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Investing in children & families to avoid unnecessary separation

Human Rights Council Side event, 8h30-10h, 22 September 2015, Salle XXIV

- **Benyam Dawit Mezmur, CRC Committee Chairperson and African Committee of Experts CWC Vice-Chairperson** will provide an international overview on the importance of investing in children and families stressing the right of each child to "grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" (CRC preamble).
- **Salimane Issifou, National Director of SOS Children's Villages Benin,** will elucidate the role of civil society in working with government to prevent unnecessary separation
- **Theophane Nikyema, Executive Director, African Child Policy Forum, African Child Policy Forum,** will showcase regional research on social support schemes in the African context
- **Ian Anand Executive Director, Foster Care India and IFCO Board Member,** will expound the need for investing in formal foster care systems as part of family based solutions in Asia
- **Maria Herczog, President EuroChild, BCN and CRC Committee member**(former) discusses the necessity of investing in quality alternative care that will result in deinstitutionalisation of children in Europe
- **Ludin de Chavez, Program Operations Director, Save the Children, El Salvador** will explain the need for supporting children to return to families of origin as unaccompanied and separated children

Co-sponsors: Permanent Missions of Kenya, Portugal, Uruguay and Viet Nam, African Child Policy Forum, ATD 4th World, Better Care Network, CELCIS, Family for Every Child, For Our Children Foundation, Hope and Homes for Children, International Federation of Social Workers, International Foster Care Organisation, International Social Service, RELAF, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages International and UNICEF.

Investing in Children and Families to prevent Separation in Accordance with the UN guidelines: Role of Civil Society

Salimane Issifou, National Director of SOS Children's Villages Benin and President of the Network of Organisations that take Care of Children in Need, describes the role of civil society in its work with Government to prevent unnecessary separation of children.

Introduction

In the world, millions of children and their families encounter huge difficulties due to many reasons (political, economic, health, environmental, etc.). Today, it is clear that child and family care stakeholders should invest in children and families so that they can properly develop and better take part in the life of their societies. Investing in children and families is a multifaceted component encompassing elements such as investment in prevention, family and parenting support, deinstitutionalization & alternative care and child participation, which are issues that are highlighted in the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Like in other regions of the World, civil society organisations in Africa are enhancing their contribution to the development of children and their families thanks to the provision of the UN guidelines.

Role of civil society organisations in prevention of family separation

Governments bear the major responsibility for the welfare of children and their families. This responsibility that is also relates to the prevention of family separation, is recommended by the UN guidelines for the alternative care of children (39-48 Paragraphs of UN guidelines). Accordingly, coalitions, networks and platforms of Non-Governmental Organisations or civil society organisations play a tremendous role, together with governments, in prevention of family breakdown. When the Network of Organisations that take Care of Children in Need in Benin[1] was proposing norms and standards, to regulate alternative care of children, to the government of the Republic of Benin, it put an emphasis on the need of prevention of the separation of children from their respective families (SOS Benin, 2012)[2]. Furthermore, integrated child protection systems – which coordinate with the welfare, education and health systems - must be supported and developed. It may happen that government forgets to implement the aforementioned mechanisms. It is up to the networks or social society organisations to remind government to do so. In 2012, the civil society networks in Benin were those that were the driving forces of the development of a comprehensive child protection policy that contributes to the improvement of child protection across the country.

> *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*
> *45. When a public or private agency or facility is approached by a parent or caregiver wishing to place a child in care for a short or indefinite period, the State should ensure the availability of counselling and social support to encourage and enable him or her to continue to care for the child. A child should be admitted to alternative care only when such efforts have been exhausted and acceptable and justified reasons for entry into care exist.*

Recently, when the Network of Organisations that take Care of Children in Need in Benin mobilized the members of parliament to develop and to vote the Child Code known under the law n° 2015-08, it highlighted the need to provide for the role of child care duty bearers to implement all measures aiming at ensuring the prevention of separation of children from their respective families and to promote the place of family as the most important environment for the development of the child (article 10 of the Code). Once promulgated, the implementation of the law will enable child care stakeholders to engage in family strengthening activities that will enable children to stay in their families instead of being placed in alternative care. As such the new Child Code is considered

