

Work Plan

2012 First Half

Introduction

The Childwatch International Research Network is a global, non-profit, nongovernmental network of institutions that collaborate in child research for the purpose of promoting child rights globally. It seeks to build bridges between organizations, researchers and practitioners. Childwatch gives special emphasis to research about children experiencing extreme adversity.

Childwatch works to build capacity in the field of child research by nurturing the emerging capacity for child rights research where little exists. Childwatch supports efforts to communicate the realities of children's lives to policy makers, to professionals working on children's issues, other researchers, and to the public. It argues that sound strategic research can help to improve the child rights situation of children in their homes, communities and countries in a globalizing world.

Childwatch was established in 1993, as a positive response by the Norwegian government in the name of the Minister of Children and Family to a request from a group of child researchers from various countries to establish a secretariat in Norway for an international network of research institutions. This initiative from the research community was an effort to promote cooperation among researchers, civil society actors and governments and a commitment to the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention is the basis for the Network's common agenda.

Since its initiation 17 years ago, Childwatch International has developed into the world's leading organized institutional network for child research. The membership now comprises 45 institutions in 32 countries, representing all regions of the world.

Core Activities first half of 2012

To strengthen the link between the production of knowledge on the child rights situation and the development of human rights policies and practices, Childwatch has created strong links with the new Office of Research in UNICEF and their research centre Innocenti in Florence.

UNICEF and Childwatch have identified the following three priority areas for close collaboration in 2012:

1. The development of a rights based Global Research Agenda that responds to the present Child Rights situation

2. Better strategies for strengthening the Child Rights Research Capacity in Low and Middle Income Countries.
3. Building Capacity for Ethical Research with Children and Young People

1. The Development of a Rights Based Global Research Agenda that responds to the present Child Rights Situation

In order to secure the relevance of policy oriented child research there is a need for an ongoing dialogue between academics, young people, agencies and organizations responsible for responses to the changing child rights situation.

Governments, the UN system and NGOs are regularly faced with emergencies and political developments where the knowledge base about the issue at hand and on rights based approaches is weak or lacking.

This was well reflected in the Call for Action from the Children's Rights at a Cross-Roads conference:

Give attention to areas that are currently underdeveloped or neglected by research but which are critical to the fulfillment of children's rights.

Identified areas included, inter alia: child poverty and inequality; early childhood development; child mental health; children with disabilities; child labour; social welfare services; children's civil rights (right to expression, decision making, association, information); children's care settings (parents, family, household, school); children dwelling outside traditional environments (street children, children on the move due to trafficking, asylum seeking, migration); war and conflict; violence and HIV/aids; new technologies (internet); global economic and development policies and emerging global issues (economic downturn, climate change)

We could add other issues to this list, perhaps most importantly, the child rights situation related to:

- The Global Economic Situation
- Disasters, floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, fires, volcanic explosions etc.
- Children in informal settlements and urban slums

The lack of good and relevant child rights based research in these areas have been experienced, not only by Governments and NGOs but also by development agencies and the UN system.

There is in other words a need to organize a dialogue between all stakeholders on how to further develop the Child Research Agenda to become as relevant as possible for the realization of the rights of children.

This dialogue should be based on a study or mapping exercise.

Proposed activities: (To be implemented in close cooperation between UNICEF and Childwatch)

- Commissioning of a study of the relationship between the Child Rights situation and the Child Research Agenda

- A roundtable discussion between involved and affected groups with the study as one of the inputs.
- A set of recommendations to be formulated

Planned outcome:

- A study of the how the present child research agenda relates to the most important Child Rights challenges published.
- Representatives from agencies implementing Child Rights programmes have given clear and specific recommendations to where the most pressing knowledge gaps are.
- Recommendations to the future Child Rights Research Agenda formulated and published.
- A revision of the Childwatch Strategic focus completed

2. Better Strategies for Strengthening the Child Rights Research Capacity in Low and Middle Income Countries.

All countries are dependent on an infrastructure of national and local academic capacity that engages in dialogue with and critical review of governments, civil society and private sector. An important part of the cooperation between development agencies and Low and Middle Income Countries should be to build a sustainable infrastructure of independent academic institutions and activities. The obvious reasons for this are the importance of:

- a. Well educated and strong professions
- b. Access to state of the art knowledge and translation of this knowledge to the national situation
- c. Knowledge production for well informed local policies and practices and for independent and critical review of the same.

In addition to this we have historical evidence for claiming that the existence of independent academic institutions is a prerequisite for raising and maintaining the necessary focus on the Human Rights situation.

