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CHILDREN AS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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1. Introduction

> Sentimentality towards children…is no substitute for the recognition of a child's entitlement to the right to equal concern and respect. This does not mean the treatment of children as adults. It requires, however, respect for the competencies of children. It argues for children to be seen as persons, not cases. It demands that children's capacities be acknowledged, that they be given a say in the decision-making processes concerning them whenever this is feasible and they are capable of participating meaningfully. It expects that the interests of children will be taken into account in public policy-making, whether the issue is lead in petrol, taxation, the financing of local government or education (Freeman, 1983:3).

The economic and social roles of children have been studied, theorized about, and targeted for change -by adults- for more than a hundred years. In this report, we do not attempt to summarize the breadth or depth of this vast experience of humankind. Nor do we attempt to enumerate the ways in which children have benefited as the recipients of policy. Instead, we aim to explore present thinking and experience on childhood and children[1] and, in light of these insights, identify the most constructive future directions for policy. This entails reflecting briefly on traditional models and approaches to children and childhood. It also requires that we draw upon new understandings from research in various disciplines and grassroots experience with children.

We do not undertake a comprehensive literature review but instead cite evidence as necessary for substantiation. Our case is built upon concepts and theories from social anthropology, developmental psychology, sociology, demography, economics, and history, in the main. We have attempted to bridge the gap between these important fields of research and the policy dialogue.

While acknowledging that children are, in all societies, powerless relative to adults, we maintain that childhood is best understood not so much as a unitary natural phenomenon, but more as a culturally and situationally diverse social construction. Cross-cultural studies of child rearing clearly show that children are raised in different ways and with very different expectations in different parts of the world. These variations in the way that children are perceived and treated reflect cultural differences in priorities for child development and beliefs pertaining to childhood and account for major differences in both children's social and economic roles and child development outcomes.

We will argue that children are not passive recipients of adult investment and training but social agents in their own right. We maintain, though, that children's economic and social contributions tend to be systematically overlooked (and therefore undervalued) and their views, perspectives and experiences denied. The fact that children's contributions are given little recognition does not mean that they are insignificant. Thus, Helmut Wintersberger (1994:215) states that "the precarious role of children as economic actors is not so much an economic phenomenon as it is the consequence of their weak position in society at large." This denial of children's economic and social roles is reflected most clearly in the orthodox thinking of economists, who are among the world's most influential policy actors. We discuss mainstream economic frameworks in

[1] We define the term "children" broadly, as no one definition has universal acceptance. Effectively, our upper bound on age is given by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: "children" includes all individuals up to age 18. This convention has become standard in the policy arena, although it departs from social definitions in many parts of the world.

Section 2 in order to explain why they so effectively ignore children and how they might be modified to rectify that omission.

Social and educational policies tend to be aimed at children and childhood far more specifically than economic policies and are, moreover, increasingly shaped by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which provides a clear focus on child protection and welfare. Indeed, modern strategies for regulating and improving the quality of child life seem quite effective. During the 20th century technological advances in health have demonstrated the amazing capacity of human society to influence the fate of its young positively; some countries have witnessed remarkable improvements in child survival and health and few are prepared to leave such matters to chance. In many of the wealthier countries a focus on children is leading to the construction of a national standard childhood, moulded by a range of designated institutions and professions and regulated by the state. In some places - mostly in the industrialised North - state regulation extends to practically all areas of child life, schooling, family relationships, recreation and so on. Childhood measures such as immunisation, nutrition supplementation and growth monitoring convey the impression that children's survival and protection can be more-or-less assured. And the organisation of children's time into structured education and leisure activities is introduced to enable each and every child to achieve her/his full developmental potential.

Undoubtedly there is greater will than ever before to influence the conditions and circumstances of children's lives throughout the world. The CRC and other child-centred measures like the ILO Convention for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour have had a significant positive influence on children's lives, reinforcing understanding in political circles that children have a right to call on state and society for protection and care. All over the world non-governmental, religious and governmental bodies are establishing new projects and programmes for children. There is an acceptance that this requires new resources, revealed by the growing commitment of donor agencies to support measures specifically for children. This interest in and work with children has also generated a wealth of new research focusing on childhood.

Nevertheless, we should not be complacent, for often practice falls far short of intentions. Policies and programmes intended to assist children do not always have the expected beneficial outcomes; some are merely ineffective and a waste of resources, but others have been shown to be counterproductive and detrimental to the children involved. Witness, for example, the generations of children throughout the world who have failed to thrive or died in neglectful residential institutions. Witness also, the countless numbers 'temporarily' evacuated from war zones who have been lost to their families forever through hastily arranged adoptions and foster placements. Consider the runaway children who have been reunited with their families, only to be exposed to further violence and abuse and the children made to leave their jobs, following political pressure, only to end up not in school but in occupations far more detrimental to their health and wellbeing.

Given the complex and fast changing contexts of childhood in today's world, policy makers have the task of identifying appropriate, effective and affordable solutions to a whole host of problems, many of which seem quite intractable. There is still a great deal to be done. In many countries the divide between rich and poor is increasing and in some of the poorest places growing numbers of children are excluded from state provision. Certain aspects of child life appear to be deteriorating even. For example, one in four babies globally is born into extreme poverty - indeed, half of all the world's poorest people are children - and there are more destitute babies now than ever before (Lean, 1999). By next year, one in every five children in nine African countries will have been orphaned by AIDS. Nor are rich country trends all positive: child abuse and neglect are rife in industrialised countries; and one in every ten American teenagers has attempted suicide (Lean, 1999).

As the new millenium commences, we are challenged to develop policies that are far more effective in terms of children's survival, wellbeing and protection. As it happens, the effective protection of children remains an uncertain art. Yet the CRC provides a powerful criterion for securing this end, in that it requires all measures, whenever possible, to be consistent with the best interest of children. That is to say, the value of programmes and policies implementing children's rights should be justified, above all, by their systematically observed effects on the children they touch. We suggest that one of the most fruitful ways of establishing whether or not a particular intervention supports children's interest is to examine the extent to which its fosters their development, since it can be assumed that measures serving children's best interests must by definition also uphold their development. We argue that this strategy effectively sets the stage for a child-centred approach to policy, which can be thought of as policy that is, in a manner of speaking, accountable to children.

Recent research in the social sciences, discussed at some length in *Sections 3 and 4,* provides new insights into children, child development and childhood that help identify how children's best interests may be served through policy. These insights challenge much conventional wisdom about how to assist children in a variety of contexts and situations. It is now apparent that what promotes children's best interests cannot be defined without reference to social and cultural theories of child development, children's personal and social characteristics, their specific circumstances, the nature of their childhood experiences, and the social contexts in which they live. Even in adversity children are not the passive recipients, but active survivors, of experience. Children's agency[2] is a key contributor to their development and hence children should play a part in defining what is in their own best interests.[3] While such insights and debates have had some impact within academic circles and are at least partially familiar to certain groups of teachers and pedagogy specialists, they have had relatively little influence on either policy or practice in many parts of the world. So, while efforts to establish the theoretical and empirical foundations for a fresh approach to children and childhood have been intensified since the CRC (Knutsson, 1997:3), these are often seriously hampered by old ideas and assumptions and old ways of doing things. It is our contention that those who defend children's rights should be interested in ensuring that policy makers involved in children's issues have an up-to-date understanding of childhood and child development. For that reason, in *Section 5* we consider the broad implications of these recent research findings for policy and practice.

That said, we are painfully aware that much of the literature and child development debate that we refer to are 'Northern' in origin and style. This is not a chosen or preferred bias. It is a reflection of reality. Both the scientific and development projects are Northern in origin and Northern dominated. The same applies to the literature on children within various disciplines. The lack of child centred information from the South and the overall absence of 'Southern perspectives' is a major problem in both research and policy terms. There is still a great deal to learn, but we do already know enough to realise that research findings about children and childhood in the rich countries should not automatically be taken to apply to other regions of the world until confirmed there by appropriate studies. If policy is to respond effectively to children's

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[2] Children are recognised as having "agency" in the sense of human agency as "contributing to the accomplishment of a purpose or results (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971). That is, children can and do use what power they have to affect outcomes about which they have opinions.

[3] We are not taking a "liberationist" stance, such as that described by Laura Purdy (1992): we are not arguing that children should have rights and responsibilities identical to those of adults. Like Purdy (1992: 231), we are calling for a "better protectionism," and we acknowledge that achieving this will require major social changes. As we will discuss below, it is important to begin making policy changes, both major and minor, in the direction leading to children's betterment.

problems, concerns and needs, it must be able to draw on sound child-centred information - in other words, empirical observation of real children in real contexts - and appropriate theories, concepts and values concerning childhood in different settings. We acknowledge the information imbalances and have tried to correct them whenever possible. We also want to point to a balancing factor. To a fairly large extent, the scientific debate covered in our appraisal is critical of dominant globalised models of childhood and child development and calls attention to the need for greater understanding of local perspectives. Nevertheless, serious global imbalances in research and analysis remain which, in themselves, should serve as a strong recommendation for the strengthening of research on children and development in the South.

2. A Place for Children in Economics

Among the most powerful policies affecting human society today are those generated by economics and applied by economists in the world's major political and financial institutions. The discipline of economics, while not claiming to understand or study human development, is based upon a set of underlying assumptions about human behaviour. Because economics and economists have been privileged in policy-making and advising, the behavioural assumptions that underlie economic analysis have subtly and powerfully influenced policy discussions. Although feminist economists and other critics join Marxist and institutional economists in exposing the weaknesses of mainstream economic approaches, the neo-classical economic paradigm has a major global influence.

Economists have, in turn, been influenced by the prevailing thinking about children in Northern cultures, and this is reflected in the economic models that underlie policy at many levels. Historical and cultural thinking about children are thus embedded in the apparently context-free framework of mainstream economics. In as much as children are considered at all, the mainstream economic view is of children as household dependants - neither decision-makers nor productive economic actors - who have value as *potential* economic resources, a status they attain with adulthood. In effect, economics represents children as dependents who thereby personify household and societal costs, there being no workable theory of children as economic agents.[4] Investment in children is assessed in terms of its role in increasing their economic productivity as adults rather than its potential for furthering the interests and welfare of children themselves. This is extremely important because economic policies nevertheless have a major effect on all policies about children, and therefore on children. The omission of children from economic theory and policy results in a systematic neglect of consideration of such impacts on them.

This section will describe the types of economic analyses that come closest to addressing issues related to children. The degree to which economics and economists can contribute to policy debates about the roles of children and their treatment in families and societies may affect the attention policy-makers give children. It is therefore relevant to address how and in what direction economists' tools and interests may be most usefully channelled.

Mainstream economists generally define themselves and their work by the type of specialised theory and empirical approaches used. Many economists work in areas in which the actors of interest are firms or where national or international aggregates such as the money supply, inflation, exchange rates, agricultural output, or the gross national product are the focus of attention. Others, however, study topics more closely related to children's lives; most of these are included under the overlapping areas of labour economics, poverty studies, economic demography, household economics, game theory, health economics, and the economics of education. Those who work in these areas usually consider themselves either theorists or applied microeconomists or both. Some of these topics are studied in the context of Southern countries, in which case they may also be categorised under the broad area of development economics. In addition, there is growing interest in considering the microeconomic implications of macroeconomics; how national and international economic trends and policies affect children, would, for example, fall in this category.

[4] While children in pre-industrial societies may be considered productive economic assets who provide net economic benefits rather than net costs, such children's activities are modelled as though they are completely determined by parental or household decisions: children's own input is ignored.

2.1 Children as engines of economic growth: education and human capital

That children can be seen as the embodiment of the future has not gone unrecognised by economists. Human capital theory, which originated with economists Theodore W. Schultz, Jacob Mincer, and Gary Becker in the late 1950s, is concerned with investment in human beings instead of physical capital. It recognises that increasing the skills and knowledge of humans leads to economic returns in the form of higher future earnings for workers and higher profits for the owners of complementary capital used by workers. Later economists have tended to emphasise, in addition, large "social returns" in the form of economic growth and development. For example, countries with universal literacy can expect to adopt technological innovations faster than those where many adults are illiterate.

The economy-wide effects of investment in human capital are rarely calculated, however; social capital has proved to be an elusive concept. Although endogenous growth theory has highlighted the role of human capital, there has been little in the way of measurement. A large literature is devoted simply to calculating the individual rates of return to different levels of schooling.[5] While individual "returns" are broadly thought of as including the increased income, social status, and, hopefully, happiness due to school education, economists working in the human capital tradition have estimated more narrowly that an additional year of schooling in many Southern countries results in adult wages that are substantially higher - 11 percent on average - than they would otherwise have been.[6] Data on adults, including their ages, current earnings, and years of schooling, and possibly other characteristics, are used in such analyses. If the (estimated) cost of the additional year of schooling is less than the expected gain to lifetime earnings, it is obvious to economists that the individuals in question should 'invest' in the extra year. Why don't they? First and foremost, economists worry about the supply of education - schools should be made available, since otherwise an inefficiently low level of human capital will prevail. Second, school-related expenses may exceed available resources. If capital markets were perfect, would-be school-goers could go to a bank and borrow money to finance their education. When they cannot do this, again, investment does not attain its optimal levels.

Note that the preceding paragraph does not mention children, or parents, or families. Human capital theory focuses on the adults that children will become. The child or young adult is of interest only as the learner who will later be a worker. Studies estimating rates of return to human capital must rely upon information about adult earners to estimate the value of those adults' past formal education, apprenticeships, or on-the-job training. Notice also that "education" is defined in highly institutional terms - years in school -rather than in terms of knowledge or skills. Ignoring knowledge and skills based on family interactions - think of farming or cooking skills, for example - implies that human capital is developed primarily outside the family rather than in it. In particular, economists have totally overlooked the role of children's participation in work for building human capital skills and attitudes.

[5] Psacharopoulos (1994; 1985) summarizes this literature.

[6] Psacharopoulos, 1994. Such estimates are crude, insofar as they usually only take a few individual characteristics into account (age and sex, for example). Studies which are able to take school quality, native language, and other information into account show much more variability in the benefits of education (e.g., Behrman and Birdsall, 1983; Patrinos and Psacharopoulos, 1994). In particular, they show that those who are privileged to begin with reap greater benefits from education. Studies of returns to education are also unable, in general, to differentiate between financial benefits that accrue to human capital (skills and knowledge) acquired via education and those that accrue to diploma effects (e.g., the belief that those with Harvard or Oxford diplomas must make the best employees) or social status and accompanying networks which facilitate employment opportunities and higher earnings.

Still, these estimates make a powerful case for spending on school education, especially primary education in Southern countries. The human capital literature has provided a justifiable economic rationale for government investment in the knowledge and skills of individual children. Much of the attention of governments and international agencies which, in the 1960s, was devoted to physical capital and infrastructure development, has been refocused on developing human resources, with an economic growth objective. In this sense the human capital approach has had a very important positive influence on approaches to international development. It does not, however, provide a comprehensive approach to human betterment:

> Although an emphasis on human skills as the key factor in economic and social development is no longer controversial, it is important to stress the difference between a human development approach and the "human capital approach". While the former takes the human being as the end, the latter analyses human development as a means: to invest in people is good for economic growth. While there need not always be a contradiction between those two approaches in actual policy conclusions, they do reflect a fundamental difference as to the overall interpretation of "development" (de Vylder, 1996:30).

The differences between human capital and human development perspectives can be glimpsed in how education is conceived. Related to the human capital approach is a literature concerned with the schooling opportunities of Southern children. A number of economic studies try to determine the degree to which various characteristics affect children's school attendance and grade attainment, with the goal of identifying useful policy levers to encourage schooling. Such studies often have three limitations. First, they have trouble asking the right questions, because of limited data. They rely upon data collected in censuses or large sample surveys. Standard household questionnaires usually include information on household structure and the age, sex, education and earnings of household members but relatively little about crucial health, intelligence or psychological factors relevant to children's schooling experiences. Nor do such data usually include details relating to the quality and costs of schooling for each child. Second, many studies of children's schooling do not consider children's alternatives to schooling. With a few exceptions, more holistic studies that also include children's labour force work and unpaid domestic work have just begun to be published in the last decade.[7] The importance of play has yet to be taken into account by economists. Third, progress through school is taken to be a valid indicator of learning, and even of life education. In contrast, a human development approach to education would consider outcomes for children in terms of substantive material learned and understood, ability to apply and generalise from the material, life skills, motor skills, social skills, and engagement in the process of learning.

2.2 Economics of the household: children are seen but not heard

Economic demographers and labour economists studying families have, in the past three decades, worked to a great extent within the tradition of Gary Becker's (1965) household economics model. The "new home economics" model was a great step forward for late 20th century micro economists insofar as it explicitly recognised and valued the unpaid as well as paid labour of all family members, including children; research in this tradition now comprises a huge literature in economics and sociology.[8] Families are considered to function like small firms, allocating their time (that is, the time of all family members) and resources in order to maximise family well-being, which is increased by the consumption of market-purchased goods, home-produced goods (like clean clothes or a meal) and leisure.

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[7] DeTray (1983) is a notable exception.

[8] Economic studies of households by economist Margaret Reid predate Becker's work by decades but have generally been forgotten.

The new home economics model is based on a number of assumptions, some of which have been criticised widely. For our purposes, the most problematic assumption implies that the head of the household makes all time- and resource-allocation decisions for all household members, in such a way that takes all family members' well-being into account. That is, the household head is assumed to be a benevolent dictator. It is not possible to use such models without assuming, at least, that one or two parents - who are in complete agreement - make all decisions concerning children's time spent in school, labour force work, and unpaid household work. Policy implications deriving from such models will thus systematically ignore the possibility that children can be participants in family decision-making and may make decisions independently of their parents. They also ignore the possibility of joint decision-making involving kin other than the parents. The outcomes of coherent "family" decisions that are implied by such a process may differ substantially from outcomes achieved via negotiations among family members. For example, parents alone might place a child in a very different work situation than would result from a parent-child negotiation, as the latter would be influenced by the child's opinions and willingness to work in different settings.

