

**Child Abuse Programme**

**Guiding Principles**

**Elaborating the Programmatic Implications**

**April 2012**



## **Acknowledgement**

The principles outlined in this paper are neither new nor exclusive to Oak Foundation's Child Abuse Programme. This paper highlights the principles that guide our work, but also moves the discussion from simply a statement of the principles, to an exploration of how they might be reflected in our own work and the work of those with whom we partner. We take this opportunity to acknowledge the extensive support given to us by Gerison Lansdown in developing these ideas, and the helpful reflection and comments on the draft documents by our partners in Bulgaria and Switzerland and programme staff.

An expanded version of this paper is available<sup>1</sup> on our website

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<sup>1</sup> In June 2012

## Introduction

Oak Foundation's Child Abuse Programme puts the child at the centre of our work. This statement has guided our work over the past decade, and we now feel that it is time to clarify and expand on this, with more details on the principles that help frame what we do.

The work of the Child Abuse Programme is guided by six interrelated and mutually reinforcing principles. The foundational principle is that the work we support is child rights-based. This is a stand alone principle and one that is achieved through the integration and operation of five other core principles. Our work is not operational, and so primarily these principles will be reflected through the work we support that is implemented by our partners.

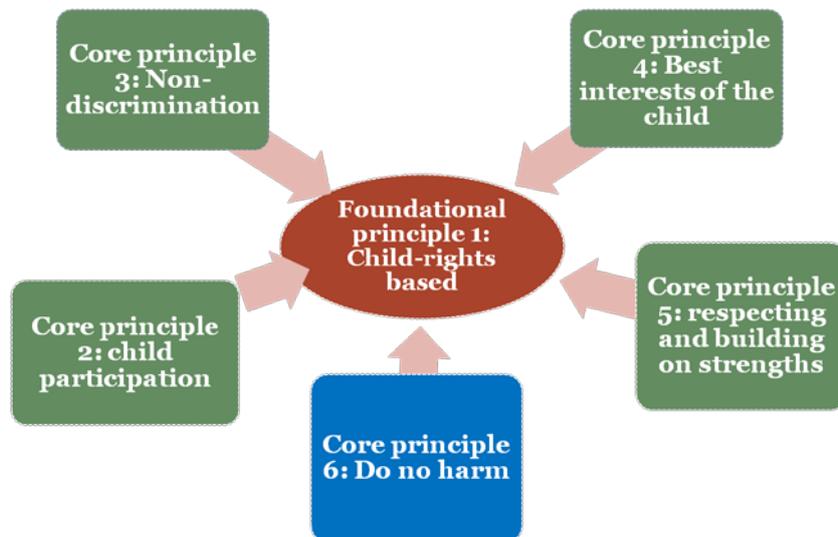


Figure 1. Gerison Landsowne, Oak Foundation's Core Principles

These are not exclusive to Oak Foundation; they frame and guide much of the work being undertaken with, for and by children all over the world. This paper has been developed to help make these principles more explicit and concrete for us and our partners. The aim is a common understanding of what they mean and how they might apply to practice. It is intended to:

- Enable **potential applicants** to understand the principles which underpin our work;
- Enable Oak Foundation's **Child Abuse Programme** to be more transparent and consistent in identifying applicants whose work is consistent with these principles;
- Provide greater consistency and clarity for **applicants and the Child Abuse Programme** in assessing how these principles are reflected in programmes.

The Child Abuse Programme recognises that the programmes it funds vary widely in scope, focus, approach and methodology. How the principles are integrated or reflected will also inevitably differ according to the design and orientation of those programmes. This may range from a minimum of not contradicting the principles, to actively promoting their realisation throughout a programme of work, and beyond. We see this as a process, part of an ongoing dialogue with partners on the various forms and degrees of integration of the principles into practice. This paper is not attempting to impose a blueprint or limit the range of work we support; it is trying to provide clarity and consistency for our own staff, applicants and partners, to help build a common understanding of the underlying values of the Child Abuse Programme.

## 1 Principle One: Child rights-based

Interventions should reflect the fact that children have rights and that states and civil society, including families, have obligations to respect and facilitate their realisation. These rights are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Children's agency and competency to participate actively in realising these rights is recognised but varies with age and stage of development.

### Understanding the principle

Nearly every country in the world has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which places them under an obligation to fully implement all the rights it addresses. A child rights-based approach to programmes or projects involves **taking action to address the fulfilment of, protection of or respect for children's rights**, and empowering children and their families to hold governments to account for commitments they have made on those children's behalf. It goes beyond provision of 'handouts', or short term initiatives to alleviate harm. It has implications for both the **process**, with the way a programme is designed and implemented being consistent with respect for children's rights, and the **outcomes**, which should make reference to the rights it is seeking to promote.

