to other areas. For example, UNICEF has worked with the Serbian Health Ministry and the Public Health Institute to send mobile teams to different parts of the country to identify and register unregistered children, and then to immunize them against major killer diseases, including tuberculosis, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), measles and polio.22

Civil society

The involvement of civil society will help to broaden the scope of interventions

‘Civil society organizations’ refers to a broad group of institutions and actors including, but not limited to, community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, think tanks, social movements, religious organizations, women’s rights movements, grassroots and indigenous people’s movements, and voluntary organizations.23 The United Nations has recognized the importance of engaging civil society in governance and development and has made it part of its reform process. The Secretary-General highlighted this importance in his report to the General Assembly in 2002, and the subsequent year he created a panel of experts to produce a set of practical recommendations on how the UN’s relationship with civil society, as well as with the private sector and parliaments, could be improved. Since then, the engagement of civil society has been prominent on the UN agenda.

International non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role by bringing issues to the attention of governments and the global community and by providing large-scale programmes and projects. For example, Plan International has been responsible for a global campaign calling on governments to ensure all children are registered at birth. They have been working with local partners in more than 40 countries worldwide to boost the rates of child registration, with some major successes. In Cambodia, for example, Plan International’s Mobile Registration Project, in partnership with the government and UN volunteers, has recently registered 1.5 million people in two months. It aims to register the whole population of some 13 million people in the coming year. In India, Plan International has successfully registered 3.2 million children in the state of Orissa alone.
Local civil society organizations can perform many tasks to assist excluded and invisible children

Civil society organizations composed of members of the local community are often in the best position within their communities to create development strategies that are tailor-made for the children who are hardest to reach. They can contribute to the inclusion of these children in a variety of ways, including situation analyses and public advocacy, policy design and scaling up service delivery, monitoring and evaluation, and fund-raising. In addition to these activities, civil society organizations play a key role in raising awareness in communities, challenging social taboos, promoting open discussion on important issues and ultimately changing public behaviour.

Professional associations are one area in which civil society organizations have been actively promoting children’s rights issues. The Mutawinat Benevolent Company, an NGO of women lawyers in Khartoum, has for years offered free legal services to women and children, most of them internally displaced people living in extreme poverty. It has helped focus attention on the plight of women in prison – often with their children alongside them – and has worked to educate judges and police on the implications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In a similar initiative in rural Nepal, community paralegal committees, made up primarily of women, monitor violence against women and children by facilitating the reporting of any incidents.

The participation of religious leaders and organizations is vital to addressing sensitive issues related to children

Religion plays a central role in social and cultural life in most developing countries, and religious leaders and faith-based organizations are greatly respected and listened to. They are in a very strong position to raise awareness and influence behaviour. All over the world, religious leaders and organizations are working to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, fight poverty and end harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and cutting. They also advocate for children’s rights, such as the right to an education for all children.

They do this through speaking out about these sometimes sensitive or taboo issues in their communities. Inter-religious councils in different regions provide a forum for discussion and creation of frameworks of action. Where religious leaders have acted to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS, particularly in partnership with national governments and NGOs, there have been significant successes in preventing HIV and alleviating the suffering from AIDS.

For the past 21 years, the Pastoral da Criança (Children’s Pastoral) project has been working to reduce child deaths and hunger in the poorest communities of Brazil and 14 other Latin American and African countries, relying on a huge network of some 240,000 volunteers. Supported by the Catholic Church, UNICEF and other organizations, the initiative received the King of Spain’s first Human Rights Award in January 2005 in recognition of its innovative

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**Figure 4.3: Main activities of faith-based organizations for orphans and vulnerable children in southern and eastern African countries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of fostering</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community school</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious education</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day care</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income generation</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical care</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home visiting</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV prevention</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School assistance</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material support</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street shelter</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orphanage</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and Uganda.

Similar projects operate in other parts of the world. In Thailand, for instance, the Sangha Metta project has trained more than 3,000 Buddhist monks, nuns and novices to work with their communities in preventing HIV infection, providing support for families and prevent prejudice and discrimination. These efforts have had a marked impact on challenging stigmatization associated with HIV/AIDS, resulting in the integration of HIV-positive women and children into groups and schools from which they were previously excluded, and the return of children to the care of mothers living with HIV/AIDS.

