

POST  
2015  
THINK  
PIECE

# EQUAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES: PROVIDING A BETTER FUTURE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES



FIVE YEARS AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF THE CURRENT FINANCIAL CRISIS, UNEMPLOYMENT CONTINUES TO BE CHRONICALLY HIGH DESPITE MOMENTARY PHASES OF IMPROVEMENT. IN 2012, SOME 197 MILLION PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD DID NOT HAVE A JOB, AND THE RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT IS EXPECTED TO KEEP RISING OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS.<sup>1</sup> WHILE THE EPICENTRE OF THE CRISIS HAS BEEN IN ADVANCED ECONOMIES, SPILL OVERS HAVE HIT LABOUR MARKETS IN DEVELOPING NATIONS AS WELL, PARTICULARLY IN EAST AND SOUTH ASIA, AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA.<sup>2</sup> THIS HAS WIDENED GAPS IN INCOME DISPARITY AND PUSHED MORE AND MORE PEOPLE INTO POVERTY, FORCING MANY TO JOIN THE MILLIONS OF “WORKING POOR” WHO ARE DRIVEN TO MAKE AN INCOME ANY WAY POSSIBLE, OFTEN IN HAZARDOUS OR PRECARIOUS CONDITIONS OR IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR.

**SOS Children’s Villages believes that in order to eradicate poverty and tackle growing inequities, the Post-2015 development framework must make employment a priority. It must ensure that everyone has equal job opportunities and access to decent work. For this to become a reality, we believe the framework must put a particular focus on measures to enhance job opportunities for the most marginalised and vulnerable, which includes women, people with disabilities, parents and caregivers, and young people, to name a few.**

Young people have been significantly affected by the global economic downturn. Today, there are about 73 million unemployed 15- to 24-year-olds – representing about 38 per cent of the world’s unemployed – and another 220 million who are considered working poor.<sup>3</sup> In advanced economies and the European Union, the Middle East and North Africa in particular, youth unemployment rates have continued to rise since 2008, increasing by as much as 25 per cent between 2008 and 2012.<sup>4</sup> Young people in all regions of the world are more likely than adults to be unemployed or underemployed or to work in informal jobs, putting them at greater risk of earning lower wages, working in unsafe conditions, or holding only temporary employment with few or no prospects for advancement.<sup>5</sup> Particular groups of young people – including young women, young people with disabilities, and young people transitioning from alternative care to independence – are at particular risk of unemployment.

Children have also been particularly affected, as parental unemployment and job displacement have a

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

At SOS Children’s Villages, we know how important employment is to the lives of children and young people; therefore, securing a sustainable and stable source of income is a cornerstone of the work we do with families and young people. SOS Children’s Villages works together with local governments, non-governmental organisations, communities, families and young people to enhance the

employability of caregivers and young people, foster entrepreneurship within the community, and help create conditions that allow everyone to have a decent job and earn living wages. The outcome of our experiences clearly shows when young people and families are empowered with the right skills and when the community can provide the right conditions, family separation and child abandonment can effectively be avoided, and young people can take their first strong steps to an independent life.

<sup>1</sup> ILO (2013). Global Employment Trends 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> ILO (2013). Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2011). World Youth Report 2011, Youth Employment: Youth Perspectives on the Pursuit of Decent Work in Changing Times.

tremendous effect on the capacity of parents to provide quality care to their children and, ultimately, on child well-being. The current job crisis is affecting millions of families around the world who no longer have a sufficient and stable household income. Consequently, children face an increased risk of losing their parental care and falling into poverty, both of which carry effects that can last a lifetime. Child poverty not only threatens the individual child, but it is likely to be passed on to future generations, entrenching and even exacerbating inequality.<sup>6</sup>

## EMPOWERING FAMILIES THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

The unemployment of parents or caregivers and job displacement has a significant effect on child well-being. Research suggests that job loss can have wide-ranging adverse impacts on children, by negatively affecting a family's financial security, as well as parents' physical and mental health.<sup>7</sup> Unemployed parents and caregivers find it increasingly difficult to provide quality care for their children, meaning not only that children's basic needs – such as education, health, nutrition and adequate shelter – are not being met, but also that they are denied stable and loving relationships.

