

Here We Stand

World Vision and Child Rights

2nd edition

Expanded
version





Introduction

“Our vision for every child, life in all its fullness;
Our prayer for every heart, the will to make it so.”

—World Vision International’s Vision Statement

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation that in 2006 alone, served more than 100 million people and worked in 97 nations. Founded in 1950 to respond to the needs of children orphaned during the Korean War, World Vision has always been willing to take a stand when the rights of children are in danger. Today, World Vision’s mission statement embodies a commitment to seek to follow Christ’s example by working with the poor and oppressed in pursuit of justice and human transformation.

For World Vision, “the poor and oppressed” includes over 200 million children who work to secure essential income for themselves and their families¹; children traumatised by war; and children scarred by debt-bondage, slavery or sexual exploitation. Working with children in communities around the globe, World Vision has also confronted issues of family abuse and violence, which threaten children in the very place where they should be most safe.

World Vision advocates to secure protection for children and respect for their rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a tool that has provided a clear framework for ensuring children are protected and able to achieve their full potential. World Vision endorses the principles and articles of the CRC and its two Optional Protocols². World Vision believes the CRC states the minimum standards relating to survival, development, protection, non-discrimination and participation of all children, as well as the obligation to keep the best interests of children in mind.

The CRC and its Optional Protocols are consistent with World Vision policy on the rights and protection of children, and the organisation’s Core Values and Mission Statement. World Vision recognises that the CRC and its Optional Protocols are complemented by additional human rights treaties, which also promote the well-being of boys and girls. World Vision acknowledges and

supports the important protection provided to children by such instruments.

World Vision has special responsibility for the children who participate in our programs, and our innovative work on child protection is a critical part of our approach to children’s rights. Our commitment to building a child-safe organisation includes mandatory training for all staff on principles of child protection, with special in-depth training and assessment for those working directly with children.

Poverty, exploitation and violence are not inevitable. The problems that children face across the developing world, and which claim 9.7 million young lives below the age of 5 each year³, are the result of exploitive practices and humanity’s failure to be good stewards of the resources

World Vision has always been willing to take a stand when the rights of children are in danger: the right to survival, development, protection and participation.

with which it is endowed. World Vision’s mission statement is a call to challenge the unjust structures that constrain the poor in a world of false priorities, gross inequalities and distorted values. World Vision works for a world that no longer tolerates poverty—one where all people are able to reach their God-given potential.

World Vision acknowledges that children are actors in their own and in their communities’ development. Recognising children’s rights to participate as partners in development is a significant pillar of World Vision’s commitment to children.

While many challenges remain, important steps have been taken to further children’s rights. *A World Fit for Children* is a key document that was agreed upon in May 2002 by 180 nations at the UN Special Session on Children.

1 *The End of Child Labour Within Reach*, International Labour Organization, 2006

2 The Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

3 UNICEF, “Surveys reveal solid progress on child survival: child deaths fall below 10 million for the first time”, New York, 13 September 2007

The agreement identifies essential steps that must be taken in order for children's rights to be fully realised. Unfortunately, the implementation of these commitments has been slow, and millions of children continue to pay for the inaction of government leaders.

The *Here We Stand* papers provide an overview of World Vision's responses to major challenges facing children in the world in which they live today.⁴ It explains the agency's commitment to the rights of children and its desire that all children be able to live in safe, secure families that can care and provide for them. World Vision will continue to stand with children as they face each of the issues that are addressed here.

⁴ The *Here We Stand 2nd edition* papers were originally released, as twelve papers plus this Introduction, in December 2007. This *Here We Stand 2nd edition, expanded version*, re-released in 2010, adds two additional papers written during the same time period as the original twelve papers. These two additional papers are on *Children and Disabilities* and *Child Participation*. The content of these fourteen papers has not been updated since the original release, except for some additions to one paper, *Monitoring & Accountability under the CRC*. World Vision's work on all the issues outlined in these papers continues to evolve; therefore, in addition to the *Here We Stand* papers, we encourage readers to consult WV websites and recent publications, for the most current information.



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Children and armed conflict

“I would like you to give a message. Please do your best to tell the world what is happening to us, the children. So that other children don’t have to pass through this violence.”

—15-year-old girl interviewed by Amnesty International.

“Our collective failure to protect children must be transformed into an opportunity to confront the problems that cause their suffering. The impact of armed conflict on children is everyone’s responsibility and must be everyone’s concern.”

—Graça Machel, *The Machel Review*, 1996–2000, p. 3.

The issue

War has always hurt children, but today’s wars brutalise children in more deliberate, intensive and systematic ways than ever. When the lines between civilians and combatants are blurred, young people get caught up in complex wars over resources, ethnicity and power. Not only are they at times unintended victims, but all too often they are deliberately targeted and forced to become active participants.

During the 1990s, more than two million children died because of war; more than four million became disabled; 12 million were left homeless; one million were orphaned or separated from their parents¹; and more than 300,000 were recruited as child soldiers².

Small arms, cheap and readily obtained, are easy for children to use. Young people are deliberate targets in systematic rape, terrorising villages and the invoking of religion or ethnicity to incite hatred³—all tools of modern war. In the absence of other economic or social opportunities, some young people join warring factions for survival. And, due to the impact of debt and

the conditions imposed by the Heavily Indebted Poor Country initiative (HIPC), governments in conflict-prone countries have cut services that might protect children. During conflicts, children are also at an increased risk of becoming displaced, which increases the risks of child labour, sexual exploitation, substance abuse and numerous other hazards.

War affects children differently than adults; thus, it is important to focus specifically on protecting children in conflict situations. War threatens the most basic rights expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): the right to survival, the right to food, the right to family, the right to cultural and religious identity, and the right to education. War does not excuse child rights violations. The provisions of the CRC cannot be derogated during armed conflict—in fact, the CRC includes humanitarian provisions from the Geneva Conventions, especially in Articles 38 and 39 where States commit to provide assistance to children affected by war.

We must not stop advocating until the use of children in war is as unacceptable as chemical weapons or nuclear arms.

Girls face added challenges in times of conflict. Often girls are married at a young age to militants in exchange for protection for the girl’s family⁴. It has been found that approximately one third of all child soldiers are girls⁵. When recruited or forced into armed groups, girls are then often given to other soldiers as wives and forced to bear children at a very young age⁶. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court considers rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual exploitation as crimes against humanity, but they are used all too often as weapons of war⁷.

The reality is, however, that there are few mechanisms to protect vulnerable children in conflict situa-

1 *Child Soldiers*, United Nations (UNICEF), <<http://www.cyber-schoolbus.un.org/briefing/soldiers/soldiers.pdf>>

2 *Facts about child soldiers*, Human Rights Watch, <<http://www.humanrightswatch.org/campaigns/crp/facts.htm>>

3 *Issues: Introduction*, Office of the SRSG for children and armed conflict, <<http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/issues41.html>>

4 Rose, Loretta, *Every Girl Counts: Development, Justice and Gender*, World Vision, 2001

5 *ibid*

6 *ibid*

7 *ibid*

tions. States, which should protect children, are unable to do so or become violators themselves; non-State actors, whether rebel troops or corporations that profit from war, are not often held accountable. Even when gross violations of children's rights during armed conflicts have been documented, the international community has been reluctant to intervene. This pattern, however, is gradually changing.

Recognition of the challenges faced by children affected by armed conflict has grown over the years and as a result, many positive steps have been taken. In 1993, the UN Secretary General appointed Graça Machel as an Independent Expert to study the impact of armed conflict on children; she issued her landmark report in 1996. In response, the UN General Assembly approved the establishment of a Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG) on Children and Armed Conflict in 1997. In 2000, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict was adopted, and it entered into force on 12 February 2002.

In 2003, the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict called for improved monitoring and reporting on the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The Paris Principles (an update from the Capetown Principles) saw 58 countries commit themselves to ending the illegal recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. It also provided detailed guidelines on how to prevent children from being recruited and how to provide effective support to those already involved with armed forces.

The Secretary General's annual report in 2005 also recommended a comprehensive system to protect war-affected children, including a thorough mechanism to take action on violations against children. This mechanism was later established through Security Council resolution 1612. In addition to the Security Council's adoption of resolutions 1261, 1314, 1379, 1460 and 1539 on children and armed conflict, a working group has also been established to provide the Council with recommendations on strengthening the laws and policies that are currently in place to protect children in armed conflict.

Another positive step was the Agenda for Action endorsed by 132 countries at the first International Conference on War-Affected Children. The International Criminal Court also made its first prosecution in 2006, in addition to the first indictments made by the prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Tangible examples of positive developments include the release of children by rebel movements operating in Uganda and Sudan, as well as the demobilisation of 40,000 children due to war cessations in Afghanistan,



PHOTO: JON WARREN

Angola and Sierra Leone⁸. Additional positive actions can be seen in Southern Sudan, where the peace settlement has made education a growing reality for children.

For most children caught in conflict, however, words and good intentions have not changed their reality. With more than 25,000 children drawn into conflicts in Darfur and Côte d'Ivoire⁹ alone, a lot of work is still needed. We must not stop advocating until the use of children in war is as unacceptable as the use of chemical weapons or nuclear arms.

8 *World Vision US publicises child soldiers report in Washington DC event*, World Vision US, 2004 <<http://www.child-rights.org/PolicyAdvocacy/pahome2.5.nsf/allarticleshome/7E0FACB51BA6C1F388256F71007F8971?OpenDocument>>

9 *ibid*

World Vision policy

World Vision's commitment on this issue is rooted in over 50 years of experience in directly assisting child victims of armed violence—dating from the Korean and Indochina wars—and its ongoing emergency relief. This experience has shown that the key priorities for children affected by conflict, in addition to protection, are the provision of food, shelter, health care and education. World Vision has also demonstrated a commitment to the reintegration of former child soldiers, care and protection of displaced children, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding through all stages of lasting conflicts—such as those in Burundi, Colombia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Sudan, Kenya and Northern Uganda.

World Vision advocates for the protection of all children caught in armed conflict and promotes international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law as appropriate frameworks for such protection. World Vision believes that the CRC and its Optional Protocols (on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) continue to provide the most coherent set of protections for all children.

In 2000, World Vision published a policy paper titled *The Right to Peace: Children and Armed Conflict*. More recently, World Vision has also published research on the impact of armed conflict on children in Northern Uganda, Southern Sudan and on the displacement of children due to conflict in the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

World Vision recommends the following steps in a comprehensive strategy to protect children's rights before, during and after war:

Prevention

- Stop the use of child soldiers through effective implementation of the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and the non-recruitment and non-deployment of those under age 18.
- Implement the call of the Security Council to “restrict arms transfers which could aggravate existing tensions... and collaborate in combating illegal arms flows.”
- Give the needs of children higher priority in World Bank, International Monetary Fund and donor country strategies. In conflict-prone countries, seek public child-impact assessments of fiscal policies and monitor the policies' commitment to the CRC.

- With the active participation of children, invest more resources in preventive peacebuilding initiatives within community development programmes.

Protection

- Strengthen early warning systems. Establish a child-focused early intervention team to aggressively monitor and report systemic violations, as well as an effective mechanism to pursue complaints of serious violations through UN channels.
- Promote and implement strategies based on the concept of children as “zones of peace;” enforce Geneva Convention prohibitions against attacks on schools, hospitals and places where children congregate.
- More actively protect children's right to access humanitarian assistance, and allocate more resources to the needs of children in camps for displaced persons.
- Maximise young people's participation, and make them aware of the risks and consequences of involvement in armed conflict.

War threatens the most basic rights expressed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Recovery and reintegration

- Establish education as a key component of emergency assistance.
- Give high priority to children's issues early in the peace process, using such means as civil society children's advocates drafting child-specific provisions in peace agreements.
- Implement child-specific demobilisation and reintegration efforts that expedite a clear break with military life. Allow a sufficient time frame for successful reintegration and promote active participation by young people in their communities.
- Pay special attention to the needs of girls, including reproductive health services and overcoming community rejection—especially following sexual abuse by enemy forces.
- Use community-based approaches to deal with the psycho-social impacts of conflict, with respect for the children's cultural context.

In addition to the above steps, World Vision is working toward three overarching actions¹⁰:

- 1) Increased funding for the prevention of armed conflict and grassroots peacebuilding by governments.
- 2) Improved interaction between grassroots peacebuilders and UN agencies, especially the UNDP.
- 3) Inclusion of peacebuilding objectives in the Millennium Development Goals.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision participated in the Graça Machel study, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, and in follow-up advocacy, including the recent review of the report. World Vision initiated a non-governmental organisation (NGO) consultation and presentation to Security Council members before their debate on children and armed conflict, was active in the First International Conference on War-Affected Children and in developing its NGO Plan of Action, and attended the first international meeting of the Global Partnership to Prevent Armed Conflict.

World Vision continues to provide leadership in NGO networks on Children and Armed Conflict, including serving on the Steering Committee for the Watchlist on children and armed conflict. World Vision also actively participated in the forum on how to best put resolution 1612 into operation, and participated in the Cornell International Law Journal's 2004 Symposium on "Peacekeeping and Security in Countries Utilising Child Soldiers." World Vision also advocates on a range of other issues, such as landmines and small arms, with the aim of lessening the impact of conflict on children.

Further reading

- *Children as Peacebuilders*, World Vision International, 2001.
- *The Right to Peace: Children and Armed Conflict*, Working Paper No. 2, World Vision International, 2000.
- *Constructing a Culture of Peace in Colombia*, World Vision Colombia, 2000.
- *One Word One World: Stop Child Soldiers*, World Vision Australia/Australian Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 1999.
- *The Effects of Armed Conflict on Girls*, Staff Working Paper, World Vision International, 1996.
- *Pawns of Politics: Children, Conflict and Peace in Northern Uganda*, World Vision International, 2004 (2nd Edition in 2005)
- *Reluctant Hosts: The Impact of the LRA in South Sudan*, World Vision South Sudan, 2007
- *War In My Back Yard? Issues and Action around Children and Armed Conflict*, World Vision United Kingdom, 2002
- *WVUK Children and Armed Conflict Update UNGASS 2002*, World Vision United Kingdom, 2002
- *Small Arms, Children and Armed Conflict*, World Vision Canada, 2005
- *Their Future In Our Hands: Children Displaced by Conflicts in Africa's Great Lakes Region*, World Vision Africa, 2006
- *Reluctant Hosts: The Impact of the LRA in South Sudan*, World Vision South Sudan, 2007
- *The International Criminal Court: Finding Justice for Victims, Ending Impunity for Perpetrators*, World Vision International, 2002

¹⁰ *World Vision demands increased funding for grassroots peacebuilding by governments*, World Vision International, 2001 <<http://www.child-rights.org/PolicyAdvocacy/pahome2.5.nsf/allarticleshome/E1140E839D10FDC48825704500836E91?OpenDocument>>



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Child labour

“Hazardous child labour is a betrayal of every child’s rights as a human being and is an offence against our civilisation”.

—UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children*, 1997.

The issue

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that in 2004 over 200 million children were participating in child labour, with approximately 126 million of those children participating in hazardous work¹. While these numbers are staggering, they mark the first time the ILO has been able to state that the number of children participating in the worst forms of child labour is decreasing².

Not all work that children participate in is hazardous or exploitive. The ILO defines exploitive child labour as work which “deprives children of their childhood and their dignity, which hampers their access to education and the acquisition of skills, and which is performed under conditions harmful to their health and their development.”³ Opinion is divided as to the point at which work becomes exploitive, but the debate focuses on questions such as: What is the physical nature of the work? How does the work affect the child’s current activities (such as education) and future choices? What impact is the work having on the child’s access to his or her most fundamental human rights?

In 1999, the ILO secured agreement on an international Convention (No. 182) on the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, supplemented by Recommendation No. 190. The Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, as it is known, seeks to eradicate the least tolerable forms of child labour, which include slavery, prostitution, compulsory recruitment into armed forces, and any labour which harms the health, safety or morals of children. In 2005, mining and quarrying were also identified among the worst forms of child labour. This form of labour is particularly dangerous as children, especially

young boys, are often asked to climb 15 to 30 metres into pits to set explosives and then escape the pits before the explosives have gone off, exposing jewels and gems⁴.

