Mainstreaming children in international development

Overseas Development Institute and the Institute of Development Studies

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   - Ideas/ policy narratives
   - Actors and networks
   - Knowledge interaction approaches

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1. Mainstreaming children in international development – where are we?

- Child-related indicators integrated into MDGs and some PRSPs/national development plans; near universal ratification of UNCRC

- Increasing efforts to collect and use child-specific data and research – MICS, Young Lives, UNICEF child poverty studies

- But still poorly integrated into donor situation analyses and policy strategies

- Issues of child protection and participation in particular remain largely invisible
2. Our conceptual framework

- **3D Knowledge generation:**
  - Mixed methods
  - Integration of children’s Vision, Voice and Visibility

- **Types of power**
  - Material political economy
  - Institutions
  - Discourse

- **Child poverty and wellbeing**
  - Material
  - Relational
  - Subjective

- **Knowledge-policy interface**
  - Context
  - Actors
  - Ideas
3D Wellbeing and Evidence Generation

• A 3D child well-being approach
  – Ensures children and their agency are at the centre of analysis
  – Encourages a positive perspective on children in development by avoiding labelling certain children as ‘poor’
  – Explicitly integrates material, relational and subjective perspectives into an understanding of wellbeing

• Generating evidence that captures the richness of a 3D approach requires methodological innovation
  – Mixed methods approaches at both data collection and data analysis stages
  – Integration of participatory approaches
  – Attention to intra-household dynamics, community-child relations and macro-micro policy linkages.
Understanding policy processes and power relations

- Evolution from rational linear models in 1950s/60s to second generation models in 1980s- with greater attention to power relations (overt and covert) and iterative processes and spaces.

- In 1990s, evidence-based policy-making movement emerged as a reaction against idealistically driven politics in the Anglo-Saxon world. However, it is increasingly recognised that evidence is not a neutral concept, and especially in the case of child wellbeing.

- We adapt a synthesis approach that embraces multiple, interlocking understandings of power and focus on three key sets of factors:
  - Policy ideas and narratives
  - Policy actors and networks
  - Political contexts/ institutions
Policy ideas and narratives

• Policy ideas or ‘narratives’ can play a powerful in shaping the acceptability of some forms of knowledge while silencing others.

• Synthesising and framing new and existing knowledge therefore needs to be seen as a strategic choice and may include:
  – Investing in innovative strategies to dismantle dominant paradigms which assume that children will automatically benefit from broader poverty reduction interventions.
  – Applying “Frame extension” to promote quick buy-in (e.g. ‘mainstreaming’ or ‘pro-poor budgeting’ discourses)
  – Promoting the triangulation of knowledge about children from a wide variety of sources is also key
Actors and networks

- Forging alliances with diverse gov’t and non-gov’t actors is key to ensure new ideas have a chance of policy uptake.
- Different audiences subscribe to different knowledge hierarchies. Both expert-led and citizen-led evidence sources can be child-sensitive under certain conditions.
  - Children’s participation in development policy processes is still fledgling and evidence to date suggests contributions to tangible policy changes have been limited. However, children’s participation may support other change objectives:
    - Introducing new ideas on to the policy agenda
    - Bringing about procedural shifts (e.g. routinising children’s involvement in citizen consultation processes)
    - Transforming policy actors’ views about contributions children can make to policy debates
Political contexts

• The importance of political context cannot be under-estimated and needs to be systematically mapped to inform the interpretation of research findings and strategies to promote their policy uptake.

• The UNCRC provides a clear formal framework with regular reporting procedures for gov’t and civil society, but local governance structures, including formal and informal politics, often play a more dominant role and demand careful analysis.

• Given a growing knowledge base about macro-micro policy linkages (e.g. trade liberalisation, fallout of economic shocks, budget processes), proponents of child-sensitive policy change need to go beyond sector-specific analyses and embed their policy engagement efforts within an understanding of broader policy process dynamics.
3. Regional contexts: Opportunities and challenges in SSA

• **Knowledge generation:**
  – Reasonable data-base on children’s material well-being, but very thin on subjective and relational well-being
  – Few research institutions focused on these issues (African Child Policy Forum is a partial exception) and donor agencies are doing relatively little to fill this gap.
  – UNICEF is however increasingly making an important contribution

• **Knowledge interaction:**
  – Limited breadth and depth of child-focused communities of practice, partially reflecting the relatively new emergence of CSOs/NGOS
  – Limited research literacy among policy actors compounded by weak knowledge management practices and extractive research approaches by northern researchers
Opportunities and challenges in Asia

- **Knowledge generation**
  - New and relatively limited playing field
  - No pan-Asian research institutions focused on children
  - More institutions in South Asia and Viet Nam focusing on children as part of broader research portfolio

- **Knowledge interaction**
  - Strong role of governments in knowledge production processes
  - Relatively limited number of child-focused communities of practice, except in some issue areas – trafficking, sexual exploitation, child labour
  - Trend towards political and fiscal decentralisation with important implications for the knowledge-policy interface, esp. on children.
Opportunities and challenges in Latin America

- **Knowledge generation**
  - More extensive regional production of knowledge on child poverty and well-being with growing number of dedicated research institutions working on diverse array of issues

- **Knowledge interaction**
  - Growing importance of civil society in the region, although child-focused communities of practice have limited breadth.
  - Media has been a key player in the policy process since end of authoritarian regimes in 1980s.
    - Important region-wide child-focused media network ANDI reflects importance of media in the region.
    - Multi-media research communication approaches appear to be effective in reaching policy-makers and citizens in transitional or post-conflict political contexts where trust in political institutions has been eroded or is fragile.
Case study: Multi-media research communication on child poverty in Peru

Poster linking MDGs to under-achievement of these indicators among children in marginalized communities

Photo exhibit on relational and subjective dimensions of child poverty in a public university

Placcards to raise awareness of child wellbeing deprivations
4. Conclusions

1. Investing in more collaborative mixed methods knowledge generation efforts around child wellbeing is key to tap the 3D nature of children’s experiences of poverty/wellbeing.

2. Institutionalising systematic context mapping at the national and sub-national levels within organisations championing children’s rights is essential to remould policy discourses and priorities.

3. Supporting intermediary organisations to foster communities of practice capable of developing feasible and regionally strategic approaches to evidence-informed policy influencing is key, especially in Africa and Asia.

4. Addressing the dearth of monitoring, evaluation and learning initiatives relating to knowledge-policy interactions on child wellbeing needs to be prioritised by the research community, policy actors, donors and the international community.
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