Civil society organizations can contribute to identifying and targeting priority areas and communities, designing effective implementation strategies, setting national and local budget priorities, and involving women and children in the design and implementation of these strategies. Because they have first-hand information on the needs and constraints at the local level, they make an invaluable contribution to the policy debate. Excluded children and their families often depend on grassroots organizations to make their concerns known in policy circles. A model of civil society engagement in policy design is offered by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The fund calls for country-level partnerships including civil society organizations to submit grant proposals based on priority needs. Once grants are approved, these partnerships oversee programme implementation.

**Encouraging children to participate will also help to empower them**

Children are not passive recipients of our charity or protection, but active citizens with rights who should be able to participate in their communities and societies. But, lacking a political voice or representation, children are easily left out of discussions on public policies. Policymakers should ensure that the views of all children, and those of excluded and invisible children in particular, are heard and taken into account. The fullest measure of our success in including marginalized children will be their participation, their new visibility. Participation of children should be developed and supported in line with the evolving capacities of the children concerned.

The Global Movement for Children exists both to advance children’s rights and to foster their participation, seeing the two as inseparable. Launched in the run-up to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002, its participants ranged from international organizations to local children’s groups. In 2005, representatives of the Global Movement published a report just before the G-8 summit to remind the leaders of the world’s most powerful nations of their commitment to end child poverty. They stressed that this is a practical, achievable objective, an economic essential and a moral imperative.

In addition, under the Global Movement umbrella, thousands of children from 13 African countries – working in jobs ranging from domestic labour to shoeshining – published in 2005 the first results of a global survey by children of the world’s progress in pursuing child rights. The report states that while there has been some progress in some areas on education and child participation, poverty is still endemic. It also recommends that children around the world work together to ensure that governments are held accountable for the promises they have made.

Youth civil society organizations increasingly contribute to the policy debate through youth forums and parliaments. The Ethiopian Youth Forum, for example, has held seven sessions on a variety of issues, including street children, poverty reduction and youth, HIV/AIDS and, most recently, girls’ education. In 2004, the Forum was involved in a child-to-child survey that mapped children out of school and advocated for getting them into school.

Child-to-child surveys in several countries have shown that children can be effective actors in the development process at the local level – and specifically in seeking out excluded or invisible children. In India, for example, the project asked children to draw a map of their village or neighbourhood, marking the houses containing children who do not go to school and including the numbers of girls and boys. The map provided
vital information for local planners and promoted community awareness of both local disadvantage and the importance of education. Children were placed right at the centre of the process, enhancing their sense of empowerment as well as their education.

**The media**

**The media has a unique and vital role in raising awareness and monitoring progress on commitments to children**

Media professionals – journalists, writers, broadcasters and programme developers – are the eyes, ears and voices of society and have great influence on how children are visualized and portrayed. They can also help by putting children’s rights squarely on the news and media agenda and drawing the attention of the general public and opinion makers to the violations of those rights, using their work to hold governments accountable. As the watchdogs of the public, the media has a unique role to play in ensuring that the rights of children are respected and that violators are brought to justice. Media scrutiny can provide public and independent monitoring of a government’s progress towards keeping their commitments to children. Through their work, media professionals can shape public opinion and influence behaviour. They can encourage governments, civil society organizations and individuals to effect change that will improve the quality of people’s lives.

**Reporting on children’s issues must be undertaken with sensitivity and understanding**

Excluded and invisible children can often make compelling news stories – from street children to child soldiers – and there is enormous potential for the media to create a social climate that demands their inclusion. But not all media professionals take care to portray such children with the respect and understanding that is their due. The media can sometimes contribute to the exploitation of children – for example, by stereotyping them as powerless victims of abuse, conflict, crime and poverty, as perpetrators of crimes or as charming innocents. Combined with sensationalism, these limited representations can lead to exploitation of children who are experiencing rights violations – for example, by providing identifying details or failing to explore the child’s capacities and strengths. Guiding principles such as those under-
UNICEF principles and guidelines for ethical reporting on children

Reporting on children and young people has its special challenges. In some instances the act of reporting on children places them or other children at risk of retribution or stigmatization.

UNICEF has developed principles to assist journalists as they report on issues affecting children. They are offered as guidelines that UNICEF believes will help media to cover children in an age-appropriate and sensitive manner, while respecting their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The guidelines are meant to support the best intentions of ethical reporters: serving the public interest without compromising the rights of children.

**Principles**

1. The dignity and rights of every child are to be respected in every circumstance.

2. In interviewing and reporting on children, special attention is to be paid to each child’s right to privacy and confidentiality, to have their opinions heard, to participate in decisions affecting them and to be protected from the actuality or possibility of harm and retribution.

3. The best interests of each child are to be protected over any other consideration, including over advocacy for children’s issues and the promotion of child rights.

