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Acting in Adversity – Rethinking the Causes, Experiences and Effects of Child Poverty in Contemporary Literature

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Ever since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), children – and the condition of child poverty in particular – have been increasingly pushed to the forefront of development agendas. However, the rhetorical commitment in 'putting children first' has not always been translated faithfully into practice, and the research base still suffers from an overall tendency to prioritise adult perspectives that often bear little resemblance to the actual experience of the child, and may even serve to obscure the real dimensions of their poverty further. Many of the conclusions drawn around child poverty are the result of generalised statistics, or simplistic theoretical assumptions riven with cultural and conceptual biases. There is still far too little understanding of how a child experiences poverty, what impoverishment means to them, or how their perceptions/priorities interact with those of local communities and the agendas of international agencies. Above all, there is a need to recognise the resilience and contribution of children as social and economic actors in the struggle against poverty.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION – DEFINING CHILD AGENCY

For too long, the literature on child poverty (and indeed the vast majority of research on children in general) has followed a standard model of childhood rooted in the work of educationalists, psychologists, biologists, health and welfare professionals. This model conceives that childhood is (or at least *should* be) a time free from work and centred on development, play and learning, and emerges from a view of children as passive, incomplete and incompetent (James and Prout, 1997). Children's contributions to society have either been ignored altogether or placed within a framework that still presents parental/adult control and dependency as a pre-requisite. However, recent sociological, anthropological and developmental research has begun to show that children are far more capable than once thought, with the social and economic power to actively determine not only their own lives but to also influence those of their larger society (James and Prout, 1997; Waksler, 1994; Mayall, 1994; Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998). Child-focused institutions, development agencies, academics and adults in general are now starting to realise the multitude of ways in which children exert their agency, particularly when faced with the adversity that was previously thought to render them helpless, passive victims (Save the Children, 1995; Punch, 1998; Baker, 1998).

But what exactly is child 'agency', and how can we hope to reconcile it with poverty alleviation strategies that are – like the literature – channelled through and for adults? In its broadest sense, child agency may be seen as 'the transition from 'the child' as an instance of a category to the recognition of children as particular persons' (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:6). It therefore entails a paradigm shift in attitudes towards children in stressing their existence as social actors *shaping* – as well as being shaped by – their circumstances or social 'structure'. Agency is not merely equivalent to action, however; it also encompasses the child as a person with opinions, a decision-maker (ibid). Nasman (1994) looks upon this attribution as the 'individualisation' of children, an idea reflected in Edwards (1996) policy arena discussion two years later, where children were qualified as:

> …social actors – individuals with rights and responsibilities of their own; playing an active role in the lives of their families, communities and societies; and having interests, views and priorities which may differ from those of the adults with whom they interact. (830)

The failure/reluctance to recognise these capacities in children has led to a portrayal of child poverty as necessitating a universal 'rescue and rehabilitation' response, with adults in the driving seat. This underlying framework – backed up by media images of child poverty – then makes it very easy to over-emotionalise poverty and talk of 'lost innocence' and 'stolen childhoods' without being aware of the implicit value judgements that are being made. This can be dangerous in potentially encouraging the creation and perception of 'poverty' where there is actually very little, or none. Worse still, the insistent focus on what has been 'lost', 'damaged' or 'destroyed' through poverty at the expense of what has survived or even gained can degrade the self-esteem of children, who are constantly pushed to confront the inadequacies of their situation. This unerring focus on the negative aspects of children in poverty, while relevant to attempts at amelioration, presents us with only a partial picture of the

child. It ignores the fact that despite the severity of their situation, many children continue to hold positive attitudes and aspirations and are able to draw upon this morale as part of their coping strategies.

These are just some of the larger issues that emerge from the literature on child poverty, and as will be seen, they are themselves both the cause and the product of numerous other distortions afflicting all levels of analysis. While this review does not claim to be exhaustive, it nevertheless highlights the disparity between the astonishingly complex nature of child poverty and the often simplistic, unsophisticated character of current responses.

2.0. THE PROBLEMS OF RESEARCHING CHILD POVERTY

2.1. Conceptualising the child – Exposing the Stereotypes

No one definition of 'children' has universal acceptance. While the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – which classifies all individuals under 18 as 'children' - has become standard in the policy arena and among the literature, it is important to recognise that in many parts of the world this demarcation has no social meaning. Children are viewed by their parents, by their peers and by their societies at large in a multitude of ways that do not always follow the criterion of age. In some countries and cultures, childhood may be qualified in relation to such factors as the commencement of work, the end of schooling, the onset of menarche or betrothal and marriage (Boyden and Levison, 2000). Even within the same society, the attainment of 'adulthood' may differ according to social class, as in Bangladesh, where a working child leaves childhood earlier than one that attends school and has no economic responsibilities (Blanchet, 1996).

The age at which childhood ends is also drawn upon lines of gender in many societies, with puberty being a critical threshold. This is because unlike cognitive, social or physical development (which are recognised in most cultures as continuous and gradual processes), puberty commonly symbolises an abrupt transition from the asexual child to the sexually mature youth or adult (Boyden and Levison, 2000). In the case of girls, this boundary is distinctly marked by the onset of menarche, but for boys the transition is less identifiable, and they are often consequently required to prove their maturity in other ways (e.g. through employment) in order to be conferred adult status by their peers.

Childhood is thus conceived and demarcated through gender in terms of both physical changes in the body and the tasks that young people are expected to perform. In Brazil's cities, school attendance reaches its peak around the ages of 10, 11 and 12, following which expectations of absorption into the labour force – particularly for boys – cause employment rates to climb rapidly (Levison, 1991). This is in contrast to parts of South Asia, where it is girls who form the majority of school drop-outs at this age as they begin to carry out the domestic tasks of an adult woman (Johnson et al, 1995). What is seen as 'appropriate' roles for children in society does not simply shift with geography and culture however, but may also be reconfigured in accordance with the varied demands of climate, environment, social class and especially poverty. Childhood may even be strategically negotiated, as in the various

apartheid regimes in South Africa, when young political activists were defined by the authorities as 'youth' to establish their legal culpability, while the activists referred to themselves as 'children' in order to avoid adult penalties. The capacities of a child may even be differently estimated and variously expressed within the smallest communities, all of which means that 'childhood' is best understood not so much as a unitary phenomenon, but more of a culturally and contextually diverse social construction that demands continuous analysis (Boyden and Levison, 2000).

This is not to say that the guidelines enshrined in the CRC are irrelevant outside the Western cultures in which they were conceived, but rather that caution and restraint is needed in applying their framework to interventions in different cultures.[2] Any child-focused research or development assistance is inevitably built upon a set of cultural assumptions about the 'proper' role and lifestyle of a child that may or may not bear much resemblance to those of the particular children targeted, and it is the lack of preliminary investigation into this potential discrepancy that has led to the difficulties or ultimate failure often encountered through implementation. As regards child poverty, the ideological stance taken towards children is key to determining how far the task of poverty alleviation/eradication is seen to be one of 'rescue and rehabilitation' around a preconceived model of what childhood should be, or one of supporting and empowering children and communities towards more locally meaningful futures. As Korbin (1983) points out,

> If we do not include a cultural perspective, we will be entangled in the ethnocentric position of considering our own cultural values and practices preferable, and indeed superior, to any other. At the same time, a stance of extreme cultural relativism, in which all judgements of human treatment of children are suspended in the name of cultural sensitivity, would be counter-productive to promoting the well-being of the world's children. (3)

The uncritical acceptance of the child development model as a series of progressive stages has given rise to the notion that particularly stressful or traumatic events experienced in early childhood (including poverty) will disrupt or distort children's later development, often with life-long negative effects. This theory has primarily been advanced by child psychiatrists stressing a largely medicalised view of children's responses to adversity, and has been blown out of proportion to the point that the literature now almost instinctively and continually mourns the 'permanent damage' suffered by children who, for example, are exposed to hazardous labour at an early age.

Apart from a lack of substantiated evidence for such claims and effectively ignoring children's resilience in coping with such pressures, this automatic connection is far from accurate, for as Myers and Boyden (1998) argue, 'although a small minority of children are undoubtedly impaired emotionally or psychologically by traumatic experiences, there is little scientific indication that the majority of children are necessarily harmed for life by such adversity' (32). Schaffer (1992) similarly remarks that 'whatever stresses an individual may have encountered in early years, he or she need not forever more be at the mercy of the past… children's resilience must be acknowledged every bit as much as their vulnerability' (47). Others have suggested

[2] For more on this, see the section 'From Needs to Rights – Child Poverty and the CRC', below.

that some children may exhibit greater personal resilience than adults (Palmer, 1983), with adversity even comprising a potential source of strength (Leyens and Mahjoub, 1992; Dawes, 1992; Zwi et al, 1992).

Despite increasing acknowledgement of childhood diversity within the literature, the vast majority of those writing are still relatively blind to the assumptions and pre-conceptions that drive their research. Very few question the orthodox model of child development that lies at the heart, whereby human competence is essentially a function of age, and childhood a linear transformation from an immature to mature adult, simple to complex, irrational to rational and dependent childhood to autonomous adulthood (Boyden and Levison, 2000). When this research then becomes the basis of intervention, it can have serious consequences for the children targeted, in many cases leaving them in a worse situation than they were in before. A good example of this are the now well-publicised cases of children 'saved' from working in garment factories in Bangladesh and Morocco in response to Western righteous conceptions of childhood as necessarily 'labour-free': interventions that are now recognised to have effectively increased the poverty and vulnerability of the children involved by forcing them to seek jobs far more hazardous than those they held originally (Zalami, 1998; Myers and Boyden, 1998).

2.2. Conceptualising the Family – Looking beyond the Nuclear

The literature on child poverty is saturated by an overwhelming belief that without the care or protection of adult figures such as a mother and father, children are automatically and especially vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, malnutrition, disease and death. The immediate, nuclear family is viewed as the 'best' place for a growing child, and those who live in other domestic arrangements – for whatever reason - are seen to be deprived (Mann, 2001). As the Canadian Christian Children's Fund suggests, 'with their parents unable to feed, clothe, educate or protect their health, their only inheritance is destitution and desperation' (CCCF, 1999 cited in Ledward, 2000:14). While it has been acknowledged through participatory research with children that the break-up of the family unit is undoubtedly difficult and upsetting for many children, we need to qualify a number of assumptions related to the role of the nuclear family unit.

Firstly, while the literature acknowledges that not all children grow up in households together with their immediate family, it does so under the implicit assumption that any alternative living arrangements are the result of the wide and varied pressures of poverty, or other 'unusual' circumstances. Anthropological studies from around the world dispute this assumption, and have shown that children are often very mobile, circulating between households and communities in times of prosperity as well as deprivation. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Demographic and Health Surveys found that in Namibia, for example, 42% of girls and 36% of boys aged 12-14 do not live with either parent, with similarly high percentages in other countries such as Cote d'Ivoire and Haiti (DHS figures cited in Mensch, Bruce and Greene, 1998). This is not just a consequence of HIV/AIDS, but an existing cultural trait.

Moreover, in many societies, child-rearing is a communal affair that includes care-givers that may or may not be related to the child in question. For example,

Tronick et al. (1987) found that among the Efe of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 'multiple mothering' – rather than being a symptom of deprivation as asserted in the West - is a culturally-sanctioned and actively encouraged norm. When a mother is working, crying babies are put to the breast of any woman, including those who are not lactating. Even when she is nearby, a mother is not necessarily the sole caregiver of her child. Similar diffusion of child-rearing responsibilities crop up among the Malays on the island of Langkawi (Carsten, 1991) and among the Inupiat of Northern Alaska (Bodenhorn, 1988). Harper and Marcus (1999) acknowledge that 'the range of household types and structures in which African children grow up is huge'(8), and other researchers have even gone so far as to assert that in West Africa, 'a network of kin, with the obligations they exchange, may be more crucial to a child's present and future experience and achievement than the child's parents' (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985:55). In many countries, it is the older siblings and other children who act as primary caregivers – in the UK alone there are at least 60,000 children who are the sole carers of incapacitated adults/parents (Mann, 2001).

The point here is that two-parent families are neither the most common household form in many parts of the world (regardless of adversity), nor act as primary caregivers for children in many cases, and are thus undeserving of the reification they receive in the literature. As Harper and Marcus (1999) point out, although the effects of poverty on the most vulnerable groups of children (e.g. orphans from AIDS, street children etc.) are the most easily identifiable, it is likely that 'the effects on children in two-parent families… while much less discussed, are equally persuasive' (9). In South Africa, for example, it is common for parents in poor households 'to be physically present, but to have little time for active parenting as they leave for work before sunrise and return after dark' (GoSA, 1996:12). In the UK, 350,000 children under 12 years old are left alone at home every day, but their vulnerability is left unchecked because both parents are *statistically* present (Blewett and Woods, 1999). Many times this number are left in charge of younger siblings in a country such as India or Bangladesh, and as Maggie Black (2000) suggests, one does not anyway have to be physically alone to suffer spiritual, mental and emotional isolation. 100,000 children under 16 run away from home every year in the UK, an estimated 18,000 of whom have been forced out by parents or carers, usually because their home life is violent and miserable (The Children's Society, 1999).

Other studies have meanwhile suggested that even in situations where numerous adult care-givers are present most of the time – such as polygamous arrangements – the children do not automatically benefit, with the poorest often receiving discriminatory treatment. The World Bank Participatory Poverty Assessments collecting the 'Voices of the Poor' found that polygamy was in fact generally regarded as a contributing factor of poverty (Narayan et al, 1999). Children within these domestic situations therefore need a great deal more attention within the literature, but tend to be overlooked in the rush to highlight those without adults around. The practice of fostering in particular warrants closer attention, as will be seen in the discussion of poverty and HIV/AIDS.

The fact that nuclear families have been idealised – however implicitly - in this way for so long has already had serious consequences therefore, not only in terms of biasing the literature into focusing on non-nuclear 'exceptions', but also in influencing attitudes among the families themselves on the ground. Increasing

evidence of an 'unravelling' of kin-based safety nets and a refusal by relatives and communities to fulfil 'traditional' care-giving responsibilities for children in need suggests that the nuclear family has gained greater significance (Ayieko, 1997; Hunter et al, 1997). While the increased monetisation of economies and the associated growth of inequality and urbanisation have been strong influences in this respect, Harper and Marcus also find some culpability in 'colonial/Christian ideologies of the family which served to reduce reciprocity within lineages, and emphasised nuclear families as the main unit of society' (1999:23). Children are more and more being seen as the responsibility of immediate, rather than extended family members, and in western Tanzania, Tibajiuka and Kaijage (1995) directly relate the rise in refusals among relatives to take in orphans to the change in the concept of family, whereby 'family responsibilities are increasingly viewed in terms of nuclear rather than extended families'(25).

2.3. Hidden behind the lines – Measuring the Poverty of Children

According to normal usage, poverty is 'the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions' (Kanbur and Squire, 1999:3). This definition is deceptively simple, but gives rise to two important implications relevant to the measurement of child poverty. Firstly, that poverty will be differently defined at different times and in different societies; and secondly, that poverty is conceived in terms of the ability to purchase goods and services (money) or their ownership (material possessions). Contemporary measurements of poverty using income-consumption analysis in line with the second of these considerations have led to the World Bank's creation of an 'absolute poverty line' (equivalent to US$1 a day) under which a quantifiable number of people may be calculated to live. In response to the culturally-sensitive demands of the first implication, a second 'relative' poverty line has also been developed in tandem in order to account for differential cost-systems and fluctuating ideas of the amount of money deemed 'socially acceptable'.

Neither of these measures is adequate in gauging child poverty, for a number of reasons. Firstly, these measures have evolved, as Harper and Marcus (1999) point out, from the primacy in the West of income as a means to access living standards, privileges and services. In many parts of the world where a monetised market economy is relatively new, there are numerous distributive non-market channels and practices (e.g. barter, trade and self-provisioning) which render such measurements inaccurate and irrelevant in assessing the situation of children. Focusing on formal sector incomes thus fails to take into account those generated from within the informal economy, where the vast majority of children are employed.

