



Save the Children

Children and good governance

Policy brief

Children remain invisible in debates about how countries are governed. By ignoring children, the governance community is missing a trick. Involving children in discussions about governance and ensuring that the realisation of their rights is a measure of good governance can help improve government performance and build more effective states, especially in challenging environments.

Children remain invisible

The leading agencies in the governance debate, including the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, are largely silent about the relevance of children and their rights to improving governance and building effective states.

Children are invisible in the information DFID draws on to understand local context, including the new Country Governance Analysis.¹ UNDP offers no guidance on addressing the rights and needs of children in its user guides on governance assessments. The OECD Development Assistance Committee's series on Governance, Taxation and Accountability does not make reference to children at all. And there is no evidence that the World Bank's widely used World Governance Indicators take into account the status of children's rights in the assessed countries.²

Why children matter for good governance

The literature on governance has, at its core, the study of power and politics, but it is adult-centric. Children constitute 34% of the global population. In many developing and low-income countries, children make up 50% of the population. Despite their numbers and their role in our collective future, however, they remain powerless within families, communities and formal political spheres.

The *human rights* case for governance has been largely accepted, but children's rights all too often fail to be included. Human rights feature explicitly throughout DFID's Governance, Development and Democratic Politics paper, but it ignores the fact that children have rights that must be explicitly prioritised if they are to be fulfilled. Save the Children's own analysis shows that children's wellbeing does not automatically follow nor equate to adults' wellbeing.³ We also know that children tend to be disproportionately poorer than adults.⁴

Recent work by the African Child Policy Forum on child-friendly governance⁵ reinforces the idea that good governance is not the same as governance that is good for children. Countries such as Ghana, Benin, and Mozambique perform relatively well in general governance assessments, such as the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), but less well in terms of their child-friendliness.⁶

How focusing on child rights can improve governance

It is wrong that children and a consideration of their rights are absent from the many forums that affect their lives.⁷ Indeed, governance fit for children is a requirement of Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁸

It is also unhelpful. Children have demonstrated their competence as agents of social change in a wide range of contexts. These include claiming state provision of health and education, providing valuable perspectives in planning processes, and monitoring service delivery.⁹

Save the Children believes that a child-rights approach can strengthen efforts to improve governance and build more effective states in the following ways:

1. Analysing children's rights can bolster our understanding of local context

Ignoring children's rights in governance assessment processes, such as DFID's Country Governance Assessment (CGA), misses a wealth of useful information.

In Bangladesh, for example, 19 local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) produced a joint submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child as part of the government's review under the UNCRC.¹⁰ This joint report flags up concerns, including that:

- benefits of improved child survival rates have not trickled down to the poorest groups
- less than half of allocated funds have been spent on one of the government's flagship health and nutrition programmes
- crucial legal mechanisms needed to protect children's rights are not in place.

These concerns are absent from DFID's 2008 Bangladesh CGA.

2. A focus on children can contribute to each of the three areas of good governance defined by DFID:¹¹ capability, accountability and responsiveness

Child rights organisations have a long history of working with governments to increase their **capability**. Examples from Save the Children's own work include training municipal authorities in planning, budgeting and tendering (Angola); building the capacity of government departments to monitor child labour (Pakistan); and working with government departments to improve their ability to collect and integrate the data necessary to effectively monitor children's wellbeing (Colombia).

Children's rights can be a starting point for galvanising action in communities and for encouraging governments to be more **accountable** for the needs and rights of all of their citizens. Examples from Save the Children's own work include the formation of a children's network at district level to advocate for their own rights (Sri Lanka) and helping to ensure that children have access to justice and legal advice in the community (Zanzibar).

One of the greatest challenges in the quest to improve governance is improving **responsiveness**. It is often the countries that most need better governance that have governments that are least inclined to deliver it. Child rights may provide an opportunity to break this deadlock. The UNCRC is so widely ratified that no country wants to be criticised for ignoring the wellbeing of children. In states that are not particularly committed to broader human rights, children's rights may be seen as less controversial and provide a useful starting point. In a 2007 study, DFID staff members agreed that children's rights could be a useful entry point to working with national governments and civil society.¹²

Save the Children can demonstrate this principle in practice. In Myanmar (Burma), for example, we helped children's rights committees identify the needs of children and improve the delivery of services to meet those needs through better coordination between central and local government.

What we're calling for

We urge all donors to:

- include children's rights in governance assessments and, as a minimum, include infant mortality as a key metric in quantitative governance indices
- support the creation of a global, country-led governance-for-children assessment, based on the pioneering work done by the Africa Child Policy Forum.

We urge DFID to:

- incorporate children's rights in its Country Governance Analyses
- track its own child-related spend and report this to the Committee on the Rights of the Child
- set aside more of its funding for governance work for issues relating to children and children's rights.

We urge UNDP to:

- bring children into its work on governance by, for a start, creating a Users' Guide on Measuring Children's Rights in governance assessments.

We urge OECD DAC to:

- convene a thematic discussion of children and governance through the Network on Governance.

We urge the World Bank to:

- include an assessment of children's rights in the sources of governance data used in the World Governance Indicators.

We urge UNICEF to:

- take a leadership role in identifying and drawing attention to the governance-related determinants of outcomes in children's health, education and protection in particular, including the governance-related determinants on return on investment for social sector expenditure.

References

¹ See DFID (2009) *Making Children the First to Benefit: How DFID can integrate children's rights into its Country Assistance Plans*, written evidence to the UK government submitted by the Child Rights Working Group of the DFID/CSO Children and Youth Network

² World Bank (2009) *Governance Matters VIII: Aggregate and Individual Governance Indicators, 1996-2008*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 4978

³ Save the Children UK (2008) *The Child Development Index: Holding Governments Accountable for Children's Wellbeing*, p12

⁴ *ibid* p4

⁵ African Child Policy Forum (2008) *The African Report on Child Wellbeing: How child-friendly are African governments?*

⁶ *Ibid* with Save the Children analysis based on World Governance Indicators 'overall' governance assessment for 2007, calculated by averaging the six dimensions of governance

⁷ R Hinton (2008) see note 4, p285

⁸ General Comment No5 UNCRC http://www.crin.org/resources/treaties/CRC_GMI.asp

⁹ *Ibid*, p294

¹⁰ UNCRC Alternative Report: Bangladesh 2007

http://www.crin.org/docs/Bangladesh_STC_NGO_Report.pdf

¹¹ This is based on the framework presented by DFID in its 2007 paper, "Governance, Development and Democratic Politics"

¹² S Maguire (2007) *A Study of the Child Rights Climate within the UK's Department for International Development*, DFID