The ILO has also taken additional steps to help raise awareness about child labour through different activities, such as declaring 12 June “World Day Against Child Labour” and initiatives such as the “Red Card” campaign. On 18 January 2002, another important protocol entered into force to help eliminate child labour; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It has now been ratified by 119 States.

Well-meaning measures can often have disastrous consequences. While families continue to live in poverty with an overriding need for income, their children are potentially vulnerable to exploitation.

Governments, NGOs and the private sector have undertaken a wide range of efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour. However, well-meaning measures can often have disastrous consequences, as demonstrated by the experience of a US Child Labour Deterrence Act, which was designed to deal with child labour through sanctions against the industries involved. When the Harkin Bill was first introduced into Congress in 1993, factory owners who faced penalisation took preventive action. In Bangladesh, one of the largest garment suppliers to the USA, factories that feared the loss of US contracts dismissed an estimated 70,000 child workers⁵. A follow-up study by Oxfam found that an estimated 30,000 children, formerly employed in the garment

1 *Child Labour*, CRIN, 2007 <<http://www.crin.org/themes/ViewTheme.asp?id=3>>

2 *The end of child labour: Within Reach*, International Labour Office, 2006

3 International Labour Organisation, ‘*Strategies for Eliminating Child Labour: Prevention, Removal and Rehabilitation*’, *Synthesis Document Prepared for the ILO Conference on Child Labour*, Oslo, 27–30 October, 1997.

4 Makala, D, Kwayu, A, Wameyo, A (2005) *What is Violence? Contributions from children in Tanzania: A contribution to the UN Study on Violence*. World Vision International—Africa Office

5 *Eradicating Child Labour Without Putting Children on the Streets*, Together: A Journal of the World Vision Partnership, No. 58, April–June 1998, pp. 9–10

industry, had moved into the more hazardous welding and commercial sex industries⁶.

World Vision policy

World Vision's experience in working in developing countries among marginalised people, including child labourers, makes one thing clear: children will continue to work until there are viable and sustainable alternatives that reach the entire family and community.

While families continue to live in poverty with an overriding need for income, their children are potentially vulnerable to exploitation. If children are not sent into export industry factories to work, they may be sent to work in other less-monitorable industries. Indeed, most child labourers are found in the informal economy⁷—on farms, in households, on the streets and in workshops, often beyond the reach of protective labour legislation.

Rather than favouring punitive sanctions or consumer boycotts, World Vision, along with many other children's rights activists and non-government organisations, focuses on working to abolish the most extreme and hazardous forms of child labour—such as child prostitution, bonded labour, work involving very young children, and any work that is hazardous to children's physical, emotional or spiritual health. In situations where children must work, World Vision works with children to advocate for improvements to their working conditions, for instance to ensure they receive a fair wage and that the conditions are not hazardous, and to improve their access to education.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision has consistently advocated a multi-pronged approach at national, regional and international levels and through a range of publications (some of which are listed below). This approach can be summarised as:

- Ending the worst forms of child labour quickly.
- Creating income alternatives for families.
- Improving access to good quality and appropriate education.
- Tackling the structural impediments that create and compound poverty.

In 2000, World Vision undertook a major study of child labour in several Asian countries, publishing an



PHOTO: PHILIP MAHER

executive summary of the extensive data obtained⁸. This study confirmed that the underlying causes of child labour are basically structural: widespread poverty, gross inequality of income distribution, and poor or inadequate education. Furthermore, the implementation of some Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, imposed on the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries, has diverted funds from areas such as health and education, making children more vulnerable.

World Vision has also completed an extensive study on child labour within Latin America and the Caribbean, titled *In Exchange for My Childhood*. Through interviews, testimonials, context analysis and portraits of the children's daily lives, the study gives an in depth look at

⁶ *ibid*, p. 10

⁷ Scott, M., Austin, S., Haines, T., Patterson, T., *Good Work, Bad Work, Tough Choices: Child Labour and World Vision's Area Development Programs in Thailand, India and the Philippines*, World Vision Canada, 2000.

⁸ *ibid*

child labour through the eyes of children, families and communities.

Based on extensive on-the-ground experience with children and their families living in poverty, and in line with children's rights as enshrined in international law, World Vision endorses a "three-pillars" approach to eliminate child labour: prevention, removal and reintegration. Of these, prevention is the most challenging—it requires long-term, international, national, community- and family-based solutions. And in the short-term, if removal is neither possible nor appropriate, World Vision urges better protection for working children.

Further reading

- *Look Before You Leap: Strategic Approaches to Urban Child Labour*, World Vision Cambodia, 2000.
- *Good Work, Bad Work, Tough Choices: Child Labour and World Vision's Area Development Programs in Thailand, India and Philippines*, World Vision Canada, 2000.
- 'Eradicating Child Labour Without Putting Children on the Streets', *Together: A Journal of the World Vision Partnership*, No. 58, World Vision International, 1998.
- *Helping Business to Help Stop Child Labour*, Anti-Slavery International supported by World Vision, 1996.
- *Children of the Dust: Street Children in Vietnam and Children in Extremely Difficult Circumstances*, World Vision International, 1996.
- *Child Labour in Context*, World Vision Australia, 1995.
- *Street Survival: Children, Work and Urban Drift in Cambodia*, World Vision Australia, 1995.
- *Children's Work, Adult's Play: Child Sex Tourism, A Problem in Cambodia*, World Vision Cambodia, 2001.
- *No Child of Mine...!' Opening the World's Eyes to the Sexual Exploitation of Children*, World Vision UK, 2002.
- *How and Why We Work: Child Workers in the Informal Economy In Phnom Penh and Battambang*, World Vision Cambodia, 2005.



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Monitoring and accountability under the CRC

“Our promises to children throughout the world remain unfulfilled.”

—Graça Machel, Introduction, *The Machel Review*, 1996–2000

“Let us not make children pay for our failures anymore. Who among us has not looked into the eyes of a disappointed child, and been humbled? ... They and their peers in every land have a right to expect us to turn our words into action—and I repeat, they expect us to turn our words into action—and to build a world fit for children.”

—Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary General, 2002

The issue

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is more than a statement of ideals or collective dreams for children. It is a covenant, or statement of commitments to children; it is also an instrument of international law. As such, it entails responsibilities for meeting those commitments. States which have ratified the CRC (known as States Parties) have the primary obligation to implement the CRC, but responsibility to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of children belongs to everyone.

The CRC entered into force on 20 November 1989, and has been ratified by every nation, with the exception of two (Somalia and the United States of America). The purpose of the CRC is to provide a set of universal minimum standards for the quality of life of every child, covering a broad range of children’s civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights¹. Tragically, the CRC has the weakest follow-up mechanisms of all the human rights instruments, and weaker mechanisms than any international economic agreement.

States are required to report on their progress toward meeting their obligations under the CRC within two years of ratification, and then periodically once every five years. NGOs, civil society organisations and child-led organisations are also encouraged to write alternative reports to convey their perspectives on the State report². Reports written by children, or with the participation of children, are growing in popularity, but the extent to which children are involved could be greatly increased.

An appointed UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reviews the State and alternative reports and makes recommendations to the governments in the form of Concluding Observations. The Committee, however, lacks power to require the State’s compliance—a significant weakness in the current system.

The legal authority of the CRC varies significantly from State to State. In some countries, international treaties such as the CRC are automatically integrated into the domestic legal framework once that country ratifies the instrument. In other countries, international treaties require specific enabling legislation or constitutional reform before they can be enforceable within domestic legal systems³.

States have official obligations, but responsibility to respect the rights of children belongs to everyone.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the rights of children are often the last to receive attention instead of the first. When asked to comply with the CRC, national governments of poor countries rightfully argue that their capacity for compliance is restrained by the fiscal decisions of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other economic institutions—institutions that have no official obligations to children.

1 *A Guide for Non-Governmental Organisations Reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child*, revised 1998, The NGO Group for the Rights of the Child, Geneva.

2 Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006, *Day of General Discussion on the Right of the Child to be Heard*, 7 May 2007, <www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/discussion/Final_Recommendations_after_DGD.doc>, paras. 31, 34, 57.

3 Austin, S., Lam, V., *Legislative Measures for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: International lessons learned and recommendations for the government of Canada*, World Vision Canada, 2006.

The system breaks down even further when national governments ignore child rights violations, or worse, are violators themselves.

Some improvements to the Committee and the monitoring process have been made over the past few years. The number of Committee members has been increased to help clear the backlog of State reports that had accumulated. Another innovation that the Committee has undertaken is to split into parallel chambers in order to increase its efficiency in processing the periodic reports.

In addition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, there are additional global, regional and national mechanisms that help protect children's rights. At the global level, the United Nations Human Rights Council appoints Special Rapporteurs who study the situation of children with specific thematic and country-focused mandates, and give reports and recommendations on how the situation of children could be improved. On occasion, the UN General Assembly appoints Special Representatives to the Secretary General (SRSG) to address specific child rights issues. An SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict is currently in place, and a new SRSG on Violence against Children was appointed in May 2009.

Furthermore, the UN Human Rights Council's new Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a mechanism through which the human rights (including child rights) situation in each State is scrutinised and recommendations made for improvements. Its first sessions took place in 2008. Under the UPR, all Member States of the United Nations will have the human rights situation in their country scrutinised in an inter-governmental process once every four years. States will examine States, and make recommendations aimed at addressing issues of concern. NGOs can participate through the submission of short reports (5 pages) on any human rights concerns, and governments can then be "lobbied" to raise particular concerns during the three hour review on each country, which takes place in Geneva. At the subsequent Session of the Human Rights Council, the State under review must report back to outline the activities it intends to undertake to address concerns raised. The UPR process is an important new mechanism for ensuring that the rights of children are accorded their due attention.

At the regional level, mechanisms exist in Africa, Europe and the Americas to help ensure that children's rights are being respected⁴. At the national level, ombudspersons also help to promote children's rights; often times they will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the CRC and ensuring that children's rights are protected within their countries.

⁴ *Using Regional Human Rights Mechanisms*, CRIN, 2007 <<http://www.crin.org/RM/Introduction.asp>>



PHOTO: JON WARREN

World Vision policy

World Vision believes that the monitoring and implementation mechanisms of the CRC must be strengthened immediately. Many government delegates and most non-governmental representatives who participated in the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002 agreed on the need for measures to strengthen implementation and accountability at all levels. When rights violations threaten children's lives or cause permanent damage, it is clear that reporting to the Committee on the Rights of Child once every five years is inadequate. Furthermore, the Committee's recommendations are nonbinding. This means that even in some of the most extreme cases of child rights violations, the Committee has only the power of persuasion. Effectively, it can be ignored.

World Vision believes that child participation within the monitoring and reporting process of the CRC is crucial. The Committee must have greater access to children's thoughts and ideas on the implementation of their

rights in order to gain a true reflection of the state of the children's rights in any given context. World Vision has recently conducted research and issued guidelines to assist NGOs in facilitating children's participation in holding their governments accountable to the CRC⁵.

World Vision also recognises the need for stronger domestic legal systems that uphold the rights of children as enshrined in the CRC. In countries as diverse as Canada and Kenya, World Vision works to ensure that national legislation complies with the standards laid out in the CRC. In Kenya, World Vision promoted and supported the creation of Area Advisory Councils (AACs) at local levels. The AACs are legally entrenched in Kenya's Children's Act and their focus is on safeguarding the rights of children⁶. In Canada, World Vision has been advocating for legislation that would bind the federal government to the CRC, and for the establishment of a national Children's Commissioner to act as an advocate and ombudsperson for children⁷.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision is a member of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and also participates in a range of inter-agency coalitions dedicated to securing the rights of children (including the Global Campaign for Education, the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, the Global Movement for Children, and the Advisory Council on Violence Against Children). World Vision's own advocacy work has a special focus on the rights of children, and its policy staff works in Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia Pacific, the Middle East and elsewhere. Advocacy for the rights of children inevitably entails seeking stronger implementation of the CRC, and as a result, World Vision has consistently called both for the CRC and its Optional Protocols to be ratified and implemented and for its accountability mechanisms to be strengthened.

To help strengthen the accountability of States that have ratified the CRC, World Vision and other international agencies have been advocating for the creation of a new Optional Protocol to establish a complaints/communications procedure that would allow individuals, groups of individuals and organisations to

petition the Committee on the Rights of the Child to address violations under the CRC⁸.

In addition, World Vision has begun to systematically engage with the UN Human Rights Council's new Universal Periodic Review (UPR). World Vision has submitted individual or coalition reports on child rights, in some cases highlighting concerns and recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Initial submissions led to two governments (as of April 2009) making new commitments with respect to children, which can be directly traced to World Vision involvement in this process.

For example, in June 2008, World Vision Colombia worked in coalition with Save the Children, Plan International, SOS Kinderdorf and the National

Our promises to children throughout the world remain unfulfilled.

Children's Observatory of Colombia, to prepare a joint report for the UPR. The report highlighted concerns around the recruitment of child soldiers, sexual violence and exploitation, and insufficient birth registration amongst other concerns. Nine recommendations from the coalition's report were incorporated by the UN into their report compiling NGO submissions. Geneva-based representatives of these NGOs then lobbied representatives of several different governments who agreed to raise these recommendations with the Government of Colombia during the review, in December 2008. As a result, Colombia committed in the Human Rights Council in March 2009 to take several new steps to improve the promotion and protection of several aspects of children's rights. World Vision Colombia and the other NGOs are closely monitoring the activities of the Colombian government in follow up to these new commitments.

There is an urgent need to close the accountability gap and ensure that governments fulfill their obligations to uphold the rights of children. Thus, World Vision advocates for the following:

- Involve children and youth in monitoring and regular reporting on the implementation of the CRC.
- Increase resources for CRC awareness, education and training, along with training in abuse prevention (through national action plans or—when countries cannot afford it—international assistance).

5 These documents are titled *Children as Change Agents: A review of child participation in periodic reporting on the CRC and Children as Change Agents: Guidelines on child participation in periodic reporting on the CRC*.

6 Wameyo, Amboka, *Quality Work—Advocacy*, email by Jenn Bouchier, 11 September 2007

7 supra note 3

8 <http://www.crin.org/law/CRC_complaints/>

- Incorporate the CRC into national laws and establish compliance mechanisms.
- Undertake and publicise child-impact assessments of fiscal policies—national budgets and policies, and those developed by institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the UN—ensuring that such policies support countries’ commitments under the CRC.
- Establish national-level independent human rights institutions with the mandate to hold governments accountable to the CRC, for example, ombudspersons or commissioners for children, in all States Parties.
- Strengthen the impact of the Committee on the Rights of the Child through the provision of increased resources, ensuring timely reporting, and wide dissemination of Committee Concluding Observations and Recommendations.
- Give children a high priority in plans for international assistance and in national co-ordination of aid, and ensure children participate in the decision making process.
- Build on the monitoring system for the CRC that is already in place, by strengthening links at national and international levels, including the creation of an Optional Protocol to the CRC for a complaints/communications procedure.
- Strengthen the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights through the establishment of a Child Rights Unit, which could ensure that immediate investigations of violations during armed conflict can be carried out and reports to the Security Council can be followed-up with actions—such as diplomatic pressure, arms embargoes and targeted sanctions— that punish violators but not children.

Further reading:

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- *Child Participation: Challenges of Empowerment*, Discussion Paper, World Vision UK, 2000.
- *Transformação*, quarterly journal (Portuguese), World Vision (Visão Mundial) Brazil.
- *Tenth Anniversary: Convention on the Rights of the Child*, *Action News*, quarterly publication, World Vision Australia, 1999
- *Guidelines for Child Participation within the Periodic Reporting Process*, World Vision Canada, 2007
- *Summary Report for Child Participation within the Periodic Reporting Process*, World Vision Canada, 2007
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Ending child poverty

“The need to protect and nurture children in early childhood should merit the highest priority when governments make decisions about laws, policies, programmes and money. Yet, tragically, both for children and for countries, these are the years that receive the least attention.”

