

POST  
2015  
THINK  
PIECE

# PROTECTING THE MOST MARGINALISED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

*SOS Children's Villages Post-2015  
Think Piece on Social Protection*



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES



WHILE THE FIRST MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL (MDG) TARGET OF HALVING THE PROPORTION OF PEOPLE LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY HAS ALREADY BEEN MET WORLDWIDE, 1.2 BILLION PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD STILL LIVE IN DESTITUTION, WITH MILLIONS MORE BARELY SCRAPING BY ON JUST OVER \$1.25 A DAY.<sup>1</sup> WHAT IS MORE, THE IMPRESSIVE OVERALL PROGRESS HAS MASKED THE MUCH SLOWER IMPROVEMENTS IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES AND THE EVER-GROWING DISPARITIES AMONG SPECIFIC POPULATIONS. WHERE POVERTY PERSISTS, IT IS INCREASINGLY ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL EXCLUSION, MARGINALISATION AND DISCRIMINATION, AND VAST ASYMMETRIES IN TERMS OF INCOME AND ACCESS TO FOOD, WATER, HEALTH, EDUCATION, HOUSING, OR EMPLOYMENT.



Children are disproportionately affected by poverty and inequity. In 2010, children accounted for one in three of those living in extreme poverty worldwide, with numbers soaring in low-income countries to one in every two.<sup>2</sup> This has devastating effects on

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

SOS Children's Villages works together with local governments, non-governmental organisations, communities, and families to strengthen the capacities of families to provide quality care to their children. We also work with children and young people without parental

care, to ensure that they too receive the care they are entitled to. The outcome of these experiences clearly shows that when children and young people, families and communities are supported through social protection measures, children and young people are given the opportunity to thrive, helping to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality.

<sup>1</sup> 2013. UN. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013.

<sup>2</sup> 2013. World Bank. The State of the Poor: Where Are the Poor, Where is Extreme Poverty Harder to End, and What is the Current Profile of the World's Poor?

children that last a lifetime. Rarely does a child get a second chance at an education or a healthy start in life; even short periods of food deprivation can severely impact children's physical and intellectual development. Furthermore, the consequences of child poverty threaten not only the individual child, but they are likely to be passed on to future generations, entrenching and even exacerbating inequality.<sup>3</sup>

SOS Children's Villages believes that social protection plays a key role in promoting equity and inclusive economies by relieving people of poverty and deprivation, addressing inequalities of opportunity, and contributing to the efforts to fulfil basic human rights. Social protection floors that guarantee basic income security and universal access to essential affordable social services are fundamental to any coherent, rights-based approach to social policy. They must, therefore, be included in the Post-2015 development agenda as a crucial tool to fight poverty and social exclusion.

It is especially important that the Post-2015 framework ensure that these measures guarantee social protection to the most vulnerable members of society – such as women, the elderly, people with disabilities, and children and young people without parental care – who are often marginalised due to multiple discrimination and vulnerabilities.

## SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITHOUT PARENTAL CARE

Children are highly vulnerable and unduly affected by the problems afflicting society; however, when their needs are met and their families are able to provide care and protection, children can grow into confident and self-reliant adults who can break the cycle of poverty and inequity, avoiding its social and financial burden. Thus, social protection mechanisms that protect children and support families ultimately benefit society as a whole.

This is especially true for children and young people without parental care, who are extremely vulnerable and often lack even very basic social support systems. Without parents or families to adequately protect them, they are at increased risk of marginalisation, stigmatisation, maltreatment and abuse. They often suffer trauma as a result of this violence; yet they are less likely to receive the quality health care they need to overcome physical and emotional scars. Children without parental care are also less likely to go to school and more likely to drop out; and as young people, they have fewer opportunities to get a decent job or make living wages. When they are institutionalised, these children often suffer from poor health, developmental delays and emotional attachment disorders, and yet they are likely to grow up without receiving

### QUALITY ALTERNATIVE CARE FOR CHILDREN IN COLOMBIA

In response to the Colombian government's efforts to transition children and young people out of institutional care and reintegrate them with their families, SOS Children's Villages is partnering with the Colombian Institute of Family Well-Being (ICBF) to improve alternative care services in the city of Cartagena. Together, they started a foster care programme for children who need temporary alternative care. The aim is that children are given the opportunity to grow up in a nurturing family environment, with caregivers that will facilitate their personal and social development so that they may overcome their challenges at home.

