Child poverty and disparities in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu: Children's inputs into the development of child-centered policy analysis

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Australian Social Policy Conference, 8-10 July, 2009

The authors acknowledge the United Nation’s Children’s Fund (UNICEF) for funding to complete this phase of the research. This presentation expresses the views of the authors only and not UNICEF.
OUTLINE

- Background
  - Why did UNICEF commission this project?

- Aims and method
  - Why and how did we design our project?

- Results from focus groups
  - What did the children say?

- Methodological issues
  - How do issues compare between rich/Western countries and poor/non-Western countries?

- Lessons learnt: Recommendations and conclusions
  - What do researchers need to be mindful of?
Background: Why did UNICEF commission the project?

- In 2008, UNICEF and governments of Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu commissioned SPRC to design a study that explored the extent and causes of child poverty.
- Progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Pacific has not been good.
  - “Oceania is off track for nearly every goal, and falling back in some areas. Even where there is progress, it is too slow to achieve MDGs. Only Sub-Saharan Africa is off track on more indicators than Oceania” (Sachs Report, 2005)
- Economic growth in the Pacific slower than other similar island countries such as those in Caribbean or Indian Ocean.
  - Population growth rates may outstrip economic growth rates.
- Until recently, poverty has not been considered a serious issue.
  - “Pacific society has long been seen as a traditional culture of caring for and sharing with family and clan. Images of hunger and destitution and of absolute poverty frequently seen in other parts of the developing world have been largely absent in the Pacific” (Abbott and Pollard, 2004)


Characteristics of child poverty
- Under-five mortality rates and maternal mortality rates have improved, but many children in the PICs suffer from malnutrition, lack access and support to continue primary and secondary education, and lack access to improved water supply and sanitation

Contextual/exacerbating factors:
- increasing cash poverty; poverty of opportunity
- family fragmentation; deterioration of cultural/traditional systems
- widening development gaps between urban and rural areas; rising urban poverty
- persistent gender inequality; political instability
- increasing vulnerability to natural disasters; unsustainable exploitation of marine and land resources, and
- poor donor coordination and poor targeting of the resources to obtain better development and social outcomes

The global financial crisis highlights the importance of achieving more effective social policies, particularly for children
Aims and method

▪ **Aims**

  ▪ **Quantitative:** Extent of child poverty
    ▪ National survey data adapted for the Pacific drawing upon a guide currently used in over 40 countries
  ▪ **Qualitative:** Causes of child poverty
    ▪ Focus groups with children

▪ **Method**

  ▪ **Phase 1:** Design stage 2008-2009
  ▪ **Phase 2:** Implementation stage 2009
Method of focus groups

- 5 Focus groups:
  - Honiara and Gizo (Solomon Islands)
  - Port Vila and Tanna (Vanuatu)
  - Tarawa (Kiribati)
- Total N = 35
  - Between 4 and 10 participants per group
  - 16 female and 19 male participants
- Aged between 12 and 18 years
- Semi-structured interview schedule:
  1. Children’s needs at school, in their home, and in their community;
  2. Children’s perceptions of how governments can help them attain their needs; and
  3. Children’s help seeking behaviour when feeling unsafe (CRC: safety)
Results of focus groups (Needs)

- **Children’s needs**
  - Water supply and clean/cheap drinking water
  - Medical clinic
  - Permanent school building
  - Affordable, reliable and safe transport to/from school and hospital
  - Sanitation (esp. after tsunami in Gizo)
  - High school fees – causes drop out
  - Equipment to clean up community e.g. rake, knife, wheelbarrow
  - School resources (books, instruments, tables, chairs, computers, sports equipment)
  - Community centre for life learning skills and advocacy
  - Strong young leaders who “do not abuse or harass children”
  - Good education system with “good qualified teachers”
  - No phone or computer networks
  - Opportunities for young people to gather together to get to know each other
Children’s perceptions of how governments can help them

“Tell the government that the children are the future leaders of the world so they need to provide for us … government just depending on adults to look after us. Not good. We’re growing up and will be the next leader” (Tanna)

“Government can’t help … and they won’t help … they don’t care about children” (Honiara)

“Government cares for children and young people “a little bit”, only “sometimes”. (Tarawa)
Results of focus groups (Safety)

- Children’s **help seeking** behaviour when feeling unsafe
  - “Men drink at night, steal young girls from their homes when they are just playing and rape them. The houses are not locked in some villages, they are open houses” (Tarawa)
  - “Chief solves on the spot” (Honiara)
  - “Don’t feel safe when lots of young people are smoking marijuana” (Tanna)
- Overall, few differences by sex, age, and SES
- Needs were generally tangible (e.g. infrastructure) and therefore, relatively easy to address
Methodological issues and considerations

- Recruitment and consent
  - Arms length approach: trusted community member or NGO staff
  - Time intensive: based on personal trust and relationship building
- Time management
  - Long process
  - Flexibility necessary
- Translators
- Location
  - Avoid institutions of power
  - ‘Maniaba’
- Developing rapport and focus
  - Literacy
  - Body language and seating
- Reimbursement
- Use of information
Lessons learnt: Recommendations and conclusions

- Child welfare is of concern to PIC governments
  - Ratification of the CRC by PIC governments
  - Children’s voices in research and potentially future policy
- Cultural misunderstandings and/or clashes
  - What does “child centred” mean in a culturally hierarchical society?
- Consultation
  - Especially NGOs
  - Build relationships

Conclusion
- Children are being heard and taken into account in defining child poverty in the Pacific