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[1] See www.respesd.org
[2] SOS Benin (2012). "Advocacy report ».

to be strongly aligned with the necessity principle in the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

Importance of civil society organisations in providing family and parenting support

NGOs networks, platforms and inter-agency advocacy and cooperation are increasingly becoming very important in the investment conducted for children and their families. In Nigeria for example, civil society organisations use the Nigeria Network of Organisations as a framework to exchange experience on the provision of family and parenting support, the fulfilment of child rights and the implementation of the guidelines for alternative care of children.[3] Child care stakeholders including civil society organisations are investing financial and other resources for the well-being of children and their families. The UN guidelines have positively influenced national child protection systems in many countries because they offer many new ideas to governments: improvement of alternative care standards (Namibia), In some other countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Benin, Togo, etc., the UN guidelines for the alternative care of children have provided civil society actors with new tools to conduct appropriate advocacy campaigns.

Providing support to parents in conjunction with interventions to tackle the root causes of poverty and social exclusion, and address structural barriers and inequalities is very important to the creation of well integrated societies. In fact, interventions such as parent support, education, training, strengthening family networks and peer support can participate in the building of parents' self-esteem and skills, improve parents' long-term employability, and enhance children's well-being and development. Unfortunately, across many African countries for example, family and parenting support is not yet widely included in the agenda of governments. SOS Children's Villages that are among the first organisations to have initiated such activities in Africa is trying to promote family and parenting support in accordance with the provisions of the guidelines for the alternative care of children (IV-A Article 32) among its partners in the different African countries where this organization operates.

Role of civil society in deinstitutionalization and alternative care

Alternative child care is not a panacea. Many activities can be conducted before children lose parental care. As a result, the UN guidelines highlight the importance of promoting parental care, the prevention of family separation, the promotion of family integration in order to fight against the need for alternative care[4]. In 2011, the network of child care organisations called FODDET in Togo (West Africa) noticed that the law that regulates the creation of alternative child care centres was passed by not promoted among the concerned stakeholders. Subsequently, based on the UN guidelines, this network successfully conducted an advocacy campaign that led to the promotion of the law with the full involvement of the network[5] (FODDET-CLOSE, 2013).

In the Republic of Benin, the Network of Organisations that take Care of Children in Need in Benin noticed that there was no law and no regulations that govern the creation and management of alternative child care centres in the country. They proposed a decree termed "norms and standards applicable to Child Protection Centres" based on the UN guidelines for the alternative care of children and required the support of UNICEF and together the decree was proposed to government; the decree was signed on November 6th 2012 by the President of the Republic. The main contribution of the decree is the fact that it was expressly built on the key principles of the guidelines for the alternative care of children: the principle pf necessity, the principle of appropriateness, the prevention of alternative care and the family strengthening to prevent children from falling out of the nest of their families (SOS Benin, 2012). When the decree was signed by the President of the Republic, capacity building sessions were organized by the network to train owners of alternative child care centres on the provisions of the decree. Funding was found to

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[3] **http://www.nnngo.org**
[4] See paragraphs 32-52
[5] FODDET & CLOSE. (2013). "Rapport de la rencontre d'échange sur la cde, la CADBE et l'EPU entre coalition des OSC du Togo et du Benin ».

support organisations that face severe financial constraints. Follow up strategies were implemented to ensure that alternative child care centres that were not abiding by the decree are reported to the ministries of justice and family affairs[6] (RESPESD, 2013). In August 2015, an organization that was using children for fundraising purposes failing to cater for the needs of the children that were accommodated in the centre was reported by the President of the network. Measures will soon be taken to close the concerned centre[7] (SOS Benin & RESPESD, 2015); the children are already admitted to more suitable environments. Civil society in Kenya together with the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect developed national Guidelines for Alternative Care based on the UN guidelines. The national guidelines developed has helped to enhance the previous Kenyan Legal framework and existing practices for children without parental care and those at risk of being separated from their parents[8] (ANPPCAN, 2012).