The programme got started in 2013 and the aim is to place 242 children in 140 foster families in its initial phase. Foster parents support each individual child according to their particular individual and family situation. They build positive and stable relationships with the children and establish an environment where they feel safe and protected, and where they can communicate about their problems. They also ensure children receive quality medical attention and that they attend school and achieve a good academic performance. At the same time, SOS Children's Villages works with the biological families so that when the children are ready and when it is in their best interest, they can return to their families.

<sup>3</sup> 2012. UNICEF. Child Poverty & Inequity: New Perspectives.

the care they need. Young people who have spent time in alternative care arrangements and who are transitioning to independent living are far more likely to experience social exclusion, poverty, homelessness and violence than their peers.

Social protection systems are that cater to their individual needs are absolutely essential to supporting the wellbeing of these marginalised children and young people. Very often, however, social protection mechanisms are linked to employment or, in the case of children, to their parents or caregivers. Children who are not growing up with their families and young people who are leaving care are very often discriminated against and left completely unprotected. Without quality care and without access to social protection, these vulnerable children and young people will be continually left behind by society, and the cycle of poverty will perpetuate.

**SOS Children's Villages urges that the Post-2015 development agenda include measures to ensure that governments invest in comprehensive social protection systems, which recognise children without parental care and young people transitioning out of care and include provisions for them.**

These must include measures ensuring these children and young people can access high- quality alternative care, which takes their best interests into account and that provides them with the positive and empowering relationships they need for their healthy personal

development. Access to quality education and health care, food security, as well as safe and adequate housing must also be guaranteed. Moreover, in order to address the numerous and multi-dimensional risks that these marginalised children and young people face, the Post-2015 agenda must ensure that social protection mechanisms are cross-sectoral, addressing chronic poverty, homelessness, unemployment and other issues critical to these children and young people.

## SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR FAMILIES

When families are pushed into poverty and social exclusion, the results are often disastrous for children. Parents and caregivers find it increasingly difficult to provide adequate care for their children and many are deprived, for example, of a healthy diet or access to quality health care or education. What is more, these children and young people are in danger of facing violence and maltreatment, and risk being separated from their families. Lacking in adequate, timely or effective support, parents may seek alternative care arrangements for their children because they simply cannot cope. Child and family poverty, therefore, should be seen as an alarm signal indicating a need for appropriate support to families at risk.

Social protection measures that allow families to meet their responsibilities towards their children are critical, as they prevent family breakdown and help to ensure that children receive quality care, growing up nurtured by a protective family structure. Strengthening families can effectively solve many of

### EMPLOYMENT FOR PARENTS IN GEORGIA

One of the most successful features of the SOS Children's Villages family strengthening programme in Tbilisi, Georgia, has been the employment support service. Working together with some 30 partners from the local community, SOS Children's Villages offers a range of services from courses and coaching in areas such as business, interview skills and CV writing, to vocational training, internship placement, and job fairs. As a result, participants in the programme are more competitive on the job market and consequently

feel an increased sense of motivation, self-esteem and self-sufficiency.

Since this programme started in 2009, some 150 families, who were previously unable to meet their children's most basic needs -such as proper nutrition and winter clothes, school supplies and health care- were able to find a job or become self-employed, managing successfully to get back on their feet. This shows the importance and long lasting benefits of providing parents or caregivers who are unemployed not only social protection in the form of welfare benefit, but also access to services that will help them to access job opportunities.

the problems that fuel poverty and inequity – such as abuse, abandonment, and exclusion from services.

However, if social protection mechanisms are to truly support vulnerable families, they must be geared towards their needs. In most cases, social protection is linked with the employment of family members; but if they have employment at all, many marginalised parents or caregivers tend to find work in the informal sector, earning low wages in often hazardous conditions. Employment-based social protection, therefore, necessarily leaves those already marginalised behind and is ineffective at preventing family breakdown and child abandonment.

In its over 60 years of working with families at risk of separation, SOS Children's Villages understands that the support and services they need are as diverse as their life-stories. In some cases, it may just be basic short-term emergency aid, such as food parcels, safe drinking water or temporary shelter. Others require access to long-term social support or child welfare schemes, legal advice, birth registration services, parental skills training, specialised support for coping with disability, financial resources to start a business, or targeted support to access employment, education or health care services within the community.



## RESTORING COMMUNITY PRIDE IN BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

More than 20 years after the Bosnian War, many families in Bosnia & Herzegovina still struggle with health issues, extreme poverty and psychiatric disorders that often result in the neglect of the children.