The new home economics model also suffers from its static nature: it refers to households' allocation of resources in one time period, and has not been adequately extended to dynamic analyses (of decision-making over time). This weakness means that it cannot be explicitly co-ordinated or merged with a human capital approach which, by its nature, is dynamic, concerned with changes over time as investments are made and as they garner economic returns. More fundamentally, it excludes consideration of children's physical and mental development.

Still, most economic studies of children's time use - schooling and work, in particular - use a new home economics model as a starting point for their analyses. Econometric analyses must be based on a theoretical model of some kind, so economists believe, in order for their results to be interpretable as causal. That is, in order for empirical economic research to have policy relevance, economists have to be able to make causal assertions (this causes that). Reasonable alternatives to the new home economics model have not yet been developed.

The neglect of children goes beyond the new home economics; it lies more fundamentally with a basic premise of microeconomic theory. Diana Strassmann summarises this problem, which she calls "The Story of Free Choice":

> The agent in economic theory is a self-contained individual-an adult able to choose from an array of options, limited only by "constraints." But by focusing on choice, the theory contains a number of ancillary, more hidden assumptions: (1) people are independent agents and unique selves, taking only their own needs and wishes into account; (2) people are able and responsible for taking care of their own needs (1993:60).

These assumptions are not benign, as becomes apparent when considering parents and their infants and children. Adults' "gifts of time, love, and money" to infants and children to whom they are intimately connected are "hidden by a theory that focuses on how people get what they choose" (Strassmann 1993:61). While some of these invisible "gifts" are made explicit in the new household economics, the degree to which children actively participate in such exchanges with adults cannot be recognised in this framework. For example, breastfeeding mothers of infants are not independent agents; nor can their babies care for themselves. Yet such infants are active participants in their own development, signalling hunger with heart-rending cries and contentment with engaging smiles.

2.3 Recognising children's lack of power: bargaining and intra-household resource allocation

While feminist economists, sociologists and even mainstream economists have criticised the problematic assumptions of the new home economics models[9] and have shown them to be inconsistent with evidence[10], alternatives have not been readily available. The most promising of the alternatives within economics lies in the literature on bargaining, which is a subset of game theory (the study of outcomes when people interact strategically). The bargaining literature explicitly recognises that power matters, and that power may differ systematically among different kinds of people.

Most bargaining models of households are concerned with wives' and husbands' negotiations, and are very abstract.[11] They attempt to recognise the role of power in relationships via the fallback positions of the different 'players' of the bargaining 'game.' A fallback position (or 'outside option' or 'threat point') is defined as the situation in which the player would be left if the relationship were ended. For example, if a marriage were to end, spouses' wellbeing outside of marriage would depend upon their relative wealth and income-earning capabilities. Since women are relatively disadvantaged in the labour market, they will have less powerful bargaining positions. A number of studies have shown that where women do have bargaining power, due to their control over assets or their education, children benefit: women's resources are directed to children's health and educational expenses to a greater extent than are men's.[12] This evidence demonstrates that bargaining is an important issue.

This literature has barely recognised the role of children within families; even here, children's agency is overlooked.[13] To a great extent, the development of bargaining models is hindered by their complicated mathematics. Models that have more than two players are analytically intractable, although they may, in the future, be solved computationally. Models in which the players repeatedly negotiate in the relationship over time (a repeated game) are inconclusive: they result in many possible equilibrium outcomes and therefore have little usefulness. Still, there is room in this literature for a discussion of how children negotiate with adults, their various fallback positions (for example, misbehaviour, running away), and how their power or lack thereof affects the household's allocation of time and other resources.[14]

2.4 Children as a means of reducing transaction costs

Another approach that could shed light on children's economic and social roles focuses on 'transaction costs.' For a firm, transaction costs are the monetary and time costs of finding what the firm wants to buy or sell or trade, and the costs of negotiating the sale or trade (Coase, 1937). Yoram Ben-Porath (1980) and Robert Pollak (1985) extend transaction cost reasoning to families and family enterprises. Ben-Porath emphasises the importance of "identity," which refers to the ability to recognise (know) and be recognised by people with whom one is involved in a

[9] E.g., Folbre (1986); Berk and Berk (1983); Pollak and Wachter (1975).
[10] E.g., Thomas (1990); Doss (1994).
[11] Manser and Brown (1980) and McElroy and Horney (1981) first explored power in households using game theory models. See also Chiappori (1988, 1992, 1997), Bourguignon and Chiappori (1992), Lundberg and Pollak (1993, 1994, 1996), McElroy (1985) and Ott (1995). Critiques and related approaches are discussed by Nelson (1994), Seiz (1991), and Sen (1990).
[12] Such references are summarised in Quisumbing *et al.* (1995).
[13] Lundberg and Pollak (1998) and Moehling (1997) are exceptions.
[14] If young children had more influence on household time allocation, it is likely that Northern parents would spend less time working and more time with their children.

transaction. Costs of doing business are reduced, for example, by the ability to rely upon family members in business transactions. In the case of families and kin groups, "transactions" may more often refer to non-market exchanges (for example, exchanges of favours over time) than to buying or selling.

Families have advantages for certain types of transactions, arising from the family's ability to "integrate these activities with pre-existing, ongoing significant personal relationships" (Pollak, 1985:585). Incentives arise from members' long-term claims on family resources, making them reluctant to behave in ways which "sacrifice long-run benefits for short-run gains" (Pollak, 1985:585). Families have an advantage in monitoring the behaviour of their members (compared to other employees) because they know more about kin than do outsiders. Furthermore, caring relationships (which economists often call "altruism") and family loyalty discourage opportunistic behaviour.

This kind of reasoning can be used to examine how families "deploy" their children: as workers, in arranged marriages, or across a variety of situations in order to spread economic risk.[15] It can, furthermore, provide space to recognise children's contributions to a family economy. However, transactions costs approaches have not led to the sort of model comfortable for most empirical economists: that is, a model fully specified in equations and empirically estimable. Pollak (1985) observes that, "formal models are self-contained constructs and cannot tell us what phenomena are worth modeling" (p.584), and while many economists would agree with him, in the absence of a formal model there has been little interest in pursuing this approach. This is unfortunate, as transaction costs are probably particularly important for explaining the continuing reliance of many family firms and family farms on children's work.

2.5 Labour economics, poverty, and the economics of child-care: where are the children?

Labour economists have traditionally been interested in employment, unemployment, and wage determination, in the broadest sense. Since, by definition, most children are not considered part of the labour force, labour economists studying Northern countries have shown little interest in them. Exceptions include studies of youth employment and unemployment, but these usually focus on ages 16 and above.

Some labour economists study the economics of child care:

> It is widely recognized that economic issues are an important part of the debate over child care policy. These issues include, but are not limited to, the responsiveness of child care demand and supply to prices, the efficiency of the child care market, the economic rationale for government subsidies and regulation of child care, and the role of employers in providing child care (Blau, 1991).

From economists' perspectives, even child-driven areas like the economics of child care focus on adults. In the case of the demand for child-care, mothers' fertility and employment are of primary

[15] E.g., Mead Cain (1981).

concern. In the case of the supply of child-care and the efficiency of the market, care-providing firms and workers are of interest. While concerns about regulation tend to focus on quality of care issues, economists leave the measurement of quality (that is, children's experiences) to others and consider how state intervention can affect the various levels of care provided 'in the market.'

A number of Northern labour economists specialise in poverty issues in Northern countries (leaving poverty in Southern countries to development economists and to labour economists in the South). The literature on poverty in Northern countries is huge, and in it the contributions of economists are only part of larger discussions among social scientists of a variety of disciplines. Although there is insufficient space to review this literature here, it is possible to generalise to some extent economists' contributions to it, whether the topic is welfare, teenage pregnancy, female-headed households, educational attainment, male unemployment, criminality, health, or any of a number of other poverty-related issues. First, economists often summarise patterns and trends.[16] Such evidence provides an understanding of which children are most 'at risk' of having inadequate standards of living along many dimensions. Second, most economic analyses of poverty take the household or the family as the unit of observation; children are at risk simply because they belong to particular adults, but the adults are the focus of attention. Exceptions to this rule include studies of children's networks and the effects on child outcomes – such as teen childbearing, educational attainment, and access to jobs – of living in particular neighbourhoods.[17] Third, economists are particularly concerned with identifying causal effects; sophisticated statistical methods (econometrics) are often considered necessary to distinguish between causality and correlation. For example, when considering the correlation between teenage pregnancy and school drop-out, econometric methods can be used to determine which comes first, pregnancy or educational disengagement.

2.6 Development economics: children's roles in economic growth and poverty reduction

Microeconomists working in the field of economic development tend to be oriented towards poverty reduction per se, while macroeconomists are often concerned with economic growth, which they see as the means to the end of poverty reduction. This latter view is debated in a literature on inequality and economic growth; and it seems clear that the continuing poverty of large portions of populations is possible even in environments of strong economic growth.

Theoretical models of economic growth often include a role for children. However, these overlapping generations models of economic growth may tell more about economists than they tell about growth. Basic overlapping generations models generally feature families consisting of one parent and one child; each parent is identical to all other parents, and each child is identical to all other children. Life for each person is often divided into two periods: in the first period, representing childhood, the child is completely dependent on his parent for sustenance. In the second period, the individual is transformed into a productive member of the labour force, with his own child to support. Such models are used, for instance, to consider the effects of intergenerational resource allocation (inheritances) or demographic changes on economic growth. They provide an example of the degree to which economists must simplify reality in order to

[16] In a discussion of the 'economic environment of childhood' in the United States, for example, Greg Duncan (1991) reports on trends over time in child poverty rates, income inequality, family structure, parental income, labour market conditions, and government assistance.

[17] E.g., Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997a), (1997b). Arline Geronimus' (1992) work on the 'weathering hypothesis,' which takes as a starting point the possibility that African-American girls have reasonable reasons for becoming pregnant as teenagers, is another exception. Not an economist herself, Geronimus collaborates with economists on this topic.

approximate it using mathematics. Macroeconomic models rarely consider children to be productive members of a family [18]. Indeed, they rarely consider any aspect of children's existence.

Microeconomists interested in poverty reduction in Southern countries have applied labour and household economics theory to study farm households, in which children are included as workers, and also child workers individually. Farm household models tend to focus on the allocation of household members' time and household resources among tasks or crops, with a view to evaluating the productivity of different types of workers and their uses. Empirical studies of urban and rural child workers aim to determine which child, family, household, and community characteristics make children more likely to be workers, the goal being to identify target populations or policy levers to reduce child work, or at least increase school attendance, thus reducing poverty in the future. Such studies are increasingly being combined with studies of the determinants of children's school attendance and educational attainment, described above.[19] Data limitations often mean that these analyses do not include relevant information on the availability and quality of school and work opportunities. Sophisticated time use data is rarely available, but the Living Standards Measurement Surveys, co-sponsored by the World Bank in a number of Southern countries, generally collect information on hours children spend in labour force work, chores, and school. The availability of these surveys has encouraged much recent research on the activities of school-aged children in the South[20].

2.7 Economic approaches to children's work

Empirical and theoretical research by economists has often skirted the most pressing issues about child work. Much of the applied work in this area has been done by economic demographers concerned with the connection between family size and the economic value of children, which is dependent in great measure on their work and schooling activities. Critical questions which have been neglected include the effects of children's work on adult unemployment and wages,[21] its contribution (if any) to family income and nutritional security, and its effect on children's ability to support themselves over their lives (for example via human capital or health effects). Economists have looked at what it would take to discourage child economic participation but not at *whether discouraging work is in fact good for all children, or even good for society*. Reducing child work is simply *assumed* to lead to the best of all possible worlds.

Other neglected research questions include the following: (1) Under what circumstances is work harmful, and under what circumstances is work helpful, for children? The corresponding policy question asks to what degree children's work should be regulated or forbidden. Are some kinds of work "bad" and others not? (2) Can work be positive sometimes but have negative effects over

[18] One exception is provided by Moe (1995), who models the societal transition from high to low fertility as driven by a shift in children's time from work to school. In Moe's theoretical model, changes in technology reduce the demand for low-skilled labour such as that provided by children, and they increase the demand for more-educated workers. As families respond to the needs of the industrialising economy, they must spend more time and/or money to better educate and train their children. Parents respond to this increasing expense per child by reducing their child-bearing. This economic model, in which the use of children's time is seen as broadly responsive to demands of the capitalist economy, is consistent with some historical evidence from the United States (Kallgren, 1995). It has also been observed in the South, although developing country data seem more ambiguous on this point.

[19] E.g., Binder and Scrogin (forthcoming); DeGraff, Bilsborrow and Herrin (1996); Grootaert and Patrinos (1999); Knaul and Parker (1998); Levison (1991); Levison and Moe (1998); Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (1994); Skoufias (1993, 1994); Tirtosudarmo *et al.* (1998).

[20] See, for example, Gage (1998), Glewwe and Ilias (1996), Grootaert (1999), Levison and Moe (1998), and Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (1997).

[21] Basu (forthcoming) has formulated a theoretical model which examines the effects of a rise in adult minimum wages on child labour.

certain thresholds of work hours or intensity? (3) Should all children be in school (regardless of the quality of the educational experience)? (4) Does work undertaken by children hinder their educational attainment? (5) How can we identify cases where working provides money which allows a child or his siblings to go to school? (6) How can we identify cases where working provides a child with motivation to learn? (7) To what extent can/does children's time substitute for other household members' time in labor force work or household work? Or even in school? Difficulty in capturing particular effects is likely to affect the answers to these questions; answers may also vary with age, gender, class, race/ethnicity, geographic location, and migrant status.

Economists studying child work have used approaches similar to those for studying the determinants of school enrolment and school years completed. That is, they have used data from large surveys and censuses to consider which basic child and family characteristics are associated with increased probabilities of child work or increased hours working. Most studies focus on labour force employment, although a few also consider household work.

One exception to this pattern is provided by a path-breaking series of studies of Indian industries by Richard Anker and collaborators.[22] Instead of focusing on child workers and their families, these researchers studied industries and production processes in India in order to determine the prevalence and importance of children's work in these processes. Among other things, they determined that products generally passed through many stages of production and many pairs of hands; that children did not play important roles and could theoretically be replaced in a number of production processes; that in spite of the so-called "nimble fingers" argument child workers were not particularly skilled and could be replaced by adults, but that employers benefited from the low wages and piece rates paid to children.

Economic theorists have recently begun to model child labour force participation, apparently in response to considerable policy interest. While some interest is better than none, we caution that economic models will, at least initially, be overly simplistic, and their policy prescriptions may therefore be applicable only under very restrictive conditions. The main problem with the models, however, is that they do not reflect empirical evidence, even the ample information about the social roles of children which have been thoroughly documented by anthropologists, sociologists, and other social scientists.

A recent theoretical paper uses a growth model to argue for legislative action on child labour. Dessy's (1998) model is concerned with the effect of children's activities on their parents' fertility choices. According to his construct, a ban on child labour (which may or may not be comprehensively enforced) acts to reduce the income brought in by child workers, which encourages parents to have fewer children, which - because child-rearing is time intensive and keeps parents out of the labour force - raises parental lifetime income through increased work time. Thus, a ban on child labour (if enforceable) is found to be beneficial in the long run. Dessy does not explore the empirical evidence on enforceability of such a ban; in fact, such bans have been almost impossible to enforce in developing countries. As usual in such models, Dessy's concern is with long-term equilibria, although he briefly mentions the need for international aid to subsidize the cost of education in the short term, to alleviate the immediate negative effects of a ban on parental income. And, again as usual, the assumptions of the model drive the results. In particular, Dessy assumes that human capital is acquired only through school education. On the other hand, his work does model the possibility that legislation aimed at curbing child labour may be completely ineffective or only partially effective. These possibilities are often overlooked in the debate on child labour legislation.

[22] A number of these studies, such as Levison *et al.* (1998), are chapters in Anker *et al.* (1998).

Two recent studies aim to discover what microeconomic theory has to say about child labour. Basu and Van (1998) argue that multiple equilibria may exist in an economy: one stable equilibrium where it is efficient and rational to use child labour, and another stable equilibrium where it similarly makes sense not to use child labour. Their model implicitly describes a situation where children's work is confined to factories (which probably accounts for less than ten percent of child employment worldwide). Employers hire either interchangeable adults or interchangeable children or some combination of adults and children; children are assumed to be less productive than adults. The authors show that, within the framework of their model, imposition of legal restrictions on child labour can cause employers to shift to the use of adult employees only. Furthermore, they find that having shifted to the new adult-only equilibrium, there is no tendency for employers to revert to the use of child labour, even if the ban is lifted. They conclude that legal restrictions on the use of child labour can be a useful policy tool. While the paper describes an interesting theoretical exercise, its practical implications are limited insofar as it fails to tackle the most difficult issues related to child work. Many countries have laws restricting or abolishing child labour, yet relatively few even attempt to enforce such laws. Indeed, attempts to do so have rebounded negatively on the rights and welfare of children. Effective implementation requires both social will and government expenditure, not to mention good sense in knowing when not to make children worse off.

A main problem with theoretical economic models is that they ignore factual evidence. In most cases, child work does not substitute for parental work but is added to it. This is especially true in agriculture, which accounts for about three-quarters of children's economic participation in developing countries.