Role of civil society in participation

Participation of children is compulsory in order to ensure a comprehensive fulfilment of their rights. It is important for Child care duty bearers to build on existing mechanisms to involve children in service delivery and to consult them on policy planning, as well as to encourage professionals working with and for children to involve them. Mostly, the involvement of children in policy development planning and implementation is neglected for various reasons. It is up to civil society organisations to remind this important component of child rights to their peers and to government. When, for example the national protection policy was being developed in Benin in 2013, the involvement of children in the development of the policy was not planned. This aspect could have been omitted without the insistence of the Network of Organisations that take Care of Children in Need. In fact, upon the insistence of the Network, the consultation component of the policy was delegated to the network that organized many focus groups with children including vulnerable ones across the country[9] (SOS Benin, 2015). In Cote d'Ivoire, the main network of organisations that take care of vulnerable children recently held meetings to exchange experience on how child participation can be enhanced subsequent to the ratification of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the implementation of the UN guidelines for the alternative child care of children[10] (Forum ONG Aide à l'Enfance, 2014). Such activities are opportunities to develop actions plans and to follow up how child participation is implemented in the country.

Concluding remarks

In Africa, civil society is tremendously getting active in the movement pushing for investment for children and families so as to prevent the unnecessarily separation of family members. Civil society organisations are meaningfully and structurally involved in the process of investment for children by governments. Hence, civil society organisations take part in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating social and other relevant policies as well as identifying and mapping best practices.

Nevertheless, strategies should additionally be implemented to map and promote cross-country experience exchange among civil society such as the exchange meeting held in 2013 among the child care networks and platforms of Togo and Benin (FODDET-CLOSE, 2013). Across Africa, Civil society face some problems such as political instability, disconnection from rural organizations, lack of unity, inadequate funding, government patronage, lack of internal democracy, lack of skills, corruption and lack of state support and partnership. Civil society should be supported to get strengthened so as to ensure effective service delivery for families through the creation of an enabling environment for their operation and to maintain a high degree of independence from the government[11] (Omede & Bakare, 2014).

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[6] RESPESD (2013). Rapport d'activités.
[7] SOS Benin & RESPESD (2015) " Situation des enfants en danger dans un orphelinat de Lokossa
[8] ANPPCAN (2012). "Annual report.
[9] SOS Benin (2015). "Lessons learnt from Care for Me!"
[10] Forum ONG Enfance (2014). "Participation de l'enfant »
[11] Omede, A. J. & Bakare, A. R. (2014). „The Impact of Civil Society Organizations on Sustainable Development in Developing Countries: The Nigerian Experience".

The African Child Policy Forum

Investing in children and families to avoid unnecessary separation: Social protection

www.africanchildforum.org

Théophane Nikyèma
Executive Director

What is Child-sensitive SP?

Human Right - (UNCRC 26)

Provides wider economic benefits / addresses multiple deprivations of children

Protects most vulnerable, creates opportunities (**preventive**), strengthens resilience (**promotive and transformative**)

Not limited to children but families/ caregivers

Different interventions: Social Assistance, Social Insurance, Labor Market Interventions

Social Protection in Africa

Livingstone Call for Action (AU 2006)	Social Policy Framework (AU 2008)
Many countries engaged in SP (at least one SPP)	Social Protection Strategies developed or in process

Usually developed and evolved from responses to crises and HIV/AIDS

Some Evidences of effectiveness

Kenya OVC cash transfer: increased school enrolment, dietary diversity, reduced child labor

South Africa: Child Support Grant: reduced household and child poverty, increased school attendance

Zambia: SP Policy rehabilitation of street children; provision of places of safety and children's homes; actions against sexual and gender-based violence

Ghana: Fuel taxes subsidize pro-poor. Elimination of school fees, expansion rural electrification, improved access to public transportation

Challenges

Limited access:
- ❑ Lack of information
- ❑ Lack of data
- ❑ Child headed households

Limited linkages with CP outcomes (e.g. prevention of violence, neglect)

Insufficient emphasis on addressing 'neglect' or promoting positive caring practices

Challenges

Design limitations:
- ❑ Formal with limited linkages with community-based, indigenous SP mechanisms
- ❑ Family-focused or family-targeted
- ❑ Donor-funded/externally designed based on national macro-indicators of poverty
- ❑ Do not incorporate all types of vulnerable groups
- ❑ Not rapidly and effectively scaled up

Conclusion

Social Protection provides increasing opportunity in Africa to invest in children and their families to prevent unnecessary separation

This calls for

Sensitivity towards children's needs

Deliberately adapted to be inclusive of children without care

Focus on working with care-givers

Mix short-term responses to vulnerability and longer-term preventive measures

This calls for..