While child rights initiatives in all countries have been based on academic studies and analysis, these studies have, in Low and Middle Income Countries very often been conducted by academics external to what might be there of national academic capacity. Child research done by academics brought in on short term missions by UN agencies, Development Agencies and NGOs may produce useful reports, but it will not build a locally sustainable infrastructure of competence and research that governments and civil society needs in order to have permanent access to a locally relevant child research capacity, and through this monitor the Child Rights situation. Policies to address obvious violations of the rights of children are consequently often based on a weak knowledge base.

It is only through well functioning national academic institutions that partnerships with community-based NGOs and local People's Organizations (PO) can be established. While the activity of NGOs and POs are crucial for Human Rights monitoring, their advocacy is considerably enhanced when they can draw on documentation and analysis done by academic institutions. Social transformation to improve children's lives happens when the local people are genuine stakeholders in generating and utilizing research based knowledge for their own development.

Linkages between NGOs and academic organizations should also be fostered, since participatory research has to be based on collaborative processes involving academics and community groups.

So, in addition to the more overarching justifications for why countries need independent academic institutions, a national child research capacity is important in order to:

- Have strong professions built on solid knowledge on the national child rights situation.
- Research based Child Rights Monitoring and Reporting systems (For local communities, NGOs, governments, the UN CRC committee etc.)
- Participation the global effort to develop research instruments that in a meaningful way includes children's participation in issues affecting them

The importance of this is reflected in The Call for Action from the Children's Rights at a Cross-Roads conference:

Strengthen the capacity of research institutions, with a specific focus on developing countries, secure adequate funding, promote their independence and critical role.

Both UNICEF and Childwatch have provided child research training for academics in Low and Middle Income Countries. We have seen other initiatives to build independent child research institutions and capacity in the same countries; some initiated by local Universities other by international organizations. Some of these initiatives have recently been evaluated.

It is the opinion of UNICEF and Childwatch that it is time to analyze the different models used for increasing the child research capacity in Low and Middle Income Countries, to produce an analysis of the efforts so far to create a learning environment for more effective strategies for improved child research capacity.

Proposed activities: (To be implemented in close cooperation between UNICEF and Childwatch)

- Compile and present the experiences from efforts to build child research capacity in Low and Middle Income Countries
- Organise a roundtable discussion on how to develop more efficient strategies for building child research capacity.

Planned outcome:

- Experiences and lessons learned from efforts to build child research capacity in Low and Middle income countries published
- Recommendations to what responsible agencies should do in order to increase the research capacity presented. (Governments, Development Agencies, UN Agencies, The Academic Community, NGOs)
- The Childwatch strategy and mode of operation revised based on the recommendations.

3. Building Capacity for Ethical Research with Children and Young People

A joint Project between the Childwatch International Research Network and the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

Background

In April 2010 the Childwatch Board approved the establishment of a new Thematic Group to undertake an international scoping project entitled *Building Capacity for Ethical Research with Children and Young People*. This project aimed to a) identify the ethical issues and challenges in undertaking research with and for children and young people in different majority and minority world contexts; and b) identify and collate existing ethics guidelines and resources. The Thematic Group's focus is closely aligned with Childwatch's aims and objectives of promoting children's rights internationally and enhancing research capacity. It is also a response to discussions and recommendations from the *Children's Rights at a Cross-roads: A Global Conference on Research and Children's Rights* and the Childwatch Key Institutions Assembly held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2009.

The Thematic Group is co-chaired by Professor Anne Graham (Director of the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW, Australia) and Dr Nicola Taylor (Acting Director of the Centre for Research on Children and Families at the University of Otago, New Zealand).

An **International Survey** was initially undertaken as a scoping exercise to ascertain the views of researchers on ethics-related issues. The research report (Powell, Graham, Taylor, Newell & Fitzgerald, 2011) was published in April 2011. Key areas of interest raised by the respondents included: cross-cultural research, training of researchers, and availability of ethics- and methodology-related resources. The project also highlighted areas of commonality and diversity between researchers based in Majority and Minority countries.

The Thematic Group subsequently wrote an **International Literature Review** (Powell, 2011) identifying the key ethical issues facing researchers working with children and young people and the evidence base underpinning these.

The project has been developed to become a collaborative Childwatch/UNICEF Innocenti project.

Project Aim and Objectives

The **aim** of this project is to improve understandings, knowledge and practice regarding what constitutes 'ethical' research with/for/on children and young people within and between different social, cultural and political contexts internationally. While other literature and guidelines have been developed and remain as key resources, the intention is to provide an integrated overall approach to ethical considerations with an explicit foundation in human rights for researchers of child and youth issues.