A more recent paper by Basu (1999) uses economic theory to survey a number of issues related to child labour. Economic arguments for government intervention to regulate or ban child labour generally depend on arguments about externalities. But even if externalities do not exist, Basu maintains that a divergence of interests within the household provides an adequate reason for intervention, since one may then imagine situations in which children are victimized by self-interested kin: they may be denied schooling and forced to work. He finds an additional reason for intervention in an economic model of violence. In this case, he finds that those who refuse to submit to workplace violence will receive a smaller wage than those who do not. He also argues that if societies agree that no one should have to pay a price for their 'preference' for no violence, then we have a sufficient condition for government intervention. This is tied to child labour by linking an aversion to submit to workplace violence to an aversion to sending children to work. This theoretical paper has the potential to lead economists into useful directions related to child work issues, insofar as it encourages further research in the critical area of household decision-making when interests of different people in the household diverge; the analysis of workplace violence is particularly path-breaking. From our perspective, the assumption of the homogeneity of child work in the theoretical models is a serious weakness: the author was envisioning factory labour (personal communication to D. Levison), and, in spite of its broad discussion, the paper may therefore encourage the simplistic views of child labour that we link to problematic policy.

Economic theory about children's activities is still its infancy and is not ready to be used in policy making. However, economic models generally begin with the simplest possible scenarios, which may be elaborated upon in the academic discussion that follows. Future models, incorporating a better understanding of child work and focussing on more pressing issues, will hopefully be of more practical use.

2.8 Macroeconomic theory and policy: powerful influences on children's lives

Since the late 1980s, a considerable interest has arisen in the effects of macroeconomic trends and policy on the wellbeing of families and individuals. This has been driven by the role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in determining macroeconomic policy of Southern countries, many of which now bear staggering debts due to excessive borrowing in the low-interest years of prior decades. (Borrowing which, it should be said, was strongly encouraged by international lenders.) As countries are unable to finance their debts, the IMF and the World Bank have come 'to the rescue' bearing emergency loans. These loans, however, are conditional upon the governments taking certain steps to bring their economies back to sound footing. These steps form what are commonly called 'structural adjustment' packages. In fact, they include two different sets of policies, one called 'stabilisation' policies and the other a more narrowly defined set of 'structural adjustment' policies:

> Stabilisation measures designed by the IMF are typically the first phase in the adjustment process. They are short-term demand-side policies intended to address inflation and balance of payments problems by curbing aggregate domestic demand in the economy. These policies generally include currency devaluations, wage and salary controls, credit contractions and reductions in government spending. To reduce expenditures, governments frequently lay off employees in the public sector and in state-owned enterprises, eliminate or reduce state subsidies for goods and services, and either reduce public service provision or increase user fees for such services as health care and education (Jennings, 1997:4).

As adults become unemployed or family income falls due to stabilisation measures, the poorest families and children are hardest hit, as they can least afford to lose resources. Children are directly affected through reductions in health and educational services or by the imposition of new health care fees and school fees. Fees are considered important by the international experts because they raise revenues that can help make programmes self-supporting, and also because "people place a higher value on something they have to pay for, however low the charge" (*The Economist*, as cited by de Vylder, 1996:39). Such fees, however, result in lower usage rates, and the most vulnerable children are most likely to be adversely affected. Few countries have put social safety nets in place to protect the poorest of the poor, and such measures are not part of standard IMF/World Bank packages.

Stabilisation often sends countries into immediate economic recession, from which they are expected to emerge stronger and more self-sufficient. Longer-term economic changes are encouraged through structural adjustment policies:

> The second phase of adjustment, known as structural adjustment, is generally designed and implemented with the support of the World Bank and has as its goal the long-term liberalization of the economy. These supply-side policies involve shifting the allocation of resources from production for domestic consumption to the production of tradables for export. Structural adjustment policies frequently emphasize removing 'distortions' in the economy to facilitate the functioning of the free market. These measures include removing barriers to free trade such as import tariffs and quotas, eliminating price controls and subsidies, devaluing the currency, and privatizing state-owned enterprises (Jennings, 1997:4).

The World Bank's emphasis for many years on 'getting the prices right' almost invariably has involved the removal of price controls on basic grains used for food, especially by the poor.

While this strategy makes macroeconomic sense - local farmers will not grow grains if they cannot be sold at a price that covers their costs of production - it has serious implications for the nutritional status of poor children. Getting the prices of food right in the absence of social safety nets can compromise children's growth, but this long-term implication of adjustment is difficult to measure and, therefore, easy for elite planners and international advisors to overlook. Critics of mainstream macroeconomic policies note that the poor, in general, bear the brunt of adjustment (Cornia, Jolly and Stewart, 1987a; 1987b). In recent times, the World Bank has tried to address this issue by emphasising the importance of governance and institutions.[23]

Macroeconomic models of stabilisation and structural adjustment assume that commodities - things people buy to eat and to use - are either internationally tradable or not. Price distortions in Southern economies have led to overproduction of non-tradable goods and underproduction of tradable goods, leading to a shortage of foreign exchange and a trade deficit. Thus, a goal of structural adjustment is to reverse this pattern by adjusting prices such that workers and resources move from the non-tradable into the tradeable sector of production. Feminist economists claim that because macroeconomic models ignore the sexual division of paid and unpaid labour, the macroeconomic incentives of adjustment negatively affect women to a much greater extent than men. This happens because a great deal of work is shifted from the formal to the informal part of the economy, and similarly some previously paid work becomes unpaid. For example, as health and education services previously provided by the state fall to communities and families, women replace such services with their own time (to the best of their ability), and thus their unpaid work and total work hours increase. Essentially, what is at fault is the assumption that the production and maintenance of 'human resources' is undertaken for love and are unaffected by money, and therefore they are not affected by economy-wide changes (Elson, 1995).

Some of the evidence used to support the above critique is not limited to adults. Girls, in particular, are shown to share the increased burden of unpaid labour in the home and community (e.g., Benería, 1992). Even in the absence of evidence, however, some of the arguments based on gender bias can just as easily be used in a discussion of generational bias. To the extent that children tend to work in the non-tradables sector - particularly in unpaid household work and low-paid services - they will be disproportionately hurt by structural adjustment policies, which may also increase children's total work hours (counting household chores) instead of reducing them. And, in general, work that is shifted to women tends to be shared by children or completely shifted to children working under women's supervision.

Evidence supporting much of the above critique of macroeconomic policies is less than overwhelming. Detailed information on families and individuals is rarely collected in a way that would capture changes over time, yet much of the argument makes a case for increasing deprivation of the poor over time, during the stabilisation and structural adjustment process. Jennings (1997) surveys the Latin American evidence which might confirm or deny the gender critiques of adjustment. She comments on the imprecision of the current evidence in addressing the causal relationship between macro-level policies and micro-level outcomes, stating that the empirical evidence offers only very limited support for the claims of feminist economists. Nevertheless, she concludes that, "the intended and unintended consequences of stabilisation and structural adjustment are consistent with the process of increasing women's unpaid work both in the home and the community" (p.31).

[23] Personal communication from Dr. Kaushik Basu, Office of the Senior Vice President, Development Economics, The World Bank, and Cornell University.

Similarly, in spite of a shortage of solid data showing systematic declines in children's wellbeing under adjustment, it is appropriate to err on the side of caution. Macroeconomic models and policies are extremely powerful in shaping social and economic development, and it is critical that they begin to incorporate elements which will allow them to better consider and respond to the situation of children.

2.9 Summary

In conjunction with child-aware macroeconomic policy, the extremely influential economic theories of education, human capital accumulation, and household production need to better reflect children's realities and children's agency. Economists have just begun to consider the implications of children's roles in intra-household bargaining and resource allocation, and in transaction costs. More serious consideration of these topics may well yield considerable insights into children's wellbeing and their time spent in activities such as school and work.

Current mainstream economic constructions of the world fundamentally affect economists' ability to "see" children. We have shown that economic models either completely disregard children, subsume them under households, or construct worlds which do not even approximate children's realities. The most well-intentioned economic researchers, working with economic tools and data, are able to speak to children's situations only in a very partial and unsatisfactory way. Economic variables are of critical relevance to children's wellbeing, yet economic models have failed to take account of children's best interests, child development, and child agency. Economists need to reconsider what it is they are maximising. In particular, a greater receptivity to a broad range of empirical evidence about children is a fundamental requirement for the development of a more child centred, policy-relevant economics.

3. The Diversity of Childhood

3.1 A focus on children

While in economic research, theory and policy childhood is often subsumed under other social categories, social and educational policies have during the 20th century increasingly singled children out as meriting special attention and specialist professional intervention. This is a strategy in keeping with the modern medical and social science view that children are in many ways quite different from adults, have particular developmental needs and require special support and nurture. This recent upsurge of interest in children as a priority category is no mere accident, but motivated by compelling social forces. First, young people under the age of 20 represent at least 50 percent of the population in many parts of the world; their existence has serious implications for demands for public services and, eventually, employment, and their reproductive behaviour will greatly affect population growth and other demographic trends. In rich industrialised countries we find a very different pattern, in which the ageing of the population has fuelled a powerful emotional interest in children. This is reflected in the rise of childhood sciences like paediatrics and educational psychology and emergence of a myriad of child guidance and monitoring systems (Zelizer, 1985).

Second, the International Year of the Child (1979) provided considerable momentum internationally for childhood issues. A multitude of new child-focused organisations - national, regional and international - were founded during and immediately after 1979. Conferences and workshops on a variety of childhood topics encouraged the exchange of field experience across continents and disciplines. Research, advocacy and networking on childhood issues led to revised definitions and understandings of existing problems, highlighted new concerns and raised general awareness of the magnitude of the threat to child wellbeing globally. Studies of hazardous work and child abuse, for example, challenged previous notions that physical deprivation - in terms of clean water, nutrition, rest and so on - is the only major threat to children globally and suggested that such social violations may also be extremely common and severe. At the same time traditional responses to social distress, such as the institutionalisation of children separated from their families, were found inadequate: they did not reach enough children, nor did they have consistently positive impacts on the children that they did reach. This implied the need for new ideas and new approaches.

Children's rights advocates began to gather evidence pointing to political causes of much childhood deprivation and suffering. They showed that the State could imperil children just as much as protect and nurture them, sometimes even under the guise of protection. They uncovered instances not just of inaction by the state but, more seriously, of acts of commission against children, such as their arrest, detention and torture, or recruitment into the military. Practitioners and advocates in children's rights argued for the urgency of defining more precisely the responsibilities of the modern nation state in relation to children and, especially, the need to make more explicit its protective roles in regards to children deprived of family or community support. The UN Commission on Human Rights eventually began to consider a proposal advanced by the Polish government for a Convention on the Rights of the Child, a Convention being more binding on State Parties than a Declaration. The main idea was, essentially, to make the State accountable for its effects on children. The acceptance and widespread ratification of the CRC is the third major force that was to consolidate the effort internationally to develop effective policies for children based on valid and appropriate information.

3.2 Child development

Orthodox paradigms

Despite the multiplicity of social and medical science disciplines and policies focusing on the young, there has been surprising consistency in the underlying theories and ideas on children and childhood globally. This is largely because the thinking internationally has been powerfully influenced in some cases both overtly and directly, but often indirectly and quite subtlely by certain theoretical paradigms that emerged originally out of developmental psychology. The accepted scientific wisdom on child development is that human competence is essentially a function of age, the overall trend in development involving transformation from an immature child to mature adult, simple to complex, irrational to rational behaviours, and dependent childhood to autonomous adulthood. Children are thus understood to be immature beings in a state of development and training for competent adulthood and social majority. Consequently, they are distinguished both by what they lack in relation to adults (power, abilities, responsibilities and so on), as well as by their special needs. Essentially, this perspective renders childhood insignificant in relation to adulthood, the ultimate goal of development and reflects the widespread rejection of young people as competent social actors (Youniss & Yates, 1994; Schildkrout, 1978).

Within this model of child development, the perspective that is most widely endorsed in research and policy emphasises the biological basis of development and uniformity of this process across class and culture. It holds, furthermore, that the progression towards adulthood occurs in recognisable stages, early behaviours and experiences being causally related to subsequent developmental achievements. Such stage theories have had massive impact on childhood policy and practice internationally, not just in education and health, but also in social work and most other child-focused interventions. Hence, education systems throughout the world are structured according to age-grades, in which the passage of individual children through school is determined by their performance in relation to the expected developmental norm for their age group.

Certainly some aspects of childhood are universal. Unless they experience a major disabling condition, all children grow in strength and stature as they pass through childhood. Certain physical needs (food, fluids, rest, and sleep) in particular are not dispensable. There also appear to be some regularities in the way biology and culture interact in the development of children, although just what these are is still very much under study. And children's early social and emotional development have some universal characteristics, the emergence of 'specific attachments' being important for emotional security, for example (Woodhead, 1998a:25). There are in addition certain commonalities in cognitive development, such as in the acquisition of language. Nevertheless, the notion of children developing in stages that occur universally in a fixed sequence no longer seems tenable, for a number of reasons.[24]

One of the most interesting aspects of recent research on children is that the search for common patterns of growth, development and socialisation has led to increasing appreciation of differences, showing that childhood is a far more diverse phase of the human life cycle than was

[24] The validity of universalistic models of child development has been disputed by eminent scholars in several disciplines. Historically, within psychology, the idea that the process is driven by universal biological structures received its greatest challenge from Lev Vygotsky, who called attention to the essential role of culture and society as indispensable elements in the growth of the human mind. In anthropology, Margaret Mead highlighted that there are many different kinds of youth, young people in different places being raised in very different ways and with very different expectations and outcomes, depending on cultural context. For his part, the social historian Philippe Ariès (1962) suggested that the concept of childhood itself is not universal, but in Europe at least was invented gradually over the course of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. While a number of scholars have since refuted his assertion that medieval Europeans ignored childhood, the social construction of generational categories is now a well established axiom in research.

once imagined. It is now widely accepted in the scientific community that both biology and culture, working together, generate both differences and commonalities of human development. There are genetic influences for diversity just as there are genetic bases for human similarity, both of which are necessary and both of which mesh with culture to ensure survival of the species (Wilson, 1998). However, research tends to be institutionally organised according to traditional academic disciplines that conceptualise and carve up human experience in less holistic terms, which until recently was considered to make investigation more manageable. This has encouraged the elaboration of biological and environmental perspectives on child development to some extent in isolation from one another, research into each assuming but largely ignoring the other. Keeping the artificiality of this traditional division in mind, it is worth considering both the biological and social explanations for diversity in the ways children develop. We focus primarily on cognitive development, which is the main subject of debate.

Genetic factors in child development

We start by considering advances in genetic research. Why are genetic explanations of child development important to policy makers? First, they already underlie much policy even if only tacitly. For example, the concepts of 'readiness' and an inherited 'intelligence quotient' are much used in education to group children for receiving different levels of instruction. The idea that the development potential of children - especially their cognitive development - is definitively limited by genetic endowment has to this day been a major factor in deciding or modifying the educational experience of untold millions of children. This is despite the fact that scientists have long distanced themselves from such interpretations and the indiscriminate use of 'intelligence tests' as a generalised measure of human capacity. Second, the topic of genetic contributions to human development, temperament, abilities and even character has been very much in the news of late, largely as the result of rapid advances in both brain and genetic research. Considerable excitement now attends research into the biological foundations of human nature and behaviour, and media portrayals of new findings sometimes hint at high degrees of genetic determinism that far surpass the actual claims of science. In regards to the development dynamics of children, such research insights are still relatively modest, but potentially important studies are now in progress on such interesting matters as the biological components of gender differences in child behaviour.

At the present time, genetic research emphasises that individual children achieve the ability to perform various tasks at very different rates according to their genetic make up, and that shared features of the gene pool account for developmental variation as well as similarity. Traditionally, genetic research has much utilised twin studies, these having proved less useful in distinguishing the influence of hereditary and environment in child development than in providing important insights into pathological situations that are due to chromazone abnormalities. Today modern genetic and neurological science has opened new and more sophisticated research approaches to the biology of human development. The huge international effort to map the human genome has sharpened debate regarding the extent to which it will be possible to associate certain aspects of human behaviour with particular genes.

Despite the importance of scientific advances in genetic research and the traditional barriers between this kind of research and studies in the social sciences, most scholars now acknowledge the contribution of both inherited and environmental factors in human development. Within the scientific community, it is generally understood that "nature" and "nurture" are not competing forces: genetic and environmental factors interact and work together in the individual development of children (LeVine, 1999). Nevertheless, the media tends to cast the "nature-nurture" debate in terms of an "either-or" argument. This is problematic because it fuels a widespread popular tendency to compare in a judgmental manner the capacities of children from

different cultural environments with those of white, northern, middle-class children, represented as the norm. Because children's capacities tend to differ in presence and magnitude across cultures, children who fall outside the "norm" are inevitably labelled as developmentally impaired. It should be emphasised that there is little to be gained from this simplistic view and much more to be gained from a holistic perspective that recognises the interconnectedness of both inherited and external influences in a child's development (Kagitcibasi, 1996). What should be explored is *how* these two forces influence child development and how we can support children and families to build on their strengths and untapped potentials.

The importance of social context

As important as it is to recognise the practical implications of variation in the patterns of children's native abilities, it is the social aspect of child development that most merits the attention of policy makers, for it deals with important societal relations they help govern. Even scientists in the stage theory tradition, notably Jean Piaget, have all along recognised that caretaker relationships and other environmental factors are of great importance to children's physical and mental growth. What is new in recent decades is the greater stress being placed on relational factors in child development. At the most obvious level, the degree to which even children's most basic physical and psychological needs are met is influenced by complex family, community, national and international economic, social and political factors. Thus, children's development is affected both by their immediate environment (siblings, caregivers and so on), and also by the broader situation in which they live (the political structure, system of social stratification, and physical environment, for example). Thus, selective neglect in the family, discrimination in the community, political oppression in national government, and pronounced inequity in international relations are all societal factors undermining the satisfaction of children's basic needs and development that policy makers have the power to do something about. That has long been recognised, even if not adequately acted upon. Policy makers need to become more aware of the complex interaction of micro and macro social processes, including the "intrapersonal, interpersonal, familial, social, cultural, and historical" (Kagitcibasi, 1996:24) factors in the environment, that influence the behaviour of children in different places.