Secondly, children's access to, and control over, income is extremely marginal. Indeed, prioritising economic welfare through the analysis of consumption and expenditure by *adults* tells us nothing about the welfare of children dependent on those adults, or about the intra-household distribution of that expenditure.[3] We are also wrong to imply that children are necessarily dependent on adults, for the reverse is often true in many cases (Mann, 2001). We are left only to rely on the assumption that the head of household is a benevolent dictator who executes all time and resource

[3] For more on this, see Box 16: 'The Politics of Intra-Household Resource Allocation' below.

allocation decisions in such a way that takes all family members' well-being into account. Numerous studies have shown this faith to be misplaced, and it is commonly acknowledged that in many countries today altruistic principles of distribution rarely prevail, with the burden of poverty being unequally heaped in accordance with age and gender biases targeting women and children in particular (Kabeer, 1994).

Thirdly, poverty lines give no indication as to how children's time and labour are being utilised or the contributions they may be making to help maintain the level of 'household' income, particularly in situations of deprivation. One study of nine Latin American countries found that without the income of children aged between 13-17, the incidence of poverty as measured by the absolute poverty line would rise by 10-20% (UNICEF, 1997). Domestic activities – mostly by girls - are also rarely valued in economic terms, and yet contribute a great deal to the ability of other members in the family to undertake income-generating employment outside the home, and as such should not be overlooked.

Finally, poverty line measurements drawn from income-consumption do not give us any information about the multitude of other aspects of deprivation impacting children's lives, such as access to water, shelter, health services, education or transport. Nor do they give any indication of indebtedness, dependence, isolation, physical weakness or disability, high mortality or life expectancy, social exclusion, status or self-respect. Most of all, they tell us very little concerning the lack of opportunity and choice that appears to impinge heavily upon poor families, and that greatly undermines their ability to protect their children from hazard or exploitation by others. The idea that parents may themselves be willing exploiters of their children (and their labour in particular) is also ignored. If anything therefore, poverty lines serve to further obscure children's experience of poverty, and are invoked less to meet the needs of the poor, but to satisfy the 'static and standardised wants of professionals' (Chambers, 1992:81).

While there is at least some welcome disaggregation of age and gender within current UNDP indicators,[4] it should be noted that almost every one relates to poverty as a purely physiological phenomenon of survival and good health, when in reality it is also experienced through a number of other psychological, social and political dimensions. As Arjun Appadurai points out, most analyses still concentrate on the physical and ignore the critical qualitative dimension which must belong to any robust conception of the standard of living. Components of this include: the perception of security in livelihood, the sense of freedom from harassment and abuse… the feeling of dignity in day-to-day transactions, the belief in the reliability of officialdom… and so forth' (quoted in Chambers, 1992:83). It is by focusing their efforts solely on alleviating these physical aspects of child poverty at the expense of other factors such as social exclusion, security and discrimination that has led some organisations to succeed in nothing more than repeatedly treating the symptoms of a poverty rooted elsewhere.

Greater efficiency and relevance in research may perhaps lie in recognising the agency of children and giving them the opportunity to define and express what poverty means to them. This was the approach of Save the Children UK in '*Different*

[4] These include life expectancy at birth, calorie supply per capita, under-5 mortality, immunisation, etc.

Places, Same Stories – Children's Views of Poverty, North and South' (2001), which found that:

- For research in industrialised countries at least, the word 'poverty' may not be a useful concept to children, who rarely talk about 'poverty' as such and more about other things affecting their lives. Those children who were deemed poor by poverty lines in the UK never identified themselves as such – 'poverty' was something that happened to other people. Furthermore, indicators such as a lack of education, health or emotional support were never classed as 'poverty' in the North – most children associated the word with the homeless.

- Children in the South were, in contrast, more likely to mention the word 'poverty' in connection with themselves, and appeared to have a broader definition of 'poverty' that included lack of well-being and lack of infrastructure as opposed to strictly a lack of material goods. Children from both North and South are generally aware that in most cases poverty is related to lack of money, particularly in the North, where the economy is highly monetised and relatively stable. In the South, children were more aware that having money did not necessarily protect against certain forms of poverty.

- Children closely related poverty to feelings of insecurity – fears for physical safety, fears about the family collapsing and fears of not achieving a settled lifestyle in the future. Bullying in school was also mentioned in both North and South, as was the danger younger children felt they were in from older children. Despite the anxiety that poverty engendered, children were still predominantly optimistic about their lives, 'reflected in the great self-reliance that children display' (23).

2.4. 'Lies, damned lies and statistics'

One of the most striking things about the literature on child poverty is its tireless obsession with statistics – percentages, ratios, population figures and predictions. It is difficult to find a text that does not at some point utilise the terminology of 'one in four…', or 'an estimated…' or '…is three times more likely to be…'. The extent and omnipresence of such statistics should in one sense reassure us that child poverty is a phenomenon about which we know a great deal - that collating the numbers and scale of those involved is somehow the key to solving their persistent deprivation. At the very least, this 'politics of hype' (Ennew, 1996) will appeal to people's sense of outrage and endow the issue with an urgency that is undoubtedly important. It may also stimulate greater funding and awareness, both of which are necessary ingredients in poverty alleviation strategies.

But in many ways, the statistical portrait of children that can be assembled from these data is still fragmented and incomplete, and often serves to further obscure child poverty, which is far more complex than the static, quantifiable phenomenon it may be presented as. Information on a child's social *condition* is still seen as sufficient indication of their *experience*, when in reality the two may be considerably different. Moreover, most statistics treat children as attributes of the family rather than a unit of observation in themselves, and this has led to significant misreadings of their situation. For example, information on the number of poor households with children

(rather than the number of poor children in households) has distorted the distribution of poverty and concealed the fact that in most cases, the percentage of children under the poverty line is higher than the corresponding percentage for families. In other words, only when children are separated from the adult nexus and treated on their own terms does the true extent of their poverty come out (Saporiti, 1994).

The obsession with statistics may anyway be misguided, for as one UN Special Rapporteur pointed out back in 1983, 'The important point is not the scale of the problem but its degree of seriousness as a violation of the fundamental rights of the human person' (Fernand-Laurent, 1983:14). In other words, if one child is suffering it is still one too many, with the issue of concern being the extent of the problem not in terms of quantified numbers affected, but in terms of the *qualitative* experience as felt by the child. This was reiterated almost 20 years later by Maggie Black (2000) in warning that 'the pursuit of global statistics is not a very useful way of trying to understand the problem' (15). Why then, does the vast majority of the literature still persist in this statistical collection?

According to Ennew (1996), it is largely because although international interest in the child has gained considerable momentum following the UN International Year of the Child (1979) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989/90), 'little has changed in terms of the way research is carried out and used by child welfare and advocacy organisations, despite considerable advances in theories of childhood and methods of researching children's issues within the academic community' (12). The increasing recognition of children's agency and of cultural relativity are two such advances, both of which are now slowly beginning to influence certain pockets of intervention. The vast majority of research into child poverty continues, however, to prioritise the identification, measurement and analysis of statistical data that can only ultimately provide us with a snapshot of scale, rather than insight into poverty as a process unfolding, fluctuating and differentially affecting children over time. While the number of orphans sleeping rough on the streets may be useful in helping to plan the scale of our response, additional qualitative knowledge is required as to how that child perceives their situation, what aspirations they may hold for the future, or why some days are better than others.

The obsession with statistics, in relating primarily to quantifiable phenomena, has also led to the literature focusing on child poverty as an overwhelming experience of loss – loss of income, loss of material possessions, loss of health, loss of a family member, etc. No mention is made of the things that many poor children retain, such as resourcefulness, courage and - more often than adults - optimism (Save the Children, 2001). Is it because these factors are simply too difficult to translate statistically, or is it more because ignoring them makes responding to child poverty easier (and thus, more 'successful'?).

Most of the literature outlining the causes and manifestations of child poverty indeed seems to have been written with a pre-conceived solution in mind, and has manipulated the observations to fit within neat statistical categories against which targets can be set and interventions drawn up. As Ennew (1996) confirms, 'knowledge is organised around adult requirements for particular kinds of fact' (23) rather than the actual lives of children. To be fair, this is because a great deal of the material originates from field research and consultancy, with certain frameworks and biases

imposed on it from the beginning. But this does not alter the fact that a child's life – particularly under the unpredictable insecurity of poverty – is rarely so simple as to fit within these assumptions. There is no shame in admitting this, or in accepting that mistakes will almost undoubtedly be made along the way. Surprising then, that so few who write on child poverty seem aware of (or willing to recognise) the biases that may underlie their conclusions. This is made worse by the tendency of those outside the literature to simply accept these statements as truth on the basis of the organisation's reputation. Without this critical faculty, we may then be misled by commonly used phrases such as 'children as young as…', which in reality usually refers to one exceptionally young child in a larger sample of children considerably older (Ennew, 1996).

Robert Chambers' work stands out in consistently highlighting the need for perpetual self-scrutiny when assessing the poverty of other people. Though he does not specifically address children, his depiction of the numerous biases that beset the unsuspecting researcher are just as relevant to the collection of data on children as adults. His general argument is that 'real' poverty (which he believes to be predominantly rural) is effectively hidden to the outsider – not merely those in rich countries who have no exposure to it, but also (and perhaps especially) the professionals whose very task it is to seek it out. This is because of the following biases affecting the researcher:

> **The 'spatial bias'** – whereby they are likely to only see certain places as part of their research, principally those close to tarmac roads to ease transportation.
>
> **The 'climate bias'** - whereby research tends to be conducted most frequently in the dry season when travel is easiest and climate most pleasant, but missing the wet season when malnourishment and poverty exact a different and often greater toll.
>
> **The 'person bias'** - whereby researchers are more likely to meet men than women, the elite rather than the underprivileged, the healthy rather than the desperately sick.
>
> **The 'diplomatic bias'** - whereby courtesy, language barriers or social custom may prevent them asking certain sensitive questions.
>
> **The 'professional bias'** - whereby the specialist misses the interconnected nature of poverty by focusing particularly on economic, environmental or other factors.
>
> *Source:* (Chambers, 1983; 1991)

Failing to at least acknowledge the possible influence of these biases on the data that have been collected on child poverty is a powerful reason as to why the literature remains so insular, circulating the same statistics and convictions within what is predominantly Western discourse. Categories, language and assumptions are all too often left unquestioned, with the political backdrop (both of the researcher and the researched) rarely gaining much more than a preliminary nod. This suggests there is a strong need to rework statistics from a child-focused perspective and also to create space for children's agency, not merely through the reporting of their visible

occupational roles as child labourers or sibling caretakers in times of crisis (which is about as far as most people go), but in allowing them to tell us their priorities, strategies and aspirations.

2.5. The Dynamics of Child Poverty

Much of the literature on child poverty makes the important distinction between *transient* poverty - where the child experiences a temporary period of deprivation, usually as the result of seasonal or random shocks such as the death of a breadwinner, a bad harvest or an environmental disaster - and *chronic* poverty, where deprivation is a general condition for the child and spans a far greater period of time, e.g. in some cases, their whole lives (Goodhand, 2001). The balance in numbers of children within these two groups shows considerable variation around the world, not least because of widespread confusion in understanding exactly what 'transient' and 'chronic' actually mean, but also because making the distinction between the two requires data collection over long periods of time. In practice, this usually comes from household panel surveys, which currently exist in a number of developed countries but are rare in the developing world, particularly Africa (Moore, 2001; Grootaert et al, 1995). There is at least one longitudinal 15 year study currently in operation titled 'The Young Lives Project' (DfID, 2002) which tracks the lives of children born into poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam in the year 2000. The results may be a long time in coming, but will no doubt be extremely valuable in providing agencies and academics alike with all too rare child-focused longitudinal data.

Despite these limitations on data collection, the general picture built from existing evidence into chronic and transient poverty is one of a smaller core of chronically poor co-existing with movement into and out of poverty by the larger population (Kanbur and Squire, 1999). For example, data from a study of six villages in India between 1975-1983 showed that 50% of the population were poor in a typical year but only 19% were poor in every year (World Bank, 1990).

While chronic poverty represents a range of durations, dimensions and levels of severity (Hulme, Moore and Shepherd 2001), most of the literature conceptualises it in terms of a cycle or process whereby poverty is *inter-generationally transmitted (IGT)* (DfID, 2002; Save the Children, 2001). This is usually understood as the transmission of poverty from older to younger generations (notably from parents to their children), but the concept is far more complex than this and raises a number of important questions. Is the 'private' transmission of poverty from individuals and families of one generation to another the sole channel, or can poverty be transmitted within, between or through 'public' spheres of community, state and market? Is poverty always transmitted from older to younger generations, or can it also move in the opposite direction? What is actually being transferred in this process? And perhaps most importantly, is this cycle of transmission relatively intractable and impervious to poverty reduction efforts, or are there specific 'entry points' where IGT processes can be affected by external interference?

Karen Moore's (2001) study of intergenerational poverty sets out to answer these questions, and her analysis contributes a great deal of information and thinking relevant to the conceptualisation of child poverty in particular. Firstly, she examines

the multiple actors and directions through which poverty may be transmitted, and the factors that control these flows, arguing that 'individual livelihoods are both facilitated and constrained by relations within and between the institutions of household, community, state and market' (8). In other words, poverty-related capital may be transmitted to a child not merely from within the same household or extended family, but also from institutions such as schools, hospitals or care centres/foster homes, and from the state via benefits and legal protection. All of these are then further affected by the 'norms of entitlement' determining who has access to and control over resources in a particular society, drawn around considerations of gender, age, class, ethnicity and religion. In this way, certain institutional, social and cultural values and beliefs surrounding children may conspire to keep a child in poverty, whilst actually aspiring to the opposite.

With a broad understanding of the processes discussed above, it is now important to ask what is the 'poverty-related capital' being transmitted through these channels? Moore (2001) divides these into five distinct – but interacting – capital groups:

- **Human Capital**

  This is defined as the capital transferred between generations whenever someone cares for someone younger or older, or provides labour, goods or services. It generally relates to broader issues of parental investment in children, but can also be transmitted from outside the family. For example, it is often pointed out that educated parents are more likely to communicate the value of this schooling to their children (Danziger and Stern, 1990; Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1997; Black, 2000). Other examples of human capital include health/nutrition, knowledge or skills useful as part of coping and survival strategies, and inheritable or communicable disease or impairment.

- **Financial/Material Capital**

  The transfer of money and assets between generations – in the form of gifts, loans, inheritance and bequests - is the most obvious form of poverty-related capital, and is similarly regulated along socio-cultural and legal norms. Gender and birth order are particularly strong factors in this sector, often favouring boys and the first born above girls and younger siblings. Debt, which Moore refers to as 'negative inheritance', is also often transferred in the absence of effective laws, and many children become enmeshed in cycles of debt and bonded labour – particularly in parts of South Asia.

- **Social-Cultural Capital**

  This refers to the role of individual attitudes and personality traits in mediating the effects of poverty, and remains highly controversial. The literature is largely divided here around the potential existence of a 'culture of poverty', which essentially suggests that people become, are and remain 'innately' poor because of their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (e.g. laziness, ineptitude, dishonesty, criminality, lack of intelligence). Children born into this 'culture' are thus believed to be either unwilling or unable to take advantage of any emergent opportunities, so perpetuating the cycle.