The **objectives** of this project are to:

- a) *Develop an international ethics **Charter** for research involving children and young people* (also linking to the values embedded in the spirit of the UNCRC);
- b) *Develop ethics **Guidelines** that could be applied within and across different international (research, policy, practice) contexts.* These need to 'hold' both universal principles (upon which the international ethics charter would be based) and situated contexts. The process of developing these guidelines needs to ensure 'buy in' from a range of researchers (and others) in different international contexts, as well as reflect a breadth of disciplinary interests;
- c) *Identify cost effective, flexible approaches to **training / capacity building** for organisations and disciplines seeking to adopt more ethical child and youth research practice in a range of contexts.* This will include the development of a web portal that provides a repository where relevant information, publications and resources can be accessed, as well as offering a potential forum for discussion, advice and support around ethical issues and dilemmas (universal/situated) encountered by researchers, policy makers, practitioners, ethics governance bodies etc.

Project Governance

The project will be a **joint initiative of UNICEF Innocenti and Childwatch International**. An **agreement** has been signed between UNICEF Innocenti and the Centre for Children & Young People (CCYP) at Southern Cross University, Australia, which will work in conjunction with the Centre for Research on Children & Families (CRCF), New Zealand, in delivering the project (both Centres being Key Institutions of Childwatch International). Governance responsibilities will be vested in Innocenti Childwatch for project oversight and accountability purposes.

Objectives to be met by July 2012:

- A final Charter, Guidelines developed and a web portal established;
- Recommendations sent to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child that a General Comment (or other publication) on effective child research practice be developed.
- A 'launch' event planned

Follow up after July 2012:

- Training programmes on child research ethics developed
- The web portal actively updated and made user friendly

4. Network Activities and Support:

International Networking

A key objective for Childwatch is to “raise the profile of child research by demonstrating how research can contribute to better understanding of and improvement in policies that impact directly on children’s lives.”

Participation in global, regional and national events enables the network to disseminate important research based knowledge and to strengthen our collaboration with the broader child rights community. Institutions that will be prioritised are: The UN CRC Committee, Child Rights NGOs, Foundations, etc

The participation of staff from Key Institutions and the Secretariat in these events also contributes to further develop the relevance of our networking strategy.

Web-site: www.childwatch.uio.no

The new web site of Childwatch launched in October 2008 has been very successful in gathering and disseminating information about child research - activities and events. An increasing number of UN agencies, NGOs and research centres are using the website to access information and to publish information about their work, publications and conferences. It is fair to say that the web site is now considered to be a key resource for information about international child research with a rights perspective. It has given our network and the network Key Institutions increased visibility and gained interest for the network among the network partners.

Secretariat (Staff, Offices and Support Functions)

The Secretariat, hosted by the University of Oslo, initiates and promotes new networking activities and assists in the organizing of study groups, regional networking, international meetings and conferences in accordance with the Board’s direction. The University of Oslo has taken on the staff of the Secretariat as university staff, given that external funding is available. The Secretariat is based at the Blindern Campus, and has one full-time employee.

It is the responsibility of the Secretariat to:

- Develop and implement an annual work plan in accordance with the strategic priorities and within available resources.
- Facilitate dialogue among member institutions
- Promote and encourage collaboration between members and initiate collaborative projects
- Disseminate information about current developments and opportunities in child research to members of the network
- Maintain the network and external contacts updated on major news posted on the web-site.
- Develop the Childwatch International Website to provide easier access to relevant information and to collaborate with Child Rights Information Network to provide good access to child research through Internet.
- Promote awareness regarding child research and its application to promotion of child rights to decision makers and society at large
- Develop relations with relevant public authorities and other agencies
- Actively raise funds for Childwatch initiated activities
- Provide funding agencies with the required reports and other information.

Risk	Measure to be taken
<p>The lack of a long term funding agreement will negatively affect planning and implementation of network activities.</p>	<p>Activities to be set on hold or cancelled and alternative plans to be developed. The Board to discuss a network model appropriate for the available funding.</p>
<p>Because of the short time frame there is a risk that the best people may not be available to take on the required analytical work. (The development of a rights based Global Research Agenda and development of effective strategies for strengthening the Child Rights Research Capacity in Low and Middle Income Countries)</p>	<p>Use the international network of UNICEF, Childwatch and other international agencies to identify the best possible candidates. If necessary split the analytical work in specific sub-projects. Underline the importance and potential effect of the two projects.</p>