The social dimensions of child development can also be thought about with far more subtlety; researchers have been examining how society is integral to the growth of human mind from the very first days of life onward. Lev Vygotsky, a contemporary and sometime interlocutor of Piaget, was the modern progenitor of this perspective. He called attention to the essential role of culture as part and parcel of children's cognitive development. According to this view, human beings are co-operative problem solvers - that is the edge by which otherwise vulnerable humanity survives - and development consists of learning how to solve effectively the problems of everyday life within a cultural and social context. As Barbara Rogoff puts it:

> Child development involves appropriation of the intellectual tools and skills of the surrounding cultural community. Hence it is essential to consider the role of the formal institutions of society and the informal interactions of its members as central to the process of cognitive development (1990:11).

Moreover, each community tends to define child development in terms of the basic skills required to survive and succeed in that society.

> Understanding the goals and skills valued in children's communities is essential for defining developmental endpoints as well as for examining children's cognitive skills . . . Rather than having to explain the fact that development occurs, it is

necessary to determine the circumstances in which development takes one course rather than another (Rogoff, 1990:12).

Even the most primary aspects of a child's development are social. As Vygotsky pointed out, the very acquisition of language is an intensely social act that consists of structuring the self through a set of social codes. There is no essential separation between the individual and the social, for one cannot become an individual without becoming social.

The important point about this observation from a policy perspective is that differentiation between societies is a powerful source of differentiation between children. As Michael Cole, one of the leading thinkers in this tradition, has emphasised, a full understanding of culture in human development "requires both a specification of its universal mechanisms and the specific forms that it assumes in particular historical circumstances" (Cole, 1992:731-2, quoted in Woodhead, 1998a:17).[25]

What we can infer from this is that particular societies have their own ideas about children's capacities and vulnerabilities, the ways in which children learn and develop, and what is good for them and what is bad. Further, we can conclude that these expectations not only define the opportunities for and constraints to children's development but also to an extent circumscribe children's actual behaviour, thinking and adaptation (Dawes and Donald, 1994:11; Woodhead, 1998a:10; Super and Harkness, 1986). In other words, children possess many different capabilities and vulnerabilities that do not derive simply from their age or developmental stage but are determined in part by genetic heritage and also, crucially, by the social arrangements, child development goals and child rearing practices of the communities in which they live.

It follows that understanding the social and cultural context of childhood is extremely important for policy, in that this contributes fundamentally to the expectations and outcomes of child development and wellbeing. Different cultures approach childhood in different ways, so that while at one level social equity and justice seem to require uniformity in policy across class and culture, unless context is taken into account we run the risk of establishing "universal" policy norms that are so narrowly based that they are in practice incomprehensible, inapplicable or even counterproductive in large parts of the world**.** Let it be noted here that the argument for more recognition of diversity and more broadly based child protection norms does not constitute a relativist position that excuses any cultural practice as acceptable or appropriate. We believe that basic national and international norms to protect children are indeed possible and desirable, but we do think care should be taken to ensure they reflect the broad range of human experience across societies and social groups. In the two following sections, we examine some ways in which diversity in childhood is articulated and expressed.

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[25] Charles Super and Sara Harkness (1982) highlight the importance of cultural specificity through the concept of 'developmental niche', which they use to explain how children's needs and development are mediated and expressed in particular ways in particular cultural and social settings. They draw attention to three components of children's environment as being instrumental in this regard: "the physical and social settings they inhabit; the culturally regulated customs and practices of child care, learning and socialisation; and the beliefs or 'ethno theories' of parents, or other key individuals in their lives, about the goals and priorities for development" (Woodhead, 1997a: 8).

Social and cultural definitions of childhood

One of the most obvious sources of childhood diversity lies in the multiplicity of social and cultural definitions of a child, for such definitions crucially shape developmental opportunities and constraints during childhood. Since the advent of the CRC, there has been a tendency among governments to define childhood by the criterion of age, the upper limit being 18 years in most places. However, this interpretation confronts major legal and cultural anomalies throughout the world, in that especially beyond the industrialised, literate world, the movement of individual children through childhood is not followed with much precision and age is frequently treated as only an approximate benchmark. Among the Gisu of Uganda, for example, youths may reach the age of twenty-five and be the fathers of legitimate children while still uninitiated, while in Madagascar Merina boys are now initiated as toddlers (Bloch, undated).

Many different kinds of criteria - although seldom age - are used to demarcate childhood. These criteria include the commencement of work, end of schooling, onset of menarche, betrothal, and marriage, among others. Normally the criteria that are applied differ according to gender and class. Frequently, children are understood to assume the competencies and responsibilities of adulthood gradually. Most societies acknowledge a number of major developmental milestones within childhood, and some mark these formally with rites of passage during which a range of rights and responsibilities (to do with social conduct, dress codes, work and the like) are bestowed on children (Gilmore, 1990). Because they raise children's social and economic status and constitute a public affirmation of community membership, such transitions far outweigh the universal age-based threshold in their social and personal significance for children. To add to this complexity, the age at which childhood ends is often prescribed by gender, boys frequently having to wait until after physical maturity before being recognised as men, and girls entering womanhood at around the age of menarche, commonly through marriage. Further, children in different social classes within the same society may reach adulthood at different ages, depending on their social and economic roles. Hence, in Bangladesh a working child leaves childhood earlier than one that attends school and has no economic responsibilities (Blanchet, 1996).

> The word *shishu* does not refer only to the age or physical development of a child. It is a stage determined by the circumstances of life....a child "who knows too much", a child who fends for herself or himself is not considered to be *shishu* any more. On the other hand, a child well provided and cared for, and kept away from responsibilities may remain a *shishu* up to the age of 12 or so. In no circumstances is the word *shishu* used for youth beyond puberty (Aziz & Maloney 1985:16 quoted in Blanchet 1996:14).

Most cultures regard children in the first years of life as frail and dependent, requiring continuous nurture, indulgence and care. Middle childhood, though, is a period of child life that shows great cultural diversity, the treatment and expectations of children in this age group being highly variable. In many communities children, especially girls, are regarded as economically and socially capable by at least age six, middle childhood being an important time of work, often combined with schooling. That children's work is taken seriously during the mid-childhood years is indicated by the fact that failure to accomplish tasks properly may often lead to chastisement

(Mendoza, 1993). Frequently girls begin work before boys, who may spend much of their time at play and in school. Girls' work is also likely to be more crucial to household maintenance, closely complementing the work of women. In exceptional circumstances, children in middle childhood may be the principal breadwinners in a household, as well as carers of family dependants (Boyden with Holden, 1991).

In many societies puberty, celebrated often by rites of passage, is a critical milestone, particularly in relation to schooling, work, criminal responsibility, and sexual maturity. Significantly, unlike cognitive, social or physical development, which are recognised in most societies as continuous and gradual processes, puberty commonly symbolises an abrupt transition from the a-sexual child to the sexually mature youth or adult (Corteen & Scraton, 1997:82). This emerges as one of the greatest ambiguities of childhood in many cultures, in that children who are socialised into gender-appropriate adult roles from birth are frequently expected to remain sexually naive well into adolescence (Corteen & Scraton, 1997:76). Further, while there may be universal acknowledgement of the physical changes of puberty, social views often involve the regulation of reproduction and sexuality well beyond this age (Ennew *et al.*, 1996).

Young people's tasks tend to change systematically at around puberty, the balance between education, unpaid and paid work shifting radically, with gender determining the appropriate roles, dress codes and patterns of social behaviour. In Brazil's cities, for example, school attendance peaks at ages 10 to 11, and labour force employment rates begin to climb rapidly at ages 13 to 14, especially for boys (Levison, 1991). Boys of this age in Colombia usually stop doing domestic tasks and assume work outside the household (Salazar, 1990). In parts of South Asia, on the other hand, it is girls, not boys who experience the greatest changes at this stage, as this is when many leave school. In Nepal, girls take on the work roles of an adult woman at age 12, while boys do not reach this threshold until age 14 (Johnson *et al.*, 1995). In Moslem societies, girls often assume adult codes of behaviour and dress at puberty and are either wholly or partially secluded from male society.

That there are many social and cultural constructions of childhood brings into question the universalised model, which extends juvenile status to age eighteen. In many parts of the world this age threshold has no social meaning, especially since by the age of 18 a significant proportion of young people are already working fulltime and some are married with families of their own. The CRC acknowledges children's growing maturity within childhood through articles confirming their right - in accordance with ability - to take part in decisions and processes affecting them. The problem is that policy has not always proved adept at capturing such subtleties, governments commonly resorting to a range of policies that in practice serve to control and constrain more than protect the young. This approach is evident in education policies that penalise children for non-attendance at school without taking full account of family circumstances and other causal factors. It is evident also in policies that exclude young people from reproductive health education on the grounds that they are forbidden to engage in sexual activity. Denial of youth sexuality results in widespread ignorance among the young of the risks associated with unprotected sexual activity (WHO/UNFPA/UNICEF, 1989:10). Such policies are a continuous source of frustration among adolescents in particular, for although in many ways mature and capable, they are thus cast as incompetent and untrustworthy.

Social power within childhood

Another reason why it is important to understand social and cultural ideas about childhood is that within societies and communities children with different social and economic power experience very different childhoods and very different developmental possibilities and limitations. Children

who are distinguished by gender, ethnicity, religion, and by personal attributes such as temperament, physique or cognitive ability, tend to be valued and treated very differently. Recognising power and status distinctions within childhood is essential for understanding why it is that some children are encouraged to acquire certain competencies while others may experience very different expectations. It is also essential for recognising why for large numbers of children abuse, exploitation and other forms of adversity are not random or chance experiences. Many children are exposed precisely because of *who* they are. This can be illustrated by the case of children with mental or physical disabilities. It is estimated that at least one in ten children is born with, or acquires during childhood, a serious physical, sensory or mental impairment. For many disabled children, however, such disability is far less of a handicap than the ignorance and prejudice of society at large. These children may be viewed as a burden to the family, a source of family shame, or as evidence of a misdemeanour committed by a relative against an ancestor. They often confront stigma and neglect, a significant proportion being abandoned or killed at birth, or dying of malnutrition or disease. On the other hand, in other contexts, children with disabilities may be regarded as a divine gift, or imbued with divine powers, and hence cherished and venerated. Thus the life chances of these children are crucially bound up with societal norms and attitudes concerning disability.

Gender distinctions within childhood

Gender is one of the most striking and enduring examples of power difference within childhood, with major consequences for survival, wellbeing, competencies and susceptibilities. Clearly there are physical differences between the sexes, in terms of sexual apparatus, size, strength and so on, and some genetic researchers have tried to establish whether there are also sex differences in psychological abilities. But such investigations are extremely controversial, and often produce contradictory findings (Durkin, 1998:163), the evidence to date tending to suggest that where there are psychological differences between boys and girls these are due mostly to learned behaviours and social opportunity.

From birth, girls are socialised to behave and think differently from boys. Gender roles in childhood and the gendered expectations of adults are learned by children through observation, ‘acting out’ during play, and various kinds of socialisation. Gender distinctions find their expression in all aspects of social and productive life, including in school, at work, in informal interactions among children and between children and adults. The development of sexuality in children is also gendered. Expectations of boys and girls in different societies may entail differential ages for the development of reproductive maturity (Ennew, *et al*., 1996). Thus, for example, where girls and women are largely economically dependent on men, a girl’s passage to womanhood may take place far earlier, at a chronological age fairly close to the average age of menarche for her social group. Boys on the other hand may have to wait beyond physical maturity to be recognised as men.

Many societies have strong gender preferences. In plough agriculture in Asia and Europe, for example, there is an apparent preference for boys (Robertson, 1991:70). Daughters have to be given dowries and are ‘lost’ to parents as a support in old age. In African hoe agriculture, on the other hand, families have good productive as well as reproductive reasons to welcome girls, and good political reasons (such as perpetuation of a lineage) to want boys (Robertson, 1991:70). Gender preference directly affects survival in some settings. In South Asia, gender discrimination is a major determinant of demographic distortion, with fewer than expected females in the population relative to males (Drèze and Sen, 1995). This pattern is linked to female infanticide, the abortion of female foetuses and major gender discrepancies in the allocation of food and health care.

Gender bias also affects school attendance and education performance in many countries. Gender discrimination in inheritance and marriage and in the labour market is a decisive factor in the low participation of girls in school. Gender stereotyping in texts and materials used in school and the neglect of female pupils by teachers are widespread and entrenched problems in many parts of the world. Research from the United States demonstrates that lingering cultural stereotypes tend to steer girls away from mathematics, science and technology - subjects that generally lead to well-paid jobs (King, 1990). In these classes, girls usually receive less attention and respect than do boys. But gender bias does not always work only against females. In the United States, boys are more likely than girls to abandon secondary school before graduating, and more girls than boys now attend university.

In most societies children's jobs are gendered, especially after age 6 or so. Caring for small children, for example, tends to be a female occupation world wide, whereas mining is normally done by boys. In most contexts, girls are expected to work longer hours and in a wider range of tasks than boys (Johnson *et al.*, 1995; White and Tjandraningsih, 1992; Reynolds, 1991). They are also likely to have a wider range of work responsibilities, combining domestic chores within the home with paid work outside and sometimes schooling as well. Because of limited employment opportunities, girls are often more oppressed in the workplace than boys, who commonly have greater opportunity to change jobs and be trained in alternative skills. This does not mean that boys do not undertake detrimental work, however, because they are often concentrated in very hazardous occupations like metalworking, mining or drug trafficking. Also, the gendering of childhood jobs can be context-specific, in that gender roles in one society or community may be reversed in another society or community. Moreover, childhood gender roles are not necessarily fixed, but can be susceptible to birth order and the sex composition of the sibling group (Punch, 1998). Hence, in rural Bolivia children tend to assume the gender roles of the opposite sex when the sex composition of the family does not match the role requirements for household survival.

Social power and differentiation within childhood is a major concern for policy. Insofar as the social and personal attributes of individual children influence their life experiences, survival and wellbeing, it is incumbent upon policy-makers to learn about traditional values and practices with regard to children in different categories. The challenge is to find ways both of reducing risk among children who are considered by their families and communities to be more expendable than others and of providing support to affected children.

4. Children's Learning, Protection and Social Competence

4.1. Promoting children's learning

The adaptability of children

According to modern thinking, children have special needs that family and society must provide for through services, socialisation, guidance, protection and so on (Woodhead, 1997). Children are perceived both as a cost (according to most economic models) to society and the passive receptacles of benefits and knowledge imparted by adults. In other words, children's integration into society is portrayed, in effect, as a one-way process in which adults give and children are beneficiaries. This traditional approach to child socialisation has led to a particular view of children, their socialisation and social integration that merits careful reappraisal in light of new evidence and thinking in developmental psychology and the sociology and anthropology of childhood.

Essentially, the young are believed to passively absorb adult training and wisdom rather than act as agents in their own lives (Hardman, 1973:87, quoted in James *et al.*, 1998). Consistent with this perspective, there has been a tendency, particularly within anthropological research, to think of society as embodying a coherent system of norms and values that are consistent over time, highly formal in nature and the subject of widespread consensus (Allen, 1989; Youniss & Yates, 1994). Adult behaviour has been thought of as based on a fixed set of rules, roles and modes of conduct, which children must assimilate in order to become significant social actors. Stability and continuity in nurture and care have been seen as essential ingredients in effective socialisation and adaptation in children, change and contradiction being regarded as a source of psychological and social vulnerability.

This view in many ways exaggerates the accord and consistency within human society, in that the human condition has been described as inherently precarious and perilous, involving constant uncertainty, ambiguity and contingency (Youniss & Yates, 1994; Reynolds White, 1998:18-19). According to this perspective, even small, comparatively isolated, social groups manifest varying, competing and sometimes dissenting ideas (Allen, 1989:48). Moreover, it is worth highlighting that children today experience opposing values in a way that few past generations of children have done. In a world profoundly affected by the globalisation of economic, political and cultural processes, and by armed conflict, mass migrations and other major social upheavals, growing up in a stable environment, with continuity of social and cultural values, is no longer an option in most communities. Global culture and the global economy coexist and conflict with local cultures as never before, such juxtapositions corresponding often with a rise in religious or cultural fundamentalism.

Changes and contradictions are both obvious and subtle. Relatively few adults in the North experience the ease with computers of today's better-off children; that is obvious. Probably relatively few adults comprehend the significance of Nike trainers to children; the influence of global consumerism is both blatant and subtle. Adults sometimes find such changes difficult to comprehend and thus to acknowledge. Children are more agile than adults are at shifting between co-existing cultures. Herding children living in felt tents in the Gobi desert may not go to school very often, but are likely to watch satellite television regularly and be very familiar with programmes like South Park and The Simpsons. Children working on the streets in Senegal, India, Brazil and Peru may not have secure incomes or somewhere they conceive of as home, but can communicate with each other on the Internet. Education often facilitates children's cross-

cultural agility, as when children learn national languages and modern sciences at school, but speak traditional languages and live within traditional belief systems at home. Refugee children in particular often learn languages and academic skills that their parents do not have access to. Today, children in transitional societies are in the forefront in shaping a whole new system of values and social arrangements. In the former Soviet States, for example, many adults are bound by the old occupations, norms and institutions, for their training and experience is ill-adapted to the new ways of thinking and doing, while children and youth have proved both more mobile and adaptable as workers.