Greater synergy with community-based, indigenous SP mechanisms and resources

Greater linkages with child protection, community care and positive parenting outcomes

Adequate resources for geographic coverage, outreach and follow-up

More on SP

www.africanchildforum.org/ipc

Promotion and support of foster care as part of family based solutions in Asia

Ian Anand Forber-Pratt, Executive Director, Foster Care India and member of the Board of Directors, International Foster Care Organisation presents foster care solutions in Asia.

In Asia, foster care is a concept that is both ancient and modern. Deeply rooted in many countries' informal care structures, the idea of caring for a child other than your own is not new. However, the idea of government involvement and regulated systems of care is a concept that is new to Asia and often misunderstood.

Today, in 2015, the dialogue and movement towards foster care at a policy and service delivery level is steadily increasing throughout Asia. Responding to the United Nations Alternative Care Guidelines in 2009, a majority of the 50 Asian countries have engaged in conversation and strategic planning at national, state/ district and local levels about the need for family-based care. Yet decentralized efforts to start foster care at the government and civil society levels can lead to inefficiencies in the development of family-based care reform.

> The United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (2009) define foster care (Para. 29(c)ii) as: *"Situations where children are placed by a competent authority for the purpose of alternative care in the domestic environment of a family other than the children's own family that has been selected, qualified, approved and supervised for providing such care."*

This short presentation will frame the Asian context and address the following four topics:
1. The situation of foster care in Asia including country examples,
2. Remaining challenges of implementing foster care
3. Benefits of establishing a formal foster care system in Asia and
4. Needed next steps for promotion and support of foster care in Asia.

Out of the 50 or so countries identified in the Asia according macro geographical regions by United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Welfare,[12] this presentation briefly covers Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Mongolia, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam.

The situation of foster care in Asia including country examples

Foster care attributed to the joint family living arrangements (i.e. grandparents, aunts / uncles and children living in the same home) traditionally absorbed the need for care and protection of children. As 'development' has spread across a majority of the countries in Asia, the joint family structures have broken down, yielding to nuclear families in exponentially increasing numbers. For example, 10 – 15 years ago, an Indian couple with two children lived with their parents, extended relatives and was tightly connected with their surrounding community. Now, in 2015, the same Indian couple has moved to a bigger city and has a more distant relationship with their joint family and past generations who may live in a village area. Now, if an accident occurs and the Indian couple is no longer able to care for a child, their children who are accustomed to a certain modern lifestyle, may not wish to move back to the joint family unit. Though preference to move back to a village is an important factor, the limits of access to education, social support and opportunity are contributing factors as well. This puts pressure on a government who could have said 10 – 15

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[12] Asian countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Yemen (countries are highlighted who are addressed in this short paper United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Welfares. Assessed 03 August 2015. (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/economic_main.htm)

years ago "that is a family problem" when now they are forced both socially and politically to create and promote social initiatives to care for the children.

Foster care is practiced across Asia especially during times of emergency situations, but the formalization of the system is still slow to be accepted and implemented. However there is progress. In Bangladesh, for example, a recent 2015 article marked one of the first public statements about foster care in the country's history, "Health Ministry, the government has taken the plan as a part of its effort for making the autistic and neuro-developmental children as worthy citizens of the country so that they could contribute to its socio-economic development. "Gradually, the government will introduce the foster- family care service in the country and there work is on to prepare a concept paper in this regard," a senior official of the ministry told UNB.[13]

Agencies other than the government are likewise taking the lead on foster care initiatives. These initiatives are often without government's firm commitment to this family based form of care and nationwide systematic implementation. Some pilots include Nepal: Foster Care Pilot (UNICEF & Terre des Hommes), Vietnam: Foster Care Pilot (UNICEF), Mongolia: Foster Care Program in development (World Vision and Save the Children) and Sri Lanka (Sevana Sarana Foster Parents Scheme and Foster Parents Program of the Department of Probation and Childcare Services.)[14]

Remaining challenges of implementing foster care

Stark differences exist when initiatives are Government led and well resourced. For example, compared to the above pilots, China and South Korea have comparatively robust nationwide foster care systems. The China Social Welfare Department statistics show there are 919 children under foster care across Hong Kong. The foster family pool comprises 938 registered families. The government spent HK$115.6 million on foster care services in the 2012-13 fiscal year, and increased the budget to HK$130.7 million for 2013-14.[15]This financial investment is paramount, in the beginning years of a legal foster care system. Yet financial investment is not enough.