4. When trying to determine the best interests of a child, the child’s right to have their views taken into account are to be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

5. Those closest to the child’s situation and best able to assess it must be consulted about the political, social and cultural ramifications of any reporting.

6. Do not publish a story or an image that might put the child, siblings or peers at risk even when identities are changed, obscured or not used.

**Guidelines for interviewing children**

1. Do no harm to any child; avoid questions, attitudes or comments that are judgemental, that are insensitive to cultural values, that place a child in danger or expose a child to humiliation, or that reactivate a child’s pain and grief from traumatic events.

2. Do not discriminate in choosing children to interview because of sex, race, age, religion, status, educational background or physical abilities.

3. No staging – do not ask children to tell a story or take an action that is not part of their own history.

4. Ensure that the child or guardian knows they are talking with a reporter. Explain the purpose of the interview and its intended use.

5. Obtain permission from the child and his or her guardian for all interviews, videotaping and, when possible, for documentary photographs. When possible and appropriate, this permission should be in writing. Permission must be obtained in circumstances that ensure the child and guardian are not coerced in any way and that they understand that they are part of a story that might be disseminated locally and globally. This is usually only ensured if the permission is obtained in the child’s language and if the decision is made in consultation with an adult the child trusts.

6. Pay attention to where and how the child is interviewed. Limit the number of interviewers and photographers. Try to make certain that children are comfortable and able to tell their story without outside pressure, including from the interviewer. In film, video and radio interviews, consider what the choice of visual or audio background might imply about the child and her or his life and story. Ensure that the child would not be endangered or adversely affected by showing his or her home, community or general whereabouts.

**Guidelines for reporting on children**

1. Do not further stigmatize any child; avoid categorizations or descriptions that expose a child to negative reprisals – including additional physical or psychological harm – or to lifelong abuse, discrimination or rejection by their local communities.

2. Always provide an accurate context for the child’s story or image.

3. Always change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as:
   - A victim of sexual abuse or exploitation.
   - A perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse.
   - HIV-positive, or living with AIDS, unless the child, a parent or a guardian gives fully informed consent.
   - Charged or convicted of a crime.
pinning the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and frameworks such as UNICEF’s Principles for Ethical Reporting on Children\(^3\) should be used to ensure that the rights of children are both promoted and respected. In all cases, the best interests of the child should be of primary concern.

A good example of a holistic approach to improving the quality of reporting on children and youth is the Brazilian News Agency for Children’s Rights (ANDI).\(^3\) ANDI journalists monitor the media and publish league tables to show which publishers portray children in the most negative light. These tables have contributed to a gradual change in the tone of coverage, with publishers striving to occupy a better position in the league. In addition to monitoring, ANDI offers news guidelines and training for journalists and increases the visibility of social projects aimed at children. Journalist Friends of Children are given awards that have created incentives for sensitive coverage by improving the access that award winners have to children. The model is now being replicated in eight other Latin American countries.\(^3\)

One way to improve the media presentation of children and to empower children in telling their own stories is to encourage their direct participation as programme developers and presenters. In Albania, reports by teenagers on the conditions in an orphanage led to changes in its administration.\(^3\) This illustrates how the media itself, employed judiciously, can be a powerful tool towards helping children to protect themselves.

A constructive and supportive debate is needed on the issue of media images of children. Media organizations should consider appointing children’s correspondents with responsibility for covering all aspects of children’s lives. Media professionals and organizations need to educate themselves on methods of responsible reporting on children and their rights.

**Partnerships with the media can enhance the effectiveness of campaigns**

The media can also be used as a vehicle to educate the public on specific issues by

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4. In certain circumstances of risk or potential risk of harm or retribution, change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as:
   - A current or former child combatant.
   - An asylum seeker, a refugee or an internally displaced person.

5. In certain cases, using a child’s identity – their name and/or recognizable image – is in the child’s best interests. However, when the child’s identity is used, they must be protected against harm and supported through any stigmatization or reprisals.

Some examples of these special cases occur when children:
   - Initiate contact with the reporter, wanting to exercise their right to freedom of expression and their right to have their opinion heard.
   - Participate in a sustained programme of activism or social mobilization and want to be so identified.
   - Engage in a psychosocial programme and claim their name and identity as part of their healthy development.

6. Confirm the accuracy of what the child has to say, either with other children or an adult, preferably with both.

7. When in doubt about whether a child is at risk, report on the general situation for children rather than on an individual child, no matter how newsworthy the story.