### Why we emphasise child rights-based approaches

Our goal is a world where **all children are protected from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation**, a goal **best addressed through the holistic and coherent framework of children's rights**. The CRC provides a central instrument to help define goals, establish standards, measure progress and frame advocacy. This position is strengthened by the near universal legitimacy of the CRC as a principled framework to underpin all matters affecting the child.

### Implications of a child rights-based approach for programmes

Ensuring that a programme is child rights-based requires a clear focus on what those rights are, what action is needed to help ensure that they are realised and how to measure whether progress is being made in this regard. It involves thinking not only about **what is being done**, but also **how it is being done**. Working towards the realisation of children's rights will entail the following steps in developing and implementing a programme or project.

- **Situation analysis** – what rights are being violated or neglected and why, who is responsible for addressing those rights, what children and parents feel about whether their rights are being respected and what they would like to see changed.
- **Programme design and implementation** – a rights based programme could involve elements of any or all of the three following types of activity: **direct action** to tackle violations of rights, such as advocacy campaigns or pilot projects to protect children's rights; **strengthening structures or systems** to protect rights, such as laws or policies; **strengthening capacity** to protect rights including training for professionals, awareness raising with parents or research to enhance knowledge and understanding. Not all programmes will include, or place an equal emphasis, on all three areas of activity.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** - A child rights-based approach to monitoring and evaluation means assessing whether or not the programme has been successful in working towards the fulfilment of, protection of or respect for children's rights.

## Illustrating a child rights based approach

**A welfare or needs-based approach:** A local NGO is concerned at the vulnerability of the growing number of girls involved in child prostitution on the streets. It establishes a local refuge, providing shelter, food, education and vocational training to try and provide greater protection and alternatives choices for the girls involved.

**A rights-based approach:** The NGO undertakes a consultation with girls who are sexually exploited to identify their primary concerns and collaborates with them in developing a programme to address those concerns. In the immediate term, this involves provision of safe spaces where they can find shelter when needed, keep their possessions and money, as well as a place where they can meet socially and consider future options. Importantly, these services are designed with the girls themselves. However, it also involves dialogue with the local police about how they can change their practices to improve safety, with education ministries about improving access to school, and with the government about reforming the law relating to protection of girls on the streets, including the right to protection from sexual violence and rape.

*The most significant difference between the two approaches is that a child rights-based programme does not simply decide what the girls need and set out to provide it. Rather, it seeks to create a space for the girls to articulate their own concerns and to support them in understanding that they have rights, in challenging the rights violations they experience, and in holding governments to account in protecting those rights.*

In the past, many programmes to address the situation of street children [and many other children who are unable or unwilling to return to their communities] have involved providing shelters and expecting children to live in them for their own protection. Many have failed. Children rejected them, because they did not address an overall understanding of their rights and their aspirations. A rights-based approach suggests it is necessary to engage with the children as to why they are on the streets, what rights are violated, their aspirations and goals, what strategies they would adopt to achieve change. Many are there because they have run away from abusive and violent homes. They often experience the shelters in a similar way. Far from protecting, they replicate the problem. Conversely, children often find some solidarity in the community on the streets. Instead of enforced rescue, children highlight the need for better understanding by the police, access to legal representation, opportunities for education and vocational training, safe places to keep their money and possessions, and access to micro-credit. Through these strategies, they are empowered to find sustainable solutions to the challenges they face.<sup>2</sup>

### Sources of information on child rights-based approaches

- CRC General Comment No.13, Article 19: The Right of the Children to protection from all Forms of Violence, CRC/C/GC/13, Feb 2011
- E Learning in Child Rights Programming, [http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base\\_id=593&language\\_id=1](http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base_id=593&language_id=1)
- Save the Children Sweden (2005) Child Rights Programming: How to Apply Rights-Based Approaches to Programming
- Lansdown G (2005) Rights-based approaches to programming: Implications for children, Save the Children
- Jonsson U (2003) Human Rights Approaches to Development Programming, UNICEF
- Theis J (2004) Promoting Rights-based Approaches - Experiences and Ideas from Asia and the Pacific, Save the Children Sweden

<sup>2</sup> Elena Volpi, Street Children: Promising practices and approaches, World Bank, 2001.

## 2 Principle Two: Child participation

The Child Abuse Programme is committed to the meaningful involvement of children in all decisions that affect their lives. This includes promoting greater respect for children and their inclusion in decision-making within their families and communities. Children's capacities to participate and contribute need to be strengthened, and environments that encourage and support children in applying those capacities, created. The nature of children's participation will vary, reflecting their evolving capacity.

### Understanding the principle

Article 12 of the CRC recognises that children have a right to express their views on all matters of concern to them and to have those views taken seriously. It is a broad ranging right which: applies to **every child** capable of forming his or her own views; requires that **space and time** are created for him or her to be heard; applies to **all matters** that affect children whether they relate to the home, school, local community, local or national government; applies to children as **individuals** and as a **group**; requires that children's views are given **due weight in accordance with their age and maturity**. This does not mean that adults must do whatever children want, but rather, that they must give their views proper consideration.