This school of thought, aside from having heavy undertones of racism and classism, is neither constructive – in rendering any attempt to eradicate or alleviate poverty among this 'underclass' doomed to fail (Banfield, 1970) – nor substantiated by any evidence suggesting that poor people have fundamentally different expectations from other members of society. In fact, participatory consultations with poor children in both North and South have shown that 'despite the anxiety that poverty often engenders, the optimism of many children and the sheer joy of living come through' (Save the Children, 2001:23). Having said that, the same study points to cases where persistent poverty in childhood has indeed curtailed children's hopes for the future, with many learning either not to plan ahead at all or deliberately choose low expectations for fear of disappointment.

Despite this, it is often the case that the socio-cultural traditions and values systems that seem to hinder poverty eradication – such as gendered inheritance practices in South Asia – constitute structural impediments that both the poor and the rich have to negotiate, rather than a 'culture of poverty'. Interestingly, Moore (2001) raises the possibility that it may even be a 'culture of wealth' among the rich and middle class that keeps the poor in poverty.

- **Social-Political Capital**

  Many of the factors that are often most important in terms of one's power within a community – such as race, ethnicity, caste, kin group and family name - are inherited, substantially raising the survival chances of certain children from the moment they are born. Others must contend with social exclusion and stigma for a variety of reasons. As these factors are so influential in the lives of many children currently struggling against poverty, they will be discussed in greater detail later.

- **Environmental/Natural Capital**

  This relates to the degradation of the environment and the over-exploitation of natural resources, which of course affect the livelihoods of future generations. Indeed, many children are today impoverished as a result of the environmental abuse of past generations – for example, the pollution of local ground water increases the financial burden on families who have to buy water to avoid contamination.

These five forms of poverty-related capital are not placed in any particular order of importance, and continuous disaggregated data collection is needed among target populations to determine which are likely to hold greatest relevance in tackling child poverty. The literature overwhelmingly emphasises human capital as the apparently universal key to breaking the poverty cycle, with education reified as the single most important intervention with impact far more significant than any other (DfID, 2002; UNICEF, all years). But agencies should exercise caution here, for education may not always be as beneficial or powerful in combating child poverty as is assumed.[5] Moreover, no two communities are ever exactly the same: in one study of the dynamics of poverty in Cote d'Ivoire, it was found that in urban areas, human capital

[5] For more on this, see the section 'Reading Between the Lines: Child Poverty and Education', below.

was the most important endowment explaining welfare changes over time, compared to financial and material capital in the rural sector (Grootaert et al, 1995). It should also be recognised that the evidence base for IGT poverty is still predominantly from the USA, United Kingdom and other Northern countries, which lends a Western bias to the focus. These studies principally examine earnings between generations and have usually compared fathers, sons and brothers, with patterns of poverty cycles among women receiving substantially less attention. The few Southern studies that exist focus more on education and nutrition – particularly that of women and girls – which makes gender patterns much clearer (Harper et al, forthcoming).

While parents form the most common channel through which these different forms of poverty-related capital are transmitted to children, from the small amount of evidence so far accumulated it appears that the number of children who actually hold their parents or immediate family responsible for their deprivation is much less than imagined (Save the Children, 2001). They frequently refer instead to broader structural factors or their beliefs about the world at large – one researcher in Mexico asked poor children why they thought there were rich and poor people in the world, and they answered 'destiny', 'that's the way God created earth' and 'the rich are of the Devil and the poor of God' (Narayan et al, 1999:188).

3.0. CHILD POVERTY AND GLOBALISATION

3.1. Understanding globalisation

The way in which organisations have approached child poverty over the last few decades has been heavily influenced by the increasingly complex discourse on 'globalisation'. The latter is a term that continues to generate much confusion in the literature, not least because it means many different things to different people. As Cornia (2002) points out, 'globalisation' is a 'magic' word that is popularly used as both '*a symbol of all hopes for future improvements and the presumed cause of all ills and social injustices*' (2). Connecting such an elusive concept with the concrete lives of children is thus a significant challenge, but one which is critical to ensuring that organisations who work to alleviate child poverty do so in the most relevant and effective manner.

The first step is therefore to define exactly what we mean by globalisation and to decide which of its many facets are the most important in affecting children's well-being. As Appadurai observes, characterising 'globalization' depends primarily on the kind of social, cultural, economic or political lens we are looking at the world through, and

> …at best, 'globalization' is no more than a catch-all category to refer to various trends towards more complex patterns of international circulation, not only of media products, but also of technologies, finance, people and ideas. (Appadurai, 1990:2)

In linking globalisation to child poverty, attention has tended to focus on its economic expressions (such as the deregulation of the domestic economy) and the headline-grabbing activities of multinational companies in utilising child labour in their

factories. Such instances may offer the greatest chance of obtaining measurable correlations between globalisation and children's lives (explored in more detail in the section 'Macroeconomic Policy – Making the Connections' below), but only give half the picture.

Other aspects of globalisation, such as the internationalisation of certain cultural values, consumption patterns and entertainment continue to be less explored in relation to their effects on children under the assumption that 'their impact is probably less significant' (Cornia, 2002:2). From the perspective of day-to-day survival, this is probably true, but care should be taken not to underestimate the ways in which media and the export of Western products can exacerbate some aspects of impoverishment (as a relational concept) among children. In post-Soviet Russia, the desire for western consumer goods (such as Nike trainers) is a major cause of the high levels of children working on the streets (Mansurov, 2002). More analysis of this kind is therefore needed if we are to understand the numerous ways in which impoverished children both respond to and are affected by globalisation.

3.2. 'Anti-poverty' democracy

While global economic trends have undoubtedly had significant impact on children's lives, the ways in which we conceptualise and respond to child poverty have also been shaped by the circulation of ideas that globalisation has brought into the international political arena. Democracy is a prime example of this, having been heavily promoted by the West as the pinnacle of nation-state development and the most 'anti-poverty' of the various forms of political rule. Conceptually synonymous with the positive ideas of equality and participation, democracy is presented as being critical in escaping poverty and ensuring the well-being of citizens. In practice, there is actually little evidence that democratic governance necessarily diminishes either social or economic inequity (see section on 'Politics and Governance' below) and has in a number of cases intensified the divisions that previously existed.

3.3. The nation state

The construction of the nation state as the model implementing arena for democratic rule has also had significant consequences in terms of how we perceive poverty and who we hold accountable in responding to it. In many parts of the world the credibility of the nation state is not well established, having been formed without the full participation of the citizenship (e.g. Iraq). Through globalisation and the subsequent weakening of the power of the state to shape cultural practices and ideas, the definition and protection of political boundaries and borders has taken on greatly increased significance. In the process, the issue of who is 'responsible' for the well-being of people within these boundaries – be they registered citizens, refugees, 'illegal' immigrants etc. – has intensified. Globalisation, whilst facilitating the wider spread of technology and information, has also paved the way for unprecedented movements of people, and attempts to clarify state obligations within national constitutions have been increasingly undermined by the size and complexity of the population fluxes.

3.4. Human rights

The widespread dissemination of the idea of 'universal human rights' (formalised by the United Nations Declaration in 1948) has added further complexity. Historically, the 'rights' of people have been conceived of largely in civil and political terms (e.g. voting, freedom of speech, judicial representation etc.) and Amnesty International is a good example of one organisation that continues to uphold this emphasis. However, more recent human rights instruments – including the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – have since become increasingly social and economic in nature, and relate more directly to the issue of poverty. Organisations such as Human Rights Watch have subsequently expanded their agenda accordingly to incorporate these new emphases. The result is a framework in which poverty is now seen as an issue less of resources and more of rights, with the democratic nation state held up as the key guarantor and protector of those rights.

3.5. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Until the advent of the CRC in 1989, interventions focused around child welfare and protection were predominantly based on the notion of meeting 'universal' criteria of children's 'needs'. These mainly emphasised the child's survival and physical well-being, and were often hierarchically ranked to promote the areas of health, nutrition and adequate shelter above all others. However, the needs-based approach was soon felt to be lacking in that it primarily depended on contextually-fluctuating attitudes of goodwill, charity and benevolence towards children, and thus remained politically impotent. In other words, the concept of need did not carry with it any notion of obligation or responsibility in meeting that need. It also conceptualised poor children as passive victims of circumstance as opposed to survivors of adversity, social actors with competencies, insights and energy that can be employed in the alleviation of their own difficulties.

In an effort to rectify these shortcomings, these 'needs' were then reframed in a more holistic discourse of children's 'rights' that laid down the duties, responsibilities and obligations of states within the formal agenda of the CRC. The Convention also recognised the child's capacity to act independently of adults, bestowing enabling rights (such as the right to freedom of expression) alongside those concerning protection and provision. The CRC remains the single most widely ratified international treaty in existence, and the vast majority of child-focused organisations such as the Save the Children Alliance and UNICEF acknowledge its central position in guiding their actions. Yet there are a number of problems with the CRC – many pertinent to the issue of child poverty – that suggest it is far from an adequate tool with which to interpret or respond to children's worlds.

Firstly,the CRC is currently being promoted as a global standard, when in practice it is a normative framework developed within a specific context in accordance with a particular set of ideas. The fundamental notion of 'rights' is tied to a Western world-view (specific to Judeo-Christian belief systems) in which the individual human being exists as an autonomous entity in itself. Research from anthropology and other social sciences has shown that this emphasis on individuality

and individual rights holds little relevance to more 'socio-centric' societies around the world, where children exist by virtue of belonging to and sustaining a larger social group. The idea of them exercising rights autonomously is not only foreign but potentially undermining of family and community and even of child survival, since the child exists only as a part of a whole.

It is also apparent from anthropological research that in many societies, the responsibilities of children are far more important than their rights. Their social integration within families and communities and their advancement through the life cycle into adulthood (including their informal learning) is achieved through the fulfilment of these responsibilities. Children thus gain access to resources such as food and shelter by virtue of being a contributing member of the group, which is one of the reasons why disabled children face increased alienation and impoverishment. Their potential to contribute and fulfil their designated social and economic responsibilities within the system may be diminished by their disability, and it is often within this framework (rather than simple cruelty) that parents may resort to infanticide (Poffenberger, 1983; Mann, 2001; Boyden, 1990). Therefore, the idea that persons – particularly children – possess rights that may conflict with those of other group members or with the group as a whole is foreign to many cultures, and approaches that seek to tackle child poverty through the trumpeting of rights thus risk irrelevance at best, and beneficiary defiance at worst. Indeed, setting a child apart from a group to which they belong and which assigns them a separate social status can further increase child vulnerability.

Another related problem in tackling poverty through the CRC is that no children whatsoever participated in the drafting of the Convention, and very few if any have been consulted by governments as to the most effective manner of its implementation. This disregards a number of the Articles set down in the treaty itself which specify that children are capable of forming their own views and have a right to participate in decisions and matters affecting them (Boyden, 1990). This is perhaps one of the contributing factors as to why so much of the literature on child poverty is written from the point of view of how adults *think* children live (or *should* live), rather than how they actually *do* live.

However, the problem of implementation is arguably the greatest weakness of the CRC as a tool in tackling child poverty – it may tell us where a child's rights have been violated, but it does not provide a framework for effective action in such instances, or help us to discover why or how one child was affected and not another. The bulk of the treaty deals with the protection of children in especially difficult circumstances, many of which are connected to poverty. However, the way these issues (such as education, child labour, sexual exploitation, etc.) are commonly dealt with in turn encourages implementation and response that is similarly divided/exclusive in its attention, reinforcing category-based poverty interventions that risk stigmatising particular groups of children further, as will be seen. It may also lead to the inaccurate conceptualisation of impoverishment where there actually is none, simply because the international rights legislation does not reflect the socio-economic realities of children's lives. The unequal distribution of resources, combined with the overwhelming impact of poverty can make it impossible for children and families to meet such goals, particularly when these dictates may anyway run contrary to traditional values and customary law (Boyden, 1990).

The consolidation of a universal standard for children can also have the effect of penalising or even criminalising the childhoods of the poor, often for the simple reason that poor families are unable to reach this standard. For example, under the CRC, children absent from school or the home and children at work or living on the streets all signify family or personal dysfunctioning, and are thus considered legitimate targets for state intervention. This had led to a situation in Peru where children who are on the streets during school hours are classified by the state as 'materially abandoned' and are arrested by police and sent to orphanages (Boyden, personal communication). The assumption that the state's obligatory intervention in such circumstances will necessarily serve the child's best interests is therefore often mistaken. Stephens (1995) points to the modern compulsory education system of Japan and South Korea as a 'tyranny of labour' for children, and suggests that 'the universalising modernist discourse on children's rights… may actually be brought into service to legitimate situations that constitute new sorts of risks to children' (40).

Whether the democratic nation state is the best implementer of a globalised human rights agenda is highly debatable. In many parts of the world (such as Bangladesh) citizens' right 'not to be poor' cannot be guaranteed by the state, simply because populations are too high and resources too limited. Secondly, there is little evidence that the nation-state is actually the best implementing platform to protect some of the 'rights' embodied in the convention. While it is nation-states who sign and ratify treaties such as the CRC, the obligations enshrined therein often demand implementation by the family, and can rarely be realistically operationalised at the level where children live. As this paper will show, a great deal of child poverty results from micro level problems (such as inequitable intra-household distribution) in which the state is simply unable to intervene. While government policy may make some contribution to ensuring better and wider service provision for example, how those services are used remains subject to the will and discretion of citizens. Finally, there remains the underlying tension between poverty eradication or alleviation and the free-market economy proffered under democracy. If the state intervenes too heavily to raise and protect income for the poorest, it thereby sacrifices the concept of a 'free-market economy'. This struggle between the public and private provision of services continues to afflict many countries around the world (including many in the West), and remain just one of the many examples of the difficulty that nation-states have in making these global concepts workable.

All of these observations do not undermine the political importance of the CRC in recognising children as a distinct group within society, and in focusing greater international attention on the deprivations of children around the world. As an advocacy and awareness-raising tool the CRC has also proved invaluable, and continues to be constructively used by many as a platform for building consensus and understanding of children's worlds. However, caution should also be exercised to ensure that governments and other implementing partners do not use the CRC to enforce alien external standards or to judge and criticise poor behaviour by parents.

4.0. MACRO CAUSES OF CHILD POVERTY

4.1. Macroeconomics and Child Poverty – Making the Connections

The literature on child poverty is astonishingly sparse when it comes to detailing the links between the macroeconomic environment and the situation of children on the ground. While Save the Children's (2002) report acknowledges that 'globalisation affects the lives and prospects of many children around the world in very real ways, and can be a significant force for good or ill in their lives' (9), the actual evidence linking global economics and child well-being is still quite scarce. The problem is largely because of the different time scales involved: macroeconomic policies often take years to work themselves out into conceivable effects on the ground, while the manifestations of child poverty appear all too convincingly to be the sole product of more immediate factors such as a polluted water source, for example.

The problem is then worsened by the fact that macroeconomic policies on children are usually mediated through the family or other local institutions such as school and health services, which makes assessing any direct impacts particularly difficult (Harper and Marcus, 1999). A final obstacle is the fact that 'economic models either completely disregard children, subsume them under households, or construct worlds which do not even approximate children's realities' (Boyden and Levison, 2000:42). James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank has also been forced to admit that 'there are no 'child-neutral' macroeconomic and fiscal policies'[6]. Therefore, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, economic theory and analysis still fails to take into account the value or utility of children's time and labour in contributing to the economic arena, in both public and private contexts. As a result, much of the debate connecting macroeconomics with child poverty is based around conjecture and is subject to both over- and under-statement.

4.1.1 The 'Benefits' of Economic Growth

Although economic growth is generally associated with improved indicators of child wellbeing, the link is not as strong as one might imagine. Without efforts to reduce disparities in the distribution of incomes and assets as well as specific policies to ensure access to basic social services of good quality for the poor, economic growth cannot guarantee improvement in quality of life for all (Mehrotra and Delamonica, forthcoming). In many cases economic growth coexists with inequality sufficiently severe to prevent the most vulnerable from benefiting, and may even increase child poverty among excluded social groups (Boyden and Levison, 2000). As UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated in his keynote report to the UN Special Assembly on Children, May 2002:

> The pattern of growth in the 1990s meant that those children who most urgently needed a share in global prosperity were often those least likely to obtain it.

