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United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Research Report

Topic 1: The question of integrating isolated, impoverished and isolated adolescents into society,
public systems and education



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Introduction

This research report intends to offer a guideline for further research on the *question of integrating isolated, impoverished or orphaned adolescents into society, public systems and education*. First acknowledging the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as having helped raise worldwide awareness on issues concerning adolescent welfare as well as provide a blueprint for government action. However, these gains have been largely limited to those easily reachable. Thus, the gap has widened between those who already enjoy better opportunities and standards of living and those who remain marginalized and excluded, here amongst the socially isolated, impoverished and orphaned adolescents.

Please note that the adolescence situation may differ vastly in different regions in distinctive countries, emphasising that this paper merely seeks to offer guidance.

Definition of Key Terms

Community capacity building (CCB) is the promotion of the ‘capacity’ of local communities to develop, implement and sustain their own solutions to problems in a way that helps them shape and exercise control over their physical, social, economic and cultural environments.

OVC Orphans and other vulnerable children

Orphan UNICEF explains an orphan according to the following definition: “a child under 18 years of age who has lost one or both parents to any cause of death”¹

Adolescent Individuals between ages 10-19²

Background Information

By UNICEF’s definitions, there existed nearly 140 million orphans globally in 2015³. In addition, a report by the World Bank Group finds that in 2013, extreme poverty, measured at \$1.90, affects almost 385 million children worldwide⁴. Lastly, although isolated children cover a number of different areas, one common denominator among them is a they have no reliable social safety networks, limited access to education, little to no say in their community and proneness to neglect and health issues. As a result of this circle of disadvantage, adolescents are often subjected to missed economic opportunities, inaccessible social resources and everlasting scars from an uprising in a poor care environment.

PROVIDING AND STRENGTHENING THE SOCIAL SAFETY NETWORK

Recognising OVC as being the most vulnerable and marginalised group throughout all our society, it is vital to provide and continuously develop a reliable social safety network. In this context, a social safety network may be defined as the combination of interventions, programs and benefits that are provided by governmental, civil society and community actors to ensure the welfare and protection of socially or economically disadvantaged OVC. Critical to a strong social safety system

¹ (UNICEF, 2017)

² (UNICEF, 2011)

³ (UNICEF, 2017)

⁴ (The World Bank, 2016)

is a well-planned, well-trained, supported social service workforce that is capable of delivering quality, sustainable, multi-sectoral services.

Strong country ownership and availability of quality services requires addressing capacity of the social service system at all levels. Yet, this system is in an emerging state in most countries, and responsibilities are dispersed among a broad array of actors and organizations. Many service delivery problems are the result of gaps within the social service system, made worse by the lack of communication and coordination within and among government ministries, different levels of government, civil society and communities. These coordination issues hinder the system's ability to provide strong service delivery. Increasing government and civil society coordination and improving information exchange among service providers ultimately improves service delivery and strengthens the social service system's ability to support the most vulnerable children.⁵

IMPROVING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR VULNERABLE ADOLESCENTS

A crucial factor to integration of OVC may be that of education. Despite remarkable progress over the past two decades, an estimated 63 million⁶ adolescents do not attend school globally. Estimates suggest that many of these youth will never enter the classroom. In sub-Saharan Africa, where the proportions of out-of-school youth are highest, an estimated 89 million youth aged 12-24⁷ do not attend school. Almost one-third of out-of-school adolescents live in conflict-affected areas, illustrating the effect of instability on school attendance. Generally, girls are much more likely to be out-of-school than boys, reflecting their greater vulnerability to the key drivers of poor educational outcomes, including poverty, political instability/conflict, lack of accessible facilities, and lack of economic opportunities linked to education. These gender-based differences worsen the higher up the education system you go, with the greatest gaps between genders typically in tertiary education. Furthermore, progress seems to have stalled in the past ten years, with significant consequences for those who do not start or complete their education. Youth who do not attend school, or who drop out prematurely, miss many of the fundamentals of basic education, including basic health information and life skills. Such youth are vulnerable to misinformation from unreliable sources.⁸

Program planners can think of out-of-school OVC as falling into two main categories: at-risk and especially vulnerable youth. The at-risk out-of-school youth include girls (who typically receive less education than boys in the developing world), pregnant girls and married adolescents (who often drop out of school), and those rural boys and girls who have no access to formal schooling. Youth who are especially vulnerable and socially marginalized include street children, disabled children, children in conflict situations, orphans, migrants, child soldiers, refugees, drug users, and adolescent sex workers.

