

Brief-Child Friendly Cities Research Initiative

The Child Friendly Cities Research initiative is aimed to generate knowledge for enhancing the awareness, understanding and realization of children's rights at sub-national levels – in urban areas and in other decentralized contexts. Concretely it is intended to provide resources for assessment, monitoring and critical self reflection. It represents a partnership between the Innocenti Research Center (IRC) of UNICEF and Childwatch International, a network of research institutions involved with children's rights with the collaboration of the Adolescent Development and Participation Section of UNICEF and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation. The research initiative is being coordinated jointly by IRC and the Children's Environments Research Group (CERGO) of the City University of New York. DevInfo has become involved in the research initiative in the later phase of development and testing of the interactive database and a web user interface.

Background

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) is a worldwide movement that aims at fulfilling children's rights at the communities and local authorities' level. It recognizes that while much progress has been made in many countries to develop national level policies, strategies and programs of awareness to achieve children's rights there is a need to strengthen efforts to bring the children's rights agenda down to the local level. CFC involves the simultaneous engagement of citizens in assessing children's rights at the community level and the improvement of municipal level governance structures. It promotes: (1) a broad awareness and realization of children's rights including their critical assessment at the community and local level and (2) the development of systems of governance where children, young people and the larger community participate and have a direct voice in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, laws/regulations and budgets affecting children.

Recent years have seen increased interest in the CFC approach, emerging from:

- The need to promote rights-based integrated approaches that stimulate participatory civic engagement in the enhancement and the realization of children's rights at home and in the schools, communities and cities;
- The continuing high pace of urbanization, as highlighted by recent reports on youth from the World Bank UNFPA, DESA and others. Findings indicate that within the next 30 years the urban population of developing countries will double from 2 to 4 billion and more than 50% of this number will be under the age of 24. Although poverty is commonly perceived as predominantly a rural phenomenon, a large and growing proportion of the world's poorest and most deprived children live in urban areas;
- The worldwide trend of government decentralization whereby local governments are assuming more responsibility for providing social services, a function once performed more predominately by national governments. This trend means that cities need to equip themselves to serve a growing number of children, families and communities;

- The recognized value of the systemic, integrated approach that characterizes the child friendly communities/cities for making progress toward the Millennium Development Goals at local level.

The CFCI Secretariat was established at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in 2000 to serve as a common point of reference and interaction and a source of consistent technical support to CFC activities in different countries. For example, UNICEF has facilitated the development of a common vision and a Framework for Action for child friendly cities that is firmly grounded on the comprehensive promotion of child rights and which now represents the global consensus on CFC. Furthermore, the CFCI database, which is available to the public through the site www.childfriendlycities.org, has been a main instrument for knowledge development and dissemination. Despite the various efforts of cities in becoming more child friendly using the Framework as a reference, there has been an increased need by the communities and cities for tools/instruments that allow them to comprehensively and systematically assess themselves and to subsequently monitor their improvement.

The Need for Assessment

Early in 2008, the Geneva Office of UNICEF hosted a consultation on Child Friendly Cities that was co-organized with the Adolescent Development and Participation Section and the Innocenti Research Centre (IRC). The Consultation brought together participants from country offices and national committees of UNICEF in the industrialized countries, many of whom have been involved in the promotion of child friendly cities. During the meeting, participants agreed the need for a research effort to be undertaken to examine and improve the instruments that enable communities and cities to assess their child friendliness and to monitor their progress in improving the situation of children. The existence of such instruments and tools would allow the communities and cities to:

- Better assess and identify the needs and priorities of children in their communities/cities based on a participatory rights based approach;
- Engage children, young people, community members and decision makers in a participatory process that enhances their awareness of children's rights and leads to a collective response to these needs;
- Generate and utilize data to influence policies, laws and regulations as well as decisions related to children;
- Improve planning and provision of services so as to better respond to the actual needs of children especially the most disadvantaged groups;
- Monitor progress and improvements in the situation of children.

Objectives

The overall goal of this research initiative is to raise the quality of child friendly community and city activities by providing resources that will enable communities and municipal governments to better assess the degree to which they are fulfilling children's rights and to look self-critically at the governance structures and processes that are designed to support families and their children. While local governments have access to some quantitative indicators of the fulfillment of certain rights, such as sanitation, water access and vaccination rates, only a limited range of indicators are available for the majority of children's rights in any city.

The new materials will be a package of participatory instruments, and associated guides for communities and municipal authorities to expand the breadth and quality of information available on children, particularly by bringing forward the perspectives of children, caregivers and service providers. Furthermore, the tools enable community members to identify priorities of action and to engage in a process of local planning for the improvement of child well-being.

The tools are designed to be suitable for use by groups and quantifiable in simple ways that are comprehensible to those groups. They are easily adaptable to various contexts of the communities and cities. Following the administration of these instruments they will be converted into a virtual (web-based) interactive resource for free accessibility and use globally.

The research initiative has produced two different kinds of tools:

- ***For assessing the nature and degree of cities' and communities' child-friendliness.***
These instruments enable communities to comprehensively assess the degree to which the full range of children's rights are satisfied from the perspective of parents, professionals, and children themselves.
- ***For assessing the capacity of local government structures and processes to promote the fulfillment of children's rights.***
These instruments enable local administrations to evaluate the structures and processes that exist in their locality to fulfill children's rights for protection, development and participation.

The Process

The research initiative has involved partnerships between cities and researchers in a selected number of locations in both programme and industrialized countries. Nine countries have joined the initiative: Brazil, Dominican Republic, France, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Philippines, Spain and Sudan. The process including the testing phase is also aimed to promote awareness among various stakeholders, sensitize policy makers about children's rights and generate data on the situation of children in the participating cities. It is intended to yield a set of robust tools and instruments that can be used globally to promote the realization of children's rights. The research process has also contributed to the capacity building of various research institutions in participatory methods of research.

Countries/cities participating in the project have already established a Child Friendly City Initiative, and reflect different contexts in terms of geographic location, size and setting. The research process has involved the following steps:

- Preparation of an inventory of existing assessment instruments that are being used and conducting a critical review of existing approaches, tools and instruments for assessing and monitoring the fulfillment of children's rights at the local level by a team of researchers;
- Identification of areas of assessment that need to be included in the developed instruments and tools;
- Development of new approaches to assessment and monitoring through partnerships between cities and research team;

- Administration of the developed instruments and tools by the cities participating in the research which have generated data on the situation of children in these cities. During the testing period, tools and instruments were made available for broad field testing through the CFCI website that will be revised and updated during the research duration;
- Presentation and dissemination of findings including the revised versions of the research approaches according to the feedback from field testing.

Updated September 28, 2010