The acceptance of the idea of foster care as a legitimate way to give children care and protection is one of the most fundamental barriers to the success of the system. Therefore more than resources - a true commitment by governments into promoting and supporting carers is crucial. In India, for example, the Minister of the Women's and Children's Development Ministy has pushed the nation towards family-based care diaogue and awareness through new schemes, concentrated media efforts and the passing of legislation. The India government's task will now be to take the momentum created at the national level to the ground level. The bridging of the gap from policy to practice is of crucial importance for the sustainbility of a foster care program.

Benefits of establishing a formal foster care system in Asia

Since a formal foster care system (apart from kinship care) is a new concept and has not taken root in societies in Asia, the aforementioned limiting factors must be addressed. The benefits of having a formalised foster care system with dedicated resources, a pool of trained foster carers and clear comptent authority support are:
- Foster care can be embedded into society
- Carers can support each other, as well as keep other carers accountable (e.g.: foster care associations)

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[13] http://www.newstoday.com.bd/index.php?option=details&news_id=2405855&date=2015-03-17 . Please note, when one searches on the government's website under 'foster care', no information is currently available.

[14] EveryChild (2011) Fostering better care: Improving foster care provision around the world. EveryChild, 4 Bath Place, Livington Street London EC2A 3DR

[15] http://www.chinadailyasia.com/focus/2014-02-28/content_15121431.html

- Children receive the care and support they need to reach their full potential
- Carers retained for many years can support many children (e.g. carers who have cared for 30 children over the course of 15-20 years)

Moving forward: next steps for the promotion and support of foster care in Asia.

The first step in promoting and supporting carers is the establishment of a formal and effective system of foster care. The better resourced the system the more carers can concentrate only on delivering quality care to children in need of care and protection. Clear policies and procedures for the full range of foster care situations helps carers to know what to expect and how to handle challenges. For example, if provisions for emergency foster care are set-up with clear processes, children will not have to be institutionalised even during their initial entry into care.

In order to create such a foster care system in which not only the needs of children in various situations are met, but carers are also supported and given the importance they deserve, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Wider promotion of the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children
- Effective national policy frameworks
- Adequate and well-planned financing for foster care
- An effective child welfare workforce
- Reductions in the number of children in need of alternative care
- Supporting a range of care choices
- Building research and understanding on foster care

> United Nations (2009) Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children
> *Par 118. The competent authority or agency should devise a system, and should train concerned staff accordingly, to assess and match the needs of the child with the abilities and resources of potential foster carers and to prepare all concerned for the placement.*
> *Par 119. A pool of accredited foster carers should be identified in each locality who can provide children with care and protection while maintaining ties to family, community and cultural group.*
> *Par 120. Special preparation, support and counselling services for foster carers should be developed and made available to carers at regular intervals, before, during and after the placement.*
> *Par 121. Carers should have, within fostering agencies and other systems involved with children without parental care, the opportunity to make their voice heard and to influence policy.*

The time is NOW for the systematisation and sustainability of foster care throughout Asia. As policies and procedures emerge on paper, it is time for practitioners to collaborate and demand quality and a community-base for service delivery. For a region with huge populations and deeply historical roots, the opportunities and responsibilities will be realised with the combined efforts of civil society and government in a joint effort to vision the much needed quality "care" for our children and caregivers.

*Ian Anand Forber-Pratt is Foster Care India's Executive Director (www.fostercareindia.org). Ian Anand was born in Kolkata, India in 1980 and raised by an adoptive family in the America. He has received his Master in Social Work (MSW) from Washington University's Brown School of Social Work. He traveled to India during both his undergraduate and master's educational programs to build an orphanage, conduct research, lead therapeutic trips for adoptive families and offer support for those in need. He sold everything in America to follow his dream of giving back to his birth country in 2011.