### Why we emphasise child participation

We believe that the active engagement of children **provides information and insight into their lives** with which to inform legislation, policies, budget allocation and services. Respecting children's right to be heard serves to empower them to advocate for their own rights, enhances protection, promotes development and citizenship, and strengthens accountability.

### Implications of child participation for programmes

The Child Abuse Programme does not prescribe how programmes can or should engage with children. That will be determined by the individual initiative in accordance with a broad range of factors: for example, the nature of the project, the goals sought, or the cultural context. However, programmes are encouraged to consider the potential for children's participation:

- What **role** can children's participation play in the work of the project? Child participation can be either or both **a means** through which a programme works to achieve its objectives, for example, involving children as advocates to promote girls' right to education, and **an end in itself**, for example, support for child clubs or parliaments, or promotion of children's media. Both approaches are legitimate, but clarity about the purpose of participation is important.
- What **form or level** of child participation is appropriate for the work being undertaken? Participation can be: **consultative**, where adults recognise that seeking the views of children will enhance knowledge and understanding; **collaborative**, where there is a greater degree of partnership between adults and children, with the opportunity for active engagement at any stage of a decision, initiative, project or service; **child led or initiated**, where children are afforded the space and opportunity to initiate activities and advocate for themselves. **All three are valid approaches**, but the extent to which children are empowered to engage in an initiative will be influenced by the level at which they are participating. And a programme may start as consultative process, move on to becoming collaborative and ultimately create space for children to initiate their own agenda.
- How can the programme ensure that its participation is **effective and ethical**? To be effective, ethical, systematic and sustainable, a number of basic requirements need to be in

place. Participation should be transparent, voluntary, respectful, relevant, child friendly, inclusive, supported by training, safe and accountable.

### Three illustrations of child participation

#### Consultative participation: Children and health care in South Africa<sup>3</sup>

A project to improve the quality of health care for children undertook a consultation with children about their experiences. The children commented that nurses and doctors did not always seem to care about them or their health. When they were in pain, there was no-one to tell or to ask for help. They often felt lonely and frightened, particularly at night. Doctors and nurses sometimes shouted at them, or treated them roughly when, for example, changing bandages. Lack of privacy and respect for their dignity was another major concern. They also highlighted the lack of information provided by doctors '*It makes us sad when we ask the doctor or nurse what is wrong and he won't tell you*'. Some caregivers failed or refused to take them to a doctor even when they were sick or in pain, and they felt that health professionals had a role to play in educating caregivers about early identification and referral. They also felt that health workers should be sensitized to the power relationship between adults as authority figures and children, children's vulnerability when sick, and to be encouraged to be more pro-active in offering care in ways that acknowledge the child's feelings.

These findings were used to develop improved training for health professionals and to introduce changes within the hospital to address the children's concerns.

#### Collaborative participation: Child reporters as agents of change<sup>4</sup>

A Child Reporters project in Koraput, Orissa, started with the selection of 100 children aged between 8-14 years- ten each from ten schools - in collaboration with the local authority and civil society partners. The children were selected by children, parents and the schools. The children were provided with orientation workshops on issues of development, journalism and reporting. Each team of 10 then regularly noted their thoughts and daily observations in diaries, which were collected together, and the best writings included in a monthly newsletter. The selections were made by an adult local facilitating group and the quality, content and selection reports were constantly discussed with the children. A group of the children were trained in using audio-visual equipment, and made a film recording a local planning process. A number of them went on to speak at national and international conferences. It is important to note that the children involved, came from a remote part of India where they had never before even seen a television. From starting out shy and unable to speak fluently, they became confident and successful in influencing their local communities.

#### Child led participation: Children participating to claim childhood rights<sup>5</sup>

A group of children aged 8-12 years old working in the coffee plantations in Nicaragua, met together to plan a campaign to defend their right to play. They were concerned that "*A lot of kids work on farms and plantations and they come home worn out, so they don't get to play. At harvest time the kids work all day and there's no time to play*". The problems are compounded by parental attitudes: "*Parents tell girls, 'Go and find a job to do, and don't be playing'*".

They consulted with other children who expressed the view that play was important because:

- It's our right - and not just children, also big people"
- It makes us feel good
- It helps us share and express our feelings
- It helps us make friends and not be shy
- It helps kids relate to older people and feel respected
- It helps boys and girls relate to each other with respect
- We learn to share games, because not everyone knows the same games".

Accordingly, they undertook research into the state of play within their communities, how girls were discriminated against, and what forms traditional play had taken within the community. They followed up the research by holding public meetings, and approaching the District Children and Youth Committee to promote positive attitudes towards children's right to play. The Committee responded positively to the children's message and has agreed to develop its own action plan for a more playful municipality.