Education as recognised in the convention on the rights of the child is a basic human right for all children⁹. A child who has access to quality primary schooling has a better chance in life. A child who knows how to read and write and do basic arithmetic has a solid foundation for continued learning throughout life¹⁰. USAID and CRS maintain that school attendance helps children affected

⁵ (The World Bank, 2017)

⁶ (UNICEF, 2015)

⁷ (The World Bank, 2015)

⁸ (UNICEF, 2009)

⁹ (United Nations Human Rights, 1989)

¹⁰ (USAID & CRS, 2008)

by trauma to regain a sense of normalcy and to recover from the psychosocial impact of the experiences and disruptive lives. It has further been observed that education benefits individuals and the whole nation as a major instrument for social and economic development.

Schools not only benefit the child but can serve as important resource centres to meet the broader needs of the community¹¹. Schools can provide children with a safe structured environment, the emotional support and supervision of adults and the opportunity to learn how to interact with other children and develop social networks. “Education is likely to lead to employability and can foster a child developing a sense of competence”¹².

STRENGTHENING YOUTH PARTICIPATION

In recent decades youth participation has been increasingly incorporated in community development; and shown great promise¹³. Some organizations have expressed youth participation as being imperative to any project involving youth: if a program is designed to benefit young people, they should have involvement into how the program is developed and administered. Furthermore, youth participation may also lead to improved skills, behaviours and knowledge.

There have been many distinctive strategies in programs involving youth. In the past, peer education, youth advisory boards and youth focus groups were typical examples of youth participation. In recent years, there have been efforts in involving integrating youth into programming, including advocacy efforts, governance, and evaluation. However, it must also be acknowledged that involving youth in meaningful activities can come with its challenges. Actors must consider issues regarding selection, recruitment, and retention of young people, whose needs, skill levels, and backgrounds will vary.

EVALUTATING AND FORESTALLING ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

Despite adolescent abuse and violence remaining one of the highest priorities in ensuring youth welfare, this area is still in need of more reliable data. Annually, UNICEF estimates¹⁴ that there are between 500 million and 1.5 billion children each year enduring violence. This uncertainty appears frequently in global violence statistics among adolescents. This is the result of the hidden nature of much abuse, however also suggests how many countries have little idea of what is happening across their populations. Advocates for adolescents and the media have helped advance understanding, even as experts struggle to formulate evidence-based policies. Recent attention has focused on changing international adoption policies and disputes, and the ongoing plight of AIDS orphans, but more knowledge is still required at a fundamental level.

For adolescents living outside the care of biological parents, the situation is assumed to be the direst, particularly in the developing world. Neglect, discrimination and malnutrition affect orphans more commonly than their non-orphaned peers: Research has shown such children are more likely to go to bed hungry¹⁵ and to be exploited and less likely to be enrolled in school. Increasing

¹¹ (PEPFAR, 2006)

¹² (PEPFAR, 2006) p. 9

¹³ (Youth Power, 2015)

¹⁴ (UNICEF, 2008) p. 8

¹⁵ (Grantham-Mcgregor, 2002)

urbanization in the developing world, growing poverty and the rising number of orphans requiring care exacerbate these problems.

THE ALCOHOL ISSUE

Alcohol consumption among young people is a growing public health concern. It has been known to lower inhibitions and contribute to higher rates of risky sexual behaviour. For example, adolescents who use alcohol are approximately three times less likely to use condoms. Alcohol use is also associated with an increased chance of both experiencing and perpetrating sexual violence. These factors all place young people who use alcohol at a greater risk of unplanned pregnancy and of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Alcohol also contributes to an increased risk of mental health problems, alcohol dependency, and alcohol-related injuries from motor vehicle accidents, falls, burns and drowning.