Parental unemployment also puts children at a higher risk of losing their parental care, as parents who find

themselves unable to provide for their families may be forced to migrate and leave their children behind, or they seek alternative care arrangements for their children in the hope that they will have a better situation. Women – who are more limited in their choice of jobs and more likely to take vulnerable employment<sup>8</sup> – are also increasingly migrating in order to become their family's main earner, passing child care responsibilities on to remaining female relatives, friends or institutions. Without mothers or caregivers to adequately care and protect them, children are at increased risk of marginalisation, exclusion from services, stigmatisation, violence, 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 the physical and emotional scars. Children without parental care are also less likely to go to school and more likely to drop out; and if they have been institutionalised, they often suffer from poor health, developmental delays and emotional attachment disorders.

For more than 60 years, SOS Children's Villages has been working with children without parental care and strengthening families. The years of experience have proven that supporting heads of households, especially those at particular risk of experiencing poverty, to find a sustainable source of income is one of the most effective means of keeping families

### BAZ – GIVING YOUNG PEOPLE A CHANCE

For the past 15 years, the SOS Vocational Training Centre Berlin (BAZ) has been providing young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to gain professional qualifications and on-the-job experience. The BAZ - located in the heart of Berlin's ex-OSRAM factory, home to over 60 shops, galleries and offices - offers young people the possibility to train at a top-notch restaurant, beauty salon, paint shop, landscaping business or media unit, where they are supervised by a professional team of trainers, social educators and support staff.

BAZ Berlin has also developed a three-stage concept of vocational preparation, so that undecided young people can work their way towards their ultimate career goal.

Once their social and organisational skills and theoretical knowledge have been established, they enter the career guidance phase where they rotate through work placements lasting several weeks. The third stage then involves targeted preparation for the chosen occupation through required qualification modules.

In addition, BAZ offers a range of support options, from the European Computer Driving Licence to job application training and the SOS "Learning Oasis" project, which allows teenagers who do not attend school regularly to complete their secondary school qualification. The BAZ also has a project devoted to the particular needs of single and young parents, giving them the chance to complete a training course on a part-time basis, while their children go to day care at the "BAZini" nursery.

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF (2012). Child Poverty and Inequality: New Perspectives.

<sup>7</sup> Kalil, A. Unemployment and Job Displacement: The Impact on Families and Children. Ivey Business Journal, July/August 2005

<sup>8</sup> ILO (2012). Global Employment Trend for Women 2012.

together and ensuring child well-being. This implies much more than just supporting parents to job hunt, but it also entails helping them to obtain professional, vocational, entrepreneurial and social skills that match labour market needs, thus enhancing employability or encouraging the set-up a small business.

Furthermore, the conditions surrounding a family must also be conducive to parental employment. Parents and caregivers need access to adequate day care, so that they can safely leave their children during working hours. They also need equal access to micro-credits or interest-free loans if they want to venture into self-employment. Parents and caregivers must also be guaranteed decent pay and fair labour conditions, especially considering they often work in temporary or informal employment. It is particularly important that jobs are created in or around the place of residence, in order to prevent economic migration and family separation.

The Post-2015 development framework must include measures that foster favourable conditions for mothers, fathers and other caregivers to have decent employment opportunities that allow them to earn living wages to support their families. If the new agenda makes the child's best interest a primary consideration, whilst acknowledging the importance of supporting their caregivers, measures will not only



## PARTNERING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

In December 2010, Deutsche Post DHL (DP DHL) launched a partnership with SOS Children's Villages, aimed at fostering the empowerment and employability of young people. Young people are offered career guidance, internship placement and mentoring from DP DHL volunteers with professional experience. Within the frame of this partnership, DP DHL also provides financial support to educational programmes of SOS Children's Villages thus contributing to the overall development of youth in the partner countries.