<sup>3</sup> Moses S and Urgoiti G, Child Rights Education for Professionals (CRED-PRO) , Pilot of the Children's Participatory Workshops, Cape Town, March 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Acharya L, Child Reporters as Agents of Change, in A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation, ed Percy Smith and Thomas, Routledge, London, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Nicaraguan Children's Right to Play Campaign, 2010. Available at: [[www.commonthreads.org.uk/righttoplayupdates.htm](http://www.commonthreads.org.uk/righttoplayupdates.htm)].

**Sources of information on children's participation**

- Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No.12, the Right of the Child to be Heard*, CRC/C/GC/12, July 2009, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm>
- Lansdown G (2011) *Every Child's Right to be heard: A resource guide on the UNCRC General Comment No.12*, Save the Children/UNICEF
- Child and youth participation resource guide*, UNICEF, <http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/cypguide/resourceguide.html>
- Willow C (2010) *Children's right to be heard and effective child protection: A guide for Governments and children rights advocates on involving children and young people in ending all forms of violence*, Save the Children, Bangkok
- Lansdown G and O'Kane C, (2011) *Framework and Toolkit for Measuring Children's Participation*, CRIN, [www.crin.org](http://www.crin.org)

### 3 Principle Three: Non-discrimination

All the work Oak's Child Abuse Programme supports must be implemented in a way that does not discriminate on the basis of race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion or other status of the child or his/her parents or guardians. Any affirmative action targeting a specific group should be designed to promote equality and inclusion.

#### Understanding the principle

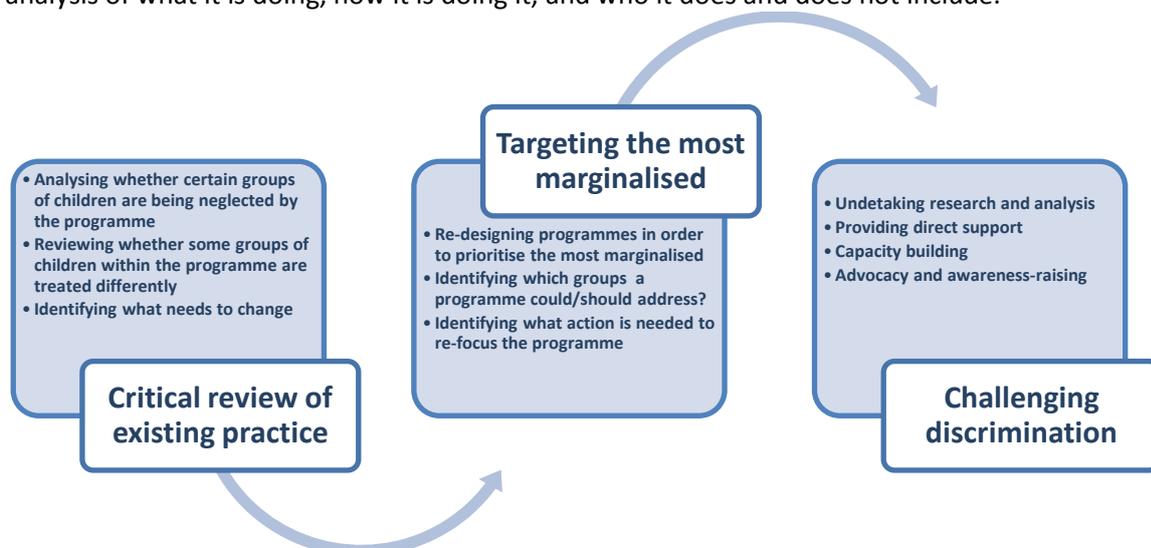
Human rights apply equally to every child. Article 2 of the CRC places a clear obligation on governments to respect and ensure **all** rights to **all** children without discrimination on any grounds. Discrimination can take place both **directly**, for example, when an action, activity, law or policy deliberately seeks to exclude a particular group of children and **indirectly**, for example when an action, law or policy has the consequence of excluding or harming particular groups of children, even if that was not their intention. **This does not mean that all children must be treated the same.** It is acceptable to support legitimate differences in treatment between children, if these are applied in order to help them achieve equality.

#### Why we emphasise non-discrimination

Many children suffer discrimination and are denied respect for their rights because of who they are. Discrimination can have a devastating impact on children's lives, **resulting in the denial of many rights.** We therefore place a **high priority on working pro-actively towards overcoming these inequities** through the programmes we support.

#### Implications of non-discrimination for programmes

Most programmes will be committed to non-discrimination. However, it is important to go beyond an approach which relies on an absence of explicitly rejecting behaviours or attitudes towards any particular group of children. Ensuring that a programme is not discriminatory requires a pro-active analysis of what it is doing, how it is doing it, and who it does and does not include.