See References, page 93.
**Child labour and corporate social responsibility: The UNICEF-IKEA project to combat child labour**

An estimated 14 per cent of children aged 5-14 in India are engaged in child labour activities, including the production of goods, often inexpensive, for direct export by large multinational companies. Most of these children work in the informal economic sector, largely beyond the reach of institutional oversight and often in private homes doing subcontracted work.

What are the implications for corporations and their indirectly employed child labourers? Since the early 1990s, multinationals have begun to include anti-child-labour policies in their corporate codes of conduct. IKEA Group, the multinational that designs, manufactures and sells home furnishings, provides an example of how the private sector can do business in developing countries in a socially responsible manner by using the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a framework.

To ensure that no children are employed at any level of the supply chain, IKEA has specifically designed the ‘IKEA Way on Preventing Child Labour’, a code of conduct that applies to all its suppliers. The code requires that all contractors recognize the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, to ensure compliance, IKEA employees make regular on-site visits to check that there are no children working on the premises, and unannounced inspections are made at least once a year by independent auditors. As a result, local suppliers who want to attract business have to comply with the corporate codes that are based on existing local and domestic laws concerning children and minimum employment age.

UNICEF and IKEA joined forces to implement this code of conduct in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India. In 2000, UNICEF developed Phase 1 of the Bal Adhikar-IKEA initiative, covering 200 villages where IKEA currently sources carpets. Uttar Pradesh accounts for an estimated 15 per cent of the country’s working children. These children are largely employed in the informal sector, working within families or households. The carpet industry of Uttar Pradesh contributes approximately 85 per cent of India’s carpet exports and is highly decentralized, with marginalized rural households constituting much of the weaving labour force.

The project has been expanded to 500 villages and is founded on the belief that child labour cannot be eliminated by simply removing a child from work, or terminating a multinational supplier’s contract, as the child would simply move on to a different employer. The problem is tackled instead by addressing child labour’s root causes, such as indebtedness in marginalized communities, adult unemployment, child labour and corporate social responsibility: The UNICEF-IKEA project to combat child labour.
including children. They serve as partners in building a protective environment for children and by ensuring that their actions never cause children harm or allow them to be exploited. One of the most effective ways that private-sector organizations can do this is through corporate social responsibility, by establishing and abiding by codes of conduct, as well as creating awareness and training staff.

**Corporations must ensure that their activities never contribute to excluding children or making them invisible**

Recently, many companies have come to accept some form of corporate social responsibility: that they are accountable to all of their stakeholders in all their operations and activities, with the aim of achieving sustainable development not only in the economic dimension but also in the social and environmental dimensions. The publication of corporate social responsibility reports has brought the use of child labour to light and mobilized consumers to demand an end to rights violations. Pressure must continue to be exerted to ensure that hazardous child labour is eliminated, that fair work practices are implemented, and that corporations do not use outsourcing as a means to evade their responsibility to those who produce their profits.

A notable step in the protection of children all over the world was achieved in April 2004 with the launch of the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism. The Code of Conduct emerged as a result of collaboration between End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT) and private-sector groups in the

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CHILDREN 79
Film-makers are in a unique position to draw public attention to the plight of excluded and invisible children, and the need to speak for those children who do not have a voice was recently recognized by some of the world’s most prominent directors. They collaborated with UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the Italian Government to produce seven short films presented as All the Invisible Children during the 62nd Venice Biennale Film Festival. The project aims to raise awareness of the need for a global commitment to help protect the rights of all children everywhere.

The eight directors involved with All the Invisible Children portray the lives of children from different regions of the world. Mehdi Charef depicts conditions in Burkina Faso; Emir Kusturica, Serbia and Montenegro; Spike Lee, USA; Katia Lund, Brazil; Jordan Scott and Ridley Scott, UK; Stefano Veneruso, Italy; and John Woo, China. Each episode focuses on children made invisible by poverty, violence, armed conflict, marginalization or HIV/AIDS.

The world of street children is the setting for three of the films. In Lund’s short, two siblings scrape together a living by collecting cardboard and scrap metal in the streets of São Paulo, while Veneruso and Kusturica’s films show children desperately stealing to get by in Naples and the Serbian countryside, respectively. Lee portrays the tragic story of an HIV-positive Brooklyn teenager facing torment and stigmatization from her peers. In Jordan and Ridley Scott’s contribution, a war photographer retreats into reminiscences of his childhood to escape terrifying adult memories. Charef’s episode introduces us to the lives of child soldiers, who manipulate machine guns with practised ease, but who are starved of love and education. The collection ends with Woo’s short, which examines the contrasting lives of a rich girl and a poor girl growing up in China.