The partnership began in Madagascar, where 67 DHL employees volunteered their time, patience and understanding to help steer 15 young women along a career path. Today, young people on their way to

independence benefit from local partnerships in 14 countries, including Brazil, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, Kenya, Madagascar, Mexico, Morocco, Panama, Peru, South Africa, Uganda and Vietnam. In each country, DP DHL and SOS Children's Villages develop activities that are tailor made to meet the needs and interests of the local youth as well as the realities of the DP DHL volunteers on the ground. This customised individual support has the greatest impact on the employability of the young people in the programme.

Additionally, through this unique partnership, in 2012 SOS Children's Villages and DP DHL teamed up to advocate at the European Parliament, the United Nations in New York and at several high-level conferences for the need to focus on the employment of young people.



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prevent family breakdown and child abandonment, but also ensure that all children receive quality care in a protective family environment.

## SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE

The current economic crisis has severely affected young people. Across the world, youth unemployment has been relentlessly high, trapping young people in a vicious cycle of unemployment and diminished opportunities. The longer young people remain jobless, the more obstacles they face in their personal and professional development.

Furthermore, high unemployment rates coupled with longer periods of job search has resulted in discouragement, causing many young people to give up all together. The number of young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) has grown significantly since 2008, reaching 15.8 per cent in OECD countries for example.<sup>9</sup> Because they are neither improving their employability through skills training or work experience, NEETs are particularly at risk of both labour market and social exclusion.<sup>10</sup>

## A HOLISTIC APPROACH IN COLOMBIA

SOS Children's Villages runs three family strengthening programmes in Colombia, all of which are located in vulnerable areas characterised by insufficient health and education services and a lack of sanitation infrastructure. School drop-out and unemployment rates are high, and around 70% of the population lives below the medium income line and many subsist on informal jobs or turn to economic migration.

One of the main features of the work of SOS Children's Villages is to create conditions so that mothers can earn a sustainable and stable income for their families. On the one hand, SOS

Children's Villages helped to set up a community-led day care service, provided in community houses by trained and remunerated community mothers, so that children can receive care in a safe place while their parents work. On the other hand, SOS Children's Villages also offers literacy and job seeking workshops to develop the professional skills of mothers. The organisation also provides qualified mothers in the programme with micro-credit to start a small business. Success rates of the programmes have been excellent; in one of the serviced communities, La Candelaria ("Nueva Vida"), after two years the rate of women in paid employment increased from 15% to 82%.

<sup>9</sup> ILO (2013). Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

More generally, unemployment can have serious, long-term implications for young people. It affects their self-esteem and sense of worth, carrying repercussions ranging from depression to strained personal relations, which increases their risk of showing anti-social behaviour such as substance abuse.

While the latest wave of unemployment has affected young people in all regions and from all social and economic classes, there are certain groups of young people that are particularly vulnerable including young women, unqualified young people, young people with disabilities, those caring for children or other relatives, and young people transitioning out of care to independent living. It is with this last group of young people that SOS Children's Villages has particular experience.

When young people without parental care reach a certain age, in some countries as early as age 15, they are no longer entitled to care and protection under the child welfare systems. They must leave their alternative care arrangements, often totally unprepared, to start life as independent young adults. Without adequate social protection, these young care leavers face social exclusion and discrimination in all spheres of life including employment, where they have particularly limited job opportunities due to accumulated, interrelated risk factors.<sup>11</sup>

An SOS Children's Villages study from 2010 regarding the situation of young people leaving care showed that in the countries under review, young people leaving care were simply not competitive in the job market and were therefore often forced to accept illegal work with minimal and irregular pay, and little or no access to health and social support.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the lack of social skills, inadequate education and training is the main factor that puts these young people at a disadvantage. Children in care often receive education and training that responds neither to their interests nor to the labour market demand. Furthermore, very often young people with an alternative care background face a great deal of instability and trauma in their lives driven by frequent moves and changes in caregivers. This causes disrupted school

careers and unstable accommodation, making it difficult to successfully finish school or accumulate the necessary work experience to find a job and develop marketable skills. Finally, young people who have spent time in care usually do not obtain a high quality education and are more likely to have poor educational outcomes,<sup>13</sup> which again puts them at a disadvantage in a labour market that puts a high premium on academic skills and achievement.

