Developing Community-based Child Protection in China
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Background

Since 1980s, the economic reform and change in China has had consequent and significant social changes; China's economic transition from a command to a market economy has generated considerable private wealth and has created many opportunities and rewards for individuals and communities.

However, it has also fostered increasingly pronounced economic inequalities are exposing people to new risks and insecurities, including: increasing family poverty in urban and rural areas; rising levels of juvenile crime, domestic violence and divorce; the emergence of 'Street Children'; growth in rural/urban migration; and the abandonment of children, particularly in poor rural areas.

- Economic reform and change in China has had consequent and significant social changes, with particular impact in changing the nature of childhood;
- **School Performance** - Pressure on children to perform well at school have focused attention on their behavior, new opportunities have arisen for exploiting children, and increased level of violence towards children, abuse and violence at home makes children vulnerable to exploitation through being trafficked or running away from home;
- In the communities, families and **children affected by HIV/AIDS** are suffering from discrimination, stigma or school peer bullying;
- The development institutions **(Repatriate Centre)** to accommodate street children briefly and send them home;
- Growing geographical and **rural-urban inequalities**, and urban unemployment, have led to migration, trafficking, domestic tensions and increase in crime;
- Removal of children in conflict with law to institutional **(Detention Centre)** care;
People have a very little knowledge of definition of child abuse i.e. child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility trust or power;

Lack of Regulation/Supervision for Child Welfare Provision - Existing systems for child welfare were established on different assumptions and norms, including the use of large institutions to care for some orphans and abandoned children (most disabled babies and girls); majorities of abandoned disabled children fostered in poor rural villages with very low food allowance; over about 500,000 orphans are informally cared in their relatives or friends’ families with very limited or nothing subsidy from government; In child welfare institution, a lot of staff who are directly working for children are often uneducated and temporally employed with a little payment, who have no professional training on child care and child protection; there is very low awareness of child abuse in child welfare home.

There is a gulf between legal/policy intentions and their effective implementation and practice. There is neither integrated mechanism nor national system for the effective protection of children.

Save the Children Responses in China

The development of a comprehensive child protection system in a country as large and diverse as China is a huge task which is expected to include development of the roles and responsibilities of communities for child protection, which is importance of piloting the community-based child protection project to influence government policy and practice on care and protection for most vulnerable children.

Child participation is a core work-method alongside research and monitoring children protection from abuse and neglect, children are likely to be paid less attention. There is a necessity for children’s voice to be heard and ideas to be adopted; children are empowered to make decision on the things related to children themselves. Also through the participation, children learn the knowledge of preventing any forms of child abuse and harmful risk, increasing the awareness of child abuse. Sexual, physical violence and emotional abuses

Five dimensions of changes is assessing that children are benefiting from the activities from the centers and communities, the community-based child protection mechanism – child activity centers are playing a great roles and responsibilities for children from abuse and neglect.
Approaches of Developing Child Protection

A comprehensive protection approaches of child protection involving children’s participation at both practice and policy levels; a number of areas of our work contributing to the development of community-based children protection in China:

- **Baseline Survey** - Initially build on the work on specific identified local issues, including trafficking, migration, disabled children, children in conflict with the law, street children, and HIV/AIDS affected children.
- **Research** – cooperated with government partners and academic researchers to influence government policies, support government law reforms by results in the research of street children, orphans, migrant children and children affected by HIV/AIDS.
- **Children Activity Centre** - Development of integrated children's activity centers in rural and urban locations that are inclusive, providing services to all children in local communities with children's participation.
- **Protection Network** - Development of local multi-sectoral and multi-agency protection networks in rural and urban locations. Community based children protection networks through the use children activity centers and children's organisations as hubs for service provision. Community based prevention of separation of children from their families, homes and communities, and their subsequent exploitation for harmful work (including child labour on the street), through being trafficked or through unsupported and dangerous migration, both in-country and across borders.
- **Alternative Practice** - Development of alternative practice on diversion from custody. Preventing children coming into conflict with the law, or onto the street, through children activity centers, alternatives to custody and restorative justice; community based rehabilitation and reintegration.
- **Child in Quality Care** – prevention of abandonment (e.g. through positive work on disabilities), development of alternative care and quality of care services,
- **Training/Advocacy** - Provision of training for partners i.e. on working with children, care and welfare, child development, children's participation, provision of psychosocial support, and training of trainers. And provision of training for children i.e. life skills, vocational training, peer education. Adopt a distinctive work approach of strategically linking up policy and practice work, engaged on the ground in communities, with children and adults, whilst working with government at different levels, from grassroots through to national, to achieve a mixture of programme practice and advocacy. All work conducted in partnership with government and with emerging civil society organisations.
- **Children’s Participation** - An emphasis on children's participation, with children more strongly engaged as partners, with promotion of children's
and young people's organisations and children's greater involvement in service delivery.