—Carol Bellamy, then Executive Director of UNICEF, launching *The State of the World's Children*, 2001.

The issue

In the year 2000, every United Nations member adopted the Millennium Declaration, as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These documents represented a unifying commitment of 189 nations to tackle poverty and all of its devastating effects¹. That same year also saw the climax of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, to have all unpayable debts from the poorest countries cancelled by the year 2000². These two major events have played a significant role in changing the ways in which aid and debt relief are viewed and handled, at both national and international levels.

Five years later, when the crippling effects of poverty were still being felt and promises of poverty reduction were still unfulfilled, numerous international treaties and campaigns were set into motion. In 2005, the Global Call to Action Against Poverty was launched (better known as the Make Poverty History campaign). In that same year, the UN Millennium Summit took place, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness was signed, the Commission for Africa was created and the G8 leaders agreed to increase the annual amount of aid by US \$40 billion.

In spite of these major developments, 600 million children are currently living in absolute poverty³, one billion children are deprived of the basic necessities of life⁴ and 77 million primary-aged children are still not in

school⁵. Yet every day, \$100 million is paid in debt relief from the world's poorest nations⁶. This debt repayment costs seven million children their lives each year⁷; every year 9.7 million children under the age of 5 die due to poverty or preventable causes⁸.

The MDGs were supposed to be a first step forward in combating the devastating effects of poverty. The Goals are:

- 1) Reducing the number of people living in poverty by half;
- 2) Ensuring all children complete their primary education;
- 3) Eliminating gender discrimination at all levels;
- 4) Reducing the number of child deaths under five by two thirds;
- 5) Reducing the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters;
- 6) Halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV, malaria and other major diseases;
- 7) Ensuring environmental sustainability; and
- 8) Developing a global partnership for development.

Research has shown that education not only improves economic opportunities but also has a significant impact on health.

When creating these goals, the hope was that the majority of them would be completed by 2015⁹; however, at the halfway mark the completion of these goals is behind schedule.

While it is the responsibility of all countries, both rich and poor, to accomplish the first seven goals, it is crucial that the richer countries come through on the

1 *What they are*, Millennium Project, 2006, <<http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/index.htm>>

2 Barrett, M., *The world will never be the same again*, The Creative Element, 2000

3 *Poverty and Economics*, CRIN, <<http://www.crin.com/themes/ViewTheme.asp?id=4>>

4 *The State of the World's Children*, UNICEF, 2005

5 *Reaching the Unreached—our common challenge*, The Global Task Force on Child Labour and Education, 2007

6 *Drop the debt*, Jubilee Debt Campaign, <<http://www.jubileedebt-campaign.org.uk>>

7 supra note 2

8 UNICEF, “*Surveys reveal solid progress on child survival: child deaths fall below 10 million for the first time*”, New York, 13 September 2007

9 MDG 3 also included a 2005 indicator of eliminating gender disparity within primary education. This indicator was not met.

eight goal well before 2015. MDG 8 requires that the richer countries provide more and better aid, more sustainable debt relief and fairer trade rules. While progress has been made around areas of debt relief through campaigns such as Jubilee 2000, the promises made have not been kept.

One of the major changes that resulted from the Jubilee campaign was that of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). PRSPs required national governments, with the participation of citizens, to develop national strategies to reduce poverty in their countries. This concept was a good one—however, in practice, years of externally imposed economic development policies have weakened the capacity of governments to effectively implement their strategies to reduce poverty. If national PRSPs are to be effective, then the capacity of governments and the ability of citizens to meaningfully participate must be strengthened.

Having resources available for the realisation of children's rights is not just a question of debt and adjustment. It is also a matter of creating fair conditions for trade: conditions allowing poor countries to sell their goods in the markets of rich countries without paying additional taxes, and conditions that recognise that developing countries may need special measures to create strong economies both in the short and long term.

World Vision policy

World Vision programmes benefit more than 10 million children worldwide—both directly (for example, through support for education and nutrition) and indirectly through initiatives that strengthen the economic position of their communities (such as training, agricultural improvements, and micro-credit and income-generation initiatives). Such programmes help children and their families achieve their right to an adequate standard of living and help create opportunities for children's future participation in the economic life of their countries. But without just economic policies at the national and global levels, children's participation will always be hindered. World Vision believes that there are six key areas around economic justice: aid, debt, poverty reduction strategies, conditionality, trade and corporate responsibility.

World Vision believes that economic injustice is the root cause of child poverty, and that without sustainable, "pro-poor" economic growth, hundreds of millions of children will remain in absolute poverty, living on less than US\$1 a day. Supporting pro-poor growth means ensuring that governments have the resources they need to invest in the realisation of children's rights, including



PHOTO: PHILIP MAHER

their rights to education and health care. It also means ensuring income distribution that shares national wealth fairly. This kind of growth is dependent on the creation of better trade rules, deeper and quicker debt relief, and the provision of desperately needed funds for human development.

World Vision supports debt reduction through the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and also believes that this process needs to be improved so that more debt is relieved within a shorter timeframe. World Vision has advocated for economic justice through being active in PRSP discussions in Senegal, Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras and Cambodia. World Vision believes that PRSPs have the potential to reduce poverty, however, the current weaknesses within the system must first be addressed. World Vision programmes work to "strengthen [local producers'] capacity to break through [trade] barriers; other [programmes] engage in direct advocacy to make local conditions fairer. World Vision has been involved in ethical trading initiatives to demonstrate alternatives to the current trade system"¹⁰.

10 *Quick Guide to Economic Justice: advocacy issues*, World Vision International, 2006

World Vision also serves on the International Facilitation Group that is the co-ordinating body of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty.

World Vision advocacy

To help achieve the kind of economic justice that can allow poor children to reach adulthood in more prosperous countries, World Vision has advocated for increased aid through campaigns such as Urgent Issues, Imagine a World where Children are Safe, and Make Poverty History; debt relief through Jubilee 2000, Bretton Woods Project and Eurodad; and lobbying for an urgent review of conditionality through the Bretton Woods Project. World Vision is also a member of coalitions that advocate for more aid such as InterAction, British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND) and Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), as well as being involved with the Ethical Trade Initiative for different trade-related causes and participating in WTO debates.

World Vision has also been active in the MICAH campaign, which set out to mobilise Christian churches to show public support for the completion of the MDGs. World Vision also submitted a paper to the Committee on the Rights of the Child for the 2007 Day of General Discussion on the responsibility of States to invest in the implementation of children's economic, social and cultural rights.

Children must be able to grow up with equal access to essential services such as health care and education. Research has shown that education not only improves children's economic opportunities but also has a significant impact on health.

World Vision has five recommendations for improving the availability of resources for the implementation of children's rights:

- 1) Increase transparency and accountability in resource allocation and use;
- 2) Take a whole-of-government approach to the identification and use of available resources to benefit children. Develop indicators to measure progress toward realising children's economic, social and cultural rights;
- 3) Assess available resources beyond financial measures that contribute to the implementation of children's economic, social and cultural rights;
- 4) Ensure that international co-operation is guided by the CRC, and that specific targets are set for the allocation of resources toward children through official development assistance (ODA); and

- 5) Develop and implement effective resource-tracking systems for the allocation and use of resources.

World Vision's advocacy also includes a focus on the need for increased levels of overseas development assistance. In order to tackle poverty and not only meet but also exceed the MDGs, World Vision calls for the following five actions:

- Increase and de-politicise aid, make it predictable and target the vulnerable;
- Cancel the remaining debts of the poorest countries;
- Strengthen national PRS processes;
- Review conditionality¹¹; and
- Adjust trade rules in favour of poorer countries.

It has consistently been children who have felt the effects of misguided economic policy.

Further reading

- *World Vision International's Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child's Day of General Discussion: "Resources for the Rights of the Child—Responsibility of States" Investments for the Implementation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Children and International Cooperation (CRC art.4)* 21 September 2007 • *PRSPs: Good News for the Poor?* World Vision International, 2000. • *Food Security: A First Step Toward More Fair Trade*, World Vision Canada, 2000. • *The Poor Can't Wait: Poverty and Debt Relief, Working Paper No.1*, World Vision International, 2000. • *Urgent Issues for the Children of the New Millennium*, World Vision International, 1999. • *Trade and Development: Making the WTO Work for the Poor*, World Vision Australia, 1999. • *Globalisation and Development: Three Perspectives on Human Security*, Discussion Paper, World Vision UK, 1999. • *Who Will Bale out the Poor?* World Vision International, 1998 • *Poverty Reduction: Are Strategies Working?*, World Vision Zambia, Bolivia, UK, 2005 • *Make Their Poverty History*, World Vision International, 2005 • *PRSPs and Donor Strategies: Do They Add Up to Effective Aid?*, World Vision Canada, 2004 • *Rough Diamond: PRSPs and the 60th Anniversary of the World Bank and IMF*, World Vision International, 2004 • *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, World Vision International, 2004 • *African Voices for Africa's Future*,

¹¹ World Vision therefore supports the use of target-based conditionality allowing governments the flexibility to develop local plans and strategies to achieve these targets.

World Vision Africa Regional Office, 2004 • *Risky Development: Export Concentration, Foreign Investment and Policy Conditionality*, World Vision Australia, 2003 • *False Economies: Why AIDS-affected Countries Are A Special Case For Action*, World Vision International, 2003 • *Doing the Rights Thing: The World Bank and The Human Rights of People Living in Poverty*, World Vision International, 2003 • *Maquilas through the Americas*, World Vision International, 2003 • *The IMF and Civil Society: Deepening the Dialogue*, World Vision International, 2003 • *Promoting Growth for Poverty Reduction: The Role of IMF Lending Advice*, World Vision International, 2003 • *Aid, Growth and Poverty Reduction*, World Vision Australia, 2002 • *Masters of their Own Development? PRSPs and the Prospects for the Poor*, World Vision International, 2002



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Girl children

“Gender equality will not only empower women to overcome poverty, but will also assist their children, families, communities and countries as well. When seen in this light, gender equality is not only morally right—it is pivotal to human progress.”

—*The State of the World’s Children 2007: Women and Children the double dividend of gender equality: Executive Summary*, UNICEF, 2007

“The girl child of today is the woman of tomorrow. The skills, ideas and energy of the girl child are vital for full attainment of the goals of equality, development and peace. For the girl to develop her full potential she needs to be nurtured in an enabling environment, where her spiritual, intellectual and material needs for survival, protection and development are met, and her equal rights safeguarded.”

—From the *Platform for Action*, Fourth UN Conference for Women, 1995

The issue

Globally, the fact that girls are disadvantaged is not news. Before birth, the girl child may be selectively aborted; at birth she may be killed or abandoned. As she grows, she receives less food, health care and education than her brothers. She will typically work longer hours than the boy children around her, receive less education, training and lower pay, and be treated as a second-class citizen in the social, economic and legal systems that structure her life.

She is extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation through abuse, rape or prostitution; viewed as an economic and social burden, she is often married off early, becoming a bride and a mother while still a child¹.

The deplorable conditions in which countless children, especially girls, exist have prompted the global community to create a safer, more nurturing world for children—at least on paper. Efforts to improve

the status of girls include events such as the Beijing +5 Conference and the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. While some progress has been made in changing policies, the reality for millions of female children is illustrated by the world’s failure to meet the 2005 indicator for MDG 3: to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education.

The Partnership on Sustainable Strategies for Girls’ Education has stated that investment in girls, particularly through education, is one of the most effective development investments a country can make. When a country educates its girls, it raises economic productivity, lowers maternal and infant mortality, reduces fertility rates, improves the health, well-being and educational prospects of the next generation, promotes sounder management of environmental resources and reduces poverty². It also meets a basic human right³.

The skills, ideas and energy of the girl child are vital for attainment of the goals of equality, development and peace.

The plight of the girl child has become increasingly recognised by the international community. This can be seen in the 2007 State of the World’s Children report, which focused on women and girl children’s difficulties, and the Commission on the Status of Women, which focused its 51st session on “The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child”⁴. World Vision submitted a briefing paper to the Commission for this session titled *Hope for the girl child*.

2 *Girls’ Education: A World Bank Priority, Why is girls education important*, World Bank, 2007 <<http://go.worldbank.org/1L4BH3TG20>>

3 *ibid*

4 Children’s Rights Information Network, <<http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=12789>>

1 Rose, L., *Every girl counts: Development, justice and gender*, World Vision, 2001

World Vision policy

In the early 1990s World Vision's Gender and Development Working Group developed a renewed policy commitment to advocacy and programming for women and girls. One result of this process was World Vision's "Decade of the Girl Child" throughout the 1990s. World Vision's own commitment to girls reflects those UN conventions that define and promote the human rights of women and girls. It also reflects World Vision's Christian understanding of God's intention of fullness of life for all people.

World Vision believes that for communities and nations to have healthy, productive societies, the girl child needs to live and develop in an environment free from discrimination. She needs to be valued on an equal footing with her brothers and have the same access to education, health care and economic opportunities. She needs to be affirmed in her self-worth and her voice needs to be heard. Attitudes must change in the home and in the community and government legislation must protect her if these goals are to be achieved.

World Vision has implemented projects that work with girls who might otherwise be denied basic rights to education and economic opportunities, and has carried out interventions that address problems such as female genital mutilation, dowry, trafficking and sexual exploitation. A 34-country study of World Vision's girl child programming has highlighted the potential impact of innovative and flexible strategies to help girls.

Targeting girls for assistance does not disregard boys. Girl child initiatives seek to bring a balance in opportunity, investment and resources for girls, but effective strategies will involve and benefit boys and ultimately the whole community. Empowered and educated girls grow up to be contributing women and citizens who can change nations. One cannot address the values and prejudices that affect girls without involving the whole community—including men, boys and policy makers. World Vision conducts gender sensitisation and training to help communities understand and develop gender equality. To date, World Vision has trained more than 1,000 staff and community members with the World Vision Gender Training Toolkit.

World Vision advocacy

Recognising that sustainable development efforts depend on girls being valued, protected and having equal access with boys to services and resources, World Vision actively promotes equal rights for girls. World Vision participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and called on participating governments



PHOTO: REENA SAMUEL

to take concrete measures to "end all forms of discrimination against girls, to increase public awareness of the value of the girl child and to strengthen her self-image, self-esteem and status." Gender empowerment was a major theme in World Vision's 1999 advocacy campaign "Urgent Issues for the Children of the New Millennium". At the Beijing +5 meeting in New York in 2000, World Vision's representatives included four adolescent women.

World Vision's delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2007 also included a 16-year-old Kenyan girl who advocated, alongside World Vision staff, for girls like herself. World Vision also attended the 2004 International Conference on Female Genital Mutilation in Nairobi and promoted alternative rites of passage, while lobbying the African Union states to implement and ratify the Maputo Protocol and the Cairo Declaration, which call for the elimination of female genital mutilation.

World Vision has also led or participated in national and regional forums to promote the rights of girls in places such as Bolivia, Ghana and Tanzania. As a member of child rights coalitions such as the Global Movement for Children, World Vision continues to advocate for legislation and practices that value, support and promote the girl child.

World Vision offices in Tanzania, Guatemala and Sri Lanka, amongst others, have appointed Child Rights staff members to advocate for the rights of girls. World Vision has an international Gender and Development Department which, supported by a global network of staff, promotes programming and advocacy for the empowerment of girls.

One cannot address the values and prejudices that affect girls without involving the whole community and policy makers.

Further reading

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- *VOICES: Growing Up a Girl*, Magazine, World Vision Canada, 1995.
- *Street Girl Children Research Study: Addressing the Plight of Street Girl Children in the Dhaka Metropolitan Area*, World Vision Bangladesh, 1993
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Sexual exploitation

“The World Health Organization estimates that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence during 2002.”

—Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence Against Children, 29 August 2006.

The issue

Despite a vast majority of countries having ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocols on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, along with the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and the Agenda for Action against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, the sexual exploitation of children remains an alarming fact of life for many. This gap between policy and practice echoes the power gap between adults and children.