[6] Quoted at the Westminster Conference on International Action Against Child Poverty (IAACP), 26th February 2001.

By all accounts, this pattern is set to continue into the future. While the World Bank predicts a possible US$355 billion increase in global income by 2015 as a result of continuing trade liberalisation, it nevertheless admits that the net gains to Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia will be minimal (World Bank, 2002). Unfortunately, these are the very regions highlighted by Kofi Annan as being most in need – Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest child death rates in the world, while South Asia is home to 100 million of the world's 150 million malnourished children (Save the Children 2002).

4.1.2. Foreign Investment

This is often seen as one of the great benefits of globalisation for the poor. Yet studies have shown that these benefits may be very selectively distributed and may also aggravate existing rich/poor divides both within and between countries by increasing the concentration of capital flows among multinationals. Moreover, several companies continue to violate regulations such as the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, and this has direct impacts on children (see section on health below). Therefore, without specific policies to ensure access to basis social services such as healthcare, education and access to safe drinking water (which directly improve children's lives), economic growth seldom improves the quality of life for the whole population (Mehrotra and Delamonica, forthcoming).

4.1.3. Transitional Economies

Economists have argued that while the transition from a centralised to a market economy may be difficult, the period of 'short-term pain' experienced by poor children will eventually be more than compensated for by the 'long-term gain'. This does not take into account the fact that given the amount of time macroeconomic policies take to come into effect, the 'short-term pain' – characterised by constant worrying about survival, increased tension, possible domestic violence and family break-up - could very well span the entire developmental years of a child. World Bank studies of the impact of the Mexican and Thai financial crises show that

> …even after the economies of these two countries recovered, health status was still affected. During the transitory but acute recessions, children were taken away from their schools, entered hazardous jobs or prostitution rings, or sustained permanent brain damage as they suffered from acute malnutrition (Cornia, 2001:837).

4.1.4. Structural Adjustment

The economic policies of recent decades that have arguably been the most detrimental to the welfare of children are those comprising the World Bank's Structural Adjustment (Cornia, Jolly and Stewart, 1987a; 1987b). Originally intended to bring struggling economies back to their feet, the first steps involved the introduction of 'stabilisation measures' which generally included:

> …currency devaluations, wage and salary controls and reductions in government spending. To reduce expenditures, governments frequently lay off employees in the public sector, eliminate or reduce state subsidies for goods and services, and either reduce public service provision or increase user fees for such services as health and education. (Jennings, 1997:4)

In almost all countries undergoing this process, the result was an increase in mass unemployment as civil services underwent 'necessary streamlining'. At the same time, compensatory growth of new private sector jobs failed to materialise, leaving the poorest families in particular struggling to keep their head above water (Mwanza, 1998). In Zimbabwe, the proportion of the population below the poverty line rose from 33% in 1990 to approximately 60% in 1995 after the first phase of the adjustment programme – an impoverishment trend repeated across the vast majority of other countries undergoing the same process (Government of Zimbabwe, cited in Mwanza, 1998).

Meanwhile, competition in the informal sector increased, as retrenched workers and new entrants to the labour market scrambled for income-generating opportunities. Children were called upon to join the hunt for income, with over half of the households in Togo where a breadwinner had been retrenched withdrawing at least one child from school (World Bank, 1996). As Oloko (1996) wrote of Nigeria, 'children have always worked, but the Structural Adjustment Programme has aggravated the necessity of work for all members of the family for collective survival' (61). The loss or reduction in income also took its toll on child nutrition by setting one or more of three significant mechanisms in motion: first, a reduction in overall food consumption; second, a switch to cheaper or less nutritious food; and third, a decrease in the time working mothers have to spend cooking/attending to their children (Jespersen, 1992).

4.1.5. User Fees

Arguably the worst consequence of structural adjustment for children came through the introduction of user fees for basic services such as health and education. The effects of these fees can be easily perceived at the household level, with greater proportions of the poor simply unable to afford even the most basic treatment or schooling for their children. With ineffective exemption schemes for poor children and the absence of satisfactory social welfare provisioning to fall back on (discussed in more detail in the following section), poor children suffered greater hardship and sometimes death as a consequence. In Kenyan and Zambian health facilities, poor people were not exempt from fees, and many staff and institutions faced with an acute lack of resources introduced additional charges on top (Booth et al, 1994; Narayan and Nwamwaya, 1996). In China also, the replacement of the communal health system with user fees and private healthcare has led to a resurgence in diseases such as tuberculosis, a fall in child immunisation rates and an increase in both stunting and under-5 mortality over the past 15 years (UNICEF, 2000; Bloom, 1997).

4.1.6. The dangers of Privatisation

In a special report prepared for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, 26 August – 4 September 2002, Save the Children pointed out that increased involvement of the private sector in delivering basic services is likely to have a negative impact on the equity, quality and capacity of these services to combat child poverty and fulfil children's rights (Save the Children, 2002). Using numerous examples, it argues that local community exposure to global market forces and multinational companies can be devastating for poor children.

For instance, in August 2001 the public water regulator in the Philippine capital of Manila was persuaded by the private sector water providers to raise water rates by over 50%, despite not meeting their obligations to supply a 24-hr service (Save the Children, 2002). Another source points to the trend in expanding private sectors drawing personnel away from the public sector and exacerbating shortages of trained and qualified staff, precisely as witnessed in Thailand's health system during the 1980s and 1990s (Sitthi-amorn et al, 2001). The result is the lowering of both quality and quantity of staff across public sectors, with poor children disproportionately affected.

Despite this kind of evidence, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund continue to promote public-private partnerships as a means to deliver sustainable development, although the commitments to increased liberalisation central to the structural adjustment programmes are now more heavily disguised within the new Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Even the IMF has been forced to concede, however, 'it is broadly true that the core macroeconomic and structural elements of the early PRSPs have changed little from the programs of the recent past' (IMF and IDA, 2002). The key therefore lies in trying to include more child-focused policies within these grand economic schemes, so that children's rights and needs are at least acknowledged and hopefully incorporated. This does not have to change the policy in any dramatic way, for as Stefan de Vylder (2000) suggests, all of the child-focused economic choices are beneficial for adults as well, and are characterised by the following:

- Equity
- Predictability and stability
- Human and social development
- Job creation
- Inclusive development
- Accumulation of social capital
- Long-term perspective
- Gender and Age awareness

4.2. Politics and Governance – Democracy to the Rescue?

As with macroeconomic policy, the links between child poverty and political environments are often neither clear nor easily substantiated. The machinations of some dictatorships and military regimes such as those enacted in Burma, Nigeria and

various countries in Africa have obvious and immediate effects on child mortality and access to basic services. However, the literature on child poverty suffers from largely ignoring the political backdrop – probably because little or no evidence has been collected across a time period long enough to make the connections easier to identify. In spite of this lack of data, a recent World Bank study of African poverty at the Millennium was adamant in its assertion that 'the failings of political systems, and the social forces underlying these, are identified as the key primary factors underlying the poverty problem of many African countries' (White and Killick, 2001:30). The numerous reasons proffered as evidence for this statement include an analysis of how political corruption and poor governance stunt economic incentives and the processes of accumulation; constitute a major source of the inadequate human capital of the poor; and remain largely unresponsive in the face of urgent and growing crises such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic (ibid).

4.2.1. Democracy and Poverty

Of all the literature concerning the influence of politics on poverty, the 2002 UNDP Human Development Report takes the closest look, and constructs its analysis around a central thesis reifying democracy as the key player in poverty alleviation. We are told that 'Democracy is the only political regime that guarantees political and civil freedoms and the right to participate' (3) – at least in principle, given evidence of continuing discrimination and exclusion in large democracies such as India and the USA. Democracy also

> …helps protect people from economic and political catastrophes such as famines and descent into chaos – Nobel Prize-winner Amartya Sen has shown how elections and a free press give politicians in democracies much stronger incentives to avert famines. (UNDP, 2002:3)

It cites as evidence for this the fact that while staggering numbers of people have lost their lives in famines in non-democratic countries such as China (when nearly 30 million people died between 1958-61), since achieving independence in 1947 India has not had a single famine, even in the face of severe crop failures. Food production may have been hit hard during the 1973 drought in Maharashtra, but elected politicians responded with public works programmes for 5 million people and averted a famine (ibid).

Another example is then cited of the benefits democratic civil society activism can bring in improving basic services such as healthcare and sanitation – both of which are vital ingredients in the alleviation of child poverty. In Porto Alegra, Brazil, citizen participation in preparing municipal budgets has helped reallocate spending to critical human development priorities, with the result that during the first 7 years of this experiment, the proportion of households with access to water increased from 80% to 98%, and those with access to sanitation from 46% to 85% (ibid). As usual, we need to be cautious in celebrating these statistics, for there is no indication given here of whether or to what extent the poor benefited within these groups.

Indeed, it would appear somewhat of a hasty over-simplification to conclude from these examples that the poverty of children is automatically ameliorated by

virtue of overarching democratic rule alone, for Brazil is but one country among many where democracy continues to coexist with economic and social inequalities that are among the world's largest. Evidence from other democratic countries also suggests that the relation is far from reliable, particularly in India, which, despite being the world's largest democracy, still suffers from chronic political instability, the hegemony of indigenous elites and the effective exclusion of large numbers of ethnic and religious minorities (Boyden et al, 2001).

4.2.2. Social Welfare Systems – Falling through the net

The poorest people in any country often depend on the construction of efficient and capacious social welfare mechanisms for their very existence. These 'safety nets' are deeply rooted within the political arena and are frequently touted during election campaigns as a means of winning more votes. Even in the richer North however, social welfare systems are seldom adequate to cope with the demand or the diversity of the poverty populations they are designed to assist (Danzinger and Stern, 1990). In the USA, for example, there has been a dramatic shift away from universal benefits for all, and now only the poverty of those *not expected* to work – such as the elderly or disabled – is addressed with expanded welfare benefits, which leaves numerous groups including single parents and their children out in the cold (Ellwood, 1987).

In the poorer countries of the South, it is often a bonus if government assistance programmes exist at all, and where they do they often suffer heavily from corruption. While contributing a little in poor people's struggles to survive, they rarely help them escape poverty altogether (Narayan et al, 1999). Furthermore, the poor are all too frequently prevented from accessing the resources and benefits that are supposed to be directly targeted at them, not merely because of bureaucratic requirements for documentation, but also through the transaction costs in proving eligibility. As one respondent in Moldova related,

> Not every disabled person can afford the procedures to qualify for disability payments; the medical examination alone is 170 lei, and families outside the Chinsinau must also reckon in transportation costs for the disabled person as well as the accompanying person. (ibid:190)

This means that huge numbers of children in poverty are unable to access assistance even when such provisions formally exist – an important argument against making hasty assumptions as to which groups of poverty-stricken children may be the most vulnerable. Equally, given that participatory consultations with poor families in these countries show that formal service provision institutions are largely 'ineffective and irrelevant in the lives of the poor' (ibid), we should be careful not to over-estimate the influence or capacity of governmental assistance as a contributing partner in the fight against child poverty.

4.2.3 Sanctions and the International Arena

Sanctions have for many decades been utilised as the centrepiece of efforts to subdue or alienate political regimes designated as abusive by the United Nations. Countries

that qualify for this treatment may have governments enacting crimes ranging from widespread human rights abuses to harbouring international terrorists, and the imposition of sanctions (most frequently connected to trade) is seen to be the best solution avoiding all out warfare. However, as Graca Machel points out, sanctions have had devastating impacts on the health, development and lives of children in embargoed countries.

Trade restrictions cause serious shortages of civilian-related items, creating enormous economic hardship. They also accelerate the deterioration of public infrastructure critical to health, including water, sanitation and electrical power. As a result, families and especially children experience extreme deprivation, malnutrition and poor health. Given that sanctions usually affect innocent civilians far more than the political regimes they are targeted at, the success rate of sanctions has been poor, with many imposed sanctions running for decades. The UN Security Council's sanctions regime against Iraq is its longest running and most severe yet, with half a million Iraqi children estimated to have died as a result (Machel, 2000).

4.2.4. The Criminalisation of Child Poverty

A worrying issue connected to judiciary politics and poor governance is the increasing criminalisation of child poverty, although this is still surprisingly absent in the literature. In some countries, a judge can put children in jail simply because they are dirty or sleeping on the streets, and in Kenya, the three most common legal bases for the detention of children in juvenile remand homes are 'destitution and vagrancy', 'beyond parental control' and 'found begging' – all of which may be seen as directly related to child poverty (UNICEF, 2002). State institutions in South Africa also exclude street children from the judiciary system and treat children as youth offenders in terms of the Criminal Procedures Act, instead of identifying them as neglected children and treating them under the Child Care Act (Narayan et al, 1999). In many countries, informal sector work such as street vending is also defined as illegal, while in Peru, children on the streets are viewed as materially abandoned, and can be placed in institutional care by the juvenile courts on this basis (Boyden, personal communication 2002).

Public officials, including police and urban authorities, are also frequently cited by street children as being overly oppressive and often vindictive, mainly as a result of deeply-rooted corruption and a simple lack of respect:

> Laxmi, a pavement dweller in Bombay, reported 'time after time the police demolished us. We didn't realise that the police legally can demolish our plastic sheets and bamboo poles'. A community worker from Jakarta reported 'the poor are forcibly removed. In some cases, groups of thugs, under the eyes of police officials, were brought in to demolish the houses and push the people out. People were severely beaten… communities were broken; family life suffered… and their children couldn't attend schools.
> (Murphy, 1990:46)

Simply living in one particular impoverished area within a city can make children and their families more liable to accusations of criminality. As one group of youths in

Jamaica reported, 'through area stigmatisation, everyone in their community was branded either a criminal or an accomplice to one, so that they are disrespected by outsiders and the police alike and cannot secure a job' (Narayan et al, 1999:189). Self-construction, invasion of unused urban land and other forms of informal housing are generally defined as illegal. This stigmatisation tends to result in a vicious circle whereby children from these areas grow up with little expectation or chance of doing anything other than fulfilling these stereotypes. In the opinion of one man speaking of exactly this issue in Venezuela, 'Those juveniles are in another world and don't believe in anything. They don't care if you are really tall and built or tiny, if they like what you are carrying they will take it from you, and if it involves breaking into your home, they'll do it' (ibid:194). This has a further knock-on effect for children outside these stigmatised communities – in Thailand, some children had been forced by their parents to drop out of school not to work, but to guard the home from break-ins while their parents were out (ibid).

In Bangladesh, poverty-stricken adolescents may also become entangled in criminality after being offered small incentives by political activists looking to swell their numbers on protests and marches. As these children are usually promenaded at the front of these protests holding banners and flags, they are often the first to be rounded up by the authorities for arrest in the event that a protest gets out of hand, when their former 'friends' suddenly disappear (Blanchet, 1996). Poor pay and conditions combined with targets for numbers of arrests also contribute to making police in Bangladesh behave abusively towards children in the street, arresting them arbitrarily and demanding payment from their families for their release (White, forthcoming).

4.3. Poverty and the Environment – An Enemy in Mother Nature?

The physical environment in which children live – be it geographical terrain, shelter or climate – can play an important role in mitigating or exacerbating their experience of poverty, though this is rarely recognised in the literature. Most of the attention it does receive is framed around the impact of man on the environment rather than vice versa, and focuses on the sustainability of exclusively 'adult' livelihoods and the controversial introduction of new biotechnology (such as GM farming) into traditional agricultural practices. Children's involvement in these areas is still largely ignored within these debates, despite evidence that agriculture accounts for over 70% of the total workforce of 5-14 year old children (ILO, 1996). Although the natural environment (climate, vegetation, terrain) plays a key role in permeating conditions that enhance or mitigate the spread of disease, the impact of various environmental settings on children is still a relatively new direction of analysis. Early studies have produced some interesting findings, however, particularly in the field of child malnutrition, where it has been suggested that children born in certain regions are more likely to experience malnourishment at some point in their life partly through the influence of climate alone.