Such insights are of great significance because they indicate that young people do not receive societal norms and values as consistent messages. Research has spawned new understandings of how the young perceive and process discontinuities, inconsistencies, and indeed outright conflicts in their environment (Younniss & Yates, 1994). It suggests that growing into adulthood entails a great deal more than merely absorbing the accepted wisdom of society, since young people must continuously confront and evaluate varying options, make choices and negotiate their decisions with other actors. Some doubt has even been cast as to whether, to flourish, children really do need enduring security and stability in their social milieu. Ideas emphasising the value of stability in the development and wellbeing of children have given way to a far more dynamic view, which emphasises the active, constructive nature of human development. In general, change and contradiction are argued to be normal - a healthy part of childhood and youth - and not inherently unnatural or undesirable. Indeed, young people have considerable inner resources for coping with such circumstances (Diggins, 1994:223 cited in Reynolds & White, 1997:18).

Living in a context of rapid change can carry certain family and personal costs, however. Children in Russia and Romania are taking up jobs on the streets, such as vending and the provision of personal services, that many adults abhor (Mansurov, 1993). Russian parents fear that working on the streets will jeopardise children's education. Russian children share this concern, but are more interested in being able to purchase highly valued consumer items. But there are other costs that may be more profound. When children become receptive to norms and values that are very different from those of their family they frequently reject family guidance and authority, which no longer seems relevant to them. This may lead to entrenched inter-generational conflict, when children refuse to bow to the authority of parents or community elders.

Many children may be growing up in societies lacking positive role models, but what sometimes seems more serious is that they also lack appropriate role opportunities. Indeed, this may be one of the biggest social crises facing the world today. Governments in the North tend to resolve youth unemployment by keeping young people in education for as long as possible. But southern countries with relatively large youth populations, yet with slow or no growth in jobs and economic possibilities, confront far graver problems. In some cases such difficulties are intensified by modern expectations of childhood that isolate children from productive activities that once conferred on them social standing and acceptance. Teenage boys in Africa, for example, are expected nowadays to go to school rather than work, although the practical effect of a chronic shortage of employment and school places is that many drift into idleness, begging, informal street work, prostitution, or crime. Structural crises associated with the lack of meaningful opportunity can take the form of mass migrations and war. Individual crises include depression, suicide, and addiction to toxic substances. While young people may be quick to take up informal economic opportunities when necessity demands it, society is also quick to respond, by condemning them for engaging in anti-social or illicit activities. In situations such as these it is commonly the wheels of juvenile justice that are set in motion rather than imaginative social and economic policies to increase productive opportunities and self-efficacy among young people.

Providing for children's multiple intelligences

The socialisation and training of children has long been a major focus of childhood policy throughout the world. Education is now regarded by many as the single most fundamental contributor to social capital, increasing emphasis being given to formal institutional settings and centrally determined curricula. In modern societies, the school and the home are taken to be the most appropriate sites of child socialisation and policy commonly emphasises their complementarity and mutual reinforcement. School education tends to stress cognitive and, to a lesser extent, sports competencies, while the family is largely responsible for health, moral and social development, and for reinforcing the skills learned at school.

Undoubtedly school is a powerful force for children's betterment in the modern world, linked with major improvements nationally in survival, health, economic development, income, and job opportunities, as well as in gender equity and in a reduction in population growth (King, 1990). School can, in addition, be an important site of friendship and social support for children and a place where peer cultures and values are fostered and spread. In conflict zones schooling provides a sense of purpose and structure to children's daily lives, even when all around is chaos and destruction. Refugee children often place an especially high value on education, which is portable and brings stability and familiarity for people living in strange or hostile surroundings (Sesnan, 1995). In this sense, education is surely one of the most important policy areas affecting children today. Recent decades have witnessed many significant achievements in public school education globally, with widespread increases in enrolment and literacy, especially among girls, children in poor urban communities and other categories traditionally excluded. Schooling and its accompanying qualifications enjoy great prestige in most communities today.

We do not contest the importance of schooling. Nonetheless, research on how children learn, school attendance and drop out, and the competencies likely to be required by society in the future is beginning to raise fundamental questions about the relevance and effectiveness for children of some of the approaches that are commonly used in modern education systems. We note three broad categories of limitations.

First, in contrast with the expectations of the CRC, many orthodox education systems have a rather narrow view of child development that stresses certain cognitive capacities over and above many others that are also very important. The kind of learning that is normally most valued in school education is logical, formal and measurable, that which enables people to become functionally literate within industrialised society (Abbot, 1999).

Reading, writing, calculation and acceptance of formal discipline and control are the basic skills taught, with a particular bias in favour of the logico-mathematical domains, mathematics and science being held in particularly high regard in industrialised economies (Gardner, 1983). However, a more recent, sophisticated and increasingly applied view of children's 'intelligence' holds that it is multiple and modular rather than unitary, as the orthodox approach has implied. It maintains that all children possess a variety of different 'intelligences', or genetically influenced abilities, which affect their development in complex and interacting ways that are not expressible through a single concept or measure of overall capacity (Gardner, 1983).

Moreover, the particular kind of competencies emphasised in school education are not necessarily relevant to all children in all social, cultural and economic contexts. A study by Robert Serpell (1977 cited in Kagitcibasi, 1996:43) in Zambia indicates that different cultures have different conceptions of what constitutes "intelligence". Serpell administered a standard intelligence test -

designed in the North - to a group of children whom adults in the local community had identified as "intelligent". The children's scores did not correspond to the adults' ratings, however, since the local criteria for "intelligence" included "social skills and social responsibility" and hence did not match the purely cognitive skills measured by the test.[26]

It is now understood that children must develop many physical and mental capacities in order to live a successful life in different contexts, and that the types of cognitive function most associated with schooling constitute but a small portion of these. The methods of identifying and describing children's various capacities are a matter of considerable discussion, but claims have been made to have isolated roughly a dozen or more of such clusters of native ability or talent, and it is suggested that many more may await discovery.

Second, the institutionalisation and professionalisation of children's learning and leisure in modern society has become accepted as the most effective way of teaching children the skills of competent adulthood. However, some scholars have pointed out that a focus on the institutional school setting as the major designated site of learning is problematic, for this often separates school education from its social context and practical application. In this way, children "lose the opportunity to form their own impressions and make their own mistakes, in favour of second hand experiences in protected environments" (Qvortrup, 1996:65). Research tends to show that when learning is through instruction and extrinsic rewards rather than observation, imitation and direct experience, children have difficulty understanding, internalising and perceiving the practical relevance of knowledge. When school de-contextualises learning it also risks separating children from their cultural repertoire of valued social goals, tools and activities. Some educationalists have also pointed to the artificiality of typical schooling - the regimentation of class and play time, rote learning, children seated in rows and so on - finding this not to be conducive to meaningful learning.

The value of such approaches is now being challenged by research which shows that many of our current arrangements for learning are based on a misunderstanding about how the brain functions, how learning takes place, and how young people mature (Abbot, 1998). Essentially, it is argued that children learn about the world not so much by studying it but more by operating in it, or in other words through practical application. Moreover, there is a question as to whether the knowledge that is imparted at school is the most adaptive in the modern context. Fostering the capacity to learn, an inquiring spirit and transferable skills, is likely to be far more important than specialist knowledge for dealing with the endlessly changing and uncertain circumstances of the modern world. This is already apparent in the recruitment practices of some of the world's major multinational corporations, which have begun to hire people less on the basis of higher academic qualifications and more on the grounds of aptitude for open-minded, creative thinking.

Research now indicates that a less formal, institutionalised approach to education would benefit children considerably. It also suggests that under the right conditions and circumstances, guided

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[26] Similarly, Thomas Fiati (1991) examined the capacity of Ghanaian children to engage in social, dimensional and spatial thought. He found that children in Ghana had high-level ways of interpreting social behaviour that his research instrument were insensitive to. Furthermore, he discovered that a child's level of cognitive development in the dimensional and spatial domain was strongly related to the presence and quality of Western schooling. For example, bi-dimensionality was the highest level achieved by children in rural villages without schools, whereas formally-educated urban Ghanaian children indicated a higher level of cognitive competence in this domain. The explanation for these differences in cognitive functioning may lie in the priorities of different communities: in places where literacy is a principal means of communication and a necessity for a child's future economic survival, it may be important for young children to ascertain the differences between two- and three-dimensional shapes (Rogoff *et al.*, 1993). However, in communities where the style of communication depends more on social signs and intimations, dimensional thought may be less important, if at all.

participation in work and social activities within the family and community can have intrinsic developmental value as well as complementing school learning (Rogoff, 1991:190; Collins *et al.*, 1991). Through guided participation, children are taught accepted social practices through positive reinforcement of approved behaviour and learn the duties of adults through rites of passage and/or by observing, copying and managing tasks undertaken by elder siblings and adult family members. Thus, the Wolof in Senegal use teasing and other forms of social pressure to teach children from the very first years of life to share food and other resources, joint, mutually interdependent, activity being highly valued in many rural African communities (Serpell, 1996). Often, adult work roles are first learnt through 'playwork' (Briggs, 1990), which is play that mirrors work tasks, although even before age four children may begin to assist adults directly in their daily chores. Typically, girls and little boys help women and elder siblings, while older boys assist men. Beyond this, ethnographers of childhood have begun to discover the many informal sites of learning children have access to, highlighting the vital role of peer education and peer culture as opposed to adult instruction and guidance in building children's competencies and values (Youniss & Yates, 1994; Mayall, 1994; James, 1993; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998).

Third, school is often represented by policy makers as an alternative and solution to children's work, whereas research suggests this may not be the most appropriate way of addressing hazardous labour. Certainly when children are in school they are not working and school schedules are sometimes fixed so as to conflict with work routines and thereby attract children away from work. But in many communities child work and schooling are viewed as complementary, not competing, activities - the aim being for children to take part in both. In some cases it is children's work that makes school participation possible, for their earnings are used to pay for uniforms, utensils, transport, fees and other costs. Besides, in many cases poor schooling is one of the main causes of, rather than a solution to, child work since children often cite the boredom, irrelevance or brutality of schooling as a reason for dropping out of school and taking up employment.

Frequently the introduction of formal state schooling represents a conflict of interests for children and their families. While most care deeply about education, many cannot afford the loss of income associated with cessation of work. Equally, while education policy tends to convey the idea that work has no part to play in children's learning and socialisation and that vocational education approaches which do not guarantee certification are inferior, many families and children believe that school education is not sufficient in itself (Serpell, 1996:130). Families and children around the world argue in favour of learning not just academic but also vocational skills. This entails understanding how the adult labour market works, learning how to negotiate with adults other than parents, appreciating the value of money, developing a sense of responsibility and other good work habits. Many find that school education is not always of very high quality and fails sometimes even in basic objectives such as literacy and numeracy (Boyden, *et al.*, 1998; Guijt *et al.*, 1994; Schiefelbein, 1997; Woodhead, 1998b). In such situations it is commonly thought preferable for children to leave school, so that they can focus their attention on work which seems a more fruitful way of spending their time and brings immediate economic returns. Yet, in a global culture that is so biased against child work and in favour of schooling, children who are unable to attend formal schools and children who have dropped out are often left with a deep sense of shame and inadequacy (Serpell, 1996). Also, it is questionable whether the kind of work children do, and the number of hours they often work, is adaptive, especially given the predisposition of modern society toward high levels of literacy, numeracy and scientific knowledge (Oloko, 1994).

Regardless of the relative adaptiveness of school or work, it is now apparent that schooling defines but one possible developmental pathway and supports particular kinds of competencies.

While these competencies are certainly very relevant in many contexts, it is not evident that they are relevant for all children, or that they are sufficient in themselves for full adaptation to the rapidly changing modern world. The concept of 'multiple intelligences', and the idea that children have very different native aptitude profiles (that imply differences of learning style more than limited capacity to learn) suggest education policies and child rearing practices very different from those based on single judgements of overall ability. This indicates that children are most likely to flourish not in a narrow, academic institutional setting but through exposure to diverse learning environments and opportunities, of which school is but one. The need for differentiated rather than standardised educational experiences, so that learning can call upon a panoply of children's natural endowments, might be one logical policy conclusion. In the words of David Wood (1998:281): "One implication of theories of multiple intelligences is that if we want more of our children to achieve their full potential, we should diagnose and build upon their strengths and enlarge our view of what it means to be intelligent." The policy challenge is to pay considerable attention to the quality and relevance of school education. Schools should also be made more flexible, open and interactive, focusing not just on core academic subjects but on a far broader curriculum that also incorporates topics such as democratic values, life and citizenship skills.

4.2 Helping children deal with adversity

Defining adversity

While policy needs to support all children through mainstream programmes in health, education and other critical fields, particular attention should be given to those children who confront extreme adversity, not just because they deserve and have a right to special consideration but also because this is necessary for society to prevent the attrition in human capital that derives from widespread suffering among children. Countless children throughout the world today are exposed to extremely hazardous conditions and circumstances, whether because they live in abject poverty, abusive families, war zones, or hostile institutions, are exploited, trafficked, homeless or engaged in detrimental work. How to protect such children is a major concern of state and society. As a basis for defining priorities, policy makers, practitioners and children's advocates are seeking to understand which experiences and circumstances are most harmful to children. At present, the focus tends to be on children in the really acute situations that are highlighted in the protection articles of the CRC. However, while giving priority attention to such children cannot reasonably be contested, the latest research on risk and resilience in childhood reveals the difficulty of establishing objective criteria of jeopardy that are valid for all children in all situations.

Consistent with the evidence that child development is heavily dependent on environmental factors, it emphasises both the mediated and relative nature of many aspects of children's responses to misfortune and shows also that formulations of normality in childhood are very variable according to context (Dawes & Donald, 1994:21). This is illustrated by a series of cross-cultural studies of child abuse and neglect conducted over a decade ago by anthropologist Jill Korbin and her colleagues (1983a). Korbin stresses that most, or possibly all, cultures employ child-rearing practices that within their particular context are considered perfectly normal and yet elsewhere might be perceived as highly abusive. She cites as examples: severe beatings (used to impress children with the necessity of adherence to cultural rules); harsh initiation rites (genital operations, deprivation of food and sleep, and induced bleeding and vomiting); isolating infants and small children in rooms or beds of their own at night; and making them eat according to a dictated schedule (Korbin, 1983b:4).

Some of the most widely accepted norms regarding what is detrimental and what beneficial to children turn out to be founded on views that are quite arbitrary and have no special logic in terms of children's wellbeing. One has only to contrast internationally promoted attitudes and assumptions toward children's labour force work with those toward their unpaid household work to comprehend how certain modern attitudes reflect the ideological views they derive from. Why is it that drudgery which is unpaid household work is acceptable and even good for children, whereas drudgery in the paid labour force is unacceptable and bad? Just as paid and unpaid labour force work share many characteristics, so labour force work and housework are often hard to differentiate in terms of children's effort, safety and risk factors, intellectual stimulation, and hours worked. Yet, in most national policy domestic work is still considered appropriate for children, while labour force work is not.[27]

Even if a practice were identified as abusive of children, to exhort families or communities to behave differently would not necessarily promote children's wellbeing as much as might be expected. This is because the effects of adversity on children are determined not by the objective nature of an abusive act or situation so much as by children's subjective experience of that act. For example, protecting a child from a painful, but culturally required, initiation rite may bring physical relief but would deny the child a place as an adult in that culture (Korbin, 1983b:4). Blocking the passage to adulthood would most likely cause the child far greater distress than enduring a painful initiation. Similarly, removal from hazardous work may cause children distress because even work that is not safe can be a source of pride, social status and other positive effects. This is not to condone detrimental child work, but to emphasise the importance of understanding fully the context and the children's perspectives before intervening in their lives:

> The 'developmental appropriateness' of children's experiences, the 'harmfulness' or 'benefits' of their environment cannot be separated from the cultural context in which they are developing, the values and goals that inform their lives and their prior experiences of learning skills and ways of thinking (Woodhead, 1998a:10).

Herein lies one of the central dilemmas of childhood policy, for:

> If we do not include a cultural perspective, we will be entangled in the ethnocentric position of considering our own set of cultural values and practices preferable, and indeed superior, to any other. At the same time, a stance of extreme cultural relativism, in which all judgements of human treatment of children are suspended in the name of cultural sensitivity, would be counter productive to promoting the well-being of the world's children (Korbin, 1983b:3).

While we do not accept the notion of universally-dictated norms of child rearing and protection, we do assert that there is considerable evidence that certain life circumstances can threaten the optimal development of children's adaptive powers, and hence their ability to engage actively in the world (Dawes and Donald, 1994:23). No responsible society should expect children to put up with conditions that threaten their health, survival or development - this is provided for in the

[27] This approach reflects the belief (if not the evidence) that families can be trusted to protect their children. It also serves adult interests, in that many parents are happy to have their children do unpaid household work because this complements and supports adult paid labour outside the home. At the same time, it also serves the aim of removing children from more lucrative areas of the economy where they might compete with adults. Ultimately, these kinds of attitudes are far more consistent with late 19th and early 20th century European approaches to child labour — which focused on the abolition of industrial wage labour — than with the stated preference of many children today for working outside the home. As research from Nepal and Indonesia shows, children often choose factory work because it provides a wage, a fixed schedule and freedom from family obligations (White & Tjandraningsih, 1992; 1998; Johnson *et al.*, 1995).

CRC. It should be possible for practically all those concerned with children's rights to agree that some situations and practices - the bondage of children, their use as mine detectors on the battlefield, or their involvement in slave prostitution, for example - are unacceptable. And, in all societies and cultures there are, in addition, certain 'idiosyncratic' practices that are considered to be outside the realms of acceptable behaviours tolerated in that culture; these too should be condemned.