World Vision’s own research suggests that a large proportion of the world’s 100 million-plus street children will experience violations of their rights through commercial sexual exploitation or other forms of sexual abuse during their adolescence. The prostitution of children is a growing problem in both developed and developing countries; it has become a multi-billion-dollar industry that destroys young lives—and with them, the potential human capital of their countries.

Over 200 million children have experienced some type of sexual abuse in their lives, and 1.8 million are being exploited in prostitution and pornography¹. Children involved in commercial sex frequently experience many abuses of their rights, including physical abuse, starvation, lack of sleep, denial of education and social stigma. Children are also at risk of long-term physical and mental health problems².

Popular myth suggests that child prostitution is largely a product of Western tourism or the presence of foreign military bases. In reality, these factors have been significant in relatively few cases. The recent growth of child prostitution owes more to poverty and to the

spread of HIV and AIDS. Many children affected by AIDS have been left with no economic alternatives while (predominantly local) men seek young girls or boys in the belief that they are less likely to carry the virus³. Cultural acceptance of commercial sex, the sexualisation of children and the unequal power afforded to women and children also drive the growing problem of sexual exploitation of children.

Children who drift to urban centres after experiencing family disintegration in rural areas sometimes engage in commercial sex as a means of survival on the streets⁴. These children often need additional income to buy “protection,” from street gangs and from pimps (in some countries, the pimps buy their own protection from the authorities).

Each year more than one million children fall victim to some form of sexual abuse or exploitation.

Increasingly younger children are being drawn into the sex industry. Cross-cultural research conservatively estimates that most women in commercial sex begin before age 18. For example, in Nepal in the 1980s, the average age of girls entering the sex trade was 14 to 16 years. In the 1990s, this dropped to 12 to 14 years⁵. World Vision’s own research up until 2000 indicated that the average age of children freed from sexual exploitation was 14 years and two months. Of this number, 58 per cent had sexually transmitted diseases and 18 per cent were HIV-positive⁶.

Children are not only exploited through commercial sexual exploitation. Many children are victims of sexual exploitation by adults they know, such as parents or other family members, teachers, employers, or others in their community⁷. In some countries, traditional practices result in the sexual exploitation of girls⁸. More recently,

1 UN Study on Violence Against Children, United Nations, 2006

2 *The Small Hands of Slavery, Modern Day Child Slavery: A Report by Save the Children UK*, Save the Children UK, 2007

3 *Sexual Exploitation*, CRIN, <<http://www.crin.com/themes/ViewTheme.asp?id=9>>

4 supra note 1

5 ibid

6 *A Safe World for Children*, World Vision, 2000

7 supra note 1

8 19 July 2007—CRINMAIL 899—*Special edition on child marriage: Introduction: Q and A*, CRIN, 2007

the Internet has become a source of child sexual exploitation where the ways in which children can be exploited seem endless.

World Vision policy

World Vision has been involved in programming aimed both at protecting children from sexual abuse, and helping those who have already been victims of sexual exploitation. Awareness-raising activities, such as campaigns aimed at reducing the flow of girls from rural areas to urban brothels, have been an integral part of prevention. Building such activities into income generation, HIV and AIDS awareness, and maternal and child health programmes in Thailand, Myanmar/Burma and Cambodia has ensured that awareness-raising is owned and managed by local people. World Vision has also undertaken projects aimed at those most at risk, such as the street children of Dhaka, Bangkok, Manila and Phnom Penh. The role of parental education, awareness-raising and poverty reduction cannot be underestimated in the larger fight to end the sexual exploitation of children.

In 2004, World Vision introduced the Child Sex Tourism Prevention Project in the United States, Thailand, Costa Rica and Cambodia. In partnership with the US State Department and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), World Vision's project gave Americans a clear message that there would be serious consequences for anyone participating in child sex tourism. These messages were positioned in places where potential child abusers would see them, such as in airports, on in-flight videos, on television and on roadside billboards in destination countries. ICE is also working with World Vision staff members in these destination countries to help them identify and track predators.

In 2006, World Vision Cambodia produced a research document that described the effects of pornography on children⁹. The study found that a large portion of children within Cambodia had been exposed to pornography and that this exposure can lead to "gender-based violence, the use of commercial sex workers, the spread of HIV and AIDS, and the rape of children by perpetrators who are themselves often minors"¹⁰.

World Vision endorses the CRC as an important set of standards for the rights of children and supports implementation of other key conventions (including ILO Convention no. 182, the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action, the Yokohama Commitment and the Convention against Trafficking in Persons) that relate

⁹ Fordham, G., *As if they were watching my body*, World Vision Cambodia, 2006

¹⁰ *ibid*



PHOTO: JON WARREN

to sexual exploitation of children. The position taken by World Vision recognises the need for children to participate in addressing issues of their present and future, the need to promote accountability of governments on children's rights issues, and the essential role of broad-based prevention strategies that include diverse stakeholders such as parents, educators, religious leaders and children.

The vulnerability of children in all situations must be recognised within government policies on aid, trade and investment. As one example, it is an unfortunate reality that pedophiles seek and attain employment with organisations that allow them greater access to children. It is vital that all organisations operating in any country enact and enforce strict guidelines on recruitment

and operations with a view to the protection of children. World Vision is a member of the Keeping Children Safe coalition that assists NGOs in building and improving their child protection policies and has provided feedback on *Setting the Standard: A Common Approach to Child Protection for International NGOs*.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision is committed to advocating for a world in which children are safe from sexual violence and has been an active advocate on issues related to sexual exploitation of children for many years. World Vision staff members have highlighted the reality of vulnerable children at events such as the First World Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Stockholm, 1995). World Vision's ground-breaking report *The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children* was a major contribution to the process surrounding the congress.

World Vision also convened the Sub-Group on Sexual Exploitation for the NGO Group on the Rights of the Child, and in this role participated in the international planning committee for the Second World Congress.

World Vision has contributed to the international community's understanding of child sexual exploitation through reports to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, contributions to the UN Study on Violence Against Children, and various international, regional and national forums and working groups.

In Cambodia, World Vision has worked with law enforcement agencies to build their capacity to deal humanely with the rapidly growing problem of child prostitution and has also worked with the Ministry of Tourism to research the problem of sex tourism. World Vision also seeks child-friendly legal reform and specific interventions that will strengthen responses where exploitation occurs. In 2004, the US Ambassador praised World Vision Cambodia for the work that was being done to prevent child sex tourism.

In 2003, World Vision Costa Rica participated in the Regional Consultation for the Americas on the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Tourism, where they presented various methods of preventing child sex tourism. World Vision Costa Rica is also educating children on sexual exploitation as part of the Sex Tourism Prevention Project.

World Vision Brazil is active in the Campaign to Combat Domestic Violence and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, which was launched in 2001 by a partnership of government councils on the rights of the child and humanitarian and medical groups.

World Vision continues to advocate for governments and development institutions to take steps to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, including enacting and enforcing adequate legislation, providing comprehensive training awareness-raising, and adopting and implementing rigorous child-protection guidelines. ■

Further reading

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- *Challenge and Hope: Disability, Disease and Trauma in the Developing World*, World Vision Australia, 1999.
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- *Children's Work, Adults' Play: Child Sex Tourism, a Problem in Cambodia*, World Vision Cambodia, 2001
- *'No Child of Mine...!' Opening the World's Eyes to the Sexual Exploitation of Children*, World Vision UK, 2002
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Children and HIV and AIDS

“National Governments, international partners and communities are failing to adequately provide care and support for the 15 million children orphaned by AIDS and for millions of other children made vulnerable by the epidemic.”

—Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary General

The issue

Children are bearing the brunt of the HIV and AIDS pandemic; they represent more than one seventh of all deaths due to AIDS worldwide and one sixth of new HIV infections¹. In 2006, AIDS killed 330,000 children and some 2.5 million were living with HIV²—over two million of these children are in sub-Saharan Africa.

HIV progresses rapidly in children. Of the 420,000 children newly infected with HIV in 2007³, 50 per cent will die before their second birthday if they do not receive treatment⁴. The vast majority of these deaths are preventable, either through treating opportunistic infections with antibiotics or through anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment. Cotrimoxazole is a cheap antibiotic that has been proven to be highly effective in preventing life-threatening opportunistic infections in HIV-infected children. But in 2007 UNICEF stated: “At most, one in 25 children born to HIV-infected mothers receives cotrimoxazole prophylaxis to prevent opportunistic infections that can be fatal.” And despite recent increases in the number of HIV-positive children accessing ARVs, in 2006 the number receiving them was still only one in seven of those in need⁵.

AIDS is a major contributor to the rising mortality rate of children aged under five in Southern and Eastern Africa. In 2004, 106 children died in Botswana for every 1,000 live births; more than half of these deaths were caused by AIDS or AIDS-related diseases. In Kenya the rate was 118 (20.3 due to AIDS) and in Zimbabwe, 117 (38.7 due to AIDS). Higher child mortality is a

major contributor to shrinking life expectancy in many African nations⁶.

The rapidly increasing number of HIV-positive children is driven by a failure to prevent mother-to-child transmission (pMTCT). Over 90 per cent of HIV-infected infants and young children are thought to have been infected through mother-to-child transmission⁷. Approximately 15 to 30 per cent of children born to mothers who are living with HIV will acquire the disease during pregnancy or delivery; a further 10 to 20 per cent of babies born to HIV-positive mothers are infected via breastfeeding⁸.

Children are bearing the brunt of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

Developing countries have been unable to replicate the situation in the developed world, where pMTCT rates are close to one per cent, because the majority of pregnant women do not have access to diagnostic services and appropriate treatments. In 2005, only an estimated 11 per cent of pregnant women with HIV in low- and middle-income countries had access to a range of services to prevent transmission to their children⁹. There is an urgent need for national governments, with the support of the international community, to prioritise the response to pMTCT and implement national plans for the scale-up of comprehensive and integrated pMTCT services.

Numerous deaths could be prevented by following WHO's recent (Oct 2006) guidelines on HIV and Infant Feeding, including recommending: “Exclusive breastfeeding...for HIV-infected women for the first six months of life unless replacement feeding is acceptable, feasible, affordable, sustainable and safe for them and their infants before that time.”¹⁰

1 AIDS Epidemic Update, UNAIDS, 2007

2 ibid

3 ibid

4 Children and AIDS: A Stocktaking report, UNICEF, 2007

5 AIDS Epidemic Update, UNAIDS, 2006

6 A call to action: Children the missing face of AIDS, UNICEF, 2005

7 Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV, WHO, 2007
<http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/hiv/hiv_tecbrief_pmtct.pdf>

8 ibid

9 Towards Universal Access: Scaling up priority HIV/AIDS interventions in the health sector WHO/UNAIDS/UNICEF, 2007

10 WHO HIV and Infant Feeding Technical Consultation held on behalf of the Inter-agency Task Team on Prevention of HIV Infections in Pregnant Women, Mothers and their Infants, Geneva, October 25–27, 2006

Indeed, the risk of child deaths through unsafe formula feeding far outweighs the risk of HIV transmission in many poor environments where clean water and enough money to buy infant formula are scarce; therefore in those areas breastfeeding is still the safer option¹¹.

Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS strikes children at an early age and again at puberty. As of March 2006, approximately 10 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 were living with HIV or AIDS. Of those, 6.2 million were girls and young women¹². In sub-Saharan Africa, young women are three times more likely to be living with HIV or AIDS than their male counterparts¹³.

Girls are more likely than boys are to become infected with HIV. Female physiology is one reason why girls are at an increased risk, as it makes them more susceptible to HIV during sexual intercourse¹⁴. Poverty is an additional factor—and not just for its role in making girls more vulnerable to commercial sex¹⁵. In Africa and elsewhere, “sugar daddies” provide small gifts or may help buy, for example, school supplies in return for sex. When coercion fails, men may resort to force: rape and sexual abuse are world-wide problems. Added to the physical and psychological trauma is the possibility of HIV infection. Studies also show that girls are less informed than boys about HIV and AIDS and how the disease is spread. Other studies in economically deprived areas have found that a significant proportion of girls were sexually active at the age of 14 or 15, however this trend is changing. An increasingly number of girls are postponing their first sexual experience until after the age of 15 and decreasing their high-risk sexual activities¹⁶.

Both African and Asian research has shown that girl children, who often have fewer choices and less control over their lives, are more likely to drop out of school if their families face AIDS. Declining family resources may see girls pressured into commercial or non-commercial sex work to increase income.

Most children won't contract HIV, yet millions will suffer indirectly from the disease. The number of children who have been orphaned due to AIDS grew to 15.2 million in 2006, up two million from 2004. Almost twelve million of these children live in sub-Saharan



PHOTO: TIM MCGUINNESS

Africa¹⁷. UNAIDS predicts that the total figure will jump to 20 million by 2010¹⁸.

Increasing numbers of children orphaned by AIDS are becoming street children¹⁹, trying to survive as vendors, car watchers, beggars or thieves. Intravenous drug use is also common among many street children, often exposing them to HIV.

Reports indicate that orphans are among the “poorest of the poor”—often living in extreme poverty with other orphans under the care of ailing grandparents or other extended family members. Whether under the care of a relative or on the street, chances are that children orphaned by AIDS are less likely than their non-orphaned counterparts to be in school²⁰.

The AIDS pandemic is hampering children's access to education. In parts of Africa, many children will be affected by teacher shortages. In 2000, 85 per cent of teacher deaths in the Central African Republic were

11 WHO estimates that 1.5 million babies die a year due to not being breastfed. That's about the same number of children who became infected with HIV through mother's milk in the past 20 years.

12 *Prevention of infection among adolescents and young people*, UNICEF Statistics, 2006, <<http://www.childinfo.org/areas/hiv/aids/young.php>>

13 *Girls, HIV/AIDS and education*, UNICEF, 2004

14 *ibid*

15 *Women & HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, UNICEF, 2004

16 *supra* note 4

17 Cumulative figures

18 UNICEF, UNAIDS, *Africa's Orphaned and Vulnerable Generations, Children Affected by AIDS: Executive Summary*, United Nations Children's Fund, 2002

19 *HIV/AIDS and children: How does HIV affect young people?*, UNICEF, accessed in 2007 <http://www.unicef.org/aids/index_youngpeople.html>

20 *supra* note 4

caused by AIDS; in Malawi, the student-teacher ratios can be as high as 96 to 1, partly due to many teachers falling ill or moving to urban areas to be closer to hospitals²¹.

Children are also being denied their right to health care, with pressure on already strained local, district and national health infrastructures, and increasing the risks in medical and surgical procedures. Just as with the teacher shortages of the education sector, the health care sector faces doctor and nurse shortages due to AIDS-related deaths. Many of those who are healthy seek employment in developed nations²².

Within the past few years the AIDS epidemic has been increasing all over the globe; in 2004 more than 55,000 children under the age of 15 in Asia contracted HIV and 39,000 children died due to AIDS. In Latin America, an additional 13,000 children contracted HIV and more than 11,000 died due to AIDS²³.

Notwithstanding all the information available on HIV and AIDS, combating and reversing the effects of HIV and AIDS remains one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), set to be reached by 2015. While many challenges remain, the global community has seen an increasing recognition of the HIV and AIDS pandemic and its effects on children. In 2001, the United Nations General Assembly held a Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV and AIDS to strengthen and increase the international response to the epidemic. The outcome document from this meeting was the *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS*, in which heads of state and governments pledged to reverse the HIV and AIDS epidemic through targets and goals in four main areas: prevention of new infections; provision of improved care, support and treatment for those infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS; reduction of vulnerability; and mitigation of the social and economic impact of HIV and AIDS.

In 2002, the UNGASS on Children represented a landmark event, as it was the first to be exclusively devoted to children, and the first to include them as delegates. The outcome document for this event, *A World Fit for Children*, states that combating HIV and AIDS is one of the top four priorities for the international community. A high-level meeting has been planned for December 2007 to review progress in meeting the goals and targets of *A World Fit for Children*.