The climate is also changing rapidly all around the world under the influence of processes such as the greenhouse effect, mass deforestation, desertification and soil erosion. Children in regions that already start with an unusually high proportion of arid and semi-arid land (such as Africa) face environmental situations that can only

get worse. The International Food Policy Research Institute currently estimate that at least two-thirds of total cropland in Africa is suffering from degradation (White and Killick, 2001). The marginal land on which poor families depend is highly vulnerable to soil erosion, and families quickly become trapped in a cycle of falling yields, increased exploitation and further erosion. With scarce affordable housing in urbanised areas, poor families are often forced to reside on steep hillsides and marshes highly susceptible to mudslides and floods. In areas of Benin, for example, poor people live in water 'up to their ankles for three months a year', and must contend with diarrhoeal diseases and respiratory tract infections as a result (Narayan et al, 1999:47). When environmental disasters are relatively predictable, as with seasonal flooding in Bangladesh where river systems annually drain a vast basin 12 times their own area, local people and the economy slowly adapt over generations. Even then, in years when river levels and heavy rainfall peak together, there is still enormous loss of life, livelihoods, property and crops, with the poorest rural families and their children being hit hardest (ibid).

4.4. Rural vs. Urban Poverty

This is one area where there is a relatively large amount of information available within the literature on child poverty, but it tends nevertheless to analyse the urban/rural differential solely in terms of statistics, without much insight into the actual experience of either. Some large publications such as the World Development Report 2000/2001 disappointingly appear to ignore it altogether, and make no effort to disaggregate poverty into urban and rural categories (World Bank, 2000). In general, the facts and figures quoted underline why much of the migratory movement that characterises the coping strategies of many poor families is from rural to urban. Families in urban areas are more likely than their rural counterparts to enjoy better access to services, longer life expectations at birth, lower rates of stunted growth and better standards of living (White and Killick, 2001; Kanbur and Squire, 1999; Kabeer, 1994; Save the Children, 2000). Employment rates may also be higher in urban conglomerations, but the myth that urban salaries are automatically higher appears unsubstantiated – the African urban working poor have earnings (usually within the informal sector) below the poverty line (White and Killick, 2001).

Caution needs to be exercised as always with urban/rural statistics, for exactly where the boundaries are drawn between the two is not always made apparent. As Phillip Amis (2002) suggests in the case of South Africa, it is likely that the definition of 'urban' used greatly underestimates the extent of real urban poverty, largely because the apartheid history of settlement and removals has made 'urban' and 'rural' very problematic categories. Most studies do not stop to question these categories so deeply rooted in poverty discourse, and continue to cite statistics that tend to cumulatively reinforce each other to the point where much of the literature appears to assume child poverty to be a solely rural phenomenon.

Granted, the vast majority of the world's poor children still live in rural areas, and the evidence and analysis for this is well-developed (Bird et al, 2002; Chambers, 1983; Whitehead and Kabeer, 1999; World Bank 1997). However, the balance is significantly changing, particularly with rapid urbanisation in the South (Jazairy et al, 1992). Africa's towns are expanding twice as fast as the total population, and the

proportion of urban dwellers has more than doubled since 1960 (White and Killick, 2001), but the literature does not yet appear to have taken this on board. The severity of urban child poverty also appears to be increasing - in Mozambique, although rural children are more likely to be among the very poor, urban children are more likely to be among the poorest of the poor in terms of income poverty (Rebelo, 1999). Meanwhile, a recent review suggests that urban poverty as a proportion of total poverty is increasing in Bangladesh, China, Colombia, Ghana, India, Nigeria and Pakistan – seven countries that represent two thirds of the developing world's population (Haddad et al, 1999). The concentration of services and resources in cities is no guarantee of child or youth welfare, and indeed the failure of these amenities to cope with this mushrooming urbanisation has even in some cases led to the re-emergence of malaria in cities such as Nairobi and Harare, from which it was thought eradicated (White and Killick, 2001). Whatever the effects, it has undeniably become 'impossible now in the 21st century to have an anti-poverty strategy without an urban dimension' (Amis, 2002:3).

Those studies that do attempt to take the urban dimension into account in relation to child poverty still tend to limit their discussions to the easily visible categories of urban children (such as street children or sex workers) who make up only a small proportion. They also tend to assume that phenomena such as these are an inevitable consequence of poverty, when there may be other causes such as family discord or simply a search for freedom and excitement by young people. Only a handful of studies acknowledge the changes in family structure and household organisation that characterise urbanisation, whereby households shrink and the number of adults – grandmothers, aunts and older cousins – available for childcare drops dramatically (Black, 2000; Bartlett et al, 1999). There is an urgent need for more research in this area, particularly as urbanisation is set to continue at an equally rapid pace.

Finally, there is also a need for a deeper understanding of how the larger macroeconomic environment is affecting the balance between rural and urban poverty. This is particularly important in the context of financial crises such as that experienced in East Asia. In Indonesia, the country hit hardest by the crisis, the traditional poverty concentration is in rural areas – in 1997 it was at 12.4% as opposed to 9.2% in the urban sector. But the immediate impact of the crisis fell on the financial sector, with incomes in urban areas falling by more than 30%, compared to less than 15% in rural areas (Poppele et al, 1999). This means that if poverty alleviation schemes continued to have been prescribed according to the traditional pre-crisis distribution of poverty, a whole population of newly poor children in the urban sector would have been missed (Kanbur and Squire, 1999). Regular assessment of other factors that potentially affect the rural/urban bias – aside from the most obvious trend in urban migration – is therefore necessary to ensure that new generations of poor children do not slip through the net.

4.5. The Enduring Legacy of Conflict

It is estimated that 540 million children, or 1 in 4, live in countries where there may be conflict[7] at any moment, are displaced or made refugees as a result of conflicts that are already raging (UNICEF, 2000b). While violent conflict is not confined to the South, a disproportionate number of conflicts take place in poor countries – more than half the countries in Africa, for example, are affected by armed conflicts. At the macro level, there are numerous political, social and economic costs over and above the deaths directly resulting from battle – the World Bank estimates, for example, that conflict in Africa is causing a loss of 2% annual economic growth across the continent, as well as an average of 12% loss in agricultural productivity (DfID, 2001). Graca Machel's seminal 1996 report on *The Impact of Conflict on Children* was the key in translating the multiple effects of conflict into impacts on children, with UNICEF's comprehensive South Asian study following 5 years later (Boyden et al, 2001). These reports point to the difficulty in establishing precise links between conflict and the impoverishment of children, and the necessity of relying heavily on 'impression and anecdotal evidence, backed up by such statistics as exist regarding basic health, literacy levels and life expectancy pre-, post- and during conflict' (ibid:8).

The primary concern for children in conflict zones is their physical safety – these dangers range from being accidentally caught in the crossfire, bombing and shelling and communal massacres, to landmines, which children are particularly vulnerable to due to their generally smaller stature and the proximity of vital organs to the body surface. These threats to the physical integrity of the child make it very dangerous for them to remain freely mobile during a conflict, which may affect their access to schooling and/or employment. The deliberate destruction of transport facilities and infrastructure also deepens this isolation. A general breakdown of law and order often leads to uncontrolled theft and looting, exacerbated by problems of food production arising from the abandonment of land through forced migration, fear of military action or shortage of labour. Poor families are particularly vulnerable here, since they can least afford to lose what little they have. Households that are just managing to survive economically may be rendered destitute by the demands of military forces living in their immediate vicinity. Particularly unfortunate are those living in 'grey zones' who may be subject to extortion from both sides – reportedly the case in many villages in Nepal and Kashmir. The poor living in these areas 'fall below the law' in the sense of losing the law's protection (Keen, 2000).

4.5.1. Child Combatants

The connection between children and conflict is given greatest attention when it concerns child soldiers, and the frequently cited estimate that around 300,000 children are directly involved in armed conflicts around the world at any time.[8] Poverty is a contributing factor here for two reasons: firstly, military units who recruit forcefully often choose children from the poorest communities because they are the most

[7] Conflict is a difficult and chameleonic term to define, but for the purpose of this report it will be assumed to refer to "a struggle, between individuals or collectivities over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are to assert their values or claims over those of others", (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999:14).

[8] Save the Children International Alliance Child Soldier Database, website: http://www.rb.se/childwardatabase

accessible and least able to defend themselves. This was the case in Uganda when The Lord's Resistance Army abducted between 5,000 and 8,000 children between 1995-7 (Amnesty International, 1999). Secondly, it has been suggested that coping strategies collapse more often when associated with violence than with environmental and economic shocks because of the severity and length of conflict (Goodhand, 2001). For a poor family, giving their child a gun may thus become a rational livelihood strategy – as one commentator on Liberia noted, 'the law in force here is this: whoever has weapons eats first'(Kapusckinski, 2001, cited in Goodhand, 2001:16).

Joining a military group can give a poor adolescent the opportunity and power to take control of his or her life, to put rice/potatoes on the table of his family or at least to offer them the protection of the army. However, in the post-conflict period it can have a powerful adverse impact on their reintegration into society. This is because in many conflicts, including Mozambique and Uganda, child soldiers have been forced to kill family or community members in order to reinforce their loyalty to the rebel army and to prevent them returning to their communities (Oulanyah, 1998, Rebelo, 1999). Such experiences can destroy trust, with severe implications for social cohesion and support networks.

While it is the numbers of deaths on the battlefield that dominate coverage of conflict around the world, many more people – the majority women and children – die from wars as a result of the lack of basic medical services, the destruction of rural livelihoods and transport, and the collapse of the state (Goodhand, 2001). For those children growing up in societies where violence is common – such as urban South Africa – it may become normalised as a means of solving disagreements, and traditions which helped maintain social stability may collapse without replacement (Oulanyah, 1998). The enduring legacy of the damage inflicted by conflict can then last for many years after peace has been negotiated: 'The end of any war is not the end of its costs' (Green, 1994:45). If anything, poverty is likely to continue increasing due to the higher dependency ratios resulting from the loss of adult male breadwinners and the increased proportion of elderly, women and the disabled in the population (Goodhand, 2001). Even those families who manage to retain their productive assets may be left with insufficient labour through death or disablement to make proper use of them. It may not matter how quickly the actual period of fighting is over – in just a few minutes the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001 had devastating repercussions, as the President of the World Bank relates:

> We estimate that tens of thousands more children will die worldwide and some ten million more people are likely to live below the poverty line of $1 a day because of the [September 11] terrorist attacks. This is simply from loss of income. Many, many more people will be thrown into poverty if development strategies are disrupted. [9]

Whether poverty is a causal factor in conflict is still a matter of contestation – some believe that it is the combined lack of poor governance, societal welfare and humanitarian crises that renders poor societies 'at risk of falling into no-exit cycles of

[9] James D. Wolfensohn, quoted at the Westminster Conference on International Action Against Child Poverty (IAACP), 26 February 2001, London.

conflict' (Gurr et al, 2001:13), backed up by those who conclude that 'the very high incidence of wars among low-income countries almost certainly reflects a two-way causality with low-income, predisposing conflict and itself being a probable outcome of conflict' (Stewart and Fitzgerald, 2000:4). Graca Machel (2000) also points to the links between conflict and increased rates of HIV/AIDS transmissions, which have massive implications in terms of orphanhood and child poverty in general. However, the linkage is still vehemently denied in research conducted by the Clingendael Institute in The Hague, which unequivocally asserts that 'there is no clear and persistent relationship between poverty and violent conflict' (Vestegen, 2001:5). Whatever the case, we can at least be sure that the many dimensions of child poverty are more often than not deeply exacerbated by conflict, for many years after the guns have stopped firing.

5.0. MESO REACTIONS TO CHILD POVERTY

5.1. The Stigmatisation of Poverty

Poverty can be a source of stigma and shame for children all around the world. Much of the abuse may come from other children and peer groups, particularly in institutions such as schools, where the inability of poor children to conform physically, materially or intellectually often incites bullying. Some schools may even invite stigmatisation by exacerbating the social distinctions. As one teacher from Latvia described,

> Children who receive free lunches are served at a separate table, receive poorer quality food, and feel humiliated when other children claim they are eating from other people's money, even though some parents do community work for the municipality to pay for the lunches. (Narayan et al, 1999:31)

The assumption that in countries where poverty is the 'norm', poor children would therefore suffer less abuse is also shown to be unfounded, for there is always a hierarchy of poverty, even among the poorest of the poor (Save the Children, 2001). The case of a 10 year-old Kenyan boy in Nairobi who tried to commit suicide simply because he was ashamed to go to church barefooted is a stark example (Narayan and Nwamwaya, 1996).

According to participatory consultations with poor children in the North and South, the feeling of 'not belonging' generated through poverty was one of the most pressing and debilitating: 'I want to be named like any other people in the community because we are no different from them. The only difference is that we live in poor houses and they live in nice houses' (Zimbabwean child quoted in Save the Children, 2001:14). Interestingly, however, a significant number of children also expressed concern about being 'full participating members' of the societies they lived in. In the North, many feared being looked down upon, while others simply saw the 'community' as nosy and interfering with their freedom. This was particularly apparent among children born into already marginalized communities such as Travellers, whose previous experience with ostracism made them more cautious:

> Community for me is not something I really want to belong to anyway, because there are so many rules and you have to do so many things… If you're just by yourself you can do what you want, don't have to answer to anyone, can do it your way (UK child quoted in Save the Children, 2001:15)

These attitudes were less prominent in the South, where cultures are more community based or because literal survival is more of a critical issue.

While it is obvious that social exclusion and poverty are deeply interconnected, with each tending to reinforce the other, it should not, however, be assumed that the two necessarily coexist. As participatory assessments with poor groups from around the world have shown, 'people can be poor without being socially excluded, or excluded without being poor' (Narayan et al, 1999:188).

5.2. Social Exclusion and Ethnicity

For large numbers of children poverty, abuse and other forms of adversity are not random or chance experiences, but simply the result of *who* they are (Boyden and Levison, 2000). Social exclusion on the grounds of ethnicity is a common theme throughout the literature, and plays an important role in determining the degree of children's vulnerability to both becoming poor and being able to escape from poverty. In Peru, for example, indigenous groups were 50% more likely to be poor than non-indigenous groups in 1997, with the incidence of income poverty generally much higher among the indigenous populations across Latin America as a whole (World Bank, 2000). In the United States the distinctions are particularly pronounced: not only are poor black children 5 times more likely to be chronically poor than all other children, but the Infant Mortality Rates in some states are still as high as those in the developing world, despite the US being perceived as a 'rich' country. Even the completion of many years of schooling rarely makes a difference to this pattern, for at every education level, black non-Hispanic men had the highest rate of low earnings in the USA, followed by Hispanics and then white non-Hispanics (Danziger and Stern, 1990).

Many of these disadvantages faced by poor children of minority ethnicities are the result of marginalization in ethnic ghettos and segregation from mainstream services, but they may also be institutionalised within the rigidities of structures such as the caste system in India:

> It is observed by Gandas of Khairmal [a low caste] that, even in public institutions like schools, their children take midday meals sitting at a distance from other children. One Anganwadi [higher caste] worker had to leave the job because she did not want to clean the utensils touched by Ganda boys and did not like to take care of the Ganda children. (Narayan et al, 1999:202)

Children from ethnic minorities in Vietnam face similar discrimination in attending school, often with additional linguistic barriers:

> In the whole district, there are two Chau Ma children going to school. They do not want to go to the school, for the Kinh children are beating them up…

> Teachers are available although most of them speak only Vietnamese. The rate of Kinh children going to school is much higher than that of ethnic groups. Most of the drop-outs are found among the indigenous people – if they ever start school. (ibid)

All of these factors – and many more – conspire to render children from ethnic minority groups almost universally more likely than other children to suffer poverty. Yet the literature does not reflect this, tending to concentrate instead on generic categories of vulnerable children such as street kids, working children or sex workers/prostitutes.