An estimated 10–20% of the violent deaths among young people are estimated to be alcohol related. The rate of alcohol use among young people is unclear because data is scarce and patterns of use vary by geographical location. Heavy drinking tends to be greater among adolescents under stress and is especially high among street youth. Parents, peers, cultural and gender norms and expectations, and structural aspects such as the legal age of drinking, all influence consumption of alcohol use among youth. The most common programmatic responses to addressing alcohol use are education programs and substance abuse treatment programs. Unfortunately, there are few such programs specifically targeted at young people.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

The Sustainable Development Goals Campaign: Also known as Agenda 2030 is a set of 17 global goals distributed across 169 areas developed by the United Nations. Taken from UNDP's website: "a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity."

One Young World: A not-for-profit organizations aimed at gathering young leaders from around the world to develop solutions to the world's most pressing issues.

Save the Children International: A non-governmental organization aimed at promoting children's rights, providing relief and helping children in developing countries.

SOS Children's Villages International: A non-governmental international development organization which has been working to meet the needs and protect the interests and rights of children.

Youth Power: An organization utilizing a youth development approach to implement programs within and across sectors. Its mission states: "Youth Power seeks to improve the capacity of youth-led and youth-serving institutions and engage young people, their families and communities so that youth can reach their full potential."

Sub-Saharan Africa: the area of the continent of Africa that lies south of the Sahara. According to the UN, it consists of all African countries that are fully or partially located south of the Sahara. Statistics suggest the OVC situation to be especially dire in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

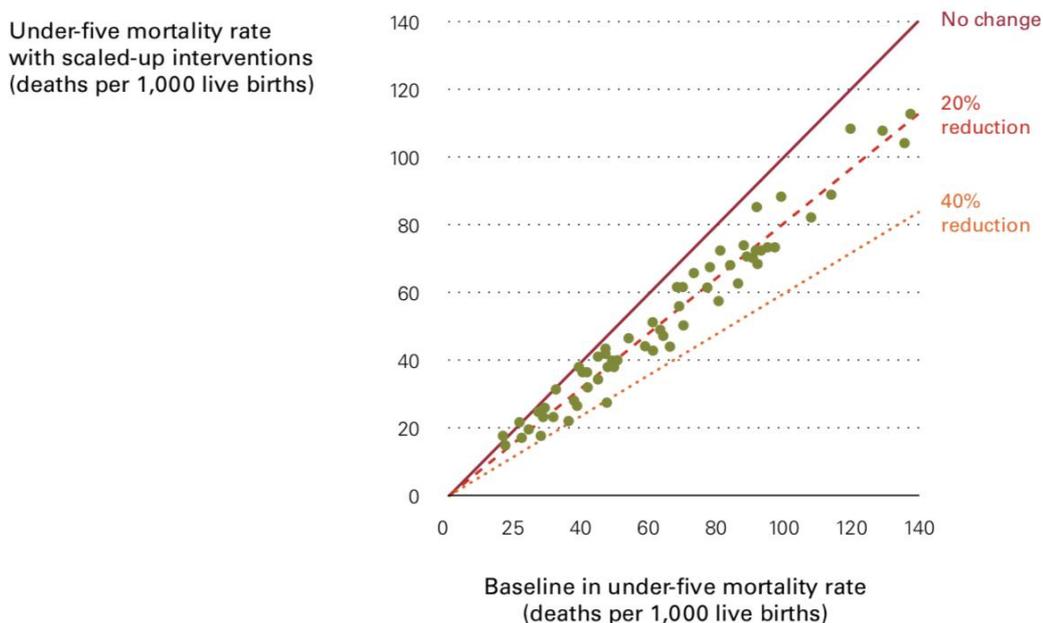
In developing countries, government officials are often reluctant to explore the link between disadvantaged adolescents and their integration into society because of its complexity and because of its implications for responsibility.