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Investing in quality care that will result in the deinstitutionalisation of children in Europe and globally

Dr Maria Herczog astutely explains the importance of high quality sustainable deinstitutionalisation processes that are rights based and more effective in the long run.

There have been many attempts made in many countries for many years to prevent the separation of children from their families, placing those in need of out of home placement into family, community based alternative care for the shortest possible period and reuniting them with their families if possible. The UN Guidelines on Alternative Care of Children approved by the UN General Assembly in 2009 has become an essential tool helping decision and policy makers, practitioners, service providers working in child welfare and protection to learn about the possible child rights based approaches on how to assess and make decisions on children at risk or separated from their families. It aims to provide States information on the principles, possible policies and practices of prevention, service provision and placement options.

The Moving Forward Handbook on implementing the "Guidelines on Alternative Care for Children" was developed by CELCIS and a group of NGOS and experts and was launched in 2013 to support the implementation of the Guidelines by offering practical methods and information.[16]

Need to reform welfare and protection systems

More and more governments are confronted with the need to reform and restructure their welfare and protection system for all, including children, considering human rights, individual needs, professional arguments and evidence, limited resources and financial considerations as well. The focus has been on avoiding institutionalization by providing high quality local universal, targeted and specialized services to persons, families in vulnerable situations, by strengthening families, communities and ensuring the active participation of all actors, including family members and communities.

Paradoxically poverty has been in all countries the main root cause of separation of children and placing them into institutions but despite of evidence on the harm caused, there has not been much effort made to learn more about the costs and outcomes, long term impact on children and the effects of referring them into care.

The current climate of austerity has accelerated pressure to evaluate the ways public money is spent, including the effectiveness, efficiency and outcomes. Many countries have made very difficult choices about budget cuts, mostly on health, education and social service provisions, despite of the growing needs and social problems occurring during the crisis. Early intervention, prevention, community and family-based care are easy targets because the outcomes are more likely to be long-term and therefore more difficult to measure and politically often not supported for different reasons.

Many countries have child protection systems with an over-dependence on institutional, residential care, despite the overwhelming scientific evidence of the detrimental effects of institutional, residential care on children's emotional, physical, mental and social development the poor outcomes and very high costs. Other countries have limited or very poor quality services at all levels in all areas, including health, education, social support, accelerating the already existing problems and depriving many, including children from access to them.

Deinstitutionalisation and investing in family and community based alternatives

Deinstitutionalisation - the process of strengthening families, preventing family breakdown, and putting in place more appropriate forms of alternative care for children, reintegration into their

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[16] http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/news/implementing-the-unguidelines

family, requires substantial and long-term strategic investment, careful planning, on-going monitoring and evaluation, follow up. This presents a huge challenge to advocates pushing for system wide child welfare and protection reform both for prevention, early intervention and reintegration purposes to conduct a high quality sustainable deinstitutionalisation process.

Despite the current political and economic challenges, there is a considerable momentum worldwide to move away from institutional, residential care to community and family-based alternatives. There has been successful attempts and substantial policy changes made in the recent years for instance in Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, among other countries, to prevent separation, reintegrate children into their families, developing foster care and family services and raising awareness about the rights of children to be brought up in their own families or in quality alternative care and the harm institutions can cause.

Deinstitutionalisation is perceived by many as being a short-term cost saving measure, not requiring parallel and additional resources and often meant as closure of institutions without proper alternatives and family preservation efforts. In fact high quality intervention and support are by no means cheaper than institutions but they are rights based, reaching out the entire community, they are far more effective, their impact on the children, families and society is positive in all means. The cost benefit analyses are a very useful tool to measure the investment and the outcome in many ways but cannot provide the whole picture. Social return of investment is aiming to draw a more complex picture of all the possible areas that count on both sides, taking into consideration of not only easily quantifiable elements but emotional wellbeing, savings or avoiding harm etc.

Consideration has to be given to how to develop a complex model, including economic elements, that adequately reflects the complexity of child welfare and protection systems, their links with health, education, criminal justice and social welfare, and the difficulty to establish direct cause-and-effect relationships between decisions on policies and practices, allocation of resources, implementation, direct services and indirect impact on outcomes on children, families and the community. Taking a holistic perspective is important as it is increasingly recognised that integrated services and inter-agency work, mobilisation of the children's, families' own resources are important factors in improving outcomes for children, just like the flexible funding opportunities where "money is going with the child" and is not sectorial or authority based.

