

Piloting Notes!



#4 – The Poverty Study

Welcome to the fourth edition of **“Piloting Notes!”**, a series of short documents providing guidance for the implementation of certain refinements to CCF’s program approach.



An understanding of poverty, and how poverty affects children in particular, must be the foundation of our program approach.

So this edition of **“Piloting Notes!”** is focused on the results of CCF’s recent research on poverty and its impact on children, including a literature review and in-depth studies undertaken Kenya, India, Sierra Leone, Bolivia and Belarus.

Introduction

Our research has found that poverty is a highly contextualized and dynamic condition, resulting from a complex interplay of causes and effects across societies, across geography, and across generations. Poor people experience poverty as a form of adversity, in which material needs and lack of income interact with and are compounded by social exclusion, inequity, and powerlessness.

For a significant minority of people, poverty is a transient experience, the result of random or idiosyncratic shocks such as family or personal loss, or a major societal crisis.

It is also clear from research findings that children are acutely aware of poverty, feeling its effects not merely as a lack of income, education, or health, but also in terms of shame, social stigmatization, humiliation, and exclusion. For children in particular, poverty is comparative and subjective.

Despite the assumptions of many aid agencies and financial institutions, economic liberalization, globalization, urbanization, and formal education are not automatic pathways to affluence; in fact, these manifestations of “modernity” can produce increased vulnerability, inequity, and poverty.

Childhood itself is a more complex and dynamic concept than usually assumed. Childhood is not a uniform life phase and the circumstances, expectations, achievements and vulnerabilities of children are highly variable.

The crucial role played by the family in children’s lives is clear: research confirmed that families whose members work collaboratively to maintain the household were the most likely to be able to withstand poverty. Nevertheless, the family is not always a benign force in children’s lives, and violence, gender discrimination, and inequities within household resource allocation can lead to the impoverishment of

certain members within what is otherwise a well-off household. Thus, intervention at the level of the family is no guarantee that children will benefit.

Contrary to assumptions made by aid agencies, children are not passive recipients of experience, but are instead active contributors to their own wellbeing and development. They think of themselves as contributors to their families, playing their own part in the care of younger siblings and incapacitated adults and in household maintenance and survival. Indeed, the assumption of age-appropriate roles and responsibilities within the family and community can be a vital source of self-esteem and motivation for children.

Note: the following sections come directly from the CCF Poverty Study!

What is Poverty?

Moving Beyond Economic Explanations

- *The objective of child poverty interventions should be to improve children's well-being and increase their quality of life rather than simply reducing poverty.*
- *"Well-being" and "good quality of life" are concepts that should be derived from the views and feelings of affected populations including the children themselves.*
- *These ideas about well-being and quality of life should not be limited to economic aspects of life. They should be holistic, embodying cultural, social, and political goals.*



- *It is important to note that in some situations, empowerment of the poor and creating an enabling environment through the development of legal entitlements, political stability etc. may be as (or more) important than increasing access to assets, income and capital.*

Respecting Contextual Diversity

- *Poverty and illbeing cannot be solved through a standard and prescriptive approach to child and community development, limited for example to health and education only.*
- *Instead, poverty interventions should be suited to each context, requiring local adaptation that draws on and is consistent with CCF's global approach, policies and learning.*
- *Thus, poverty interventions should be in accord with an understanding of each context where CCF works, building on and addressing the different perspectives of different interest groups in society.*
- *Participatory methodologies and methods should be employed in harnessing and fostering local understandings.*

Questioning the Power of Modernity

- *Child poverty measures should embody proper respect for the many advantages found in the modern world, including education. However, when considering these advantages, we must not forget the real costs involved – stress, pollution, violence, loss of traditional values, etc.*
- *The benefits and strengths of traditional cultural values and practices, traditional assets and traditional livelihood and risk management strategies need to be acknowledged and fostered whenever possible and feasible.*

Recognizing the Dynamic Nature of Poverty

- *Poverty is not a static state but a continuously changing condition that arises from the interaction of forces operating at the household, community and national levels.*
 - *Poverty interventions need to take full account of broad structural and national trends while also focusing on individual, household and community vulnerabilities, capacities and strategies.*
 - *Policy should be responsive and flexible, adapting to changes in the conditions and circumstances of children, their families and communities and the wider society.*
-

How Do Children Experience Poverty?