□ **Critical review of existing practice:** Different projects will be working with or for different groups of children. Some are generic, working with all children across a particular community. Others will focus on, for example, girls, children with disabilities, younger children, or children in institutions. A commitment to non-discrimination does not in any way undermine the legitimacy of targeted programmes. However, it does mean action to ensure that:

- **particular children or groups of children are never directly or indirectly excluded from a programme activity on the basis of who they are** – for example excluding indigenous children, or children with particular impairments from a programme to strengthen protection for children with disabilities.
  - **all the children with whom the programme is working are treated without direct or indirect discrimination on any grounds** – for example, in a project to address sexual violence against children, it would not be acceptable to assume that rape was less serious when perpetrated against girls than boys, or against children with disabilities.
- **Targeting the most marginalised:** It is the **most marginalized children who suffer the greatest rights violations** and who are in the greatest need of support. Programmes therefore need to consider designing initiatives that will specifically reach out to those children who are excluded from the mainstream.
- **Challenging discrimination:** Programmes might be designed specifically to address discrimination experienced by particular groups of children. This might involve research and analysis; direct support; capacity building; and advocacy and awareness-raising.

### Illustrations of a non-discriminatory approach

#### Oak Foundation is supporting programmes in Bulgaria targeting the most vulnerable children

A programme in Bulgaria is responding to the need for a continued focus on prevention and early interventions against child abuse at national level, especially with hard-to-reach and marginalised groups. This includes Roma children, rural children, children of migrant workers, young care leavers and street children. Family and community strengthening programmes create life opportunities for young people and children and encourage them to become equal participants in finding solutions for themselves.

A programme in Sofia is working to reduce the vulnerability of children to abuse, neglect, homelessness and abandonment in three Roma communities by developing a comprehensive community-based model to encourage the proper functioning of families and access to social and health services and schools. The model will be based on the experience of Bulgarian and UK organisations and will combine the efforts of professionals, families and children. It will assess the individual needs of children and parents, plan concrete steps, provide assistance and evaluate the changes in their lives.

If a legal system requires that a witness in a court is able to visibly identify a defendant in order to be able to give evidence against them, this will discriminate indirectly against blind or partially sighted children, who are unable to meet the requirement. This could result in offenders against blind children being immune from prosecution and free to abuse them with relative impunity. Such a restriction could therefore be argued to breach the principle of 'do no harm'. Explicit and deliberate efforts within programmes are needed to ensure a commitment to both direct and indirect discrimination. During the period of Romania's accession to the European Union, the Government was required to bring an end to the discriminatory practice of placing children with disabilities in residential institutions and to promote inclusive education. Hundreds of children were suddenly transferred into mainstream schools with no support, no training for teachers, no dialogue with parents, and no resources. The outcome was that most of the children ended up at home with no schooling at all - an infinitely worse outcome than if they had been left in the residential schools.

#### Sources of Information on Non-Discrimination

- Committee On Economic, Social And Cultural Rights, *General Comment No. 20, Non-Discrimination In Economic, Social And Cultural Rights (Art. 2, Para. 2, Of The International Covenant On Economic, Social And Cultural Rights)*, E/C.12/GC/20, July 2009
- *General Comment No. 18: Non-discrimination* : . 11/10/1989, *CCPR General Comment No. 18*.
- Sheahan F (2008) *Translating the Right to Non-Discrimination into Reality*, Save the Children Sweden
- Hodgkin R and Newell P, (2007) *Implementation Handbook on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, UNICEF, 2007, New York

## 4 Principle Four: Best interests of the child

The Child Abuse Programme recognises that in all decisions impacting children, their best interests should be a primary consideration. This applies at two levels. First, decisions and actions affecting an individual child should reflect his or her unique circumstances; second, all actions and decisions – whether legislative, administrative or programmatic – that impact all children or a specific group of children, must consider their collective interests.

### Understanding the principle

The concept of the *'best interests of the child'* is a central building block at the heart of the CRC, which, if effectively implemented, would profoundly enhance the status and well being of children in countries throughout the world. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has interpreted Article 3 as **applying both to children as individuals and as a constituency**. In other words, it applies when decisions are being made or actions taken in respect of an individual child, for example, in relation to his/her health care, education, placement or adoption. It also applies to actions affecting groups of children, for example, policies on education or transport.

### Why we emphasise the best interests of the child

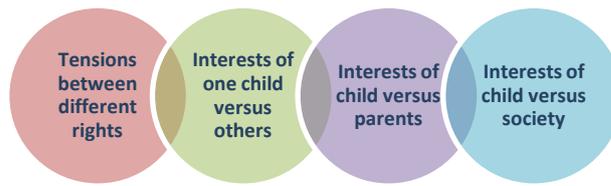
In many societies, children lack power and influence; as a result their interests tend to be disregarded in the public policy sphere in favour of more powerful interest groups. We are committed to challenging that invisibility to ensure for children a **higher priority in political, social, economic and protection policy making to promote their well-being**. Placing a high priority on promoting the best interests of children is a key strategy in achieving that goal.