There have been many other significant developments in the global response to children affected by HIV and AIDS. In 2002, the Global Fund on AIDS, TB and Malaria was created, providing an influx of resources for national-level interventions. In 2003, the Committee on the Rights of the Child issued a General Comment focused on HIV and AIDS and children's rights, which provided clear guidance to states on their obligations to children. In 2003, the Global Partners Forum on Children Affected by HIV and AIDS was established to give momentum to fulfilling global commitments for children affected by HIV and AIDS, as laid out in the UNGASS 2001 *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS* and in the MDGs. The first Global Partners Forum was held in October 2003 and commissioned *The Framework for the protection, care and support of orphans and vulnerable children living in a world with HIV and AIDS*.

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In 2004, UNAIDS launched the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS. That same year, *The Framework for the protection, care and support of orphans and vulnerable children living in a world with HIV and AIDS* was released (its companion paper on child protection was later released in 2007). This framework was created with the assistance of numerous practitioners, policy makers and key experts from an array of organisations and institutions. The framework, built on lessons learned over many years, sets out a "common agenda for mounting an effective response"²⁴. The framework's companion paper,

21 supra note 13; Malawi's high student-teacher ratio has also been attributed to education wage caps encouraged by the International Monetary Fund, and to teacher training not keeping pace with the huge increase in student numbers since free Malawi introduced free primary education.

22 supra note 6

23 *Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*, UNAIDS, 2004

24 *The Framework for the protection, care and support of orphans and vulnerable children living in a world with HIV and AIDS*, 2004

based on a comprehensive study completed in 2006²⁵, provides additional recommendations for protecting orphans and vulnerable children. It was also in 2004 that UNICEF highlighted HIV and AIDS as one of the top five concerns for children.

The following year, 2005, also saw a number of positive steps being taken, including the launch of the UNICEF and UNAIDS campaign “Unite for Children, Unite Against AIDS.” At their 2005 Summit in Gleneagles, the G8 leaders agreed to work with partners in Africa “to ensure that all children left orphaned or vulnerable by AIDS or other pandemics are given proper support”. Likewise, at the September 2005 UN World Summit, world leaders agreed to reach the goal of universal access to treatment by 2010 and to reduce the “vulnerability of persons affected by HIV/AIDS... in particular orphaned and vulnerable children and older persons.” Also in 2005, the UNAIDS Programme Co-ordinating Board helped to intensify HIV prevention by adopting the first internationally agreed upon Prevention Policy.

In 2006, the Report of the UN Secretary General on the protection of human rights in the context of HIV and AIDS was released, in addition to the *Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS* which considerably expanded the commitments for children affected by HIV and AIDS.

World Vision policy

As a child-focused agency, World Vision staff, child sponsors and donors are committed to improving the lives of children through programmes and advocacy. World Vision has managed HIV and AIDS programmes since 1990 in East Africa and Southeast Asia, and more recently in Eastern Europe, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. The programmes vary from large state- and agency-financed ventures to smaller community-based activities.

Recognising that HIV and AIDS is not only a physical but also a social and economic disease, World Vision includes HIV and AIDS awareness-raising components within other programmes. Family and community acceptance of and care for people living with AIDS is critical. Community-based and non-institutionalised care for orphans and vulnerable children is also extremely important. Special awareness-raising initiatives reach young people and other high-risk groups with both mass media and group activities, but family-oriented approaches are also emphasised.

World Vision emphasises helping orphans and vulnerable children to stay in school and pursue vocational training in order to enhance the economic prospects of those who need or decide to support their families. Through World Vision’s HOPE Initiative, the agency’s HIV and AIDS programmes have dramatically increased in number and breadth.

World Vision’s HOPE Initiative is focused on HIV and AIDS prevention, care and advocacy. The core programming models include: mobilising community-based care for orphans and vulnerable children, mobilising and sensitising churches and other faith communities to the needs of those affected by HIV and AIDS and motivating them to respond in powerful ways, and providing children with the resources they need in order to make healthy life decisions to avoid acquiring HIV.

The HOPE initiative has seen promising results. In 2007, more than 400,000 children received information and training on HIV prevention, almost 600,000 orphans and vulnerable children received care and assistance from World Vision, more than 45,000 chronically ill persons received home-based care, and more than 50,000 persons were helping to care for orphans and vulnerable children as well as chronically ill persons within their communities.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision advocates at the local, national and global levels to change policies and practices in order to fulfill the rights and meet the needs of children affected by HIV and AIDS. Our advocacy focuses on four priority areas:

1. Expanding and strengthening care for orphans and vulnerable children
2. Reducing gender-based vulnerability to HIV
3. Increasing access to a continuum of care and treatment for people living with HIV and AIDS
4. Mobilising resources for expanded HIV and AIDS response.

Governments must be held accountable to make and enforce laws and policies that support the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), numerous Articles of which are extremely pertinent to HIV and AIDS:

- the obligation to care for orphans (Articles 19 and 20);
- the right to nutritious food (Articles 24 and 27);
- the right to health (Article 24);
- the right to education (Articles 28 and 29);
- the right to information aimed at the promotion of [the child’s] well-being (Article 17);
- the right to protection from sexual abuse (Articles 19 and 34).

²⁵ The Study was titled *Africa’s Orphaned and Vulnerable Generations: Children affected by AIDS*, and was published in 2006

However, the cornerstone to protecting the rights of children affected by HIV and AIDS is found in Article 6 of the CRC, which upholds the child's inherent right to life and his or her right to survival and development. General Comment 3 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child provides further elaboration on the obligations of States Parties to the CRC with regards to HIV and AIDS.

World Vision has campaigned for children affected by HIV and AIDS through the Hope for African Children Initiative, and in 2003 encouraged the governments that attended the Annual Meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to take urgent action and address the needs of countries that are most affected by AIDS. At the G8 Summit meetings in 2005 and 2007, World Vision advocated for increased policy commitments and additional resources for the children affected by HIV and AIDS, and for the global response to the epidemic. World Vision actively lobbied governments attending the 2006 UNGASS, and as a result policy commitments for children and AIDS were improved considerably in the *Political Declaration*.

World Vision will continue to advocate at local, national and global levels especially around the main recommendations from the 2006 Global Partners Forum on Children Affected by HIV and AIDS. These included:

- improving the flow of resources to communities with orphans and vulnerable children;
- increasing levels of birth registration;
- improving the integration of issues related to orphans and vulnerable children in national development instruments;
- increasing access to social services, and support for social protection measures;
- speeding up the process of abolishing school fees and indirect costs of education; and
- improving access to health services and pediatric treatment.

Another way in which World Vision has advocated in affluent countries for children affected by HIV and AIDS is through the One Life Experience exhibit, a 185 square-metre interactive village that transports visitors to the heart of Africa. By means of a captivating audio tour and powerful imagery, visitors experience the impact of HIV and AIDS by stepping into the life of a real child. They are then invited to sign a petition to government leaders to call for increased resources for orphans and vulnerable children.

Further reading

• *More Than Words: Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Africa—Monitoring Progress Towards the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS*, World Vision UK, 2005. • *Lighting the Darkness for AIDS Orphans*, Childview, World Vision Canada, Winter 2000/2001 edition. • *The Silent Crisis: The Challenge of HIV/AIDS in Africa*, Action News, World Vision Australia, Summer 2001 edition. • *Addressing the HIV/AIDS Crisis in Africa: 2000 and Beyond*, Concept Paper (presented to the World Bank Africa Vice President), World Vision Africa Regional Office, 2000. • *Children and HIV/AIDS: A Millennium Time Bomb*, 'Promoting the Convention on the Rights of the Child Worldwide' Briefing Paper, World Vision UK, 1999. • *Beyond the Fragments: HIV/AIDS and Poverty*, Issues in Global Development, no. 1, World Vision Australia, 1994. • *HIV-Positive Lives*, World Vision Latin America, 2004



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Ending violence against children: a call to action

“States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.”

—Article 19, Convention on the Rights of the Child

“No violence against children is justifiable and all forms of violence are preventable.”

—Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence Against Children

The issue

In the home, on the street, at school—is there no place safe for children? The UN’s World Report on Violence Against Children (hereafter referred to as the “UN Study”) has shown that violence against children occurs everywhere and in extreme ways, and is perpetrated most often by people who are closest to children, such as family members, teachers and friends.

World Vision endorses the UN Study’s definition of “violence against children”:

“All forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse¹, and the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a child, by an individual or group, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity.”²

Violence against children takes many forms, including economic, political, structural, societal, physical and psychological. As a development agency, World Vision is all too familiar with economic and societal forms of violence: the effects of poverty, the lack of adequate health

care, education, food and shelter. World Vision is also witness to the violence associated with exploitative forms of child labour, armed conflict and neglect by the State and others.

The effects of violence on children are numerous and depend on the severity of the violence; however, the short and long-term affects can be disastrous. Experiencing violence during childhood can lead to social, emotional and cognitive impairments³. In cases where children are exposed to prolonged violence nerve and immune system disruptions can occur⁴.

Protecting all children from all forms of violence requires a holistic approach to the rights of children, encompassing their economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.

World Vision policy

World Vision is committed to the protection of every child from all forms of violence, and promotes the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the CRC’s two Optional Protocols, the General Comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and all other relevant international, regional and national instruments that protect the rights of children. When inconsistencies exist between the national, regional and international standards concerning child rights, World Vision supports the highest standard.

World Vision endorses the findings of the UN Study, and affirms the central message of the UN Study, namely that *no violence against children is justifiable and all forms of violence are preventable*. Moreover, World Vision endorses the UN Study’s 12 overarching recommendations to prevent and address all forms of violence against

¹ As defined by article 19 of the CRC.

² As defined by the *World Report on Violence and Health*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2002, p 5.

³ *UN Study on Violence against children*, United Nations, 2006

⁴ *ibid*

children, and supports the numerous setting-specific recommendations relating to the home and family, schools and educational settings, care and justice institutions, places of work, and the community.

World Vision has undertaken first-hand research analysing domestic violence in Latin America, gender violence globally, the sexual exploitation of children in countries such as Cambodia, and the extent of abuse and neglect throughout a number of countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. The findings of this research indicate widespread and systemic violence against children, perpetrated by all segments of the community. These findings were further confirmed through the UN Study, in which World Vision played a leadership role and actively contributed to the research.

As a result of these findings, World Vision has renewed its calls for concrete action for change and for governments to meet their obligations under the CRC. World Vision has undertaken many initiatives to prevent and respond to violence against children, including being an active member on the NGO Advisory Council, whose mandate is to support follow-up to the UN Study, along with the Keeping Children Safe coalition, which assists NGOs in building and improving their child protection policies.

World Vision has also created an internal working group dedicated to disseminating the findings of the UN Study and to implementing the recommendations. Additionally, World Vision promotes preventative interventions, works with children to raise awareness and provides tools to combat violence.

Protecting all children from all forms of violence requires a holistic approach to the rights of children, encompassing their economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. Taking the CRC as a framework for action and reflecting its fundamental principles—the best interests of the child, non-discrimination, participation, survival and development—World Vision seeks to address violence against children wherever it is found.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision campaigns for an end to all forms of violence against children. Change can be achieved if the political will exists. World Vision asks all people to ensure that governments and representatives:

1. Enact and enforce legislation that prohibits all forms of violence against children, ensure accountability and end impunity of all perpetrators, including individuals, groups, organisations, corporations, armed forces and the State.
2. Prioritise prevention of violence against children, including promoting non-violent values. Raise awareness of violence against children by educating the public. Helplines, where feasible, and other support should be provided to children who have experienced violence and children at risk of violence.
3. Create accessible and child-friendly reporting systems and services, by training welfare and law-enforcement agencies about issues concerning violence against children, and promoting effective policies based on international standards. No child who has suffered violence should be victimised by the welfare or legal process.
4. Enhance the capacity of all who work with and for children, including governments, parents, community groups, churches, faith-based organisations and other civil society organisations, to promote protection of children, prevention of violence, rehabilitation and social reintegration of those who have been victims of violence.

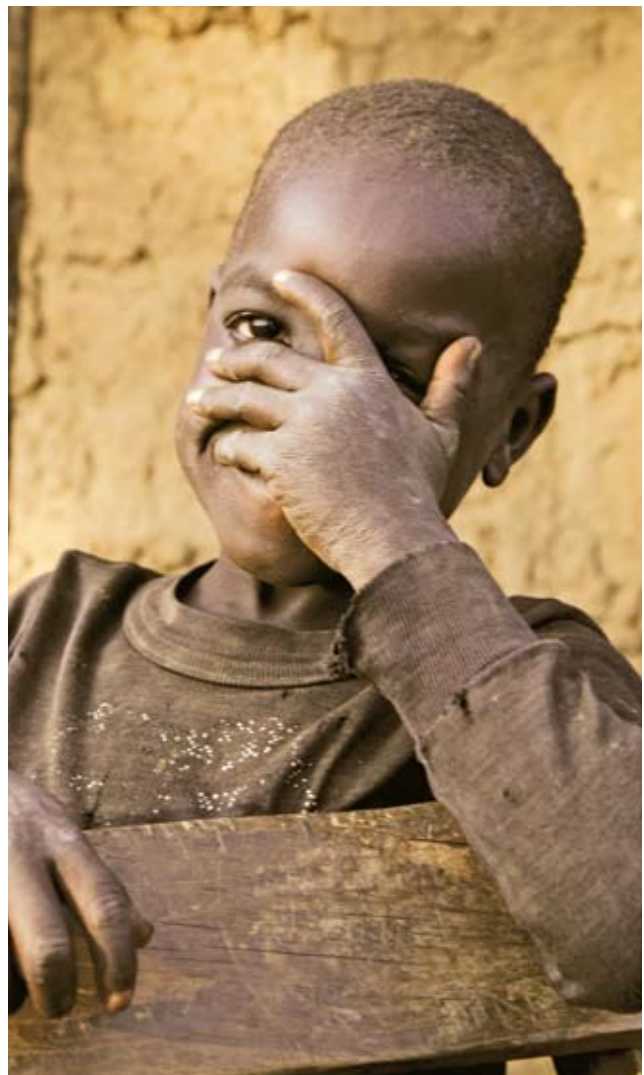


PHOTO: PAUL BETTINGS

5. Address the gender dimension of violence against children . All efforts to prevent and address violence against children must take gender into account, given that girls and boys are at different risk for different forms of violence across different settings.
6. Seek and commit resources—whether national or international—to protect children from violence. For example, poverty reduction strategy papers produced by developing nations should include a plan for child protection.
7. Support comprehensive international and national efforts to study and address violence against children, including developing and implementing systematic national data collection and research efforts.
8. Involve children as full participants in establishing measures that offer prevention and protection, foster development and guarantee human rights.

Further reading

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- *Children at Risk: Practical Approaches to Addressing Child Protection Issues in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam*. Monrovia: World Vision International, 2003
- *Violence Against Women: From Silence to Empowerment*, World Vision International, 2003
- *Faces of Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean*, World Vision International Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2002
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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: an essential framework for action

“Mankind owes to the child the best that it has to give.”

—Extract from the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924)

“The child should be...brought up in the spirit...of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.”

—Preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

“Children are not mini human beings with mini human rights.”

—M. de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council Of Europe

Recognising that children have rights, but also acknowledging children’s need for special care and attention, their vulnerability, and the difference between their world and the adult world, the League of Nations adopted the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1924. Then, in 1959, the General Assembly of the United Nations called upon parents, men and women as individuals, voluntary organisations, local authorities and national governments, to observe the rights of children and to uphold them by legislative and other measures, through the establishment of the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

In the decades since these declarations were adopted, many perceptions have changed and new ideas have emerged. The concept of children’s rights has widened, and so has the international will to enforce these rights. On 20 November 1989, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The fundamental principles that underlie the CRC are straightforward and have at their heart: the best interests of the child, non-discrimination, the right to survival and development, and respect for the child’s views.

While these fundamental principles are captured in particular articles of the CRC (Article 2: non-

discrimination; Article 3: best interests of the child; Article 6: survival and development; Article 12: participation), they also form a core interpretation for the entire instrument. In addition, for the first time, the CRC gives special attention to the needs of:

- refugee children (Article 22);
- children with disabilities (Article 23);
- ethnic minority children or children of indigenous origin (Article 30);
- working children (Article 32);
- child victims of sexual, physical or other forms of abuse (Articles 34 and 36);
- children in war and armed conflicts (Articles 38 and 39); and
- children in conflict with the law (Articles 37 and 40).