SOS Children's Villages is convinced that a holistic approach is needed to address unemployment amongst vulnerable young people, including those leaving care. As with families, young people not only need to be supported to find jobs, but also to acquire the necessary professional, vocational, and/or social skills that they need to compete in the job market. They too can benefit from higher education and training, job counselling and entrepreneurship training.

The private sector can be a valuable partner to help develop market-oriented job skills training, as well as provide work experience and mentorships for vulnerable young people. Public-private partnerships can be very effective tools for creating mutually beneficial cooperative ties and allowing concrete and coordinated action. Globally there are numerous innovative initiatives that have been successful at promoting youth employment for vulnerable young people. These include legislation introducing financial benefits to employers that hire disadvantaged young people; subsidies and job quotas to facilitate and encourage youth employment; and establishing centres offering professional support, counselling, training, and employment-seeking assistance.

It is imperative that the Post-2015 development framework incorporate targeted measures to encourage and foster youth employment, focusing especially on those groups of young people that are the most vulnerable and marginalised. This will help ease the current crisis and help prevent generations of young people becoming trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty as a consequence of joblessness, lack of opportunity, marginalisation and discrimination.

<sup>11</sup> SOS Children's Villages (2012). Preparation for Independent Living, Briefing Paper 5: Employment. Available online at: <http://www.sos-childrevillages.org/getmedia/1d310514-d9c6-48af-a9d0-1c4e7777d0c/BriefingPaper5-WEB.pdf?ext=.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> SOS Children's Villages (2010). Ageing Out of Care: From Care to Adulthood in European and Central Asian Societies.

Available online at: <http://www.sos-childrevillages.org/about-us/publications/pages/ageing-out-of-care-international-analysis.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> Jackson, S. & McParlin, P., The Education of Children in Care,

## RECOMMENDATIONS

If the Post-2015 agenda is to truly eradicate poverty and tackle the growing problem of inequality, it must reach the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of society. The framework must ensure that parents and caregivers have equal access to decent job opportunities, so that they can support their families. It must also take measures to ensure equal opportunities for young people, focusing especially on inclusion of the most vulnerable in the labour market. Both for families and for young people, the action in the agenda must be holistic, ensuring not only access to jobs, but also to quality training and education, micro-credits or financial aid for small businesses, and ensuring that the overall conditions are conducive to employment. Specifically, SOS Children's Villages calls on the Post-2015 development framework to include the following:

- **Action to ensure decent work<sup>14</sup> and equal job opportunities for all men and women**, especially the most marginalised and those most at risk of experiencing poverty;
- **Measures to ensure equal access to job opportunities and foster the employment of parents and caregivers** as a means to protect children and secure their quality care and healthy development; this includes the provision of child care services and family support measures;
- **Measures to ensure equal access to job opportunities and foster the employment of young people**, especially those most vulnerable such as young people transitioning from alternative care to independent living;
- **A focus on quality education and training** not only for the development of professional skills and entrepreneurship of the most marginalised and vulnerable, but also enhance the social skills needed to be competitive in the job market;
- **Measures to encourage the provision of micro-credit and interest-free loans for the most marginalised** members of society, as a means to promote small businesses and income-generating activities;

- **Action to encourage job creation in rural areas and developing economies**, making jobs available to those who need them the most, and preventing economic migration and family separation;
- **Measures to foster partnership with the private sector** to create job opportunities for the most vulnerable, especially unemployed young people;
- **Indicators to measure progress on job creation and employment, with specific indicators on the most marginalised and vulnerable** including women, young people, people with disabilities, those with little or no education and the long-term unemployed.



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<sup>14</sup> As defined by the ILO as: work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

# A LOVING HOME FOR EVERY CHILD



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES

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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