The characters in All the Invisible Children represent millions of their silent off-screen peers: the tens of millions of street children, the hundreds of thousands of children caught up in conflict, the more than 2 million children under 15 living with HIV/AIDS, the many millions who are excluded and made invisible by these and other factors. “Children are being abused and forgotten all around the world, and I hope the film brings recognition to their plight,” says Spike Lee.

Director Hanna Polak shares Lee’s hope of raising awareness of forgotten children. Her Oscar-nominated documentary, The Children of Leningradsky, explores the world of homeless children in Moscow, where an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 children live on the streets. These children are vulnerable to alcohol and drug addiction, physical and sexual abuse, HIV infection, violence and exploitation. Polak believes that portraying their stories is one effective way of helping them.

“As an individual, I can do only so much for these children,” she says. “By giving exposure to their problems through film and having them tell their stories, I hope to influence others to help as well. In fact, making a film with this subject matter is a very practical way to help.... Sometimes people ask me how I can film the harshest aspects of these children’s lives. The fact of the matter is that these aspects are very much a part of their realities. Without knowing this reality, how can someone become truly aware of their ongoing tragedy and be moved to help them?”

Despite the challenges in reaching the homeless children in Moscow, making the film was very rewarding for Polak and resulted in long-lasting friendships. Her investment is long term; she has established a foundation, Active Child Aid, which uses funds raised by the documentary and other means to help hundreds of children living in the streets.

For Polak, the biggest reward has been showing the children in her film that a different life is possible: “It is wonderful to see the children realize that they have alternatives, that they are not doomed to a life spent on the streets.”
tourism industry. ECPAT is an alliance of organizations working to eliminate the commercial sexual exploitation of children, with Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The Code commits the hotel and travel industry to establishing ethical corporate policies against the commercial sexual exploitation of children, training personnel in countries where children are sexually exploited and providing information on the sexual exploitation of children to travellers.

In the Philippines, the non-governmental organization Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Asia Pacific uses various educational tools to change the sexual attitudes and practices of boys and men that result in the sexual exploitation of women and children in communities known for prostitution.

The way forward

Bringing invisible children out of the shadows and creating inclusive societies requires that all members of the global community – in all their myriad roles – work to ensure that no child is forgotten. International agencies, donors, governments, civil society, the media and the private sector must all take responsibility for the inclusion and protection of children. The principles of the Convention and recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child must be more consistently integrated into development strategies.

Governments must make sure that their laws promote the rights of children and that they are allocating sufficient resources towards ensuring the quality of life of the next generation of citizens, particularly those who have been excluded from receiving social benefits and services. Civil society organizations can provide a forum for the voices of directly affected peoples to be heard. The private sector has made some important strides towards greater corporate social responsibility with regards to children, although continued work and vigilance is required. The media plays a significant role in bringing excluded and invisible children into the light, challenging all to act. Respect for the views of children must be promoted within the family, schools and institutions.
Demographic Challenges

Thirty-eight per cent of the world’s population is under the age of 18. In the 50 least developed countries, children account for half of the population. In 91 countries, the proportion of inhabitants under the age of 18 will increase between now and 2015 – the deadline for achieving many of the Millennium Development Goals.

Changes in demographic composition present policy challenges. It is imperative that resources are made available to meet the needs of growing numbers of children in many locations. Individuals’ needs vary during their life cycle, and early investment in the next generation is essential for any poverty-reduction strategy to succeed.

Urbanization poses additional challenges as more children are concentrated in large cities throughout the developing world. While population rates are declining, the increased size of urban populations will require significant attention to ensure that children of the urban poor do not miss out on essential services and protection. Simultaneously, attention must be paid to confronting and reversing the inequities faced by rural children.

Strategies being implemented towards achieving the MDGs, as well as forward-looking initiatives that aim to improve the adult lives of the present generation of children, will need to take these demographic trends into account. Children comprise a large, disenfranchised population with limited voice in government decision making. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that their needs are prioritized in legislation, policies, programmes and, most importantly, resource allocation.

Source: Derived from data from the United Nations Population Division as reported in Statistical Table 6, pp. 118-121.
Our Common Future

Proportion of the population under the age of 18

- 10% - 19%
- 20% - 29%
- 30% - 49%
- 50% or more
- No data

Source: Derived from United Nations Population Division, 2005 as reported in Statistical Table 6, pp. 118-121.

Countries in which the population of children will be larger in 2015


This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.