In many countries, the national commitment and international co-operation required to protect and promote the rights of children have been vastly inadequate.

The CRC emphasises that at the core of children’s entitlements is the right to a loving and secure family, a good quality education, a healthy life, a name and nationality, and leisure, recreation and cultural activities.

As the first international human rights instrument to recognise children’s political and civil as well as social, economic and cultural rights within a single document, the CRC provides an innovative and ground-breaking framework for government action and obligation. The 193 governments that have signed and ratified the CRC have accepted the primary responsibility to ensure its implementation, not only within their own borders, but also through international co-operation.

Achievements have been made since the adoption of the CRC, not least of which is its near-universal ratification. However, the achievements of the past years must not lead to a sense that there is little left to be done. In many countries, the national commitment and

international co-operation required to protect and promote the rights of children have been vastly inadequate. Even in countries where significant improvements have been made for the majority of children, the rights of marginalised children—such as those living on the streets, children of ethnic minorities and children with disabilities—are often neglected.

The promotion of children's participation is a key aspect of the CRC, and some countries are making impressive strides in formally and legally acknowledging children's right to be heard. Agencies such as World Vision are discovering the enormous value of including children's perspectives in their programming and advocacy efforts.

World Vision views the CRC as a legitimate guide for its programming and advocacy work, and is grappling with the challenges associated with putting a child-rights approach into operation. The CRC and its Optional Protocols (on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) are complemented by additional human rights treaties that also promote the well-being of boys and girls. World Vision therefore acknowledges and supports the important protection provided to children by such instruments.

Decades of experience in assisting children has compelled World Vision to promote children's rights and enabled it to take informed stances on a number of child rights issues. Disturbingly, however, World Vision continues to see evidence of governments and others deliberately violating and persistently ignoring children's rights around the world.

Progress in meeting children's rights has also been threatened because, in spite of increases in aid levels (mostly due to the inclusion of debt cancellation in the calculation of aid figures), the average level of aid from major donor countries remains far below the international commitment to donating 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income to developing countries. In 2005, average giving was 0.33 per cent among major donors. Without sufficient resources flowing into developing countries, the ability of those countries to achieve meaningful progress in the reduction of poverty is limited. Less aid means fewer resources are invested in areas such as health care, education and economic development; the end result is that the rights of children continue to be compromised.

In the last decade, the debate has been less about whether children have rights than about how those rights can be effectively implemented and enforced so children can benefit from them. Much can be done to incorporate the CRC within the legislative frameworks of States,

which would allow children the opportunity to challenge breaches of the CRC at the national level. Nevertheless, a coherent international communications/complaints procedure for the CRC must also be established to fill the gap when domestic complaints procedures fail or simply do not exist. Resources are urgently needed to address the inadequacies in the current system of monitoring, reporting and addressing governments' compliance—or failure to comply—with their CRC obligations.

Notwithstanding its limitations, the Convention on the Rights of the Child does provide both a statement of principles and a concrete framework for action. Its centrality to protecting and promoting children globally must be continually supported and strengthened.

World Vision views the CRC as a legitimate guide for its policy, programming and advocacy work.

Further reading:

- *Protecting Children: A Biblical Understanding of Child Rights*. World Vision International, 2002.
- *Children's Rights: Everyone's Responsibility? Understanding the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Topic Sheet, World Vision Australia, 1999.
- *Child Participation: Challenges of Empowerment*, Discussion Paper, World Vision UK, 2000.
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Child rights and Christianity: are they compatible?

“All the recorded encounters between children and Jesus were kind, gentle and respectful, and his reported words about those causing children to stumble, and the consequences for doing so (Matthew 18:6), are amongst the strongest in the New Testament. When he set a little child in the midst of the disciples and said ‘The kingdom of God belongs to such as these,’ (Mark 10:14) he demonstrated enormous regard for children.”

—Churches’ Network for Non-Violence (CNNV)

World Vision’s mission statement embodies a commitment to seek to follow Christ’s example by working with the poor and oppressed in pursuit of justice and human transformation. For World Vision “the poor and oppressed” includes the millions of children who work to secure essential income for themselves and their families, children traumatised by war, and children scarred by debt-bondage, slavery or sexual exploitation.

World Vision’s efforts to secure protection for children and respect for their rights stems from this experience. Poverty, exploitation and violence are not inevitable. Poverty claims the lives of 9.7 million children under 5 years old each year¹, due to the global community’s failure to be good stewards of the resources with which it is endowed. World Vision’s mission statement is a call to challenge unjust structures that constrain the poor in a world of false priorities, gross inequalities and distorted values.

First-hand experience with the effects of abuse of children and injustice against them motivates World Vision to be concerned about the well-being of children and the protection of their rights. In practice, World Vision offices have found the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to be a useful tool for work with children and their families. In working with government officials, the CRC can be invoked in support of improving circumstances for children, since every country in the

world has signed it, and all but two have ratified it. State Parties to the CRC are obliged to report on their progress with implementation, thereby creating opportunities for World Vision and other civil society stakeholders to engage in a transparent process for holding governments accountable to their commitments to children. More than that, however, promoting respect for the rights of children, as expressed in the CRC, is in itself an expression of the mission of World Vision and consistent with the agency’s core values.

Creating room for people to be what God intended them to be—as distinct from the concept of human autonomy—is the basis for a Christian respect for human rights.

Is the rights-based approach Christian?

A Christian rationale for a rights based approach in general, and for understanding child rights in particular, is helpful in responding to this question. For Christians, human rights are rooted in the following biblical teachings:

1. Worth and dignity are rooted in creation and calling.

Every person, including every child, is created in the image of God and called by God to participate in the unfolding of creation. Every person has dignity and worth in the eyes of God; every person is called to share in the task of caring for creation itself and for the people who live in it. Creating room for people to be what God intended them to be—as distinct from the concept of human autonomy—is the basis for a Christian respect for human rights.

¹ UNICEF, “Surveys reveal solid progress on child survival: child deaths fall below 10 million for the first time”, New York, 13 September 2007

2. Love includes, but does not replace, respect for human rights.

Love includes, not supersedes, respect for human rights. Jesus calls us to love God and love our neighbour as ourselves. This definition of love—far from being paternalistic charity—reflects profound respect for the other as equal in worth before God. The biblical concept of shalom captures the unity of justice, love and joy in service to God.

3. Doing justice is emphasised throughout the Bible.

The words for “justice” or “righteousness” are used more than 600 times in the Old Testament and more than 200 times in the New Testament. The biblical concept of justice has to do with restoring right relations between God and people, between people, and between people and creation.

Respect for the rights of others is a duty to God. Throughout the Bible there is a consistent focus on defending the rights of those without power in society: the orphan, the widow, the stranger, the poor. And protection for the rights of vulnerable groups was not just a matter of charity—it was an obligation under the legal system in the Old Testament.

Jesus made it clear that he came to fulfill the Old Testament vision, not replace it; restoring dignity and a rightful place for vulnerable people is a common theme in Jesus’ ministry. The focus on children and other vulnerable people is not because they are morally superior, but because a society that respects their rights is likely to respect the rights of all. For Christians in positions of influence, the focus is on enabling those without influence and power to exercise their rights. In fact, Christians throughout history have been called to give up their own rights in order to secure the rights of others.

4. Rights and responsibilities are intrinsically linked under God.

The Bible teaches that when I wrong another person, I wrong God. The cry of the victim of injustice reaches the heart of God. The concept of rights is inherent in the concept of morality; acknowledging that others have a rightful claim provides the basis for defining what is right and wrong. Rights, on the one hand, bring into focus the suffering God, who weeps when people suffer injustice; obligations, on the other, bring into focus the anger of God when people misuse their abilities and power to harm others.

Some Christians are concerned that “rights talk” is self-centred; they prefer a focus on obligations. On closer examination, however, respect for rights is focused on the claim of others, while obligations reflect what I have



PHOTO: PAUL BETTINGS

to do to avoid my own guilt—a self-centred approach. The problem arises more in practice than in the concept of human rights itself: if rights are implemented within a framework of individual human autonomy, their expression can be self-centred demands. Acknowledging the dignity of every person under God counters a selfish or self-centred approach to human rights.

Does a child have rights or a need to be protected?

The child is a person of no less worth than an adult, being also created in the image of God. Children are entrusted to the care of families and communities as part of the covenantal relationship between God and humanity, but they also have dignity and value before God as individuals. Jesus, in demonstrating the values of the kingdom of God, made it clear that children were not to be pushed aside or considered less important. The Bible includes many examples of children and young people taking an active role in the events that shaped human history,

among them Samuel, David, Esther, Daniel and his three friends, the young Mary chosen to be the mother of Jesus, the young Jesus teaching in the Temple at the age of 12, and the boy whose lunch Jesus used to feed thousands.

The concept of “childhood” is a social construct that takes different forms in different cultures. The contemporary Western concept of childhood is vastly different from concepts in biblical times. While every culture’s concept of childhood needs to be respected, the biblical norms, which respect the dignity of every child and their calling by God, can help families and communities protect their children and also help children fulfill their potential to contribute to the development of their community and their world.

A rights-based approach sees the child in the context of family, community, the State and other social structures. The balance between protecting children’s right to participate directly in decisions that affect them, and holding children accountable for their own exercise of rights, shifts by age and stages of personal development, not by status. In contrast, a needs-based approach tends to put some needs ahead of others and risks losing sight of the whole.

Without a child-rights focus, children are easily overlooked in political discourse. Children often bear the brunt of economic, social and military decisions, without having any voice in those decisions. Effective work with children will not treat them as miniature adults, the property of adults or mere extensions of the community. In order to nurture their God-given potential, they need to be taken seriously as active participants—different but just as important as any other component of society. This is an important strength that a child-rights focus brings to the work of World Vision and other organisations.

Is the Convention on the Rights of the Child anti-family?

In a survey conducted with children in Canada, “the right to have a family” topped their list of important rights in the CRC. The child’s right to a family is clearly affirmed in the CRC, as is the duty of the State to support parents in fulfilling their responsibilities to provide a safe and secure family environment where children can reach their full potential.

The CRC recognises that

“the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children,

should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community...” (Preamble, CRC)

Furthermore, the CRC also affirms

“that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding...” (Preamble, CRC)

The CRC clearly recognises the “responsibilities, rights and duties of parents” (article 5). It also affirms the child’s right not to be separated from his or her parents and the right of family reunification.

The CRC is a very useful tool for addressing factors that prevent families from protecting their children. However, it also embodies the belief that where parents do not or cannot protect the rights of their children, other mechanisms are needed. From a Christian perspective, parents do not have absolute power—only God does. While the Bible calls on parents to discipline children, it also commands them not to bring children to wrath or to violate their trust, an expression of the boundaries God places on all human institutions to prevent abuse of power.

In a Christian understanding of social development, only God is sovereign; national governments have legitimate authority and power, but they must also be held accountable to the biblical norm of justice in the way they govern.

What are some of the implications of a Christian approach to child rights?

World Vision is committed to transformational development that affects every area of life. Within that paradigm, child rights help World Vision to maintain focus on the whole child and to integrate relief, development and advocacy in the best interests of children and their families.

On a broader scale, the contribution of Christian thinking to the implementation of the CRC could make a substantial difference for children. A Christian emphasis

on dignity and right-relations among people, rather than on individual autonomy, draws attention to elements of interdependence in the exercise of both rights and responsibilities. Above all, the divine imperative for justice moves child rights from an add-on to a top priority. It would be a tragedy for children if concerns about particular approaches to implementation led to a dismissal of the entire Convention.

Christians are not naïve about human nature; their promotion of human rights is not based in a shallow or false optimism about the perfectibility of individual persons. There is no perfection apart from God. Respect for the rights of all, including children, prevents individuals or the institutions they create from setting themselves up as “gods” and abusing power over others.

Child rights in development

World Vision acknowledges that children are subjects in their own right, and social actors in their communities’ development. Recognising children’s right to participate as partners in development is a significant pillar of World Vision’s commitment to children. While World Vision promotes active child participation in its programmes and advocacy, there is still much to learn about doing this effectively and appropriately.

There is also a great need to articulate more clearly the implications of the various provisions of the CRC, to develop better mechanisms to implement the Convention and to address concerns about conflicting claims. Demonstrating effective ways to implement child rights within the context of family and community will include further work to differentiate among different kinds of rights. In all these areas Christian contributions have much to offer; it is regrettable when Christians sideline themselves or reject a fundamentally sound concept because of important but narrow concerns about implementation in a few areas.

One major problem around the CRC is that nation-states are deemed the final and almost sole arbiters of the rights of children. The United Nations, as the institution responsible for establishing and enforcing international treaties such as the CRC, is ultimately controlled by powerful member States. In a Christian understanding of social development, only God is sovereign; national governments have legitimate authority and power, but they must also be held accountable to the biblical norm of justice in the way they govern. Yet how well governments promote and protect the rights of their citizens, especially children and other vulnerable members of society, is a measure of how well they meet the criteria of justice. This is an important area of Christian witness to

governments. In the future, justice may be better served by creating more room for other social institutions, such as local communities, civil society organisations and children’s organisations, to play an integral role in the implementation of the rights of children.

The cry of the victim of injustice reaches the heart of God.

Further reading:

- *Protecting Children: A Biblical Understanding of Child Rights*, World Vision International, 2002.
- *Children’s Rights: Everyone’s Responsibility? Understanding the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Topic Sheet, World Vision Australia, 1999.
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Children and harmful practices

“Even though cultural practices may appear senseless or destructive from the standpoint of others, they have meaning and fulfill a function for those who practise them. However, culture is not static; it is in constant flux, adapting and reforming. People will change their behaviour when they understand the hazards and indignity of harmful practices and when they realise that it is possible to give up harmful practices without giving up meaningful aspects of their culture.”

—Female Genital Mutilation, A joint WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA statement, World Health Organization, Geneva, 1997.

“Child marriage is a violation of human rights. It forces children to assume responsibilities and handle situations for which they are often physically and psychologically unprepared.”

—CRINMAIL 899—Special edition on child marriage, Children’s Rights Information Network, 19 July 2007

The issue

Many harmful practices are carried out every day that negatively affect children. While there has been considerable debate in recent years as to what constitutes harmful practices, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriage are both commonly recognised under this category.

FGM is a cultural practice that can take place at any time during a girl’s or woman’s life, from shortly after birth until just before she is married or once she is pregnant¹. FGM involves the removal of one or several parts of the female genitalia. In its most severe forms, the female genitalia are sewn together leaving only a very small hole for the passage of bodily fluids². Many times the only

anesthetic is the numbing effect from an ice cold shower or bath that the girls take the morning of the procedure³. Each year, two million girls become victims of FGM and there are more than 130 million women and girls alive today who have had the procedure⁴.

FGM is predominantly practiced because it is believed to ensure a female’s virginity and to discourage promiscuous behaviour during marriage. It is also practiced because it is believed to enhance personal hygiene and health, ease pain in childbirth, and improve tribal cohesion. FGM is also seen as an important rite of passage into womanhood and is often considered a religious requirement^{5,6}. Myths suggest that a girl who has not undergone FGM will have abnormal children, her husband will die, the midwife who helps in labour will go blind, and her genitalia will be unclean⁷.

World Vision believes that FGM and early marriages are significant violations of children’s rights. Although changing legislation is a positive step forward, raising awareness around the negative consequences of these practices will help ensure longer term and more effective results.

In fact, FGM has many negative health and psychological effects. Because the procedure often takes place in unsanitary locations using unsterilised equipment, the risk for diseases such as tetanus, hepatitis B and HIV is very high. Additional risks range from excessive blood

1 Hashi, F., *Female Genital Mutilation & Early Marriage in Africa*, World Vision, 2001

2 *ibid*

3 *ibid*

4 UNICEF Statistics, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*, 2006, <<http://www.childinfo.org/areas/fgmc/>>

5 FGM is not a religious requirement as it pre-dates the major religions with which it is associated.

6 *supra* note 1

7 *ibid*

loss to gangrene. Scarring from the procedure can also lead to numerous health risks such as gallstones and urinary tract infections as well as obstructed labour and fetal distress⁸. Furthermore, women and girls who have experienced FGM often become depressed, anxious and lose self-esteem as a result.