Developing a Child Focussed Perspective

- *The national and global situation related to child poverty and adversity (including macro level economic policies, laws etc.) needs to be understood and closely monitored, and trends should be incorporated into CCF's program approach.*
- *More child-focused policies need to be included within larger economic schemes and policies, so that children's problems and needs are acknowledged and incorporated.*
- *Children's perspectives on poverty need to be incorporated within all policies and programs that aim to assist them directly.*
- *The grave social consequences of poverty for children need full and proper recognition in all policies and interventions, implying the need for a focus on human and social capital in addition to livelihoods.*

The Effect of Power Differences Within Childhood

- *Childhood is not a uniform life phase and depending on individual and group differences and on environmental influences, the circumstances, expectations, achievements and vulnerabilities of children are highly variable.*
- *Social power is one of most prominent forces of difference within childhood.*
- *Policy and practice needs to acknowledge the social suffering and economic loss associated with power differences between children and to pay full attention to issues of equity and social justice.*
- *In some contexts, social and economic responsibilities are normal features of childhood with many positive outcomes for children and their families. Rather than attempting to remove responsibilities from children, CCF may need to work with families and communities to ensure that the burdens are equally shared, not harmful and compatible with schooling.*
- *School education can in itself be a burden, especially for working children. Education should take full account of the contributions children make to their families and communities and be sufficiently flexible to allow for the continuation of these.*

Identifying the Most Vulnerable

- *There is some merit in focusing some resources on children who appear especially vulnerable. Care must be taken though to ensure that there is broad social acceptance of these targeted approaches and that highlighting the plight of a particular group will not lead to their stigmatization.*
- *The task is to develop child protection approaches that are not imposed from outside a society but build instead on local resources and understandings and*

are sufficiently flexible to adjust to local conditions and circumstances.

- Concepts of vulnerability should be grounded in local reality rather than based on external academic ideas about childhood.

How Do Children Respond to Adversity?

Revising Our Ideas About Childhood

- While some children may be very vulnerable and require special assistance and support, it needs to be understood that children are not the helpless victims of circumstances but instead are active agents in their own right.
- Forms of assistance that focus on children's abilities and on their potential as change agents as opposed to their weaknesses are more likely to reinforce their capacity to protect themselves and to overcome adversity.
- Supporting children in their own protection and in their role as change agents entails the development and use of participatory child-focused methodologies and methods in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and in policy more generally. Such methodology must be sensitive to children's existing responsibilities.



children develop mechanisms that help them integrate these experiences and protect them against becoming overwhelmed. In this, children may be supported by a range of protective processes within the environment, including and their supportive relationships with family and peers.

- Exposure to adversities such as poverty increases the level of risk in children. Those who are able to cope with or overcome adversity are often termed resilient.
- Aside from prevention and eradication of poverty, a key aim of strategies to reduce the suffering caused by poverty is to increase resilience in affected children by supporting their coping, building on their resourcefulness and competencies and fostering protective mechanisms within the wider environment. Again, this implies investment in human and social capital, and partnership with children, families and civil society organizations.
- The competencies associated with enhanced resilience and coping, for example sense of humor and self-esteem, will in most cases also contribute positively to wellbeing and overall quality of life. In this sense, efforts to support children's resilience can also contribute to the broader objective of increasing child well-being.

Working With a Range of Actors

- In order to implement its poverty framework, CCF needs to reduce its present isolation from ongoing aid and development activities at the international, national and local levels and to build links with other stakeholders, including children. These links should aim to facilitate child-focused research and

Supporting Children's Resilience and Coping

- Risk and uncertainty are normal childhood experiences. Most healthy

programming on poverty issues and entail both membership of networks and umbrella organizations and partnership with other implementing bodies.

- *CCF needs to be extremely flexible in its approach to partnerships, making strategic links with the organizations and actors that can benefit children most directly. This may mean working with non-traditional partners such as organized children's groups. It entails considerable work internally within CCF to create the structures and processes that support, integrate, empower and enable actors involved at each action level, with defined mutual responsibilities, relationships and accountabilities.*



- *In the creation of alliances with actors at different action levels, attention needs to be paid to the development of democratic and inclusive processes and structures, adherence to mutually agreed ethical guidelines and codes of conduct regarding work with children and employment of participatory philosophy and methodology throughout.*

News Flash! The full Poverty Study has been published, and is available from Victoria Adams in the Richmond Office!

The Next Piloting Notes!

Coming soon – **Piloting Notes!** on Area Federations, Finance, Partnership, etc.!