5.3. Child Poverty and Disability

According to the World Health Organisation, it is estimated that at least one in ten children is born with, or acquires during childhood, a serious physical, sensory or mental impairment (Boyden and Levison, 2000). They are disproportionately among the poorest of the poor in all parts of the world (Metts, 2000), often comprising as much as 15-20% of the poorest in developing countries (Elwan, 1999). It is therefore astonishing to see the extent to which disabled children have been ignored and neglected in the literature on child poverty. While there are considerable problems in researching child disability, much of this negligence is apparently justified by the consideration of disability as a 'specialist' issue separate from mainstream development. Many child-focus NGOs and academics still insist that they cannot focus on disability issues because they do not have 'adequate expertise or data', making it difficult for them to form inclusive policy approaches to tackling chronic poverty and disability (Metts, 2000). These concerns are generally unfounded however, for the issues affecting disabled children are exactly the same as those of mainstream development – equality, empowerment, human rights, poverty and so on. Biasing research in favour of non-disabled children constitutes yet another form of institutional discrimination that disabled children must contend with, alongside exclusion from education, employment and even the distribution of inheritance within the family (Yeo, 2001). Avoiding the issue is actually not in agencies' or academics' best interests either, for as Lee (1999) points out, 'Because disability and poverty are inextricably linked, poverty can never be eradicated until disabled people enjoy equal rights with non-disabled people' (cited in Yeo, 2001:5).

Even where research with disabled children has been carried out, it has overwhelmingly been performed by European or North American non-disabled academics, with very little opportunity being given for the influence of agenda by disabled people, let alone those living in chronic poverty (Yeo, 2001). The methodology behind research may itself even serve to exclude people with many forms of impairment – Participatory Poverty Assessments are currently very popular, but tend to be very visual, excluding those with visual impairments. This has led to a widespread lack of comparable or reliable data on the incidence, distribution or trends of disability in general, let alone the extent of disabled children's poverty. As a result, systems of analysis developed by agencies and institutions have been misguided.

For example, 'Disability Adjusted Life Years' (DALY) is the international classification system developed by the World Bank, based on the wrongful

assumptions that disabled people necessarily represent a drain on society; that disability can be measured in terms of years of burden and loss; and that disability and disease are synonymous. There is no recognition of the discrimination or marginalisation of disabled people, nor of the cultural context of different impairments. Instead, an impairment is expected to have the same value in all contexts (Yeo, 2001).

Efforts by the World Health Organisation have been slightly more encouraging, with the latest form of their International Classification of Impairment, Disability and Handicap (ICIDH) being developed in 1997 to specifically incorporate some social and environmental factors. This goes further towards recognising that a disabled person may have an impairment, but would not inevitably have significant limitation of activities if exclusion and discrimination were not experienced. However, it is still not frequently recognised that people are 'disabled from participating by others' attitudes and social barriers… Many people still believe that disabled people are not able to participate' (Hurst, 1999 cited in Yeo, 2001:15). In the few instances where aid and attention is specifically targeted towards disabled children and their families, it may actually result in exacerbating the discrimination and hostility felt towards them by the larger community, who feel their own needs are being overlooked. This was the case following the Armenian earthquake (Narayan et al, 1999).

In many cultures, the birth of a disabled child is considered a tragedy – the child needs more care and may not be considered as having the potential to ever support him or herself (let alone the family) in the future. In communities already struggling under chronic poverty, these children are likely to be further excluded in the allocation of scarce resources, as it may be viewed as 'economically irresponsible' to give an equal share of food to a disabled child who cannot 'contribute in return' (Yeo, 2001). As Ashton (1999) concludes, 'early lack of investment in disabled children is not just a reflection of ignorance. In situations of poverty this is a desperate but rational decision' (cited in Yeo, 2001:9). Similarly, disabled children often remain untreated in the case of illness, with their survival sometimes left to 'the Hand of God'. They are also far less likely to be sent to school (even if physically possible) for fear that either they will not cope, or that they will bring stigma upon the family and denigrate the marriage prospects of other siblings. Most of the time, 'disabled children are not seen as human beings; they are isolated at home and not sent to school' (Narayan et al, 1999:203), with other non-disabled children automatically getting priority in most decisions. As a result, the International Disability and Development Consortium estimate that a massive 98% of disabled children in developing countries are denied any formal education, substantially lessening their chances to escape from poverty (IDDC, 1999).

What is often not realised in the context of discussing disabled poor children is that at least 100 million people worldwide suffer impairments resulting from malnutrition and poor sanitation, which are therefore preventable (Lee, 1999). The World Health Organisation (1992) estimates that up to 70% of childhood blindness and 50% of hearing impediments in Africa and Asia are preventable or treatable. In India, lathyrism is a motor-neurone disease that affects mobility and coordination, and is caused by toxins in the cheapest forms of lentils. Almost everyone eating these lentils is aware of the risk, but because of their poverty have no alternative. Similarly,

in Cambodia over 70% of people disabled by landmines had been foraging or farming in full knowledge that the area was infested with landmines, but again had no alternative (ADD, 1997). Unfortunately, the literature still appears some way off from recognising this inextricable link between poverty and disability, and the notion that one cannot be tackled without the other.

6.0. Micro Manifestations of Child Poverty

6.1.1. More than Mortality – Rethinking approaches to Child Poverty and Health

The World Health Organisation (WHO) constitution defines health holistically as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. In other words, 'health' encompasses much more than mere mortality, which makes it surprising that the literature on child health continues to focus itself around purely physical indicators such as infant mortality rates, malnutrition, stunting, etc. Granted, infectious diseases do have a disproportionate impact on children, with 25% of all deaths occurring in early childhood, but this emphasis on health as a physical issue has led to an overwhelming bias in researching only very young children (especially the under 5's), and effectively ignoring adolescents altogether. This preferential focus may on the one hand stem from the fact that child health in developing countries – particularly in relation to the characteristically severe dimensions of child poverty found in the South – is often conceived in accordance with the Western cultural imperative to save lives. Within this framework, it is saving lives that counts, rather than issues of mental health that tend to affect older children. But as Panter-Brick (forthcoming) points out, this prioritisation is not necessarily shared by societies in the developing world, who may find the emphasis on child survival – without alleviating poverty and improving quality of life – misplaced. It has already apparent from discussions above that children are not always a community or family's top priority, with adult breadwinners often being given the greatest share of scarce resources before child dependents.

What constitutes a 'child health' issue worthy of address within the literature on child poverty is neither simple nor unbiased. Equally, what the target populations themselves understand by the term 'healthy' is frequently context- and culture-specific, sometimes bearing little resemblance to Western notions. For example, a study of market women in Nigeria found that 71% of mothers believed that the diarrhoea suffered by their child was caused by the normal teething process of childhood, with the consequence that they neither sought treatment for it nor looked to poor personal or environmental hygiene as contributing factors (Ene-Obong et al, 2000 cited in Panter-Brick, forthcoming). This is further complicated by results from participatory studies with children in the North and South, which suggest that although poverty is often measured through health, poor children actually appear to talk about it relatively little. They do not complain about their health to the extent that adults may, though they are often aware of not being 'fully up to strength'. In other words, children are very aware of the health implications of their lifestyles – a trend that seems more apparent among children in the South than the North:

> Our health will be threatened as long as we continue to live in these overcrowded conditions. We suffer from constant headaches which also come from our daily problems and stress in our lives.
> (Zimbabwean child, Save the Children 2001:18)

6.1.2 Why are poor children less healthy?

The issues raised above constitute only part of why impoverished children are more vulnerable to illness than non-poor children. As Wise and Myers (1988) suggest,

> Children of poor families experience more time lost from school and more days of restricted activity due to illness than do those of the non-poor. The inadequacy of their diet has produced significantly elevated rates of iron deficiency anaemia… Inadequate housing conditions also can affect morbidity, as lead poisoning is heavily concentrated in poor children. (1175)

In America, The National Centre for Children in Poverty (NCCP, 1990) reports that poor children are more than twice as likely as the non-poor to die in an auto accident and five times more likely to die in a fire. These ratios are higher because of the dangerous housing many of them live in and inadequate adult supervision. Their health problems may even begin before they are born: it is estimated that 375,000 children are born annually in the US who have been exposed to addictive drugs before their birth such as 'crack' and heroin. Prenatal drug exposure often results in brain damage, withdrawal symptoms at birth, prematurity and learning disabilities which are not evident until the child is between 2 and 5 years old (Danziger and Stern, 1990). It is often assumed that drug-related health issues belong mostly to children and adults in the richer countries, but according to one study in South Africa, as many as 9 out of 10 street children are thought to be dependent on glue obtained cheaply in market places, and solvents bought in industrial areas (UNICEF, 2002).

6.1.3. Health as a Political and Economic issue

The correlation between child health and poverty may also have an overarching political dimension. According to demographic analysis, countries where the income differentials between the rich and poor are large (meaning more or deeper relative poverty) tend to have worse indicators of health than countries where the differences are small. As Wilkinson (1996) concludes, 'It is…the most egalitarian rather than the richest developed countries which have the best health' (76), which further merits a redress in the analytical balance of child health and poverty to include the richer North. More research is also needed on the ways in which globalisation and international markets interact with economic hardship to affect traditional child-rearing practices, for these are vital to the early health of the child.

Of course, the biggest problem for poor families and their children has most likely been the introduction of user fees for healthcare as part of the Structural Adjustment Programmes discussed above, which have forced many into a 'medical poverty trap' (Whitehead et al, 2001). Meeting these often comparatively extortionate expenses drives around 3 million people in Vietnam into poverty every year, resulting

in a 4% rise in the poverty headcount (Wagstaff, 2001). In Bangladesh, half of all urban families in financial crisis cite medical costs of a family member as the cause of their problems (IFC, 2002). Finally, in one survey in Cambodia, 45% of rural families who were found to have lost their land had done so as a result of debts relating to medical expenses – the largest single category (Biddulph, 2000).

6.2. Reading between the Lines – Child Poverty and Education

Much has been written on the benefits of education in tackling child poverty, and its eminence in the literature is so deeply-rooted that it does not merit repeating. The rewards of literacy and numeracy have been traced to prosperity at many stages in life across sectors such as employment, health and material wealth (Danziger and Stern, 1990; Wolfe, 1990; Sewell and Shaw, 1988; ILO, 1996). Large development agencies in particular – UNICEF, Save the Children, Oxfam International and others – have continually stressed the importance of education throughout their work on child poverty, to the point where it is now immediately assumed by most policy makers and child activists alike that schooling is universally beneficial in any context (Myers and Boyden, 1998). However, there has been growing empirical evidence from less prominent sources suggesting that this view is dangerously complacent, and that there is actually 'no simplistic universal education/development relationship' after all (Gould, 1993:202). This section will therefore be given over to these findings and other less discussed areas of child education in order to balance this perspective and explode the myths.

Education most often enters the literature on child poverty at the point of its departure – i.e. when a child is seen to drop out of school through the economic pressures of impoverishment. It is stated, for example, that 'children in poor families are 3 times more likely to drop out… than are children in prosperous families' (Danziger and Stern, 1990:3), with leaving school implicitly acknowledged as a decision forced upon the child by parents or care-givers struggling to make ends meet. In practice, even when schooling is free, attendance may be costly in terms of having to buy uniforms, utensils and in some contexts, bribe teachers. Many children must therefore work in order to be able to go to school. More attentions should also be given to the significant number of children who drop out from school for other reasons. For example, there is ample evidence that many children globally choose to leave of their own accord in response to physical or psychological abuse from teachers, humiliation caused by other children, or discouragement at the unproductiveness of sitting in school without learning (Woodhead, 1998).

That children leave because they consider the school to be irrelevant to their needs is particularly common – a survey of 600 children in Guatemala who had dropped out found that 40% had left because of deficiencies of the school, such as irresponsible teachers, insufficient resources and useless curricula. Economic motives were the second most common reason cited (28%), with only 24% giving the need to work as their primary reason (Salazar and Glasinovich, 1996):

> I don't need to go to school. What can I learn there? I know children who went to school. Their family paid for the fees and uniforms and now they are educated. But you see them sitting around. Now they are useless to their

> families. They don't know anything about farming or trading or making money… (UNICEF, 1998:9)

Nor should the fact that these children forgo their education lead to assumptions that they are necessarily ignorant as a result – in one assessment of the life skills of school-age children in Pakistan, it was found that those who had not been in school did better than those who had (Black, 1999).

Schools are often far away for many poor children, and this can present risks to parents who are unable to spare the time to chaperone young girls. In Pakistan, it was found that the fear that girls would be teased or harassed on route to school was a constraint for households, who would in many cases pull the child out from school altogether rather than violate accepted social norms concerning the independent travel of young girls (Narayan et al, 1999). Many children make this decision themselves, as one girl from a village in Macedonia related: 'I chose not to attend secondary school in Struga because I had to travel everyday by bus. Many boys would tease me, and people in the village would talk about me – look at her, all alone in the bus – and that is why I did not want to go' (ibid:166). Girls are also discouraged from attending school for a plethora of other reasons, but perhaps the most common being the view that education was detrimental to future marital relations.

For example, a widely-held opinion in South Asia is that education for girls is quite pointless because they will not learn the domestic duties expected of them, thus 'diminishing their attractiveness as future wives and effectively ruining their possibilities of a future in the village'. Additionally, it is felt that educated girls will want an equally educated husband when they grow up, which narrows the range of potential candidates – a range that is likely to already be relatively small in the case of poor families. Families may also be dissuaded from enrolling their girls at school because of the marriage systems that operate in some cultures where the daughter is placed with the husband's family after marriage. In Togo, South Africa and Nigeria, people therefore viewed female education as a waste of money as it was effectively investing in someone else's family. As explained in Pakistan, *"daughters are destined to be someone else's property"* (165). In Bangladesh, girls who are educated but are unemployed command higher dowries because of social norms that require the boy to be more educated than the girl. However, if she is educated and is also employed, the dowry rate is the lowest, with an uneducated, unemployed girl commanding a dowry somewhere in between (ibid). These factors need to be recognised in poverty-alleviation strategies that focus on education, to minimise the risk of causing more harm than good to the children targeted.

The school experience of low-income children can also be detrimental in more basic ways, for many schools do not even accomplish the narrowest of their objectives – that of functional literacy. Many neglect other important cognitive skills (critical thinking, problem solving and the like) altogether (Myers and Boyden, 1998). In Latin America, recent research found that half the children leaving school after 5 or 6 years still could not read or write, of whom a massive 80% were children from the lower half of income distribution (Schiefelbein, 1997). The problem is that education policy and practice rarely recognises the diverse nature and needs of different groups of children, failing to build on their existing capacities or simply denying them any effective participation (Myers and Boyden, 1998). Thus, it would appear that the

unerring faith in the power of education in helping children to overcome their poverty is, at least in some contexts and countries, somewhat misplaced. This is not to argue that it is any less important, but rather to advocate a more balanced recognition that *"without education all is lost, but with it, only some can benefit"* (Gould, 1993:202). As the findings of a recent World Bank paper confirm, *"who gets educated matters a great deal…Unequal distribution of education tends to have a negative impact on per capita income in most countries"* (Lopez, Thomas and Wang, 1998:2).

6.3. Agency through Employment – Exploring the Myths around Child Labour

As with education, the literature connecting child poverty and child labour[10] is extensive, but often generalised and drawn from within perspectives that overwhelmingly portray employment as the negative, exploitative alternative to positive, developmental, schooling. This section seeks to expose the large number of myths surrounding child labour and poverty, and to show how a more nuanced and context specific analysis acknowledging child agency is required.