While FGM is commonly practised by many cultures, it is a clear violation of Article 3.1 and Article 2.4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 21 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children, Article 2(f) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and paragraph 16 of General Recommendation 14 of the Committee on CEDAW.

Early marriages are another form of harmful practice. They violate Article 2.4.3 of the CRC and Article 21 of the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child. According to USAID 51 million young women now aged between 20 and 24 were married before the age of 18, and another 100 million girls will enter into marriage before the age of 18 within the next 10 years⁹.

Early marriages are most commonly practiced in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia¹⁰. They often occur to ensure virginity before marriage, to ensure parents will be cared for in old age, to preserve family honour and for economic reasons¹¹. Many times, a young girl is married to a much older man because he has offered her family a large dowry. The greater the age gap in partners, the higher risk the girl has of developing HIV from her husband, as he is more likely to have had multiple sexual partners¹².

Although the girl's family may benefit from a large dowry, there are many social and health risks associated with girls becoming wives at an early age. Girls who become wives often drop out of school and are forced into various forms of labour¹³. They are also emotionally unprepared for the responsibilities of married life and often leave their husbands, turning to the street where they face additional risks and dangers¹⁴.

Girls who are married at a young age often suffer from malnutrition and have higher maternal and infant mortality rates than those who are in their 20s when married¹⁵. In many developing countries, the leading cause of



PHOTO: ALYSSA BISTONATH

death among adolescent girls is pregnancy¹⁶. Wed in adolescence, their bodies are often not developed enough to handle the stress of pregnancy and labour.

A common health risk to underdeveloped girls in labour is fistula. Fistula is a tear that occurs either between the vagina and the bladder, or between the rectum and the genital tract¹⁷. This tear is caused by prolonged and unrelieved pressure during obstructed labour¹⁸. Fistula causes incontinence, which can lead to humiliation and often social isolation of the girl if her family abandons her¹⁹.

World Vision policy

World Vision believes that FGM and early marriages are significant violations of children's rights. Although changing legislation is a positive step forward, raising awareness around the negative consequences of these practices will help ensure longer term and more effective

8 *ibid*

9 Slavin, B., USA Today, 17 July 2007, *Child marriages rife in nations getting US aid*, CRIN, 2007

10 19 July 2007—CRINMAIL 899—*Special edition on child marriage: Introduction: Q and A*, CRIN, 2007

11 *supra* note 1

12 *ibid*

13 *supra* note 1, *supra* note 9

14 *supra* note 9

15 *supra* note 1

16 *supra* note 9

17 *About Fistula: Frequently Asked Questions*, Campaign to End Fistula, 2007 <http://www.endfistula.org/q_a.htm>

18 *ibid*

19 *ibid*

results. World Vision holds that under no circumstance should FGM be practised as it violates the most fundamental rights to security and protection.

To address the issue of FGM, World Vision is educating communities about its risks and offering alternative rites of passage. Currently, more than 2,000 girls have refused the procedure and completed the alternative rite of passage celebration promoted by World Vision. Furthermore, more than 200 boys have participated by supporting their female peers who have refused FGM²⁰. World Vision provides alternative income-generating activities for the women who have chosen to no longer perform FGM. World Vision has assisted these women in developing business plans so that they can access small loans to start their own businesses. Alternatively, they are linked with micro-finance institutions so that they can “boost their business and enhance sustainability.”²¹ World Vision Kenya is also a member of Childline Kenya, a helpline where girls in danger of FGM or early marriage can report their situation²².

Based on the CRC and child development guides such as health and education, World Vision generally holds that marriage before the age of 16 is too early as it can often lead to violations of girls’ rights, including denial of their access to education and poor health (including early pregnancy and its associated complications). When early marriage is practised, it often leaves the girls with little to no education. World Vision has found, however, that when education is addressed at the same time as dowry issues there is greater chance of preventing early marriage. World Vision Asia Pacific has found that by holding public student debates on the above issues, students are able to discuss openly the negative consequences of early marriage. As a result, they have made pledges against the practice of early marriage and dowries²³.

Although more than two million women who have fistula are untreated, there is hope; a hospital in Ethiopia, the only of its kind, handles fistula patients exclusively. This clinic of only 100 beds provides medical services to more than 1,000 women a year. World Vision is proud to contribute to the clinic’s funding.

The programmes mentioned above have not only helped save many girls from harmful practices but, in

doing so, lowered their risk of contracting HIV and AIDS, dying in childbirth, and dropping out of school²⁴.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision’s current efforts to prevent harmful practices include:

- Promoting awareness-creation programmes.
- Developing programmes that address the root causes of these practices.
- Promoting prevention through solutions such as economic options for parents, bicycles to keep girls travelling to school, and community protection structures to prevent early marriage.
- Building the capacities of staff and community members to change stereotypes, beliefs and attitudes toward gender issues.
- Networking with other NGOs working to eliminate harmful practices.
- Producing educational materials that teach children, parents, teachers and community leaders about the negative effects of these practices.
- Developing culturally appropriate alternative rites of passage to FGM that allow girls to celebrate their passage to adulthood without negative consequences.

World Vision also attended the 2004 International Conference on Female Genital Mutilation in Nairobi, which promoted alternative rites of passage and called on the African Union States to implement and ratify the Maputo Protocol and the Cairo Declaration. Both the Protocol and Declaration call for the elimination of female genital mutilation.

At national, regional and international levels, World Vision has advocated for the end of FGM and early marriage, as well as other harmful practices such as food taboos, dowry, honour killings and male adolescent circumcision. Through partnering with other NGOs, governments, children and their communities, World Vision seeks to end these abuses.

Further reading

- *Every Girl Counts, Hope for the Girl Child, FGM: Girl Child Empowerment through Alternative Rite of Passage*, World Vision Kenya and Finland, 2007
- *Creating an Enabling Environment for the Advancement of Women and Girls*, CSW briefing paper, 2006.

20 Hoffman Hanchett, Ruthi, *Here We Stand World Vision and Children’s Rights (2nd edition)*, email by Jenn Bouchier, 7 September 2007

21 *Female genital mutilation: girl child empowerment through alternative rite of passage*, World Vision Kenya & World Vision Finland, 2007

22 The helpline is also available for children to report abuse and receive counselling

23 supra note 20

24 ibid



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Children in emergencies



“When civilian populations and infrastructure are targeted during conflict, traditional family and community networks which would normally give comfort and emotional support to children in crisis are also fragmented or destroyed...The impact of traumatic events on children is inseparable from the impact on their families and communities: adults must also be healed if there is to be much hope of dealing with the emotional pain of their children.”

—Graça Machel, 1996.

The issue

Emergencies such as earthquakes, wars and floods are devastating events for any human population, yet children require and have the right to additional care and protection. During an emergency, children face increased and additional challenges to their daily lives; due to their age and dependency on adults, children become even more vulnerable to violations such as abuse and neglect, sexual exploitation, child labour and recruitment into the armed forces¹. Children are also at risk of injury, illness, dropping out of school, being placed in orphanages, and being separated from their parents or guardians².

One way to lessen children’s vulnerability to these risks is to ensure all children have access to education³; however, over 27 million children affected by armed conflict do not go to school⁴. During an emergency, education can provide a safe place for children to go, as well as vital information, for example, on preventing the emergency from causing them further harm. Ensuring children have access to education during an emergency also provides them with stability and routine in a situation that is often chaotic. The children’s need for intellectual development and protection from exploitation is also met when quality education is provided⁵.

During emergencies, children and their families may be forced to flee their homes. One in every 50 people in this world is an asylum seeker, a displaced person or a refugee⁶. Children make up 45 per cent of the world’s refugee population; more than 11 million refugees are under age 18⁷. Furthermore, there are 13 million internally displaced children around the world⁸.

The challenges that children face when fleeing their homes can be greatly heightened if they become separated from their parents or caregivers. Although the UN has released *Guidelines for Separated Children*, which outline the special protection and care that these children need, the implementation of these guidelines has not been universal. Additional challenges facing separated children include providing proof of their age and nationality, finding safe and secure shelter, and having the proper support while going through the asylum-seeking process⁹. Separated children also need additional protection from exploitation, abuse, recruitment into the armed force or militias and from missing out on education.

Children make up 45 per cent of the world’s refugee population.

Finding safe shelter is another issue for children who are separated from their parents and seeking asylum. Often times, separated children are held in detention centres while the asylum process is taking place¹⁰. In order for asylum seekers to be accepted as refugees, they must prove that they have a “well-founded fear” of being persecuted in their home country. Children may not be able to express their “well-founded fear” in the same way as adults, and explaining their experiences can be traumatic¹¹.

Various international treaties recognise the rights of displaced children, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocol

1 Criswell, R., Gow, M., *Displaced, Uprooted, and Refugee Children back from the margins*, World Vision, 2004

2 Toms, C., MacLeod, H., *Children in Emergencies Manual*, World Vision International, 2006

3 *ibid*

4 Heninger, L., *Falling Through the Cracks: Millions Missing Out on Education in Emergencies*, Women’s Commission, <http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/ed_emer.pdf>

5 *supra* note 2

6 *supra* note 1

7 *ibid*

8 *ibid*

9 *ibid*

10 *ibid*

11 *ibid*

on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The African Charter was the first convention to specifically deal with displaced children¹². In October 2006, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) developed a policy document called the *Conclusion on Children at Risk*, which strengthened the implementation of all other UNHCR policies and human rights standards. A new *Conclusion on Children at Risk*, released in October 2007, brings together all of the key human rights standards and policy papers related to the protection of children and defines how they should be implemented.

World Vision policy

World Vision has a long history of responding to emergencies, dating back to the Korean War. Over 50 years of experience has shown us that due to the complexity of emergencies and the wide-reaching affects they have on children, all emergency relief workers need to be trained on children's vulnerabilities during an emergency, and how to protect children. Part of the preventative process is to educate children and their families on the dangers of sexual abuse and exploitation, trafficking, child labour and other vulnerabilities that children will face¹³.

As part of their education, children should also learn about their rights and participate in making decisions that will affect their lives. World Vision has found that when children are educated about their rights and are active within their communities they are more likely to speak up about abuse.

World Vision also sets up child-friendly spaces, an important means of providing care, support and protection for children in emergencies. Child-friendly spaces are places where children can go to play, relax and learn. The spaces are designed to help children learn about the emergency around them, and deal with the challenges they are encountering¹⁴. The spaces also provide a meeting place where parents can support one another¹⁵.

World Vision's family tracing programme has been very successful in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. The family tracing programme includes searching for parents, guardians or family of separated children, and works to ensure that all children receive birth registration papers¹⁶.

World Vision advocacy

World Vision has assisted in the creation of many key documents to assist children in, or fleeing from, emergencies. These documents include: *Setting the Standard: A Common Approach to Child Protection for International NGOs*, now known as *Keeping the Children Safe*, as well as the *Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*. World Vision Canada partnered with numerous other agencies to advocate for a national policy on separated children, and served on an advisory committee to help develop national guidelines on the reception and care of separated children. World Vision Canada also assisted in creating a guide to assist separated children through the asylum-seeking process. World Vision Australia has been speaking out against the automatic detention of asylum-seeking children who arrive in the country without proper identification. The act of detaining children as a first resort, rather than a last, goes against Article 37 (b) of the CRC.

The challenges that children face when fleeing their homes can be greatly heightened if they become separated from their parents or caregivers.

World Vision has also played an active role internationally through forums such as the UNHCR Standing Committee and Executive Committee, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, as well as working with UNICEF on child protection issues. Additionally, World Vision has provided leadership to the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child's subgroup on Armed Conflict and Displacement, and more recently on Children in Emergencies. Through this leadership, World Vision has been able to assist in advancing issues concerning children affected by armed conflict.

World Vision believes that it is not a lack of legal frameworks that allows so many children in emergencies to become increasingly vulnerable. Rather, it is the poor application of those frameworks and their lack of accountability. World Vision believes that the protection of children in emergencies requires a combination of international humanitarian law, international and regional human rights law, and national legislation; however there must be firm measures to ensure compliance with each level of law. In addition, a greater emphasis

12 ibid

13 ibid

14 supra note 2

15 ibid

16 ibid



PHOTO: PHILIP MAHER

2005) • *Reluctant Hosts: The Impact of the LRA in South Sudan*, World Vision South Sudan, 2007 • *War In My Back Yard? Issues and Action around Children and Armed Conflict*, World Vision United Kingdom, 2002 • *wvuk Children and Armed Conflict Update UNGASS 2002*, World Vision United Kingdom, 2002 • *Small Arms, Children and Armed Conflict*, World Vision Canada, 2005 • *Their Future In Our Hands: Children Displaced by Conflicts in Africa's Great Lakes Region*, World Vision Africa, 2006

should be placed on prevention strategies. Where prevention is not possible, the focus should be placed on being prepared for when emergencies do hit.

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Children and disabilities

“In countries the world over children with disabilities and their families continue to face discrimination and are not yet fully able to enjoy their basic human rights. The inclusion of children with disabilities is a matter of social justice and an essential investment in the future of society. It is not based on charity or goodwill but is an integral element of the expression and realization of universal human rights.”

—UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, *Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities*, 2007

The Issue

Approximately 200 million children around the world are disabled.¹ These children face discrimination and exclusion from programmes, policies and activities that benefit non-disabled children. Children with disabilities are also more likely than non-disabled children not to attend school, to experience violence, to be institutionalised, and to experience poverty and discrimination.² In addition, in some poor countries, the mortality rate of children under five with disabilities can be as high as 80 per cent.³ Unfortunately, over the past decade there has been the continued presence of, and even increase in, certain factors that contribute to disabilities, such as HIV and AIDS, pollution, drug abuse, and traffic accidents; armed conflict also remains another major cause of impairment for children.⁴

The discrimination and exclusion faced by children with disabilities is in part the result of people in wider society often viewing persons with disabilities as being helpless; similarly, the false belief is widely-held that in order to interact with and include people with disabilities you must have specific knowledge of their impairment.⁵ These ideas (among others) isolate and prevent children with disabilities from being able to participate as active members within their society and essentially from recognising their rights.

Poverty is recognised to be “both a cause and a consequence of disability.”⁶ Disabilities can be the result

of insufficient health/medical care, poor nutrition, unsafe environments and armed conflict; children affected by these factors are often part of poor families.⁷ In addition, if a child experiences an impairment, he or she is often denied essential services such as health care and education; this lack of services, especially the denial of education,

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perpetuates the poverty cycle.⁸ Caring for children with disabilities can also lead to a loss of income, as mothers are often unable to work outside the home while providing this care.⁹ Because of this relationship between poverty and disability, efforts to relieve poverty must address disability issues as well.¹⁰

As mentioned above, children with disabilities are often denied their right to education. They may be excluded from attending school due to physical or environmental barriers such as the school building being inaccessible for children who use crutches or wheelchairs,

1 *Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2007, <<http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/digest13-disability.pdf>>

2 *ibid*

3 *ibid*

4 *ibid*

5 *Written Statement Prepared for the 4th Session of the Human Rights Council*, World Vision International, Geneva, March 2007, <http://www.worldvision.org.uk/upload/pdf/Right_of_Disabled_Children_to_Education_-_WVI.pdf>

6 *supra* note 1

7 *ibid*

8 *ibid*

9 *ibid*

10 *ibid*

or attitudinal barriers whereby children with disabilities are mistakenly believed to be cursed or unable to learn. There may also be institutional barriers such as policies or legislation that prohibit children with disabilities from attending school.¹¹ These are just a few examples of obstacles that prevent children with disabilities from accessing school and getting a quality education. A lack of knowledge about the importance of education for all children and crowded classrooms also contribute to the problem.