- **Community Development** - Entry points for the work use local constructions of problems for children i.e. trafficking, street children, orphans, children affected by HIV/AIDS, abandoned children. The work transit from these sectoral beginnings (projects based on these categories of children) to inclusive rural and urban protection models, albeit with particular focal groups. We focus on the development of protection work in particular rural and urban locations.

**The Goal of Community-based Child Protection**

To develop sustainable, integrated mechanisms in communities and institutions for protect children from abuse, exploitation and violence, through the work to influence national policy and action for the wider protection of children in China.
CWC Goal:
Improved policy and practice for the care, protection and social inclusion of the most vulnerable children.
Description of Establishment of Children’s Centers:

The core component of the community-based child protection model is the establishment of children’s activity centers which serve as a safe space for children, developing children’s participation and (formal and informal) work towards child protection, and act as a focal point for linking sectors, agencies and government departments for child protection. The child activity centers are not an end in themselves but that they are also a means to a greater end, which is the development of integrated child protection systems and a vehicle for the practice of children’s participation, and bringing children’s views to the attention of adults. The centers incorporate different types of activities both within the centers and outreach work with relevant partners in communities using available local resources, e.g. training, children’s forums, libraries, parents clubs, children’s clubs, family clubs, drama groups, preschool education, self-help groups and IEC development. Substantial direct changes have been made towards the improvement of children’s care, inclusion, protection and participation, especially for vulnerable children in terms of policy and practice, whilst positive indirect results have also occurred, for example, the establishment of a very open atmosphere and dialogue between the different partners involved.

High priority is given to building the capacity and increasing the awareness of individuals and agencies that have a responsibility for child protection. Save the Children has organized study tours (to conferences and sites both within China and abroad) for our partners. At the community-based centers, the child welfare in communities programme provides training to parents, teachers, and relevant government departments - training on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, disability awareness, and child protection. For example, at the Children’s Activity Centre of Lumingfang, we worked with the Hefei Welfare Home to provide parents of disabled children with training on care/protection, nutrition, and rehabilitation exercises.

Centers provide physical spaces that are safe for children and where staff and children support each other in ways that enable children to speak out about their concerns, and where they are listened. The centers also act as a focal point for government and other agencies in the community to learn about children’s concerns, and to work together to respond to child protection issues.

The children's centers worked by focusing initially on the most vulnerable children i.e. disabled children those who have become separated from parents or migrated from their home villages. Activities at these centers include informal education and training, to enhance children's skills and knowledge, their self-esteem and confidence, and their social abilities in interacting with others. The processes of participation contribute to this.
Thus, children's participation and child protection must be the main strands of work in children's centers, along with providing services. These Centers help to bring about linkage between education, health, and other services – we describe this as “integrated mechanisms for child protection” – it means getting all the agencies working together and treating children's needs in a holistic way.

These centers now being developed here are exciting developments that are already attracting interest for being useful models for replication elsewhere in China – and in other countries. Our shared aim for quality in this work, and attention to detail of meaningful participation and comprehensive protection is the driving force that will ensure the centers achieve this goal.

**Characteristics of the Centers**

While the mature of the physical center depends on the locality, and what is available and what can be obtained, the social characteristics need to be consistent and applied wherever the space is established. These social characteristics include:

*Neutrality* – the center is a neutral space: it is or should be owned and maintained by children but not by one particular set of children. The means it also:

*Open to all* – the center aims to be inclusive, for all children, but also encouraging groups of children who often feel or experience low self-esteem, social exclusion, stigma. This means that it is also:

*Anti-discriminatory* – the center works to be non-discrimination in its own space, but also to actively combat discrimination. No stigma is attached to any children, which means that it also has a culture of:

Respect by and for children and each other – adults working at the center with children and children themselves should respect each other. This especially means that adults should treat children with respect and

*Take children seriously* – those children's ideas and views are listened and treated seriously. This means that center is:

*Children owned and child friendly* – space is designed and used and managed (and changed) by children, their ideas are not only taken into account, but they are empowered to make decisions and use the budgets. All of these issues mean that:

*Participation* – is at the heart of the work. By participation is meant that children are making decisions, taking action they have decided, and organizing groups and being consulted and being involved in decision-making with adults. For the center itself, the onus is on children's participation in running the
place, deciding and undertaking activities, and a space where they can be consulted by adults and involved in decision making about community affairs, and especially about the development of child protection and other children services. In order to be able to participate, children need to feel safe and inspired, which means that:

**Protection** – is an important element, for the space to function, be open, and be used by children and for children to be taken seriously. Child protection means protection from abuse, and includes protection from physical violence, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and exploitation. It also means that work must be undertaken to combat bully.

**Global Impact Monitoring (GIM)**

Five dimensions of changes is assessing that children are benefiting from the activities from the centers and communities, the community-based child protection mechanism – child activity centers are playing a great roles and responsibilities for children from abuse and neglect.

1. Changes in the lives of children and young people;
2. Changes in policies and practice that affect children right and protection;
   
   - Changes at all levels of government i.e. local, provincial and national;
3. Changes in participation and active citizenship; i.e.
   
   - Involvement in the programme i.e. planning and monitoring etc.
   - Increase life skills i.e. self-esteem, negotiation skills etc.
   - Involvement in community and civil society.
4. Changes in equity and non-discrimination; e.g.
   
   - Attitudes,
   - Policy and structure,
   - Voice of against discrimination.
5. Changes in civil society and community;
   
   - Adult group, / b. Children group.
The outcomes of assessment will help our programme of child protection in China to have better design and implementation in future.

The Quotations from Project Stakeholders

- “There are so many books and games here, I want to come here everyday!” (10 years old child)
- “I think this is our children's own home and I am (part) owner of the Club” (Child manager, age 12)
- “Kids like it here a lot. They don't want to go home, even when the club is closing” (NC staff member)
- “My kids can play here and not out in the street at risk. It's more safe for them” (Parent of a Happy Family Club member)
- “Rehab changes lifestyles. Children become more independent and more happy in their daily lives” (Foster parent)
- “I have learnt a lot info on child abuse from the center.” (people from SLJ NC)
- “In my village, children affected by HIV/AIDS like the center, there is no discrimination.” (a child orphaned by HIV/AIDS, age 13)

Conclusion

Development of Community-based Child protection is important in helping individual children's lives. The fact that places where children spend most time are safe for them, through the participation activities, children are enabling to speak out their concerns and ideas confidently. Cultures of openness, responsiveness, trust, respect, honesty and transparency in children's organisations and elsewhere are required to do this. Results of project work so far show how participatory centers and other mechanisms have reduced trafficking, promoted children's resilience, and provided psycho-social support: some children have reported a reduction in violence.
Challenges

*Sensitivity:*
- “Rights” is still a sensitive in China, especially in rural and poor areas; it is often to be linked to human right issues.
- Lacking of understandings of civil society development i.e. NGO is often regarded as anti-government if you are not government. The old perspective is something like that “there is no love without reasons, and there is no pies falling from sky.”

*Sustainability:*
- Traditional attitude about children. – Children are often treated to be object owned by adult of as family asset, adult makes decision for children who are not allowed to engage in the decision making for the thing even related to children themselves whatever children are happy or not.
- Low awareness of Child Rights and Child Protection – children rights and protection are very limited knowledge to most of Chinese families, teachers and government officials, child abuse is not easy to be understood by most of popularity, there is wrong perspective that children are more respecting to adult by beating them. Also there is not protection mechanism for children at risk to get away from abuse, often the abuse is not be paid attention to until the nature of abuse becomes the criminal issues.
- Low capacity of working with children. – There is no trained social worker China to have skills of working with children, often children are to ordered to the thing according to adult order. Children lack of psychosocial support when they have difficulties. Stigma and difficulties are accompanying with children lives.

*Discrimination:*
- Stigma and discrimination against children affected by HIV/AIDS. – Discrimination is serious issues in China. Children with poverty, disability or children affected by HIV are suffering from being looked down by others or peers; school bullying has a lot of impacting on most vulnerable children, disabled children are not welcomed by schools or communities, the parents have to locked their disabled children at home lonely.
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