This suggests the need to arrive at a consensus on a range of practices and situations that are detrimental for children. However, importantly, this consensus should reflect the concerns not just of advocates, practitioners, senior government officials and social élites, but also of affected children and their families and communities. An integrated approach, which takes into account all aspects of children's experience and wellbeing, will need to avoid prescriptive responses that favour one aspect of children's wellbeing over another. It will need also to balance the risks and benefits, both short and long term, of intervening in children's lives.

The mediation of children's experience

Younger children in particular do not experience or understand adversity in the same way that adults do. Some are overwhelmed by adversity and endure grave long-term emotional and psychological consequences. But research on the dynamic, interactive nature of child development and on children's responses and coping during adversity generally challenges the assumption that all, or even most, children are helpless in such situations. Although emphasising that the experience of multiple stressors is likely to have a cumulative effect, ultimately overwhelming coping capacity, some studies have found that the majority of children exposed to extreme adversity, such as political violence, remain resilient (Cairns, 1996).[28] Others (Ressler et al., 1992) observe that it is seldom that well-adjusted, well-cared for children are suddenly overcome by a single traumatic experience. This suggests that fears of permanent psychosocial stunting due to exposure to adversity may be somewhat overblown, in that many children are highly adaptable and able to adjust: some show greater personal resilience even than adults (Palmer, 1983; Hinton, forthcoming). Adversity can for some children be a potential source of strength, not merely of risk and vulnerability (Turton, Straker and Mooza, 1990:78; Leyens and Mahjoub, 1992; Dawes, 1992; Zwi, *et al.*, 1992; Werner, 2000).

The subtlety and complexity of psychological and emotional responses to adversity is due, largely, to the fact that mental processes originate in both social interaction and individual genetic heritage. In other words, children's responses are mediated by personal and environmental influences that can render them either more vulnerable, or more resilient. Such subtlety is seldom captured by research or policy but, nonetheless, has very important implications for children's wellbeing.

Research is increasingly able to highlight the most important factors mediating risk and resilience in children. Developmental psychology has long emphasised certain factors, most notably the early bonding between mother and infant and overall quality of nurture within the primary care giving unit, as absolutely fundamental to resilience and coping, especially in younger children.

[28] This can be illustrated also through research with children living on the streets. At one time it was believed that such children are almost inevitably damaged psychologically and morally. However, studies in Nepal, South Africa and Latin America reveal that they generally hold mainstream moral values and display average psychological and emotional responses (Baker *et al.*, 1996; Swart, 1988; Aptekar, 1989 and 1991). In fact, only in physical matters can detrimental outcome be readily foreseen (Boyden, Ling & Myers, 1998). Thus, for example, children who are deprived of food and clean water clearly become susceptible to malnutrition, diarrhoeal disease and growth deficiencies, while children who engage in active combat or dangerous work are prone to wounding and death.

Beyond this, a healthy, strong child is likely to be more resilient emotionally and psychologically than one that is weak or sick. Personal attributes such as temperament, self-perception, memory, reasoning, and perceptual competencies also play a part (Garbarino, 1999). These, to a large extent, shape the strategies children use to manage stressful situations and defend themselves against painful experiences or low self-esteem. Children who develop constructive coping techniques are normally better able to deal with their feelings and emotions than those who accentuate the difficulties and hence their sense of hopelessness. Personal history (in terms of prior exposure to multiple stressors) vitally influences coping (Garbarino, 1999). Children who have experienced approval, acceptance and opportunities for mastery, are far more likely to be resilient than those who have been subjected to humiliation, rejection, or failure. Equally, children who confront multiple stressors, such as destitution, violence, separation from family and forced migration, are far more likely to be overwhelmed than those with stable, secure backgrounds who are exposed to a single stressful event.

Gender is found to affect the way in which children respond to adversity (Werner & Smith, 1998). In general, girls are biologically stronger than boys, as evidenced by their higher survival rates after birth. In a study of children exposed to armed conflict boys were more nervous and fearful in the presence of strangers and more often expressed a need to talk about distressing or unpleasant events than girls (McCallin and Fozzard, 1991). Girls, on the other hand, were more fearful of the dark, more likely to seek approval, affection and reassurance, and to feel hopeless about the future. Age is also very relevant, the broad finding being that the younger the child, the greater the protective influence of care-givers and yet the greater also the possibility of behavioural and socio-emotional problems when these protections are not in place (Thompson, 1992:43). With increasing age, the child's growing repertoire of coping skills permits greater adaptive functioning in the face of stress.

As we have already suggested, social meanings have a very important bearing, in that the effects of adversity on children are determined not simply by the objective nature of the situation or event so much as by children's subjective experience of that situation. In other words, potentially hazardous or stressful situations normally present far less risk to children when they are culturally endorsed. This can be illustrated by the case of child work. Public perceptions of children's work affect the way children feel about being useful or competent. When child work is understood as an essential mechanism of social integration, ensuring family solidarity and successful transition to adulthood, even work that is unsafe can be a source of pride, social status and other positive effects. This is not to condone detrimental child work, justify cultural practices that may be adverse for children, or suggest that children should be expected to tolerate adversity, but it does re-iterate the importance of understanding cultural views of adversity. It also emphasises the significance of children's own ideas about their circumstances, since these fundamentally influence children's responses.

That children's responses to adversity are neither direct nor predictable, but subtle and complex reinforces the argument against the conceptualisation of children in difficult situations merely as susceptible victims. Representing children as passive victims rather than active survivors undermines the possibility of them acting on their situation and thereby further threatens their self-esteem and self-efficacy. While a view of children as resourceful definitely does not imply that children should be expected to tolerate adversity, or that adversity is propitious for children, it does bring into question the inevitability of catastrophic effects on children of such conditions and circumstances. It suggests also that children may be better served by assuming an active role in their own protection and at least some degree of responsibility for their own safety, insofar as this is possible. Further, identifying the factors that mediate children's responses is an essential prerequisite for measures designed to assist affected children since support of the right kind to the

areas of children's lives most needing attention can make all the difference to resilience and coping.

Societal approaches to child protection

Most societies employ child protection strategies of their own. Backed by public health and safety measures that include the enforcement of strict safety standards in the home, at school, on roads, in public buildings, play grounds, and all other environments frequented by children, most industrialised societies in the North call for the regulation of childhood and seclusion of children from danger. Such standards generally cover fire and other physical hazards, environmental pollution, public hygiene and sanitation, and protection against destitution, homelessness, work, abduction, family discord, violence and abuse.

Few communities in the South enjoy the benefits of enforceable safety and protective legislation of this kind. But many also view child protection rather differently. Often, the belief is that learning by doing should include the conscious involvement of children in activities that are potentially hazardous. This strategy is in part born of necessity, in that in poor areas especially all family and community members who are healthy and fit must contribute to maintenance and survival. But it also derives from an understanding that self-protection is the most effective way of keeping children safe, the relevant skills being best acquired by direct, but controlled, exposure to risk. Inuit children, for example, are continually tested in all spheres of knowledge and competence relating to the world around them. When travelling in a complex maze of fjords and bays or in a trackless stretch of snow-covered tundra, they must be able to answer where they are, how to proceed to their destination, or negotiate difficult terrain. They are taught that the world is constituted of problems to be solved. They learn how to identify those problems, to observe them actively and accurately, and to analyse the implications for themselves of situations - physical and social - in which they are involved (Briggs, 1986:8).

Certainly there is an urgent need to ensure higher standards of safety in many parts of the world and there must surely be limits to what children should be expected to endure, even if it is for their own learning and, ultimately, self-protection. Nevertheless, there is a legitimate concern that isolating children from all forms of risk could be detrimental to their interests in some important respects. Thus, researchers in industrialised countries in the North are beginning to document the mental health and learning costs of child rearing practices that have possibly become excessively protectionist. Recent public discussions in Britain have touched on ideas such as statutory regulation of the number of hours children sleep at night and the electronic tagging of children to track their whereabouts. At the same time, a three-year study by the Mental Health Foundation concluded that British children today are failing to thrive emotionally, becoming less resilient, and less able to cope with life's trials and challenges (Laurance, 1999:6). The pressures on children to achieve are enormous, but, in an over-regimented world, very little is done to help them build the resilience they need to cope when things go wrong.

How we approach children's safety is a vital concern to society and state, the main issue being the extent to which public bodies intervene in such matters by regulating childlife and the part children themselves play in the process. In many countries there is simply no choice, and children must fend for themselves. Elsewhere, there are concerns about the 'nanny state' removing all initiative from children. With declining public sector spending throughout the world, increases in adult mortality due to AIDS and other such trends, it is apparent that many more children will of necessity be providing for themselves in the future. Children in such situations should be a matter of priority for policy and require highly creative and culturally appropriate solutions. On the other hand, while standards of protection need substantial improvement in many parts of the world, this

should not be allowed to detract from children's resilience, requiring a fine balance between statutory provision and self-preservation. Policy needs to find ways of supporting the integrity, coping and resilience of children by recognising their agency and fostering their participation, as appropriate, in their own protection rather than merely imposing adult solutions that cannot feasibly cover need.

4.3 Fostering children's social competence

The obstacles to acknowledgement of children as social actors

Both the assumption of children's social incompetence and the efficacy and virtue of treating children as mere beneficiaries of adult initiatives have been increasingly challenged in the last two decades by research and practical initiatives with children in a variety of situations and contexts. Programmes in different parts of the world with children at work and in residential institutions have developed a range of mechanisms that successfully ensure children's active involvement in planning, management and implementation. And social science research in several disciplines is showing that children are far more capable than was once thought (James and Prout, 1997; Waksler, 1994; Mayall, 1994; Qvortrup *et al.*, 1994; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998). These programmes and this research suggest the need to reappraise our understanding of childhood as a 'rehearsal for adult life' and grant children recognition and respect in their own right and on their own terms "as *actors* in social worlds" (Waksler, 1994:236; Knutsson, 1997:55).

Acknowledgement of children as social agents confronts many obstacles, however. Some societies hold particularly discriminatory views of children with mental or physical disabilities, denying them proper human status and a right to live. In some cultures there is a particular interest in suppressing the agency of girls. This may be justified by the perception that they are weaker and less capable than boys, or it may be simply that girls are more vulnerable to exploitation or abuse. Normally, though, it reflects a concern by families to control their labour, sexuality and reproduction. Families generally prefer to keep their daughters at home, so that they may help with housework and the care of younger siblings and elderly or sick relatives, whilst at the same time being protected from abuse by outsiders. Often, preserving the innocence and purity of girls is a very serious matter of family honour.

Adults sometimes feel threatened by giving children a greater say in matters concerning them. Adults frequently undermine children's agency by trivialising childhood contributions. Many of the productive tasks undertaken by children are framed as 'hobbies' or 'apprenticeships', for example, as if they contributed more to children's entertainment or training than to family or personal maintenance. The work of girls in household chores is frequently ignored altogether. Even feminist researchers and activists often report work done by children (such as food preparation, cooking, child care and fuel and water collection) and managed by women as women's work, thereby rendering children invisible. Children's collective social activism, such as that undertaken by working children's organisations, is commonly resisted, even by agencies that aim to protect children. Even the term 'play' is used to undermine children as competent social actors (James *et al.*, 1998:93).

Some people might justify the denial of children's agency on the grounds that children commonly seem rather irrational, or make decisions that appear inconsistent with their best interests. Undoubtedly children may not always make the best decisions, but then neither do adults. Certainly children's capacity to contribute to decision-making is limited by their lack of experience, as it is with adults. But it is also the case that society is so biased against allowing

children to take part in decisions that it does not take the trouble to inform them properly. In other words, often the issue is not that children are incapable of making decisions, but that their decisions are based on poor information, partial information, or information that they have not been able to interpret well for lack of experience. Then, because children are poorly informed in the first place, we criticise their choices. Even when they have been informed, children may not be able to make the right judgements because they do not have the power to make other choices.

It also turns out that adults are poor interpreters of children's lives. There are many reasons why adult recollections of childhood may not adequately represent the perspective and feelings of the child who was. First, human memories are selective. Part of human resilience involves blotting out memories, as in the grieving process, for example. The business of growing-up seems to include a process of distancing ourselves from our own childhoods; this distancing may well be selective, as we reshape ourselves as adults. Second, adult experiences change our understanding of what happened in childhood. Memories may be intense and clear but yet still distorted compared to the child's experience. An extreme example is when adults have false memories of child abuse. A retrospective understanding of childhood may differ considerably from a child's current understanding of its situation. Many people have had very painful experiences in childhood; this can be an impediment to training them, as adults, to work with children, in that they feel that their personal experiences give them an expertise that should not be challenged.

Put simply, for adults to better understand children's problems and needs, they require children to explain and interpret their childhoods: only children can provide real insight into their feelings and experiences. This suggests that adults need to temper their assumption of expertise with some humility and give children more scope to contribute to social and economic processes. In this rapidly changing world, adults' understanding of the experience of childhood is rendered inaccurate to some extent simply by the passage of time. Indeed, in many situations - in the school playground, at work, and on the streets, for example - adults are simply unable to guarantee children their support and protection. Indeed, in many situations in the school playground, at work, and on the streets, for example adults are simply unable to guarantee children their support and protection, leaving children to use their own ingenuity and creativity for survival and coping.

Participation as a contributor to social competencies

To encourage children's self-determination is not merely a pragmatic response to dire circumstances, however, since exertion of agency is itself developmental. Child development research informs us that children are actively engaged in defining the effective environment for their own development, "according to what kinds of activity they seek out, what kinds of stimulation they attend to, and what selective interpretation they place on what they see, hear, and feel" (Woodhead, 1998a; 24). Even during the first weeks of life an infant will overtly elicit responses from adults through crying, gurgling, smiling and other techniques (Richards, 1979). These early actions can even determine survival, since in some societies infants unable to elicit the attention and concern of adults are open to selective neglect and death (Scheper Hughes, 1987). Hence child development is a process fundamentally dependent on children's own agency:

> Without denying that human beings develop over time and in describable ways, nor that appropriate social behaviours are learned and not natural, the competence theory seeks to take children seriously as social agents in their own right; to examine how social constructions of 'childhood' not only structure their lives but also are structured by the activities of children themselves; and to explicate the social competencies which children manifest in the course of their everyday lives *as* children, with other children and with adults, in peer groups and in families, as well as the manifold other arenas of social action (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998:8).

This implies that respecting children as competent actors and providing meaningful opportunities for them to participate in community and family life will further their development. Engagement in social, economic and political processes entails children making choices, managing crises, reaching decisions and working collaboratively in teams. Children respond to such opportunities "by developing a sense of autonomy, independence, heightened social competence, and, in a word, resilience" (Richman and Bowen, 1997:106). A sense of personal mastery or competence over events can be especially important for coping in stressful situations (Turton, Straker and Mooza, 1990:78; Leyens and Mahjoub, 1992). Moreover, involving the young in social planning and action builds in them an understanding of civil society and civil and democratic processes, thus providing for the formation of democratic values and a commitment to collective effort. Hence, the skills and responsibilities that are necessary for active engagement in societal processes contribute also to competent and honourable citizenship and sustainable social change.

Acknowledging children's agency

Children exert their agency in a multitude of ways, many of which are not acknowledged by adults, by society, by the institutions that represent children, or the scholars that research them (Save the Children, 1995; Punch, 1998; Baker, 1998). In middle and later childhood work is one of the most common expressions of children's agency. Too many children are tricked or forced into work that is termed "hazardous" or "exploitative". Such children include sex workers, soldiers, bonded labourers (especially in Asia), jermal workers (offshore fishing in Indonesia), match- and fireworks-makers (India). But most working children engage in work that cannot be classified so easily as detrimental. Further, while many children are set to work by family members, the literature surveying working children's own views suggests that many children themselves make the decision to work, and regard their work as a product of their own free will. Children often describe their work as a vehicle for self-actualisation, and for fostering economic autonomy and responsibility, for it allows children to expand actions on their own behalf (Woodhead, 1998b:59-60). Work can be seen also as enabling children to provide economic assistance to their families and thereby to fulfil filial duties towards adult family members (Boyden *et al.*, 1998).

Children also express their agency through political and social activism, whether on their own behalf, on behalf of their communities, or other children, or in support of an idea or principle. Children have acted as defenders of equality and justice, as in the struggle against apartheid and the Bantu Education system in South Africa. As defenders of nationhood, Palestinian children took up arms against the occupation of their homeland. Children have organised against exploitative employment. In 1984, British children supported the miner's strike, raising funds for miners' families and joining pickets. Through peer-to-peer teaching and counseling, children in many countries help combat the spread of sexually transmitted infections and disseminate primary health messages. Through advocacy, they fight for the rights of families living in illegal housing. Through Internet Web sites, television, film, newspapers and other media, athletics and sports, through their play, and their innovations in language and dress, children everywhere contribute to the reproduction and transformation of local, national and global cultures (James *et al.*, 1998). As consumers, northern children are increasingly making their own choices, to the extent that they often dictate what products are available on the market.

Children recognise that their interests can conflict with those of adults and, when it does not suit them, do not always remain within the boundaries of behaviour and activity set by adults. While accepting adult agency and control, and not confronting it directly, children often use various tactics and strategies to change or avoid situations they do not like. "Children may use a variety of resources, including their own bodies (as in faking illness), their emotions (as in having temper

tantrums), and their knowledge (lying)" (Waksler, 1996:5) to assert their will in situations where control is denied them. Boys and girls in Bolivia, for example, have a range of domestic and productive responsibilities but find many ways of avoiding chores or errands they believe to be burdensome (Punch, 1998). The most popular tactic is to get a younger brother or sister to do the work, or simply to escape by pretending not to hear an adult command, or agreeing to do the job but going to play instead. When children are unable to avoid a task they often make it less onerous by asking a sibling or friend to help.