### Implications of the best interests of the child for programmes

Most programmes would claim to embody the best interests' principle in all their work. But the reality is that the concept is highly problematic and challenging to implement. A child's *'best interests'* will be determined by a wide range of circumstances, such as the age, the level of maturity of the child, the role of the family, social and cultural norms and expectations, as well as the child's individual history and experiences. The understanding of what is in a child's best interests will differ widely within and across societies. Therefore, **it cannot be assumed that a child's best interests are an objective fact**.

While it can never be possible to offer prescriptive definitions which apply universally to every child in every context, it is possible to make explicit a series of considerations when determining best interests, in particular:

- **How to assess the best interests of the child:** any action or decision intended to promote the best interests of the child needs to: focus on the implementation of the rights in the CRC; take account of the child's own views; adopt a holistic approach to addressing all rights; and take account of both immediate and long term interests.
- **How to balance competing interests:** Where different rights appear to conflict, for example, the right to education and to an adequate standard of living, the **best interests of the child must serve as the mediating principle**. Legitimate competing claims between different constituencies can also arise: between parents and children, between individual children and a wider group of children, or between a child and his or her community or the wider society. There are no easy answers to such tensions, but reference to the **realisation of children's rights to protection, participation and provision must provide the principled framework to bring to bear on any decision or action**.



### Illustrating the challenges of integrating the Best Interests Principle

It is not always easy to determine whether actions or programmes are in the best interests of a child or group of children: For example, there is overwhelming evidence that institutional care is harmful for children's optimal development, health and welfare. There is also evidence of widespread physical and sexual abuse of children in institutions. However, the goal of closing institutions is likely to take a very long time in most countries.

Meanwhile, it is rare for there to be an independent inspectorate, safe, accessible and effective reporting or complaints mechanisms for children, or opportunities for children to feed into policy concerning the management, quality and standards of institutional care. Without these mechanisms, children remain vulnerable to continued violence and abuse. Should NGOs, therefore, invest in advocating for such mechanisms to be introduced to ensure greater protection of children currently in institutional care? Or will so doing simply serve to perpetuate an unacceptable and damaging system and divert attention and resources from the longer term need to invest in community-based resources to support alternative forms of care? Should the interests of children now take precedence over the best interests of a larger group of children in the long term? Is it possible to reconcile the interests of children now and in the future?

Adults may have very different perceptions of what is in the best interests of children from those children themselves - it is not always the case that adults know best. For example, a study of children's participation in child protection processes in the UK, found evidence that the extent of protection offered by professionals exceeded what the children felt they needed<sup>6</sup>. A series of vignettes, exploring situations where a decision needed to be made about whether a child should be present at a case conference, were presented to groups of professionals, and then to groups of children who had direct experience of the child protection system. It was consistently found that the children felt they had a greater capacity to deal with the situation than the adults gave them credit for. Furthermore, they argued that exclusion from these processes was harmful because it leads to anxieties about what is being said or done behind their backs. Adults' assumptions that it was in the children's best interests to protect them from access to painful information meant that children were excluded from decision-making processes in which they felt they had the right and capacity to participate.

<sup>6</sup> Marshall, K., *Children's Rights in the Balance – The Participation-Protection Debate*, The Stationery Office, Edinburgh, 1997.

**Sources of information on best interests**

- Hammarberg T and Holmberg B, (2000) *The best interests of the child: the principle and process*, in *Children's rights, Turning principles into Practice*, Save the Children Sweden
- UNHCR *Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child*, May 2008, Geneva
- Freeman MD, *The best interests of the child? Is The Best Interests of the Child in the best interests of the children?*, Ashgate, 1999
- Hodgkin R and Newell P, *Implementation Handbook on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, UNICEF, 2007, New York

## 5 Principle Five: Respecting and building on strengths

The Child Abuse Programme recognises that children, families and communities have strengths and capacities that should inform and orient interventions. An understanding of the social context and positive traditional practices may provide effective, sustainable options and opportunities for protecting children.

### Understanding the principle

An approach based on respecting and building on strengths is rooted in the belief that children, families and communities have competencies and resources that can be utilised to identify and address their own concerns. It involves mapping the assets, opportunities and capacities which can be brought to bear to promote the realisation of children's rights, as well as identifying gaps in accountability to the realisation of these rights.

### Why we emphasise respecting and building on strengths

We both believe in the principle, and we are convinced by the available research evidence, that lives are more likely to be improved when local communities build on their local strengths and assets.