Myth One: **'Employment during childhood is not beneficial'**

Closely related to the Western models of childhood discussed earlier in this literature review, comes the widespread perception that employment and children should not ideally mix. That huge numbers of children enter various workforces around the world from the age of about 11 or 12 is seen as a terrible problem, with culpability lying in the adult exploitation of children's innocence. Time and time again the detrimental nature of a working childhood is expressed in terms of psychological, emotional and physical damage, and this has led to the literature denigrating all forms of employment – whether classified as hazardous or not – as automatically injurious to children. Emphases on 'lost innocence' and 'stolen childhoods' tend to over-sentimentalise the issue and actually tell us more about the researcher's personal values than the experience of the children in question, while the assertion that working children are more likely to be sick or malnourished has also been shown to be unfounded (Myers and Boyden, 1998). In many cases, children make the decision to work themselves, and look upon it very positively as a vehicle for self-actualisation, economic autonomy and responsibility (Woodhead, 1998). Growing up without responsibility is also not necessarily the most effective way to promote children's wellbeing and best interests (Knutsson, 1997). In fact, excluding children from social, political and economic processes simply because they are young cannot be justified any more than can the exclusion of any other group in society. This is not to suggest that children take on the full complement of adult rights or responsibilities, but that they should have substantially more rights to participate in society (Boyden and Levison, 2000).

Qualitative evidence also suggests that informal and practical skills acquired through childhood work can play a role in helping children escape poverty. For example, both boys and girls have found migration from the Sahel to West African

[10] A child is classified as a worker or economically active by the ILO if the child is remunerated for that work, or if the output of that work is destined for the market.

towns and cities has enabled them to learn nationally useful languages such as Bambara (Mali) and French, literacy and numeracy, and practical work skills such as sewing, building or vehicle repairs. Girls who migrate for work can also build up dowries and secure more advantageous marriages on their return, a phenomenon also observed in Bangladesh (Harper et al, forthcoming).

Furthermore, cross-cultural research has shown that the position of children within the household often improves after they start contributing to household income. Working children say they have fewer conflicts with their parents and are less frequently punished than their non-working siblings. Employment can also increase their status among their peers (Ebdon, 2000). While this is still no reason to actively encourage child labour participation, it does at least shed some light on why so many children choose to take up work voluntarily. Nor should we, given so many examples of its capacity to 'damage' children, discard the evidence of employment as a healing activity, however slight such evidence may be at present. Research with children and families in Milange, Mozambique in 1993 showed that the building, planting and cultivation labour undertaken by children in the wake of the long-running civil war was a conscious and successful method of coming to terms with and laying to rest the suffering they had experienced (Zutt, 1994).

Myth Two: **'Poverty constrains families to make their children work'**

According to the International Labour Organisation, 'Poverty is the greatest single force which creates the flow of children into the workplace' (ILO, 1996:8). This view is repeated throughout the literature, despite increasing evidence from around the world that this emphasis is misplaced. If family poverty was a sufficient explanation, the child workforce would be far greater than it actually is. In fact, many studies on the relation between household income and child labour participation have found that the correlation may be far less reliable, and in some cases, completely the opposite. Nielsen (1998) finds that in Zambia, poverty and low income have a very small effect on the probability of child labour, with similar results emerging from Ghana (Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1997) and Peru (Ray, 1999). In the UK and the USA, research has shown that there is actually a positive association between household income and the incidence of children working, such that teenage children from wealthier households are the most likely to take up employment. Teenagers from low-income families, families from minority ethnic communities and those from the poorest city areas are less likely to work, partly through lack of economic opportunities and ethnic, racial and geographical discrimination (Ebdon, 2000).

If family poverty is but one of the reasons causing children to work – and by no means even the main one in many countries – what other factors come into play? In some cases, parents may simply prefer their children to work either instead of, or in addition to, attending school to keep them from becoming idle and prevent them running into bad company (Ebdon, 2000). This is apparent in parents' responses from many countries, including those carried out on the football stitching industry in Pakistan and urban Bangladesh (Delap, 1998). The same study also noted that some Bangladeshi parents felt that children were 'too small' to go to school, and that under the ages of 7 or 8 they would be 'too young to understand'. However, the most convincing evidence concerns the links between child labour and regional variations

in the opportunities and incentives to put children to work, or more precisely, the returns to child labour. Availability of children's jobs is a key factor, and in places where a clear market for children's labour exists, which is arguably the case in, for example, most major Asian cities, the returns to child labour are simply equal to the child wage rate (Cockburn, 1999). This is not to say that rural children are any less likely to work however, for there is considerable evidence that land area, livestock ownership and family enterprise are all positively related to child labour participation (Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1997; de Tray, 1983; Mergos, 1992; Mueller, 1984).

This kind of research has important consequences for poverty alleviation strategies, for up until now it has generally been assumed that the most effective way to combat poverty is to increase the access of the poor to productive physical assets (Dercon and Krishnan, 1998; Owens and Hoddinott, 1999). However, increased physical assets – such as livestock – has been shown in many cases to lead to greater child labour participation and to reduce time available for leisure and schooling. Land ownership in particular is among the most important determinants of labour participation for boys, with an increase in household land assets increasing the likelihood of a boy working by 7.7% (Cockburn, 1999). Therefore, the choice of assets in a poverty alleviation scheme is very important, and can have considerable consequences over how children use their time.

Another factor affecting child labour participation, unrelated to income but strongly related to gender, is the composition of the household. According to Cockburn (1999), both boys and girls are more likely to work and less likely to go to school as the number of infants (children aged less than 4 years old) in the household increases. The probability of children working also rises with the number of female adults as well, suggesting that the former are often used as work complements for the latter. Finally, it appears that the number of elderly household members has a surprisingly strong negative effect on the work participation of boys, but not girls (Cockburn, 1999). Meanwhile, a study of child labour in Egypt found that having a parent who was a child labourer him/herself substantially increases the probability of their child working, with the effect of the mother having worked as a child being twice as influential in both rural and urban areas, for both boys and girls (Wahba, 2001). Whether or not this is enough to ground the researcher's hypothesis that child labour perpetuates intergenerational poverty is questionable, and indeed, these gendered patterns and correlations are likely to fluctuate in different contexts and countries. The important point is that they show the need for more disaggregated data at this level to avoid perpetuating sweeping and inaccurate generalisations such as 'poverty causes child labour'.

Myth Three: **'Children working in the formal urban sector need most protection'**

Many of the assumptions surrounding child labour are derived from a handful of well-publicised studies of factory exploitation and export industries, particularly in the area of garment manufacturing (Zalami, 1998; Delap, 1998). This has, however, meant that international attention, legal and protective action has focused on children who work in the urban formal sector, effectively ignoring those toiling in the very worst of conditions in other areas. Furthermore, the bias toward child workers in developing countries that manufacture goods for export to rich countries has distorted

the extent and severity of child labour, for this group is actually very small – by most estimates well under 5% of working children – and is generally much better off (Myers and Boyden, 1998). Those children working in the construction and mining sectors are in far greater need of protection, where one in three girls and one in every four boys is affected by injury or illness (Ashagrie, 1999). This bias in attention therefore needs urgent rectification if we are to help the children that are most in need.

Myth Four: **'Work has a detrimental effect on education'**

Much of the literature on child poverty has concentrated on analysing the changing relations between work and education, and is starting to reconsider the assumption that the two cannot be positively combined. Research in Peru concluded that 'being employed does not significantly influence age-grade distortion. It is evident that children are able to work and attend school, with apparently no negative effect on their schooling progress' (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos, 1997:404). A UNICEF study in Sri Lanka also found that two-thirds of working children claimed their schooling was not affected by their work, and that 50% in fact claimed to be top of their class (Kiruga, 1985). Perhaps the most interesting result came from Cochabamba, Bolivia, where it was found that children who do *not* work have the lowest educational achievement (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos, 1995). In fact, research from around the world suggests that, overall, work contributes more to keeping children in school than to keeping them out (Boyden, 1994). This needs to be taken into account in reformulating child-poverty alleviation strategies that are still based on the belief that the exclusion of children from the workforce is universally beneficial.

6.4. Neglect and Inequity – The Gendered Experience of Child Poverty

Discrimination between genders affects children's lives the world over, and a large amount of international research has generated a well-developed literature base highlighting how girls in particular are disadvantaged by social, cultural and political beliefs in many countries, particularly South Asia and the Middle East. However, when it comes to examining how gender interacts with impoverishment, the literature is less sure of itself, and often appears to be making claims based more on inference than evidence. For example, an implicit assumption running through much of the writing seems to be that gender discrimination, being most pronounced in the poor countries of the South, is somehow connected to economics and the condition of 'underdevelopment' (World Bank, 2000, UNICEF, 2001).

This is a rather ethnocentric assumption, and is not substantiated given that gender inequalities are still very apparent in most rich countries (Danziger and Stern, 1990). It has also contributed to creating the distorted notion that the condition of poverty makes children more likely to be subject to gender discrimination, or for the inequity poor children experience to be more severe. Yet as recent studies show, there is almost no correlation between per-capita income and the gender disparities in sectors such as health and education: poorer countries do not, on average, have worse gender disparity than high-income countries, in the South Asian region at least (Filmer et al, 1998). This is also confirmed in Naila Kabeer's (1994) analysis of intra-

household gender hierarchies in Bangladesh, in which she concludes that inequities of distribution are not confined to the poor, but operate across the economic spectrum.

Although practices leading to the inequitable gendered distribution of resources within households are many and varied, most of them include biases towards feeding males first – particularly adult males – and giving them the choicest and largest servings. This is usually justified in accordance with cultural or religious beliefs about the relative needs and contributions of different household members and fears about the consequences of violating accepted ideologies of female altruism and self-sacrifice: 'How can you explain to your children there is not enough food? When my son cries, I feed him. It is easier to make my daughter understand' (fieldwork notes, 1987/8). Traditional poverty measurement methods fail to recognise these 'implicit contracts' of household relations, yet for severely impoverished children, they can often mean the difference between life and death. It is through facing the double challenges of economic poverty and gender disparity in resource distribution that girls are rendered particularly vulnerable to malnutrition, disease and neglect.

Data on calorific intake vis-à-vis requirements also show that children suffer from substantial deficits even in the richest households (Mahmud and Mahmud, 1985), which means gender discrimination is not something that economies can 'grow out of'. Nor should one assume that gender disparities within a single country are of the same or even similar degrees – the differences in gender disparity among Indian states or among the provinces of Pakistan for example are typically larger than those across the nations of the world (Filmer et al, 1998). This suggests that there are also likely to be a significant number of children whose poverty is overlooked because of the wealthy status of the household as a whole.

It remains evident that in a number of contexts, girls must face the likelihood that any illness or disease they may suffer will on many occasions be either ignored or take second priority to those of the male children, and not always because of financial difficulty. Chen et al (1981) showed that boys in rural Bangladesh are more likely than girls to be brought by their parents to clinics and hospitalised, despite equal incidences of infection and the availability of free clinical health care in the area under study. Another broader international study showed that while equal proportions of girls and boys may be afflicted with diseases such as diarrhoea, 66% more boys than girls were taken to receive treatment (Sabir and Ebrahim, 1984). Part of the reason for this is that girls and women are commonly kept very economically dependent on men, either through socio-cultural dictates at the religious or communal level, or through the idiosyncracies of the father/husband. For example, although daughters do inherit land under Islamic law, it is a smaller portion, and women seldom enforce their entitlement to it, preferring to waive it in favour of their brothers in exchange for protection in case of widowhood, abandonment or divorce (Kabeer, 1994).

Promotion of gendered equity in access to resources is clearly an important ingredient of anti-poverty policy for children, but must form part of the broader promotion of better livelihood security for *all* poor people. Channelling the vast majority of attention and resources solely to girls and women can have equally detrimental effects on their well-being – one of the perverse effects may be to increase the burden of women's responsibilities in providing for their children and lead men to

further relax their obligations (Mayoux and Johnson, 1997). In many cases, programmes targeting women misfire because they fail to acknowledge how household decision-making operates - women in Sri Lanka, for example, are accepting loans for micro enterprise development which are then given to and used by their husbands, sometimes to buy alcohol. In the end women find themselves repaying debts incurred by the men (Boyden, personal communication 2002).

Problems have also arisen through the reification of the 'girl child' during such events as the 1990 Year of the Girl Child initiative by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the UNICEF India office. The majority of writing and information that arose within this period concerned the low status of the girl, her limited opportunities for education and the gender bias in the home (Ennew, 1996). Despite its good intentions, this angered many child activists, who expressed opposition to the 'feminist method of carving the female persons' group out of the human race and examining it in isolation, on the presumption that females are always wronged' (Barse, 1991:99). Indeed, the literature tends to further this bias, presenting the girl child as essentially more vulnerable than boys in general, regardless of wealth or ethnicity. According to Judith Ennew (1996), this attitude 'masquerades as a concern for their vulnerability' (4) while actually serving to reinforce the traditional ideals of male control and supremacy over women's sexuality and fertility. Exactly how to incorporate gender equity within child poverty alleviation strategies thus needs careful consideration.

7.0 PROTECTION ISSUES – RETHINKING VULNERABILITY

A large amount of the literature on child poverty reflects the emphases of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is devoted to assessing categories of 'especially vulnerable children' such as 'street children' and child sex workers, among others. While children experiencing these various forms of adversity are undoubtedly in need of special attention, the level of interest they have received is often disproportionate in comparison to other children who may be suffering similar but less prominent threats to their protection. The focus on such groups may in reality also be misplaced or their vulnerability over-stated, and this section therefore seeks to set the records straight by analysing whether special efforts in these areas are actually justified. The tendency to single out special categories of children has in many cases unintentionally added to their stigmatisation by the larger societies, and the need exhibited by those writing on them to find 'reasons' for the 'deviancy' of these groups has led to many stereotypical and inaccurate representations. Rarely are the views of children themselves included, or, in the few instances that they may be, this is often countered by an authorial voice gently informing the reader why they are 'wrong' (Ennew et al, 1996).

7.1. Street Children

A typical depiction of street children[11] in the literature is as follows:

> He is often the victim of robbery and physical abuse by both peers and adults. He may join a gang as a way of creating a new 'family' in his state of isolation. He may be harassed, bullied or lured into criminal acts by gangs of youth or criminals. Surrounded by the drug sub-culture, he may begin to abuse drugs. Many street children develop extremely low self-esteem, apparently in response to the disparagement and abuse they regularly face in the course of making a living. (Narayan et al, 1999:198)

Such portrayals of street children as vulnerable, delinquent, abandoned or marginal youth, while perhaps accurate in some cases, are more often the result of a particular representation of children in contemporary Western thought (Myers, 1991; Panter-Brick, 2001b). That the assumptions on which such depictions rest are often disputed by empirical research and participatory consultation has not, however, resulted in any fundamental changes in this theorising, such that the literature on street children 'systematically ignores its own findings in favour of predetermined conclusions grounded in Northern, middle class mores' (Bar-On, 1997:63). This stereotype is perpetuated by the tendency for research to examine only 'snap-shot' moments in the lives of street children, rather than enacting longitudinal studies of their experience over a number of years. Even the category of 'street children' is itself undermined by the complex reality of children's lifestyle – as little as 2% of all street children are actually homeless, with the vast majority living, eating and sleeping at home (Black, 2000). Moreover, as a category it rarely corresponds to how children themselves classify street and home (Hecht, 1998).

Recent research has also shown that the extreme levels of physical and psychological stress street children are widely assumed to suffer is in many cases over-stated: 'rather than being the most victimised, the most destitute, the most psychologically vulnerable group of children, street children may be resilient and display creative coping strategies for growing up in difficult environments' (Veale et al, 2000:137). This assertion is supported by evidence from Nepal, which contrasts popular expectation by revealing that street children exhibit fewer signs of growth impairment or nutritional problems than in either urban squatter or village homes (Baker, Panter-Brick and Todd, 1996). Despite their lack of permanent shelter and parental care, it was concluded that these children were far from being the most vulnerable in Nepalese society. Similarly, research with street children in South Africa and Latin America has shown that those children sampled were generally found to hold mainstream moral values and average psychological and emotional responses (Baker et al, 1996; Swart, 1988; Aptekar, 1989 and 1991).