Giving young people a more active role in society means opening for them new channels of communication and dialogue with adults. Special effort is needed to include those who are frequently excluded, such as children with mental or physical disabilities, whilst also ensuring that such children are not made more vulnerable through their participation in public processes. It means providing children with more effective information and helping them assess its validity and worth. It involves offering the young more chances to practice making decisions, although adults may need to reserve the option to override these if necessary for reasons of safety. It means addressing the fears and concerns of adults and challenging conventional ways of carrying out policy development, planning, research and programme implementation.

5. A Child-Centred Vision – New Directions

5.1 Introduction

It is probably true to say that children are cherished today as never before in human history. The International Year of the Child, followed by the CRC, brought to the world new understandings about childhood and new dimensions to childhood policy, promising a very different outlook for children in the future. The CRC in particular provides for a holistic view of childhood and child development in which children are capable and vulnerable, bearers of rights and responsibilities. In addition, in both this instrument and in others, especially the new ILO Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, we find a clear focus on those children who are exposed to the most oppressive circumstances and in the gravest danger.

Modern policy has clearly embraced the ethical and moral view that children have a right to special consideration, children in exceptionally harsh situations meriting the greatest concern. But on what terms do we extend such consideration? The logical outcome of the gradual dismantling of state structures - or the absence of such structures in the first place - is that children and their families and communities cannot necessarily count on the promises made in international conventions. Moreover, due to the sheer scale of some childhood problems - think of children in Africa orphaned by AIDS, or those in the many countries and regions experiencing armed conflict and civil strife - affected children are sometimes forced to rely on their own devices. To say this is not to exonerate callous governments that choose to ignore their responsibilities towards children, but to be pragmatic about the immediate prospects for large numbers of children in a difficult world and to focus policy attention on the challenges that lie ahead.

It is clear that a convention on children's rights cannot guarantee the betterment of children everywhere without proper political and social commitment. In this paper we have also argued for the necessity of sound empirical evidence and strong theoretical and conceptual underpinning to policy and for implementation approaches that are tailored to children's actual circumstances and needs. Significant effort is also required to ensure outreach and sustainability. Above all, if policy is to more adequately serve the interests of all children in all contexts, it is time for a shift in the perspectives of those who fund, plan, and implement policy towards greater respect for children and childhood in their own right and on their own terms. We have shown that the theoretical and practical justification for such a shift has been laid down in recent research and experience with children. We now consider what implementation of this revised perspective might entail in practical terms.

5.2 Reorienting economics towards children

Economic models either completely disregard children, subsume them under households, or construct worlds that in no way approximate children's realities. In particular, economic models do not even attempt to consider the implications of maximising children's wellbeing. Yet this directly contradicts a basic premise of economic reasoning: that of the utility-maximising individual. *Economists need to consider children as agents* with preferences, upon which they act to the extent possible given adult restrictions. This is not only fair to children, it is also necessary in order to accurately understand the implications of economic policies upon children.[29]

[29] Levison (2000) explores the implications of recognising children's agency for the case of children's paid and unpaid labour force and household work.

We argue that *economic theory, economic models, and econometric analysis cannot begin to contribute to the development of child-aware policies without recognising key determinants of child wellbeing*. While empirical evidence is far too scanty on this topic, we know some of the things that children value: love and family loyalty; food, clothing and toys; challenging and interesting tasks and play; peer acceptance; skills, competence, and the respect that accompanies them; and a future for which they may prepare and to which they can look forward. Various combinations of school education, informal education, play, and many types of work may allow children to achieve some of these; simply participating in one activity or another is rarely an end in itself.

Economists have much to say about the value of time in different uses, yet they have to a great extent been silent on *the value or utility of children's time spent in different contexts.* The human capital discussion has been interpreted narrowly to focus on school education. In conjunction with child development specialists, economists could examine, for example, the implications of children's time in different activities, supervised or unsupervised, in family or non-family settings, and in private or public contexts. Systematic evidence on the impact of work on children could be appropriately analysed using econometric techniques, data permitting. Economists should be in the forefront of those recognising children's unpaid work as providing valuable contributions to society. The value of school education also needs to be carefully reconsidered. Are years of school that do not result in literacy, numeracy, self-esteem, transferable life skills, or other capabilities of any value?

Economists can contribute by *recognising explicitly the power relations within the family*. Tests of the home production (unitary) model of household allocation have shown that when women have greater control over wealth, children's health and schooling generally benefit. There is evidence that when working children contribute to family income this gives them some influence in household allocation decisions (Moehling, 1997). Thus, power to influence critical family decisions is linked to control of resources and contributions to family income. Building on work by some economists (Lundberg and Pollak, 1998; Basu, 1998) as well as studies by sociologists, psychologists and others, economists need to recognise the differential bargaining power of girls, boys, women and men, and consider the implications of this for policy. While we should not ignore the role of co-operation, we also need to recognise conflict and compromise between children and adults. In studies of children's activities, economists need to begin to recognise when and how children are making decisions independently of their families.[30]

Although we argue that child wellbeing should be valued in and of itself, it can also be valued for its contribution to society. Nancy Folbre (1994a, 1994b) maintains that *children should be viewed as public goods that provide positive externalities*. Public goods are things which are shared: if one person benefits (or suffers) from them, that person cannot prevent others from also benefiting (or suffering). What is shared can be either positive (good) or negative (bad). Examples of public goods with positive externalities include public parks, clean air, paved roads, and responsible police, the benefits of which are by their nature shared by many people. Negative externalities include industrial or noise pollution, automobile exhaust, and criminal behaviour.

When children's health and abilities are damaged by poverty, abuse or early exposure to hazardous work, we are all hurt by the absence of their contributions to society. Since all benefit

[30] Glomm's (1997) paper, for example, is aptly titled "Parental choice of human capital investment"; it assumes that children have no say in their own education. Orazem and Tesfatsion's (1997) model is unusual in that it allows some schooling decisions to be made by parents by others to be made by the child. As the authors point out, children can control the effort they expend on education by truancy or shirking. It seems odd that this should be novel.

from positive externalities, it is in the interests of society at large to ensure that children receive adequate care. This concept of the child as a public good is one that economists could actually demonstrate. It is possible to estimate, albeit roughly, the public costs and benefits of supporting children and their care-providers adequately. Since numbers are greatly respected by many policy-makers, such estimations could help generate crucial support for child-centred policies.[31] While this approach falls short of valuing human betterment as an end in itself, it would be a step in the right direction.

The concept of human capital has provided an important argument in favour of a greater allocation of resources to children. The argument is that such resources are an investment in the child as a productive worker in the future, and, furthermore, that the society will independently benefit from such investment. Thus, the human capital perspective provides one way of monetising the value of children. Useful as it is, this dominant framework also obscures the fact that human betterment is not only a means to an end, it is also an end in itself. To the extent that human betterment and the reproduction of human life is not considered central to economic development and growth, efforts to promote child wellbeing will be less than fully successful.

Still, e*ven macroeconomic policies that appear to be unrelated to children will tend to either promote or reduce children's wellbeing.* Although economic growth is often associated with improved measures of child wellbeing in certain specific aspects, the association is not as strong as many assume. It is not uncommon to find economic growth coexisting with inequality sufficiently severe that the most vulnerable do not benefit from overall improvements in the economic environment. Sometimes economic growth actually increases child poverty among excluded social groups. Stefan de Vylder, (1988) summarises the differences between macroeconomic policies that benefit children and those that hurt them. Policies that tend to promote children's betterment are characterised by an emphasis on: equity; predictability and stability; human and social development; job creation; inclusive development; the accumulation of social capital; a long-term perspective; gender awareness; and age awareness.

Efforts to engage economic planners in discussions of the potential implications of macroeconomic policy for children are essential for raising awareness.[32] To begin systematically affecting policy, member states of the IMF and World Bank might lobby for a child specialist to be part of stabilisation and structural adjustment teams. It is equally important to encourage interaction between macroeconomic planners and child advocates. Just as planners need to better

[31] Cost-benefit analysis could be more frequently used to such ends. Such analysis relies on basic economic tools but is also dependent on the existence of measured costs and benefits that can be interpreted in monetary values. A distinction needs to be made between 'cost-savings analysis' and 'cost-benefit analysis'. Cost-savings analyses determine whether savings generated by programmes are greater than their costs, indicating that "government fiscal support for such programmes may be considered a worthwhile investment of public funds" (Karoly *et al.* 1998, 75). Cost-benefit analyses consider not only savings to the government but also the benefits of the programme to other members of society, whether or not they are programme participants. Cost-savings analyses are easier to undertake, since costs and benefits to society at large are difficult if not impossible to gauge accurately. However, they are liable to vastly underestimate the potential benefit of programmes to society and to children's wellbeing, and policy-makers tend to forget that what cannot be captured by the analysis may still be important and well worth providing. For this reason, cost-benefit analyses are preferable. The drawback of using cost-savings and cost-benefit analysis is that policy-makers tend to forget that what cannot be captured by the analysis may still be important and well worth providing. Opponents misuse the cost-benefit results, which capture only a small part of the benefits reported in qualitative data.

[32] Rädda Barnen (1998) has compiled descriptions of 24 initiatives related to macroeconomics and the rights of the child; these can serve as excellent starting points for further efforts. Almost all of these initiatives have been undertaken by international agencies or NGOs.

consider the implications of macro-level policy on children and their families, child advocates also need to understand the relevance of macroeconomic issues to their interests.[33]

Finally, economists need to be especially careful to *convey heterogeneity when it exists in the data*. Averaging the situations of very different children can result in meaningless summary statistics that are extremely misleading for policy purposes.

5.3. Building public and institutional support for children's rights

A commitment to lasting improvements for children requires more than progress toward the realisation of international standards agreed by social élites. *There is a need in all parts of the world to foster a culture of childhood throughout society that is based on the principles of the CRC, and to guarantee children a higher priority in social and economic planning and family and community life* (Salazar & Alarcon Glasniovich, 1991). This involves redefining childhood, which is at present a time of exclusion. To an extent, it also implies a reduction in the power of adults. Such changes could lead to some resistance, especially in hierarchical cultures and organisations that prescribe a fixed status for all their members on the basis of gender and generation. Certainly it is important to take into account what adults might be losing by giving children a voice. It is essential also to consider the implications of possible adverse adult reactions in terms of children's wellbeing and integration into society. It needs to be borne in mind too that in many societies a significant proportion of adults are themselves excluded from social, economic and political processes because of their gender, class, ethnic or religious status.

C*reating an enabling environment for children means promoting the idea that the protection and support of children is everyone's responsibility.* A high degree of grass roots involvement in particular is now widely acknowledged as critical for good outreach, programme effectiveness and sustainability. In many contexts local-level initiative - drawing on the creative energy of children, para-professionals, community-based organisations, local government and the like - has proved more effective than central government intervention. This is because local activists and civil society organisations are often the most developed social forces and tend to have greater commitment to promoting children and their rights. They generally focus more readily on the key question of what is in children's best interests, and they are more likely to bring to that question a holistic perspective. Whereas government may be constrained to a legalistic view rooted in existing policy, or a political one reflecting the interests of a particular pressure group, civil society organisations tend to be freer to consider directly what is good for children. This role has been of critical importance in national and world debate on many different issues, such as the placement of children in foster families, the disposition of refugee children, and the protection of street and working children.

Because civil society organisations live closer to the problems of children than do public sector agencies, they generally understand them in greater detail. They tend to be more innovative in responding to those problems. They are also playing a key role in disseminating information about children and their rights. Children's advocacy organisations, religious and other value-forming institutions, non-formal education programmes, community radio stations, professional associations, drama groups and popular culture groups are but some of the bodies that have proven effective in this regard. Beyond this, more than 60 countries globally have now established networks or coalitions of non-governmental bodies that are engaged in the promotion of children's rights. The Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) recently established a

[33] A major step was made in this direction recently, with the "International Seminar on Macroeconomics and Children's Rights" in South Africa in November of 1998.

National Child Rights Coalitions Desk, which provides information on the role and work of such initiatives throughout the world.

Achieving widespread recognition and successful implementation of child-centred policy ultimately depends on extended social discourse and action that incorporates all major interested parties. Fundamental issues such as ending traditional forms of discrimination against girls and children with disabilities, changing children's family roles to avoid detrimental child work, and providing for children to participate in social decisions require extensive public discussion in order to arrive at socially supportable solutions. In some countries, such as Brazil, public discussion has led to powerful new laws, even constitutional changes, as well as the mechanisms for applying them in practice. In others, like Vietnam, public consultation has centred on the analysis of children's situation and monitoring of the implementation of the CRC. One of the implications of such examples is that policy measures enhancing the rights and abilities of all people (regardless of age, social status or sex) to participate in free and open discussions, whether in private or public fora, spoken or written, can benefit children substantially. Another is the need in such cases for great *sensitivity to local social and cultural conditions, flexibility, good co-ordination and preparedness to promote decentralised planning, management and administration*.

Collaboration across the full spectrum of civil society is likely to involve *non-traditional partners* such as the private sector. In the Philippines, for example, corporate citizenship has played a major role in improving social provision for children and other groups. Furthermore, close *inter-country and regional co-operation* is often needed to bring about legislative and policy uniformity, especially given that many problems children face, such as trafficking, are trans-national in character. Solitary action in one country to ban children's work in hazardous or exploitative conditions, for example, will not be sustainable without similar and concurrent action in neighbouring countries. In fact, it will merely give other countries a competitive edge in the international market (Levison *et al.*, 1998). There is even a risk that neighbouring countries will introduce opposing policies. Regional co-operation may involve inter-governmental collaboration and close association with national, regional and international NGO networks and supra-national bodies.

In many post-conflict or transitional societies and in some of the poorest parts of Africa, *creating institutional mechanisms for the support and protection of children may mean starting from scratch*. In some places a concept of social responsibility beyond individual and family charity does not exist. In some, governance at both the national and local levels, and in both the public and non-governmental sectors, is very weak, such that even good child-centred policies are ineffectual. A World Bank (1998) study finds that in weak policy environments, capacity - and institution-building assistance has greater impact than international monetary aid. However, capacity-building projects are also found to have limited effectiveness unless the motivation for reform comes from within the local context. That is, those involved in the projects, whether public sector employees or communities working with non-governmental bodies, must take "ownership" of institutional change.

In many places, World Bank and IMF programmes have required states to reduce the size of their bureaucracies in the name of fiscal responsibility, further undermining the capacity of already weak social provision. This emphasises the importance of involving powerful international institutions in policy dialogue, to ensure that their goals are consistent with children's best interests. Stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes need to be accompanied by social safety nets to protect the poorest families and children from bearing the brunt of economic adjustment. Children cannot 'adjust' to reduced opportunities in education, malnutrition, and

poorer health. The World Bank and the IMF have the power to insist on social safety net programmes, and their member states and governing boards need to mandate that they use this power effectively.

5.4 Acknowledging children as change agents

Children everywhere are in a subordinate structural position in relation to adults. In many ways this can be regarded as a logical, inevitable and desirable outcome of the gradual nature of maturation in human beings. Further, as social and technological processes become more complex and demanding, it seems reasonable to expect children in the modern world to take longer to grow into adulthood. This emphasises the virtue of making a distinction between children and adults, which serves to protect the vulnerable and ensure the healthy development of all. Young children in particular should not be expected to take responsibility for situations over which they have no control or do not fully understand. Great care needs to be taken to make sure that the responsibilities born by children are suited to their maturity and capacities and do not expose them to exploitation or hazard.

Nevertheless, new research findings, reported above, suggest that children are often far more competent in numerous ways than is commonly thought and also that growing up without responsibility is not necessarily the most effective way to promote children's wellbeing and best interests (Knutsson 1997:41). These findings imply also that excluding children from social, political or economic processes simply because they are young cannot be justified any more than can the exclusion of any other group in society. This is not to suggest that children should take on the full complement of adult rights or responsibilities. More to the point, they should have substantially more rights to participate in society. This is a matter of sheer pragmatism, since children often have sound ideas about their problems and needs and the possible solutions to these and are in any case better able to protect themselves when properly informed and given some say in decisions and processes affecting them. Such engagement may be especially important for children in middle childhood and adolescence.

Children's participation in social planning and action is being piloted by various non-governmental organisations and some governments in a range of situations throughout the world (Johnson, *et al.*, 1998; Guijt, *et al.*, 1994; Hart, 1997). In Colombia, the acceptance of children as participating citizens is a major educational objective and children play a significant role in the governance of the country's New Schools (Escuelas Nuevas) programme. In Senegal, members of the Working Children and Youth Union sit on the board of the National Programme to Eliminate the Exploitation of Children at Work.

Building childhood policy on a vision of inclusion, self-determination and self- protection carries many challenges. It entails changes in the way adults think and act. It requires respect for children's integrity and capacity for responsible thought and action. To do this, adults need to learn to trust children's choices. At the same time, great sensitivity must be shown towards children's existing responsibilities, in that initiatives to support and protect children should not add to the considerable family and community burdens many already bear. Also important, the responsibilities of childhood, including the responsibilities associated with participation, will inevitably change as children grow and mature. Education curricula certainly recognise children's growing maturity. But other areas of policy, such as child protection, public health, labour regulation, social welfare and juvenile justice, seldom accommodate growth and change in childhood in a systematic manner consistent with child development evidence. This suggests the need to examine and reform many of the laws, policies, procedures, regulations and programme strategies affecting adolescents and youth in particular.