The availability of consistent and reliable data on the direct and indirect costs of all type of services as well as the outcomes for children and families represents another key challenge.

Promising practice: Opening Doors for Europe's Children
Activities conducted during the 'Opening Doors for Europe's Children' campaign has demonstrated many good examples on how to mobilise hidden resources, encouraging all actors and mutually learning from each other both at local, national and international levels. In other regions, like in Africa there have been attempts made to develop indicators, analysing the costs and benefits to ensure the wellbeing of children. The inter-sectorial cooperation of professionals, regular evaluation and case conferences on learning from the experiences, better allocation of resources to local, universal and targeted services, family group conferences to involve all family members are useful examples that can be adapted in the different countries in accordance with the local needs and circumstances. There is a long way to go, thinking and working together to demonstrate the economic proof of the professional evidence in the Guidelines on Alternative Care for Children.

* Dr Maria Herczog is a sociologist, doing research and teaching, publishing on child welfare and child protection for over 30 years. She was a member of the UNCRC Committee (2007-2015), President of Eurochild (2009-2015), BCN senior advisor and temporary expert of UNICEF, WHO and Council of Europe.

Migrant children: Beyond the numbers

Ludin Caballero de Chávez, Director of Programme Operations at Save the Children El Salvador, describes the challenges faced by unaccompanied and separated children in Latin America, highlighting potential avenues for improving this difficult situation.

Beyond the numbers of children in a situation of illegal migration, *i.e.* beyond the numbers of children caught by border security systems in transit or destination countries, or the numbers of children returned precisely to those countries, which they left running away from violence, poverty, lack of opportunities or because they wished to be reunited with their families, or even beyond the numbers of children who, as we meet in this forum, are walking through deserts, crossing rivers and trying to pass unnoticed to the migration authorities, or in the worst cases, of children caught by organised criminal groups resulting in them being at risk of death or other forms of violations. Beyond these numbers, the strengthening of national protection systems – as a strategy to prevent the illegal migration of children, in particular that of unaccompanied children, and in order to provide them with child-rights-based care – becomes an imminent need that cannot be postponed.

And I say 'beyond the numbers' without any intention of minimising the research undertaken in this regard. On the contrary, the studies undertaken by UN agencies, human rights organisations, the academic sector and others have fulfilled and continue to fulfil their mission of disclosing the denial of rights, which children face in their countries of origin, transit and destination, and even more so, the numbers, which demonstrated that, for example, between October 2013 and August 2014, the number of families that migrated illegally to the U.S.A. increased by 412% compared with the same period in the previous year, and even more revealing: that, in 2014, over 66,127 children[i] undertook this journey being unaccompanied, *i.e.* without any adult person, and that 18,000 children were detained and subsequently repatriated. Furthermore, the disaggregated numbers by country showed that, for most of them, these children came from Mexico and, in particular, from the countries known as 'Central America's Northern Triangle', which includes El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and estimated that the increase in unaccompanied migrant children was of about 92% in comparison with the previous year.

An assessment study undertaken in Central America by RELAF, UNICEF and Save the Children in 2014[ii], showed that the increase in the number of migrant children and their families was soon described as a 'humanitarian crisis' and, as such, the actions of the involved governments, NGOs and international organisations mostly based themselves on its description as a 'humanitarian crisis' and therefore, most actions had a humanitarian intervention approach, *i.e.* the provision of basic services to cover the immediate needs of migrant children, as would occur in emergency situations. Many of our institutional interventions were included in the latter. However, when looking beyond the numbers and searching for the implementation of a child-rights approach in accordance with relevant international instruments, Save the Children integrated and led efforts to provide a more sustainable solution.

In the search for a systemic approach to the care of migrant children, the assessment undertaken by RELAF, UNICEF and Save the Children studied the operation of domestic protection systems in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, in order to have a basis to suggest a model of policies and services that would ensure the adequate protection of migrant children and their long-term reintegration. The outcomes identify the operational and institutional shortcomings, and the economic, social and cultural factors that generate a gap between domestic and international legal progress and the measures in practice.