Unfortunately, children with disabilities are often institutionalised due to stigma and the lack of support for them and their families.¹² For children in institutions, the risk of being neglected, isolated and abused increases.¹³ It has also been found that being institutionalised is extremely detrimental to a child's health and development.¹⁴ The best place for children to grow and develop, whether they have an impairment or not, is with their family in a home within their community. However, as mentioned above, families are not receiving the support that they need in order to properly care for and support their children with disabilities. Denial of health services and treatments is also a common occurrence for these children, as their lives are deemed less important than those of children who do not have an impairment. This reality directly violates articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): Article 6 states that all children have the right to life, survival and development; Article 24 states that all children have the right to "the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health."¹⁵

Enabling children with disabilities to be active within their societies and ensuring that their rights are recognised has less to do with overcoming their physical or mental impairments than it has to do with overcoming the social, cultural, attitudinal and physical obstacles that these children face in their everyday lives.¹⁶ Actions by the international community to overcome these obstacles have generally been positive. Over the past few decades, numerous declarations, conventions and commitments have been made to improve the quality of life for people

with disabilities.¹⁷ The CRC was the first international convention to specifically address the rights of children with disabilities.¹⁸ In 1997, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's Day of General Discussion focused on children with disabilities, and issued 14 recommendations on how States could further implement the rights of these children. A General Comment, later released in 2006, elaborated further on States' obligations to protect the rights of children with disabilities.

In 1993, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. This instrument gave detailed guidelines on the steps required to ensure the realisation of the rights of people with disabilities. The following year, 1994, the position of a Special Rapporteur on Disability was established. In 1998, the

World Vision believes that children with disabilities themselves should participate in addressing the issues they contend with and that they should be active in creating a better future for themselves.

UN Commission on Human Rights determined that disability issues are a matter of human rights, and later in 2001 the World Health Organization re-defined disability to represent "the outcome of the interaction between impairments and negative environmental impacts."¹⁹

More recently, an important step was taken towards realising the rights of children with disabilities. In March 2007, the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted, and within the first eight months received 118 signatories and seven ratifications.²⁰ This Convention is significant in that it emphasises the need for social development and gives States the unique opportunity to evaluate their laws and standards against the standard set out in the CRPD.

11 *Disability Definition, Models, and Mainstreaming Position Paper*, World Vision International Disability Working Group, 2007.

12 This is more the case in European countries rather than countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

13 *supra* note 1

14 *ibid*

15 The CRC can be viewed online at: <<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>>.

16 *General Comment no. 9 (2006): The Rights of Children with Disabilities*, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 27 February 2007, CRC/C/GC/9, available at: <<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/461b93f72.html>>

17 Although only a few of these actions are highlighted in this paper, a detailed timeline of instruments created to enforce the rights of people with disabilities can be found on page 8 of *Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2007 (please refer to note 1).

18 Please see Article 23 of the CRC.

19 *supra* note 1, p. 2

20 *Latest Developments*, UN Enable, Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities (website), <http://www.un.org/disabilities/>.

World Vision Policy

In 2004, World Vision recognised disabilities as a cross-cutting theme in its work; a process is now underway with the goal of mainstreaming disability issues into all WV programmes and policies. World Vision believes that simply providing therapies, assistive devices or special education is not enough. Rather, it is critically important to incorporate the concerns and experiences of children and adults with disabilities into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres. This is so that the inequality and injustices faced by people with disabilities in their everyday lives can be challenged. World Vision acknowledges that we are not experts in the area of disability; rather, we recognise that disabled people's organisations (DPO's) are the experts and therefore we partner with them. By working with other organisations that specialise in different areas of disability, World Vision can ensure that a high standard of programming is brought to communities.

World Vision has adopted a rights-based approach and the "social model" of disability for addressing rights violations and the many causes of discrimination against children with disabilities. This model has evolved from human rights perspectives on disability. Within these perspectives, the limitations that children with disabilities face should not be seen as the result of their impairment(s), but rather, as the result of society's failure to ensure that all children have access to the essential services they need to develop to their full potential.²¹ Hence, the social model sees disability as "the social consequences of having an impairment,"²² rather than seeing disability as the impairment itself. These social consequences can often be seen in the form of the denial of rights due to attitudinal, institutional and environmental barriers. An essential aspect of the social model, for World Vision, is the need to ensure that all barriers faced by people with disabilities are recognised and addressed. Importantly, World Vision believes that *children with disabilities themselves* should participate in addressing the issues they contend with and that they should be active in creating a better future for themselves.

Another key aspect of World Vision's approach is to ensure that work with children with disabilities is not seen as an "add on" to work already in place to assist children without impairments. It has been found that when this happens, it separates the children with disabilities from the rest of community, causing further exclusion rather than inclusion. Instead, World Vision believes that an inclusive



PHOTO: ARMENUHI SAHAKYAN

community will be better able to support all children.

Education is one important area of World Vision's involvement with inclusive programming. World Vision believes that the "only way to ensure education for the children most likely to be excluded is to include them in mainstream education systems."²³ This is in line with Article 24 on education in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.²⁴ An inclusive education system would meet the needs of all children by forming the education system around the child, rather than trying to fit the child into the education system. World Vision believes that inclusive education can be attained by prioritising teacher training and including teachers with disabilities within the classroom and the community. It is also necessary to ensure that funding is directed towards education that includes children with disabilities, to recognise that all children can learn, and to work towards transforming education systems as a whole.²⁵

21 supra note 1

22 supra note 11

23 supra note 5

24 The text of the Convention may be found at the following website: <<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/convtexte.htm>>

25 supra note 5

World Vision Advocacy

Issues relating to disability are fairly new to World Vision, however, our involvement is expanding quickly and we are committed to incorporating and addressing disability issues in all levels of our work. World Vision has established a working group that concentrates on research and developing position papers relating to World Vision and disabilities.

World Vision's advocacy about children with disabilities focuses on raising awareness and promoting the rights of all children, including children with disabilities. Part of this awareness-raising involves promoting healthy and positive attitudes and encouraging positive behaviours from the parents and communities of children with disabilities. Many of the hindrances that these children face are due to incorrect assumptions about their abilities. As stated earlier, often it is assumed that children with impairments are "useless" and unable to learn and develop. It is through advocacy that these opinions will be changed.

When advocates speak up for the rights of children with disabilities and for their right to be involved in their own development, their families and communities will be supported to challenge the assumptions made about children with disabilities. These same families and communities will also come to recognise that a child with an impairment is entitled to all of the rights enjoyed by a child without an impairment. They will see that children with disabilities can grow and develop to be productive members within their families, communities and societies. While some positive steps have been taken internationally towards these ends, there is still much to do both globally and locally before children with disabilities will be seen for their abilities rather than for their impairments.



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Child participation

“The children’s presence transformed the atmosphere of the United Nations. Into our usually measured and diplomatic discussions, they introduced their passions, questions, fears, challenges, enthusiasm and optimism. They brought us their ideas, hopes and dreams. They gave life to the values of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And they contributed something only they could know: the experience of being young in the 21st century ...”

—Kofi Annan, then UN Secretary General, describing the 2002 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, in UNICEF’s *State of the World’s Children*, 2003

The Issue

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that all children have the right to express their views on matters affecting them and that their views should be given “due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”¹ The CRC has helped to bring greater visibility to the importance of children’s participation, and has helped stimulate concrete actions by governments and civil society to give children adequate space and support to play an active and meaningful role in society. In 2006 the Committee on the Rights of the Child focused the Day of General Discussion around child participation and later released recommendations on how States could better implement Article 12 of the CRC. In addition, the Committee is expected to issue a General Comment on children’s participation in the near future, to give further guidance to governments on how to interpret and implement their obligations with respect to children’s right to participate.

Child participation is a right, but is not an end in itself. Children participate and engage with their environment from the moment they are born. Building the skills and capacities for empowerment and citizenship should begin in early childhood and be developed through the life cycle stages. This is true for all children of differing abilities or disabilities, as well as both girls and boys.

Involving children is not always an easy process as it involves challenging their traditional roles in society and transforming the relationships of power between adults and children. These changes are not always welcome, but through education and practical implementation, the benefits of child participation become self-evident.

Those benefits are numerous. When children are involved in the development, monitoring and evaluation

of programmes and policies that affect them, those programmes and policies can address the needs of children more effectively and operate more efficiently. By participating in decision-making and being valued for their contributions even from an early age, children themselves are able to grow and develop their skills and abilities. Moreover, children who participate in addressing matters that affect them are more likely to become active citizens

Children who participate in addressing matters that affect them are more likely to become active citizens within their societies; they develop an increased sense of empowerment and responsibility towards themselves, their families, communities and countries.

within their societies; they develop an increased sense of empowerment and responsibility towards themselves, their families, communities and countries. When they have developed skills for participation, they may be more likely to report instances of abuse or neglect and to speak up when their rights are being violated.²

Giving due weight to children’s views in accordance with their age and maturity is a crucial aspect of child participation. Not all children will be able to participate in the same way, and recognising a child’s current

1 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, <<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>>

2 *Children as Active Citizens: Commitments and Obligations for Children’s Civil Rights and Civic Engagement in East Asia and the Pacific*, Inter-Agency Working Group on Children’s Participation (IAWGCP), 2008, <http://www.iawgcp.com/download/Children_as_AC_brochure.pdf>

capacity and maturity is more difficult than simply classifying children into age brackets. Children's capacity to participate, rather than being based only upon their age, relates more to their previous experiences, support from family and community members and their own expectations of their community. It is important to remember that all children, regardless of their capacities or age, have the *right* to participate. Often very young children are seen as not having the ability to participate because they are unable to express their thoughts in the same way as older children. However, early stimulation and play in infancy builds life skills and self-confidence that are carried into the next phase of life. Thus, very young children are able to express their thoughts and ideas using non-written media such as drama, drawing and other forms of play. It is important to value and affirm those forms of self-expression. Another approach to respecting children's evolving capacities involves making the gradual shift from protecting children's right to participate directly in decisions that affect them, to holding children accountable for their own exercise of their rights and their responsibility to uphold the rights of others.

Child participation will only reap positive results when measures are taken to ensure that it is not tokenistic or exploitive. Due to the power imbalances that are often found between adults and children, it is crucial that all adults involved in the participation process are well-informed about child participation, its guiding principles and what meaningful participation entails. Adults can be in a position to manipulate or exploit children's right to participate, through the methods used to collect children's opinions and ideas or through the tasks that children are asked to complete as part of their participation. Due to these possibilities, child protection policies are of extreme importance, and goals must be set for what will be completed during the participation process. These steps will help to ensure that the actions taken and decisions made will be in the best interests of the children involved.

World Vision Policy

World Vision believes that the ideal environment for children to grow and mature is within a family. We also believe that within families, communities, schools and all other spheres, children should be encouraged and helped to reach their God-given potential; key to this process of child development is the right to participate.

World Vision has encouraged the participation of children in many international events and in local programming. For example, in 2006, World Vision Korea held its fourth annual Child Rights camp, in which the children participating were the ones planning and



PHOTO: LE THIEM XUAN

facilitating the activities.³ In addition, World Vision Colombia has hosted two national meetings for child peacebuilders. The second national event included 700 children who planned the meeting, where the focus was to strengthen the promotion and defense of children's rights, as well as defining the commitments and duties that participants must pursue further in their communities. As an example of child participation at the international level, World Vision included five children from Tanzania, Mexico and Colombia as part of their delegation to the UN Special Session on Children in 2002. One of the children addressed the General Assembly to describe the challenges faced by children affected by armed conflict. In December 2007, World Vision supported three child delegates from the Philippines, Peru and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS)+5 review in New York, and World Vision also helped co-facilitate a forum for over 90 children to prepare for the UNGASS+5 meetings.

³ Heisun Cha, *Children facilitate child rights camp*, 12 August 2006, <<http://www.child-rights.org/PolicyAdvocacy/pahome2.5.nsf/all/articleshome/9611CD68F4B435A6882571D2006CE930?OpenDocument>>

As a strong supporter of child participation, World Vision has seen first-hand the benefits of having children actively involved in the development, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and policies. WV encourages children to be engaged in every stage, and is striving to make children's participation a significant part of its own governance structures and decision-making processes. Where children have been involved as equal partners in internal dialogue and decision making, significant insights have been gained and changes made. There is still much to learn about including children in the most effective and appropriate way. However, World Vision is committed to continuing to grow and develop in this area. To assist in this learning process, we have recently conducted an in-depth analysis of child participation within the periodic reporting process on the CRC. In addition to this analysis, we also produced a set of comprehensive guidelines to help ensure meaningful child participation within this process (please refer to the reading list at the end of this paper).

World Vision Advocacy

World Vision actively promotes and supports children's participation in matters that affect their lives. All too often children bear the brunt of economic, social and military decisions, without having any voice in them. World Vision recommends that governments encourage and make space for children to be involved in establishing procedures that will help to advance their protection and rights.

As mentioned above, one way in which World Vision is trying to strengthen children's voices in holding their governments accountable is through the publication of research and guidelines on children's participation in the alternative reporting process to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Including children is a crucial step in ensuring that the implementation of the CRC is truly reaching those it set out to assist, namely, children. If given the opportunity, children can and will express their feelings, thoughts and ideas about their daily lives and how their access to rights, or lack thereof, is affecting them. They benefit from having the chance to express themselves on matters upon which they are the experts (their daily lives), and by doing so, can influence their country's agenda. Participating like this can also lead children to develop an increased sense of empowerment and responsibility towards themselves, their peers, their families and their society.

In our work with children, World Vision has assembled the following eight guiding principles for child

participation:

1. In accordance with the CRC and all other relevant international standards, a child is any person up to the age of 18 years. The right of children to participate is embodied in the CRC, particularly Articles 12, 13, 23, 29, and 31.
2. Participation is a right in itself as well as a means through which other rights can be realised.⁴
3. Participation should not infringe upon the rights of others (CRC, Article 13) or upon one's own rights (i.e. participation should not lead to abuse or exploitation).
4. "To engage meaningfully" means that every child is able to participate in decision-making and activities related to their physical, social, spiritual and economic well-being (CRC, Articles 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 23, 24, 26, 28, 29, 31).
5. Participation should be informed and voluntary.
6. Child participation contributes to the development of individual and social citizenship.
7. Participation affirms the right and responsibility of parents, guardians and communities in nurturing children to be active and responsible citizens (CRC Articles 14, 29).
8. Adults should partner with and facilitate the participation of children in a manner that supports their "evolving capacities" (CRC, Articles 12, 14).⁵

Lastly, World Vision affirms that child participation is one of the four pillars of the CRC, and as such supports the right of *every* child to participate. In addition, we view child participation as an effective way for children to be able protect themselves from abuse and exploitation. World Vision will continue to work for a world where children are given the space to express themselves and to be actively engaged in addressing the issues that affect them.

⁴ Hart, J., Newman, J., Ackermann, L., and Feeny, T., *Children Changing their World: Understanding and Evaluating Children's Participation in Development*, Plan International, 2004, <<http://www.plan-uk.org/newsroom/publications/childrenchangingtheirworld>>

⁵ Additional sources for these principles include: Miller, J., *Children as Change Agents: Guidelines for Child Participation in Periodic Reporting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, World Vision Canada, 2007, <<http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=15467&flag=report>>; UNICEF, *Fact sheet: the Right to Participation*, <<http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Right-to-Participation.pdf>>; UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children*, 2003, <<http://www.unicef.org/sowc03/contents/pdf/SOWC03-eng.pdf>>.

Further Reading

- *Child Participation: Challenges of Empowerment*, Discussion Paper, World Vision UK, 2000.
- *Children as Change Agents: Guidelines for Child Participation in Periodic Reporting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, World Vision Canada, 2007.
- *Children as Change Agents: A Review of Child Participation in Periodic Reporting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, World Vision Canada, 2007.
- *Children as Active Citizens: Commitments and Obligations for Children's Civil Rights and Civic Engagement in East Asia and the Pacific. A Policy and Programme Guide*, Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation, 2007.
- *Children's Participation in Decision Making: Why do it, When to Do it, How to Do it*, Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation, 2007.
- *Minimum Standards for Consulting with Children*, Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation, 2007.
- *Operations Manual on Children's Participation in Consultations*, Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation, 2007.



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