It is now apparent that *supporting children's best interests requires the perspective not just that children need special protections, but that they have valid insights into their well being, valid solutions to their problems and a valid role in implementing those solutions.* Such an approach acknowledges children not merely as beneficiaries of intervention by adults, or a future societal asset, but as competent social agents in their own right. The CRC provides for such an approach, although it is seldom translated effectively into policy or practice, which have tended toward a far more paternalistic outlook. *The task for policy makers and programme implementers is to find ways of respecting the spirit and intention of the CRC in relation to children's participation, whilst also paying due regard to the context and to the maturity and the vulnerabilities and attributes of children.*

5.5 Developing appropriate participatory skills, tools and methods

If children are to make appropriate choices and play an active role in planning and decision-making, the onus is on policy makers to develop approaches that facilitate communication and trust with children, build on children's knowledge and expertise, and encourage direct action by children (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Johnson *et al.*, 1998). To capture and reflect children's perspectives and ensure their engagement in planning and action can be difficult, however, especially given the power imbalance between children and adults, the situated character of children's meanings and the fact that children frequently employ concepts and interpretations which are unfamiliar to adults (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988:35). There are also ethical concerns, for example that high levels of consultation with children may raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled. This confronts the need to provide children with the necessary information to engage in social action and develop appropriate methodologies, methods and tools for involving children. And incorporating children's views within legislation, policy and programmes definitely involves major institutional changes.

Achieving the necessary skills and conditions for children's participation may mean awareness raising and training for both adults and children. Adults must always be mindful that their behaviour with children is appropriate. Respecting children means acting with an open mind and humility. It means *ensuring children the right to give their informed consent* to taking part in social action and other processes. Different cultures have different customs about how children and adults should behave towards each other. Care should be taken to ensure that children are not distressed by behaviour that is culturally unacceptable. Children are not generally used to taking part in the political life of the community. For this they must have the confidence to speak out and the knowledge that they will be taken seriously. To facilitate their participation, they need to develop the ability to analyse and solve problems, gather and work together and with adults in safe environments, make decisions, work in teams, record and document ideas (Hart, 1997).

Girls commonly have far greater economic responsibilities than boys and yet enjoy far fewer social freedoms, often making it difficult for them to take part in activities outside work. In many cultures they are also likely to be more reticent about voicing their concerns in public fora. Different children have very different capabilities; this profoundly influences their ability to engage in participatory processes. Some children are more analytical and more agile intellectually than others, and some may have greater facility for sharing and co-operation. Involving children may be especially challenging in the case of those who are physically or psychologically vulnerable. A special effort is needed to support and involve children with limited (or different) capacities. It is vital also to be aware of the particular susceptibilities of very disadvantaged children. It is not ethical to expose a child already vulnerable to any additional risk through an

action that carries no direct benefit for that child (Jareg & Jareg, 1994). Effective systems of referral and support for children in stressful situations are essential.

Children who have experienced rejection, humiliation or abuse of one sort or another may be reluctant to voice their opinions publicly, due to low self-esteem or fears for their safety. To involve younger children it is important to develop methods of communication, information gathering and analysis, such as mime, drawing or puppetry, that rely little on the spoken word, which they may have limited facility with (Johnson *et al.*, 1998). Several agencies internationally, in particular the Bernard Van Leer Foundation and Save the Children Fund UK, are seeking to develop effective approaches and methods for engaging very young children in planning, monitoring and other initiatives. Such examples indicate that there is now a commitment to developing the mechanisms for children's participation, although a great deal has still to be done to disseminate examples of good practice, train facilitators and resource people and increase the outreach of such programmes.

5.6 Promoting learning approaches that respond to modern conditions

Modern society is subject to a series of countervailing trends and influences that are fast changing the experience of childhood forever. Globalisation and entrenched fundamentalism are resulting in personal and structural conflicts that all of us, children and adults in all parts of the world, must increasingly grapple with in our daily lives. The geopolitical structure is changing rapidly, undermining the nation-state, whilst also bringing to the fore massive multinational companies more powerful and richer than governments. Capital moves fluidly around the globe, and the international character of financial flows can mean that sudden booms or busts are out of state control, leaving governments at the mercy of international market forces.

Budget expenditure cuts, when they come, often hit the poor first and hardest. Never before have social and economic disparities been so acute or so apparent. Today the wealthiest fifth of the people of the globe are 82 times better off than the poorest fifth, and account for 88 percent of the consumption of goods and resources (Lean, 1999). Many children in both the North and the South observe such wealth through media coverage, the display of countless consumer items in shops, and other such mechanisms, and are thereby exposed to global values and aspirations that are entirely beyond their reach. Other children are emerging as independent consumers of modern culture, users of modern technology and the subjects of forceful social ideas about individuation, self-actualisation and participation, even whilst relying on extended adult patronage. Some children live in communities that offer no appropriate adult role models or opportunities and are reliant or their own resources and on the support of peers.

C*hildhood policies need to respond more imaginatively and flexibly to the social, cultural, political and economic conditions of modern society.* Policy should aim to create an environment which ensures children can benefit from such forces and give them scope to effectively and competently further their own development and protection in such circumstances. It should acknowledge that children need meaningful roles and opportunities. It should also acknowledge children's creativity and adaptability by introducing more formal opportunities for children in civil society organisations and civic action and more channels (including through political action, sports and the media) for children to exert their influence.

Education policy can play a critical role in this regard. School education can have a major beneficial effect on children's survival, wellbeing and development, and at the same time influence positively their roles and integration into society. On the other hand, policy makers need to be aware that children and their families in many parts of the world are seriously

questioning the validity and utility of much of the school education on offer today. Some even challenge whether the institutional setting of the school, as presently conceived, is the most appropriate for children's learning.

Certain educationalists also are beginning to doubt whether modern education systems are up to the job. Their concern is to address two central questions, which are, *How do children learn?* And, *What are the most effecting environments for children's development?* They note that in the urgency of encouraging universal school attendance, the quality of school environments and teaching methods often has been simply assumed to be adequate. They argue that how children naturally learn is unsupported by much traditional classroom practice, which tends to be theoretical and isolated from the social context. They maintain that, despite the best efforts of devoted teachers around the world, our communities and school systems commonly discourage the development of transferable skills, intellectual curiosity and life long learning -competencies essential for successful adjustment to modern conditions (Abbot, 1999).They remind that many poor children still do not have access to or receive an education, consistent with their rights and development.

A major effort needs to be made to reassess the developmental goals and models of school education, to improve quality, relevance and access, and provide the holistic approach promised in the CRC. This means reaching out well beyond the core academic subjects to encompass, psychological and spiritual growth, practical life skills, citizenship skills and other critical areas of development, and also to locate school education more effectively within its social environment. It means also that policy should aim to bring children to safe, rich, relevant learning environments and at the same time develop far more effective tools for distinguishing situations (especially work situations) that contribute to learning and situations that are detrimental. Certainly children should be protected from what is bad, but it is important also not to lose the richness of learning, or to curtail children's opportunities to learn directly from society. The priority should be to strengthen the genuinely developmental aspects of education in line with the latest child development thinking, as discussed above.

Comprehension, problem analysis and adaptation to changing conditions and new leaning situations should be given precedence over learning by memory. Use should be made, whenever possible, of children's own materials, language, concepts and understandings. The pace of learning can be adjusted to the children's potential rather than matched against formal age and grade requirements. A focus on citizenship and awareness, as in the liberation education programmes in Latin America, can be particularly effective in programmes for groups (especially girls) that are typically denied access to decision-making processes. Children can be given greater choice in selecting their own curriculum options according to their specific interests and circumstances. In some countries children are able to participate in the planning of their own school activities. In one experiment, children were offered different styles of education, and were involved subsequently in building a new approach drawing on the options that suited them best.

Improving school access among the most disadvantaged populations is another immediate priority, requiring greater institutional flexibility than at present. Worksite schools, shift systems, flexible scheduling and other such measures make a big difference to attendance, especially when they are attuned with children's daily and seasonal routines and with their social and economic responsibilities. By introducing flexible promotion mechanisms and multi-grade teaching, the Escuela Nueva rural education programme in Colombia has managed to keep almost 80 percent of children in school in the country's vast coffee-growing areas where their help during harvest is essential (Salazar and Alarcón Glasniovich, 1991; Schiefelbein 1997). Providing crèches in

schools can benefit working girls particularly, making it possible for them to attend classes while younger siblings or their own infants are in the care of others.

Distance learning has proved an effective way of increasing access of children among dispersed rural populations. This has been facilitated by the creation of mobile schools and libraries. Witness the popular mobile camel library of northern Kenya, which delivers books to children in outlying villages and nomadic settlements unreachable even by four-wheel drive vehicles. Children can be involved in educational need assessments and problem analysis in relation to non-attendance and drop out. Children can also assist in monitoring school attendance and performance, providing peer support to children who have difficulties attending or keeping up. Information on extremely creative solutions to difficult problems could be collected and made available to enterprising education reformers via the international organisations and their networks.

5.7 Prioritising the most vulnerable children

There is considerable consensus among policy makers internationally regarding *the need to give priority attention to children who confront adversity or are excluded socially*. This priority touches most policy areas, whether it be education, health, social protection, juvenile justice and so on. But this does not mean treating affected children as helpless, since there is little evidence that this furthers their interests in any way. It may legitimate the protective role of adults, but is likely to undermine children's coping and underestimate their capacity to confront and overcome the processes of adversity (Zwi *et al.*, 1992:46). In high-risk situations, casting children as victims may even threaten their survival, since it renders them defenseless and dependent on others who may not in practice be in a position to help them.

How, then, can policy protect these children more effectively? How can it provide essential support without intervening unnecessarily in children's lives and in ways that undermine children's integrity and self-respect? Related to this, how can policy foster children's resilience and coping without exposing them to greater risk?

First, *we need to learn much more about the effects that exposure to adversity has on children.* In most conventional practice, what is harmful or adverse for children is normally decided by adults. Far greater attention must be paid to children's own insights and perspectives on their lives. Some children are overwhelmed by misfortune, but many have agency even in quite extreme situations and this means that they are likely to be more resilient than adults imagine. Identifying the factors that mediate children's responses is an essential prerequisite for measures designed to assist affected children. While all children certainly have a right to be protected from hazard and exploitation, actions and policies that do not acknowledge children's agency and fail to take into account these mediating influences are likely to undermine children's wellbeing.

Second, *all children are not equally at risk*. Generic policies that fail to recognise power differences within childhood are unlikely to reach the most vulnerable. Effective measures need to carefully identify and prioritise these children. This highlights the importance of studying children's specific circumstances and experiences and planning with children, policies that respond to their specific needs, whilst at the same time securing greater social equity and justice in childhood more generally. In most situations, girls experience greater disadvantage and greater obstacles to their development and wellbeing than boys. On the other hand, policy makers should avoid facile stereotypes - lumping all girls, or all ethnic minority children together as disadvantaged and susceptible, for example.

Third, *policy will need to focus on enabling children both to access systems of referral and support and to better protect themselves*. Such policy is likely to be less reliant on outside intervention than on local resources and measures. It needs to take account of international norms and values with regard to what is detrimental to children, as expressed in the CRC and other treaties, and build also on cultural values and practices and community consensus on these issues. It is very dependent also on further research into risk, resilience and coping among children.

5.8 Developing holistic, context-appropriate approaches

Policy must develop more pluralistic concepts of childhood that lead to the understanding that children's experiences are extremely varied, and the paths to their betterment are context-specific to a much greater extent than traditionally assumed. Childhood is not a monolith. There are many different approaches to and experiences of childhood. Different experiences have different meanings, and different child development effects, in different situations. Thus, universal policies based on external notions of what is in children's best interests are unlikely to serve children effectively.

We need to differentiate among situations and be open to a much wider range of solutions. Overall policy goals may be couched in general global terms, but more specific objectives must be tailored to local conditions, child rearing practices, and ideas regarding child development and wellbeing, for what is effective in one setting may well be dysfunctional in another.

This is not to argue for cultural relativism, but for greater respect for the diversity of child development and experience and also for indigenous values and practices. This in turn suggests that rather than seeking to guarantee children's rights through public sector legislative and enforcement approaches, such as sanctions, policy should aim to reconcile local and international norms and practice and achieve high levels of community and family vigilance of children's rights.

But *how can policy reconcile national and international perspectives, especially when these appear to be in contradiction?* We examine this important question by referring again to the example of child protection.

First, *it may be necessary for international children's rights advocates to recognise the practical value of compromise and flexibility* when it comes to certain of the more ideological aspects of international standards. This may mean accepting that a range of activities and situations that in particular historical and cultural contexts may have come to be seen as inappropriate for children are not necessarily as harmful as imagined, especially in other settings. For instance, it may involve conceding that children raised by elder siblings or grandparents, rather than parents, or children raised outside the natal home in the household of a distant relative or friend, practices common in many parts of the world, are not necessarily damaged or disadvantaged in comparison with others. In cases of family discord and separation, it may mean allowing a child to remain with the parent he or she wishes to be with, even if that parent appears the less suitable as a role model. Such an approach would not be incompatible with the CRC, which is sufficiently open to respect the need for compromise and to reflect different perspectives on children's rights.

Second, *it should be possible to obtain widespread consensus at all levels of society on situations and practices that seriously endanger children's lives, health or development*. Priority attention needs to be given to children exposed to such conditions. This may mean actively searching out the children at greatest risk through research, tracing, the motivation of support networks and other such mechanisms. When risks to children are not self-evident - as with the many jobs in

agriculture that are assumed to be safe but in practice entail many dangers - advocacy research may be necessary to ensure that policy specialists, activists, children and their families are fully informed. Civil society, families and children themselves must be educated and organised to recognise and mobilise against these kinds of situations and practices. Child-to-child approaches can play an effective part in such programmes, as in Bangkok, where children who have been involved in sex work contact migrant children as they arrive in the city and inform them of the risks entailed in prostitution, the means of self-protection, and the systems of referral and support.

Policies promoting the diverse, multi-dimensional aspects of child development described above and provided for in the CRC would *expand rather than limit children's opportunities*. This implies that if policy is to contemplate removing children from dangerous situations, it must adopt a holistic perspective on their lives, taking into account all their interests, activities and obligations, and also considering what they might have to lose by this kind of action. If it is deemed that separating children from danger is the only possible course of action, viable economic and educational alternatives must be found. Above all, children and their families need to be fully informed and consent freely to such interventions; this is not merely a matter of rights, for it is common that people who are the unwilling objects of policy - even policy intended to serve their best interest - end up by subverting it.

Third, children that are in situations that are not inherently dangerous but carry some potential risk need to know about such risks and be monitored by their families and communities to ensure their safety and wellbeing. Good policies and programmes are needed to stimulate and support community oversight in order to ensure that their rights are not being violated. This may be as straightforward as serious enforcement of existing workplace occupational safety codes, for example. Much is known about reasonable workplace safety standards (for adults, at least); what is usually lacking is a commitment to their enforcement.

The CRC provides a flexible framework that brings cultures together around children's rights and children's welfare rather than an instrument of censure endorsing a single model of childhood. In this vision cultures are allowed some latitude to proceed towards the global goal in their own way and in their own time, solutions are negotiated and not imposed and children assume an active role in these negotiations. Policy should respond to this open and flexible agenda provided by the CRC by offering more innovative and culturally appropriate solutions to childhood problems

5.9 Basing policy on valid empirical evidence

W*e must expand our empirical and theoretical understanding of children and childhood.* Bringing policy into harmony with our systematic understanding of children is an essential prerequisite for the development of childhood policies that really do conform to the CRC exigency of serving children's best interests. It will involve not only better communication of current scientific thinking and research findings to policy makers, but also the support and encouragement of studies that address key policy concerns and deal effectively with cultural variables. Research is urgently needed if we are to avoid superficial analyses of children's problems and concerns and stereotypical responses to their situation. Unfortunately, this kind of baseline assessment is seldom done.

More attention should be devoted to the effects policies and programmes have on children. On some topics, such as the effects of early childhood education programmes on children's subsequent school performance, high quality studies already exist. However, equally important concerns in other arenas have been little addressed. For example, very little scientific attention has been directed to the formative impact of alternative care arrangements for children separated

from their families. This means that although policy assumes, intuitively, that children are better off in the care of foster or adoptive families than in institutions, this is effectively an act of faith, in that there is very little evaluative information comparing the wellbeing of children in these different settings.

Policy requires a much better understanding of societal perceptions of children and how different child rearing practices affect children's life chances. It needs to learn how children's obligations affect their wellbeing and development, and how best to realise children's rights across cultures and social groups. Policy also needs to understand how age, gender, disability and other factors affect children's agency, what level of responsibility is appropriate for children of different ages and capacities and how best to foster children's participation without exerting unreasonable pressure on them.

Effective qualitative information depends on appropriate child-centred research methods. Already there exists a growing body of agencies and individuals, many linked with each other in informal networks, concerned to establish new approaches and methods in participatory research with children. Many are using these to build information for advocacy, monitoring and planning. Thus, in some countries children have identified the reasons behind school dropout, as a basis for both improving education provision and removing the more onerous aspects of work. Elsewhere, they are researching security, environmental, safety and communication problems in their community, with a view to upgrading the quality and utilisation of public spaces. Elsewhere still, they are monitoring the family and community impact of public health measures.

International pressure on the UNSNA to revise its accounting practices might be particularly effective, since that little-known UN agency sets norms worldwide. If the producers of UN statistical yearbooks were to include more social measures of child wellbeing, nations might co-operate in providing such data. The UN might, for example, standardise on one or two reasonable definitions of literacy. For many areas, however, data are unlikely to be provided without initial encouragement in the form of funding. For example, child-focused collaboration across disciplines can be fostered by appropriate targeting of research funds. Systematic studies of the effects of macroeconomic crisis and policy responses on children and their families will never be undertaken by countries in crisis; such studies would almost certainly require international collaboration and funding.

A call for more research should not be interpreted as a justification for inaction. Many of the efforts we recommend could take the form of action-research. In particular, it is not possible for adults to honestly engage with children in thinking about change without being changed themselves by that process of engagement. Each interaction thus becomes a step towards a social order in which children hold a respected place. International donors have some power and ability to facilitate such interactions, and they should use it appropriately.

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