Important findings on various countries

The study highlights critical aspects applicable to the countries subject to the study in relation to:
1. The lack of coordination amongst those bodies, which, within countries of origin, must safeguard the rights of children at local and national level.
2. The absence or weakness of a steering entity that coordinates, in practice, the actions of governmental and non-governmental bodies.

3. The poor development of decentralisation processes for programmes and services, which, in addition to having low coverage, are not accessible in the poorest regions of each country.
4. The shortage of specialised responses to the causes that lead to migration, including violence, poverty, lack of access to services and the feeling of a grim future. Sometimes, States launch 'preventive' campaigns, which draw attention to the dangers along the journey, in order to discourage migration, instead of focusing on its causes and trying to solve them.
5. The poor application of state enforceability mechanisms, in particular those that entail the participation of children.
6. The lack of monitoring and support to migrant children, who have returned, once they have been reintegrated into their families and communities.
7. Weakness in the development of intervention standards for the care and protection of the rights of migrant children. Some countries have harmonised their laws and protocols, but their actions usually have an approach based on assistance and humanitarian intervention, instead of focusing on the comprehensive fulfilment of the human rights of children.
8. Persistence in the application of mostly institutional options for the care of migrant children, which, in practice, are similar to detention or deprivation of liberty.
9. Finally, the issue of migrant children is disappearing from domestic budgets, other than the investment in responses to the basic needs in repatriation centres.

For the future

Based on this knowledge, RELAF, UNICEF and Save the Children have issued specific recommendations to Mexico and the countries of the Northern Triangle, based on their political and operational characteristics with regards to migrant children, but also general recommendations applicable to the region as a whole, such as:

1. To strengthen the dialogue amongst all countries in the region, in order to create regional policies that would improve the living conditions in societies of origin and in situations of displacement of migrant children and their families.
2. To promote the implementation of intervention standards in relation to migrant children, in particular those, who are unaccompanied, in the design, implementation and monitoring of plans and programmes. These standards must be based on the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, which were approved by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 2009, which require States to base their care systems on family-type rather than institutional options. For the latter, the authors have drafted a handbook on international human rights standards applicable to migrant children[iii], which is a concrete and detailed proposal of options to operate the care of returned migrant children.
3. Finally, and even though progress in the training of the personnel of bodies that work with children is welcomed, it is recommended that the staff that work with migrant children is constantly strengthened.

Furthermore, the authors emphasise that the policies and services to protect children must have a systemic and well-coordinated approach, with a steering body that coordinates the actors in the system, with a decentralised approach towards districts and municipalities, with a high degree of participation of civil society and child-related organisations, and with the operation of a independent rights protection body, which ensures the application and enforcement of the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as an adequate budgetary allocation for the operation of programmes that address the causes of illegal child migration and offer relevant responses to repatriated children.

The protection of the rights of children is also incumbent on the international community and its organisations, in order to ensure, amongst others, that the state bodies in countries of destination, transit and origin communicate through their Consulates, Ministries of Foreign Relations and those in charge of children's issues, and have a protocol for this dialogue, in order to safeguard the rights of these children at any given time during the journey and return.

This coordinated set of actors will help, amongst others, for the moment when the children are rescued on the territories or at the borders of transit or destination countries to be just that, a rescue and not a detention, and for their policies and procedures to be amended in accordance with the principle of the best interests of the child, and to call upon their understanding that they are working with a child and that this perception prevails over the child's migratory condition, given that when changing this perception, their procedures in their regard could change considerably.

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[i] *US Customs and Border Patrol, http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children.*

[ii] RELAF, Save the Children and UNICEF, *Niños, niñas y adolescentes migrantes retornados. Un análisis de los contextos y las respuestas de los servicios y las políticas de protección en El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras y México,* 2015, http://www.unicef.org/lac/informe_migrantes_retornados_final.pdf.

[iii] RELAF, Save the Children and UNICEF, *Manual Sobre Estándares Internacionales de Derechos Humanos Aplicables a Los Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes Migrantes*, 2014, http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/manual-sobre-estandares-internacionales-de-derechos-humanos-aplicables-los-ninos-ninas-y.