Previous appeals¹⁶ have been made to ensure that orphans and vulnerable children are monitored and counted as part of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although the SDGs do address general youth welfare, OVC are often discounted. In short; all children count, but not all children are counted. Thus, they risk being left behind in global development and measures taken to improve welfare for youth do not take necessary considerations to their conditions. Therefore, ensuring that children living outside of households and/or without parental care are represented in disaggregated data is a fundamental priority to taking the first step of solving the issue. It would furthermore, be useful to improve and expand data collection methodologies to ensure all children are represented.

Possible solutions

UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

Recent years of research and experimentation with universal health coverage has shown promising results.



Source: lives Saved Tool (liST) analysis by Johns Hopkins University, 2015.

¹⁶ (Eurochild, 2015)

Above graph shows a correlation between scaling up national coverage of health interventions to the level of the wealthiest 20 percent could prevent one in four under-five deaths and decrease average under-five mortality rates in countries by almost 30 per cent.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION – FROM THE START

There have been indications that a holistic approach can provide promising results. Comprehensive interventions which combine nutrition, protection and stimulation have marked gains in young children’s cognitive development¹⁷. Improved nutrition was shown to have a positive correlation to learning outcomes.

A high priority in regard to ensuring the impact of education is to ensure its quality. As such, teaching quality is an imperative element of the process. Preschool and early grade teaching for first-generation learners and students are especially in need of remedial support — this could dramatically improve learning trajectories. The most effective route to scaling up these efforts is through national teacher training programmes.

There will also simply be a need for more teachers, now that the adoption of the SDGs has committed governments around the world to universal secondary schooling by 2030.

Financing education

Although increasingly many countries are starting to invest in education, spending is often skewed in favour of the more privileged classes. This is partly because low-income children tend to drop out of school early, thereby losing benefits of public spending. Several countries have introduced reforms aimed at achieving more equitable spending patterns. In Chile, a school programme provides a mechanism that makes at-rate payments for each pupil, plus additional payments to schools that have high concentrations of disadvantaged students and students with learning difficulties.

Countries that are still some distance from universal primary completion should focus public spending at the pre-primary, primary and lower secondary levels. As progress towards universal access is achieved, spending can gradually shift to upper secondary education

CHILDREN IN POVERTY

In order to start breaking the cycle of poverty, one has to measure it. Despite monetary poverty lines having been set, it is often not much of a satisfactory indicator of poverty. Dimensions such as lack of education, health, water or sanitation are all extremely important for understanding child poverty.

Cash transfers are still in their early phases of development, but as research suggests, they can serve as safety nets for poorest, most vulnerable children. At the same time, they offer families a ladder out of poverty by boosting incomes, increasing school attendance, improving nutrition, encouraging the use of health services and providing jobs. Results from many regions demonstrate direct impacts such as increased income and consumption, increased access to goods and services, greater social inclusion and reduced household stress.

INNOVATION

Innovation is a word fuelled with multiple dimensions, all depending on which context they are used. In the case of UNICEF, this is no less different, meaning that innovation is put under constant evaluation as a result of its ever-changing nature. UNICEF published a report in 2016 called “The

¹⁷ (Behrman, Cheng, & Todd, 2004)

State of the World's Children 2016: A Fair Chance for Every Child” which summarises its approach to innovation — it is strongly recommended.¹⁸

Relevant UN resolutions

1. A/RES/45/1

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 April 2012 during the Forty-fifth session, on *Population and Development*

Available at:

http://www.un.org/esa/population/cpd/cpd2012/Agenda%20item%208/Decisions%20and%20resolution/Resolution%202012_1_Adolescents%20and%20Youth.pdf

2. A/RES/70/127

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 2015 during Seventieth session, on *policies and programs improving youth*

Available at:

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/438/80/PDF/N1543880.pdf?OpenElement>

3. E/CN.5/2017/L.4

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 10 February 2017 during the Fifty-fifth session, on *policies and programmes improving youth*

Available at:

<http://undocs.org/en/E/CN.5/2017/L.4>

¹⁸ (UNICEF, 2016)

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