Four years ago, the SOS Children's Villages family strengthening programme began a partnership with community representatives in the town of Gorazde. One well-respected and extremely dedicated member of the community took on a leadership role and immediately helped to build up a community centre and mobilise volunteers. First, the programme only offered material aid and educational activities for children, the results of which could be felt almost instantly as children began to show better school performance, better social

interactions and higher self-esteem. In a next step, the programme engaged a group of local women. In a first instance, the goal was of therapeutic; but as the women came to terms with their situation and began to gain confidence, their activities progressively evolved until eventually the women registered their group as an NGO. Today, these women organise many of the activities at the community centre and they organise grants for the economic empowerment of local women. By working with the community and making the centre their own space, the family strengthening programme of SOS Children's Villages in Gorazde has helped to restore a sense of pride and worth, making it possible for community members to organize themselves and help each other, proving that with the right support communities can be mobilised to help local families and children.



## AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN MALAWI

In 2002, SOS Children's Villages launched a family strengthening programme in Lilongwe, Malawi, providing for the diverse needs of the families in the area. Through the programme, families with land are supported with farming inputs, such as seeds, fertilizers and livestock, so as to make this a reliable source of food and income. Land has also been provided for community gardens, which are managed by village development committees, and families receive support for income diversification. As a complementary short-term measure, monthly food packs for children are distributed, servicing around 1,600 children

per month at its peak in 2004. School children also receive materials and uniforms.

SOS Children's Villages also partners with local authorities and community-based organisations to run a mobile health clinic, making quality health care accessible to families that are otherwise denied access it due to costs and/or distance. The key to the success of this programme is the diversified support SOS Children's Villages provided to children, families and the community. The combination of immediate aid to children, needs-based support to their families, access to basic services, and empowerment of the community provides a sustainable solution that will help families overcome their challenges in the long term.

SOS Children's Villages calls on the Post-2015 development agenda, therefore, to ensure that national social protection systems are adapted to the realities of families at risk. The design and implementation of these mechanisms should take into account the multi-dimensional vulnerabilities and challenges that parents and caregivers face.

Mothers, elderly caregivers and caregivers with disabilities encounter particular barriers that limit their opportunities, making it crucial that social protection measures also target them directly. Additionally, to protect families at risk of separation, communities should be strengthened to build social support networks. Strong communities are best placed to organise themselves and address their own challenges. They can best identify the problems affecting their community and can help find tailor-made solutions to support families and children.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Society has a responsibility to ensure that all citizens have equal opportunities in life; at SOS Children's Villages, we believe it is time for actors at international, national and local levels to coordinate efforts to support those who need it the most. In order to create a more equitable and just society where the most vulnerable and marginalised can thrive, sustainable and comprehensive social protection systems must be in place. SOS Children's Villages calls on the new development framework to include the following:

A set of measures that will **ensure that every individual, but especially the most marginalised people, have access to adequate social protection floors** guaranteeing basic income security and universal access to essential affordable social services;

**Mechanisms that guarantee social protection for children and young people without parental care**, including access to high-quality alternative care, quality health care and education, housing, protection from violence and harm, and social welfare benefits;

Social protection measures that **address the needs of young people in their transition into adulthood – especially the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of young people, such as those leaving alternative care settings** – including access to quality education and vocational training, housing, employment opportunities and career counselling, and social welfare benefits;

Mechanisms to **identify family vulnerability and measures addressing them** through social protection systems that can be adapted to best suit the needs of individual families and that will support parents and caregivers to provide quality care to their children;

**Measures targeting especially the most vulnerable parents and caregivers, including mothers, the elderly, and people with disabilities;**

Measures to **support communities to build and strengthen existing social support networks for families**, so that they are enabled to care for their children;

A focus on **comprehensive and cross-sectoral social protection systems** that can address the multiple discrimination and multi-dimensional vulnerabilities that the most marginalised children, young people, parents and caregivers face;

Mechanisms to **ensure that those who are targeted by social protection measures are given a chance to participate in and contribute to their design and implementation**, this includes children and young people, women, the elderly, and people with disabilities, amongst others; and

**An overarching component within the framework that proactively identifies groups of children and young people who have been systematically and consistently marginalised**, such as children and young people without parental care.

# A LOVING HOME FOR EVERY CHILD



This paper is part of a series that defines SOS Children's Villages' position on various issues related to the Post-2015 development agenda. Each paper highlights the challenges that marginalised and vulnerable children and young people face, especially those living without parental care or whose families are at risk of separation, and outlines a set of recommendations on how to tackle these challenges within the new framework.

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