### Implications of respecting and building on strengths for programmes

A strength-based approach, rooted in children's own social context, and building on positive traditional practice, has a number of key implications for the way in which programmes operate. Consistent with a child rights-based approach described earlier, it involves a focus on listening to children, families and communities about their experiences of their lives. Key dimensions of respecting and building on strengths are:

- **Investment in children's assets and protective factors:** Children have considerable strengths, skills and knowledge with which to play an active role in analysing their lives and constructing solutions. For children living and working on the streets for example, **solidarity with others in a similar situation can provide a major source of strength**, protection and belonging, which may not be recognised by adults, who are more likely to perceive only the risks and vulnerability in the young person's life. Not only is it **essential to value and acknowledge children's own perceptions of their lives**, but investment is also needed to build opportunities and space for them to explore and recognize the strengths and assets they bring towards managing their day to day realities. **Greater skills, assets and opportunities provide protection and enhance participation.**
- **Recognition of the context of children's lives:** Promoting a strength-based approach necessarily requires a commitment to understanding that **children do not live in isolation**: they can be part of, contribute to and be affected by immediate and extended family, school, social organisations, local communities, local and national government as well as international developments. All programmes need to reflect and take account of the implications of these various influences in a child's life, and the ways that children themselves exert influence.
- **Mobilization of local assets and protective mechanisms:** Children's development, protection and participation will be best achieved by **mobilising the strengths, commitments and motivations of children's own families and local communities**. Instead of relying exclusively on solutions from outside, a strengths-based approach focuses on supporting local communities to reflect on their own cultural values, spiritual beliefs and practices which can be brought to bear to afford greater protection for children.

## Illustrations of respecting and building on strengths

### Respecting and building strengths among young refugees in Jordan<sup>7</sup>

This approach is well illustrated in a Jordanian project among child refugees from Iraq which sought to discover what were the challenges to well-being facing them, what coping strategies they were using to respond to these challenges, and what positive coping mechanisms or strengths of Iraqi children and their families could be encouraged and built upon in developing and improving programming interventions. The challenges included deaths of parents, missing relatives, as well as losses in virtually every area of their lives: peer and family networks, places of worship, financial security, and gardens and recreational opportunities. Many children also identified parental depression, restrictions on movement, and friendships and educational difficulties. In response, the children identified a range of coping strategies including spending time with families, contributing economically if possible, participating in centre activities, trying to integrate into Jordanian life, being optimistic about the future, patriotism about Iraq, helping others, engaging in problem solving, and building and maintaining relations with friends and family. The project clearly showed that the children were proactive in trying to solve their problems. They identified a range of both positive and negative coping mechanisms that they employed to respond to the challenges they face.

### Mobilising local assets in South Africa<sup>8</sup>

The Circle of Care approach was employed in South Africa to explore, with children and elders, the impact of change wrought by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and approaches to addressing the problems they faced. The findings are revealing, and would not have been possible from any external analysis of the situation.

While both adults and children shared a surprisingly similar perception of the extent to which the pandemic had served to weaken traditional supports for children, they identified different risks in cultural practices and strengths to draw on to counteract the challenges.

The children saw the risks as lying in the intolerance of Elders to discussing safe sex and HIV/AIDS, the overall negative community attitudes towards young people, dangerous initiation practices, lack of opportunity for dialogue across generations and the politicization of culture. However, they felt that the potential strengths lay in cultural practices which could offer young people a sense of pride and identity, spiritual connections with ancestors to reinforce families and communities under stress and a culture which teaches safe sex. On the other hand, the Elders felt that their role had been marginalised by government and modern notions of human rights and democracy: they felt that schools reduced children's responsibilities and downgraded Elders' authority, that mothers, who are more likely to be head of households, no longer seek advice from them, that young people no longer sought guidance before marriage, and that the strategies for dealing with HIV/AIDSs had failed to acknowledge the role of the leaders and undermined and excluded them.

The opportunity for both groups to hear each others' perspectives created a space where joint consideration could be given to the construction of initiatives to address the community challenges. It led to the creation of, for example, feeding centres run by the community leaders, cultural monitoring mechanisms to ensure safe initiation practices, and youth led cultural groups to strengthen cultural identity and social connections between elders and young people.

### Sources on respecting and building on strengths

- Cook P, Bissell S, Boyden J, Myers W, Rethinking Child Protection from a Rights Perspective: Some Observations for Discussion, [http://www.iicrd.org/resources/research\\_reports/ICPRC1](http://www.iicrd.org/resources/research_reports/ICPRC1)
- Cook P and White W, Risk, Recovery and Resilience: Helping Young and Old Move together to Support South African Communities Affected by HIV/AIDS, Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, Vol4, no1, 2006, Haworth Press,
- Nelems M (2008) The Unity Circle Project: Experiences of Iraqi Children and Parents living in Amman, Jordan, Save the Children/UNICEF/IICRD/RI

<sup>7</sup> Nelems M (2008) The Unity Circle Project: Experiences of Iraqi Children and Parents living in Amman, Jordan Save the Children/UNICEF/IICRD/RI.

<sup>8</sup> Cook P and White W, Risk, Recovery and Resilience: Helping Young and Old Move together to Support South African Communities Affected by HIV/AIDS, Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, Vol4, no1, 2006, Haworth Press.

## 6 Principle Six: Do no harm

Our work and the work we support may have unintended and unexpected results. These can be positive or negative. The design, monitoring and evaluation should be explicitly designed to take account of both, and support the revision or reorientation of interventions if indicated.