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[11] According to a consensual definition of NGOs, street children are those "*for whom the street… more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is no protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults" (*Ennew, 1994:15). This broad definition includes 'abandoned children' without access to a family; 'children *of* the street' who have contacts with a family but who live and work on the streets; 'children *on* the street' who live with their families and work on the streets; and 'children at high risk' of becoming involved in street life. The first two groups are often described as 'homeless', whereas the latter two are 'home-based' children who work or play on the streets.

Another myth surrounding street children concerns the ways in which the literature assumes they interact with one another in the absence of adults. Most studies have presumed that in children's groups that span a range of ages, older children hold the highest status and level of control (Mann, 2001). Evidence collected by Aptekar (1988) among street children in Cali, Colombia, actually suggests the opposite in revealing that young children on the street were often more powerful vis-à-vis older street children in many ways. Firstly, they are better able to manipulate adults because they are small and cute, and do not therefore pose the same physical or ideological threat as do adolescent boys. Their child-like appearance and antics also enables them to access resources more easily, thereby increasing their economic productivity and thus their status within the group. These factors therefore led to a situation in which older children were forced to rely on their younger peers for material support, while offering their physical protection in return (Aptekar, 1988).

Despite the considerable attention devoted to street children in the literature, there are still gaping holes in the research. For example, not enough is known about the subtlety of factors interacting to encourage children to turn to the streets in the first place – it is generally assumed that 'poverty' is enough of a qualification, yet 40% of the children on the streets of New York were recently found to have left home as a result of conflict connected to 'coming out' as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender to their families (dos Santos, 2000). Similarly, there is very little examination of how the phenomenon of street children relates to the larger mores of a society as a whole – how, for example, differential cultural tolerance of small children on the streets interacts with systems of law enforcement, mechanisms for detecting the domestic violation of children's rights, and the quality and size of systems of foster care in place. Without proper nuanced understanding of these factors – collected through participatory consultation with the children themselves – it will be almost impossible to successfully aid them in leaving the streets, assuming that this is what the children themselves wish. As Glauser (1990) concludes with special reference to the current discourse on street children, it is not acceptable

> …that international organisations, policy makers, social institutions and individuals who feel entitled to intervene in the lives of children with problems, do so on the basis of obviously unclear and arbitrary knowledge about the reality of these children's lives. (144)

7.2. Child Sex Workers and Sexual Exploitation

Poverty is firmly established in the literature as a key causal factor in pushing children (or inciting their parents/care givers into pushing children) into sexually exploitative roles, yet this argument is in many cases over-stated and unconvincing. Many societies that are poor do not have a high degree of prostitution, while the phenomenon is becoming more widespread in the richer North (Muntarbhorn, 1996). The problem here is, as Ennew et al's (1996) seminal study of child prostitution[12] points out, that

[12] Child prostitution is defined by the current UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography as 'The act of engaging or offering the services of a child to perform sexual acts for money or other consideration with that person or any other person'. The stress

> …the available global discourse on this theme is characterised by a poor understanding and use of quantitative information, lack of attention to research techniques, the reproduction of myths and unsubstantiated facts, as well as the use of assumptions and campaigning imperatives in place of established bodies of theory. (12)

This is worsened by the fact that the poverty argument increasingly tends to be used by some as justification for child prostitution and the inaction of government bodies. It may also offer the sex tourist an easy opportunity to avoid feelings of guilt – by paying for a child's services, he/she can convince themselves that they are helping the child to escape economic hardship and contributing to the economic development of the country as a whole (Lean Lim, 1998).

The 1996 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography estimates that about one million children in Asia are victims of the sex trade, and globally child prostitution is thought to net US$5 billion annually (Lean Lim, 1998). The reasons why children may find themselves suffering sexual exploitation are, however, far more complex than the literature implies. One of the most commonly cited reasons why children are sexually exploited is directly connected to impoverishment, and involves the parents selling their children into indentured servitude in brothels. One study in Cambodia found that 40% of child prostitutes had been sold by their own families, and a further 15% by 'friends' (Gray et al, 1996). Such findings tend to be set by the literature within a framework suggesting that the majority of parents who enter into these transactions suffer from a 'veil of ignorance' regarding the activities that their children will perform.

Yet in the Philippines, NGOs attempting to eradicate child prostitution found that this veil was in fact a myth and that many families 'wholeheartedly accepted' the exploitation of their children. The NGOs reported that in several instances where they tried to press for imprisonment or deportation of known foreign paedophiles, they met surprisingly strong opposition from the families of the children involved, who came to the defence of the foreigners – many of whom, it turned out, regularly gave expensive presents to the children and helped support their families. The fact that parents are in many cases fully aware of the consequences of their actions therefore renders attempts to eradicate the sexual exploitation of children that bit more difficult (Lean Lim, 1998).

For some families, prostitution has become a way of life:

> How can we talk of prevention when the mother is a prostitute, the father is a pimp, the uncles and brothers are pimps and often drug pushers as well, and sometimes even the grandmother was a prostitute? We are talking about generations that have had prostitution as the only avenue open to them for making a living. (Abreu, 1991:3-4)

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of this definition is that child prostitution is not 'committed' by the child but by the person 'engaging or offering the services of a child' (United Nations, 1995:6).

In Bangladesh, a similar portrait emerges, where the majority of prostitutes' daughters become prostitutes themselves. This is not least because the general disgust for the sex trade and the social value placed on controlling women's sexuality leaves these children with precious few routes towards achieving social legitimacy (Barnitz, 1998). Having said that, many prostitutes in Bangladesh have also expressed pride in their occupation, in that it affords quite a bit of independence from men and enables them to avoid marriages that are often arranged and a source of misery for women. They argue that prostitution is a good business that opens up possibilities of other kinds of businesses too. Nevertheless, they remain adamant that they want their children to grow up in the community (some place their children with paid foster parents to keep them out of the brothel) to go to community schools etc. and are determined that they should not enter prostitution (Boyden, personal communication 2002).

In some instances, boys have continued to prostitute themselves even while living at NGO centres where they are given food, shelter and clothes. Prostitution is for them not only a means of earning money, but also part of a street lifestyle that has its own 'attractions' – such as the status of associating with relatively wealthy and well-travelled foreigners, of being taken on trips and given presents (Lean Lim, 1998). This in part explains the rise in the phenomenon of the 'sugar daddy' in western and southern Africa, where adult males provide school fees, food, clothes and gifts in exchange for sexual favours (ECPAT, 2000). Research has also revealed that in India, sexual assaults by older male children on the street against younger girls are relatively common, with instances where the street child's pimp is actually another child (ibid).

Interviews with prostituted children have revealed further variations of the controversial 'choice' argument. Sexually exploited children have in many cases freely explained that they participated in prostitution and/or pornography because they wanted to help support their families, because they were homeless and the adult who sheltered them needed some form of payment, or because their pimp was really a boyfriend who loved them and just needed some extra money (Barnitz, 1998). Although poverty lurks behind many of these reasons it must still be accepted in the face of current evidence that even if the majority of children do not themselves decide to enter the sex trade (though some of them do), they are nevertheless both willing and able to make their own choices along the way. This should be taken into account in strategies to assist them and ought therefore to lead to much greater consultation with children.

A final point must still be made concerning avenues of research where the literature falls down. Firstly, it is necessary to realign the dominant focus on child sex workers who service foreign clients to include recognition of those catering for local customers, who remain uncounted and ignored within current policies and programmes. The obsession with sex tourism is the result of Western interests rather than a true reflection of the situation on the ground, and may well be obscuring a large part of the child prostitute population, just as the focus on street children excludes the far larger numbers of deprived and marginalized children in rural areas (Ennew et al, 1996). Secondly, more attention must be paid to sexual abuse within the home, and whether it is affected by conditions of impoverishment. This involves overcoming the widespread belief that if danger threatens any child, it necessarily comes from 'outside' the family (La Fontaine, 1990). Finally, there is a need to address the impact

of prostitution on boys and its relation to cultural discourses surrounding homosexuality and male sexual behaviour, for although they apparently make up an increasing proportion of those involved, they are often ignored in place of girls (Barnitz, 1998).

7.3. Children Affected by HIV/AIDS [13]

> Today, more than 13 million children currently under age 15 have lost one or both parents to AIDS, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2010, an estimated 106 million children under age 15 are projected to have lost one or both parents, with 25 million of this group orphaned due to HIV/AIDS. (UNAIDS and UNICEF, 2002:3).

Statistics like these suffuse the majority of the literature on child poverty and AIDS, and while useful in providing a sense of the scale of the pandemic, have in many instances nevertheless contributed to providing a distorted picture of the issues. For example, the frequently highlighted severity of the HIV/AIDS problem in Sub-Saharan Africa has led to an almost exclusive focus on the experience of children within this region, despite the fact that even at a lower prevalence, the number of people with HIV/AIDS in Asia threatens to surpass the numbers in some of the most severely affected African countries (UNAIDS and UNICEF, 2002).

The attention and priority given to children orphaned by AIDS has also led to the vulnerability of other children being ignored, despite evidence that fostered children are often treated in a less favourable manner than other, non-fostered children in the family (Mann, 2001; Mann and Ledward, 2000). For example, among the Inupiat of Northern Alaska, Bodenhorn (1988) found that orphans who are not taken in by extended family members are often pushed from house to house and treated as *savikti*, meaning slave. In most contexts, girls will often be fostered more easily because of their domestic labour potential and because with marriage they move away from the foster home and thus tend not to be viewed as 'permanent' additions to the family or long-term competitors for resources (Ayieko, 1997). Boys, on the other hand, are seen to take longer to mature and to require more resources in terms of land and money for dowry payments. Among some cultures in Western Kenya, families look upon orphan boys as 'likely to thrive and crowd-out other sons in their foster home' (Ayieko, 1997:12), while in one children's centre in Rwanda, 126 of the 128 children who remained to be fostered were boys (Mann, 2001).

Stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS is still widespread and severe, though not automatic. Foster et al (1997) found that almost all Zimbabwean orphans who had experienced discrimination or had been stigmatised by family or community believed that this was because they were poor or parentless. For example, they felt they were teased because they had no shoes, or torn clothes, or because their father was dead, rather than because of associations with AIDS. It is likely therefore that at least some of the literature on the social stigma of AIDS either over-estimates the severity or confuses it with more general discriminatory practices against poverty. The fear of

[13] UNAIDS and UNICEF intentionally avoid the use of the term 'AIDS orphans' because it may contribute to the inappropriate categorisation and stigmatisation of vulnerable children. Instead, they use 'children affected by HIV/AIDS', 'orphans due to AIDS' or 'children orphaned by AIDS'.

stigma is still enough for many people to conceal the virus even when they recognise they have been infected, and many families attribute the death of a family member to another disease, rather than face the consequential isolation. As such, it is still very difficult for analysts and child researchers to accurately assess the effect or level of the HIV/AIDS pandemic among children, and the profusion of statistics hides the fact that the vast majority of these are actually 'guesstimates'.

It should not therefore be forgotten that the health, safety and survival of *all* children in affected countries are jeopardised by the impacts of AIDS on families and communities, for the widespread loss of life reduces the number of skilled personnel in public management, social services, education and health care. The pandemic is also reducing labour and agricultural productivity and weakening social structures, though these correlates are rarely discussed. Adults continue to oversimplify HIV/AIDS issues relevant to children, with emphasis placed either on statistics of infants affected, or on methods of altering the 'high risk behaviours' among certain groups of children, such as adolescents. The growing rate of infection suggests that the wrong problems are being addressed however, and there needs to be more prevention efforts focused on helping children in ways which remove, or protect them, from high risk situations in the first place (Lyons, 1998). As one participant reminded the audience at a recent international conference on Street Children, Health and HIV in Rio de Janeiro, 'Condoms don't fit children' (ibid).

8.0. Conclusion – Recognising Agency, Rethinking Action

This paper has highlighted the multiple biases, assumptions and myths that continue to plague our understandings of and responses to child poverty – many of which arise as a consequence of conceptualising children as passive 'victims'. In reality, poverty is rarely something that happens to children against which they have no defence or control, but rather a set of circumstances with which they interact in numerous ways. Some children will of course be more mentally or and/or physically powerful than others in responding to adversity, but all children do at least to some degree engage with and interpret their situations in ways that need to be acknowledged.

As we have seen, on the few occasions where child agency is recognised in the literature, it is done so in a very ambiguous fashion that on the one hand admits the distinctiveness of children as a social group with their own particular rights, while on the other still provides for these rights to be exercised on their behalf by (adult) others. This avoidance of agency is further perpetuated by the overwhelming bias of the literature in focusing on how poverty affects very young children, who have had the least time to even recognise, let alone utilise, their own personal agency. Adolescents have a far greater understanding of the factors affecting their environment and how this determines what they can and cannot do, but this potentially valuable contribution is left untapped and ignored by families, development agencies and governments alike. The vast majority of literature on child poverty thus depicts it as necessitating a universal 'rescue and rehabilitation' response, rather than a more culturally sensitive and nuanced analysis of how children can participate in overcoming poverty to a more meaningful and relevant future.

Connected to this is the strong desire in the literature to locate the causes of poverty anywhere but in children themselves – in other words, to absolve them of any responsibility in contributing to their situation. This is unrealistic, for we need to understand that children can play significant parts in perpetuating (or ameliorating) the experience of poverty felt by themselves or other children. As we have seen, agency is not always benevolently expressed – many children (e.g. street children) have been found to exert what power they may possess within a certain context at the expense of other, less powerful children. It should also be acknowledged as Moore (2001) reminds us, that among the poor there *are* people who 'act in lazy, irresponsible or imprudent ways, perpetuating their own and their family's poverty' (15). Difficult as it may be to reconcile these points with the romantic populist notion of children as innocent simply by virtue of their age and 'inexperience', it is necessary in order to appreciate the range of factors that may contribute to keeping particular children in poverty.

Incorporating child agency in this way should not, however, exclude analysis of the larger social structure, for children are deeply embedded within important and influential networks of social, cultural, economic and political relationships. Caroline Harper (Interview, 2002) also warns against taking the agency argument too far, for poverty alleviation strategies that bypass or undermine the authority of adults are unlikely to be very effective or sustainable. A possible balance may be struck in the approach called for by White (forthcoming), in asserting that organisations should focus on 'the multiplicity of relations amongst and between adults and children, and the variety of forms and terms of engagement which these comprise' (5). In other words, to understand the choices and actions taken by people, we cannot consider them as detached individual agents, but have to consider their selves and activities as essentially constituted in and through their relationship with others.

Understanding the complexity and differential nature of child poverty therefore requires a multitude of approaches and perspectives, not merely from those who are currently experiencing poverty, but from those who have escaped and overcome it, and who may be able to provide valuable insights. Unfortunately, the literature tends to focus exclusively on the former group, with little or no attention paid to the latter. Furthermore, there is still too much attention to child poverty in the South, with little regard to the possible connections and/or discrepancies with its counterpart in the North. Analysing the two together can only be beneficial in understanding what factors keep children in poverty and why certain manifestations occur in the countries they do, yet very few studies take advantage of this comparative potential.

Tackling child poverty is thus a huge and complex task, and involves somewhat of an exercise in humility on two distinct levels; firstly, in recognising the cultural biases and assumptions on which current approaches rest; and secondly, in understanding that the eradication of child poverty is, by virtue of its far-reaching linkages, not something we are likely to achieve quickly, easily or without the active involvement of others – particularly that of the children themselves.

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