### Understanding the principle

'Do no harm' is a fundamental principle deriving from Hippocrates who articulated the maxim '*As to diseases, make a habit of two things— to help, or at least do no harm,*' and it forms the basis of the Hippocratic oath which all doctors are required to swear. It requires that doctors and other health care providers must always consider the possibility that an intervention, however well-intentioned, may cause harm. The principle has equal relevance for programming in the child protection field, and needs to inform the thinking underpinning all interventions.

### Why we emphasise 'do no harm'

We are aware that **interventions or decisions** made by donors, policy makers, NGOs and international organisations, **can have unintended consequences, both positive and negative**. We encourage programmes we fund to be **alert to the importance of taking every possible measure to 'do no harm'**. At the same time, we recognise that "failures" can be important sources of learning. Thus we encourage partners to be **open about outcomes** which do **not** result in an immediate benefit to children so that lessons can be learned and applied, and repeated failures avoided.

### Implications of 'do no harm' for programmes

Every project and programme funded by the Child Abuse Programme believes that its actions will lead to greater protection for children: that is their very *raison d'être*. It can be difficult therefore to acknowledge that the desired outcomes have not been achieved, or, worse, that they have actually led to a deterioration in the lives of the children concerned. However, programmes can be alert to the fact that any intervention might have a different outcome to those that were intended, and to minimise the risks of a negative result by taking action to anticipate and avoid it. This might include:

- Anticipate:** From the outset of any programme, when determining the aims and objectives, it is important to **reflect on all possible consequences that might arise, including negative outcomes**. It is also important to promote a culture that recognises the possibility that interventions might cause harm as well as good, and being confident about acknowledging these as a key first step in the process of responding and changing interventions.
- Apply the core principles:** Integrating the other four core principles – non-discrimination, child participation, best interests and strength-based approaches – into a programme, will facilitate an approach that, at a minimum, commits to doing no harm, but hopefully extends beyond that, to positively doing good.
- Monitor outcomes:** Throughout the course of a programme, it is essential not only to monitor whether the work being undertaken is on track to achieve the planned aims and objectives, but to monitor any unintended or negative outcomes emerging. This might be through including negative benchmarks or indicators alongside the positive aspirations of the programme. Listening to children and community experiences of the intervention can play a crucial role in bringing to light any unintended negative consequences.
- Learn from mistakes:** Ultimately, there has to be a preparedness to recognise if the programme is actually resulting in more harm to children than good. Lessons can be shared with other programmes in order to provide broader learning from the process and ensure future work builds on that experience and minimises the risks of future negative outcomes.

## Illustrations of failing to integrate a “Do No Harm” Approach

During the period of Romania’s accession to the European Union, the Government was required to bring an end to the discriminatory practice of placing children with disabilities in residential institutions and to promote inclusive education. Hundreds of children were suddenly transferred into mainstream schools with no support, no training for teachers, no dialogue with parents, and no resources. The outcome was that most of the children ended up at home with no schooling at all.

An initiative promoting sexual and reproductive health rights for young people is likely to be committed to ensuring that both girls and boys have equal access to counselling, advice and services. Such an approach would be seen as consistent with the commitment to children’s rights, to non-discrimination, and to the best interests of the young people concerned in terms of their health, development and protection. However, where such a programme is being developed in a deeply conservative community, a service offered on an equitable basis may be seen as offensive and threatening, and indeed, young girls may be subjected to punishment, potentially extending to extreme violence, as a consequence of participating. The ‘do no harm’ principle would require that these risks are fully taken on board. The best interests of the girls concerned need to be understood in respect of all their rights, including the right to protection from all forms of violence, and the right to life as well as those rights being promoting by the programme. This does not mean that efforts to provide sexual and reproductive health services should be abandoned for girls, but that when designing the programme, the cultural context is taken on board and efforts made to understand and address parental concerns.

## An illustration of monitoring “Do No Harm”

An initiative might be established to support a child protection system which involved mandatory reporting for all professionals, together with the creation of an integrated child protection register. Possible downsides might be that children felt there was no-one to talk to confidentially, that the idea of their stories being shared among other professionals felt like further abuse, that they would no longer talk to professionals about abuse in case the information was reported to other officials, thus reducing the level of support available to them. Investment would need to be made in collecting information on these potential outcomes as well as charting progress in establishing the policy and the child protection register. Data might, for example be collected on numbers of children reporting abuse, focus groups or surveys on children’s experiences of the new systems, and actual outcomes for children who are registered.

### Sources of information on ‘do no harm’

- American Association of Pediatrics Policy Statement on Health Equity and Child Rights, 2010
- Development assistance and humanitarian aid in conflict, [http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/project\\_profile.php?pid=DNH&pname=Do%20No%20Harm](http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/project_profile.php?pid=DNH&pname=Do%20No%20Harm)
- Anderson M B (1999) Do no harm: how aid can support peace--or war, Lynne Rienner Publishers