

Summary of the ICPNC Webinar on Child Protection Systems Strengthening Approach
(November 30th 2016)

The *International Child Protection Network Canada (ICPNC)* was established as a result of international child-centered organizations and individuals coming together based on a shared interest and commitment to increasing the effectiveness of Child Protection programming. The Network brings a spirit of collaboration, commitment to child protection and believes Canada can play a leading role in advancing children's rights and child protection. Member representatives from leading child's rights organizations, consultants and academia collaborate on position/policy papers, and have rich dialogue among network members, ultimately to advance the child protection agenda.

ICPNC is delighted to host the webinar which was borne out of informal discussions and reflections between colleagues from Child Frontiers, World Vision and the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) noting the need on reflecting from on-going global efforts to strengthen child protection systems, particularly about its potential effectiveness and its considerable challenges to apply it to operational and functioning child protection systems in countries with very different cultural, political, historical and economic contexts.

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, the field of child protection in development and humanitarian settings has renewed its commitment to evolve into a dynamic and professionalized sector ensuring girls and boys are free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. This webinar was borne out of informal discussions and reflections between colleagues from Child Frontiers, World Vision and the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) noting the need on reflecting from on-going global efforts to strengthen child protection systems, particularly about its potential effectiveness and its considerable challenges to apply it to operational and functioning child protection systems in countries with very different cultural, political, historical and economic contexts.

Guest Speakers:

Dr. Philip Cook is the founder and current Executive Director of the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) and Faculty at Royal Roads University (RRU), in Canada. Phillip has been working in children's rights and child protection research, policy and practice for over 25 years on issues of human adversity, human resilience and human well-being.

Bill Forbes is the Director of Child Protection for World Vision International, providing leadership to efforts to strengthen prevention and response to abuse, exploitation and neglect of children. Previously, Bill led the World Vision Peace and Justice Program in Cambodia for eight years, with a special focus on trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse of children. He studied International Development at Fuller Theological Seminary and at Cornell University.

Summary of the Q&A Session

(Transcribed from the recording)

- 1. How do you balance out needing to be sensitive to context, culture and informal endogenous systems and the need for a more formal approach to address violations through law enforcement etc.? In other words, are we in danger of paralyzing our staff in implementing effective child protection work by making everything relative and contextual?**

"It's a challenge that we face but it is one that is insurmountable. The beginning of an answer to that is to take a the systems approach, if we are truly honest in thinking systemically, then what we would do is begin by looking at the existing government systems that are in place and looking how they can best respond to local and endogenous, or what we have been referring to is "informal systems" in this conversation, and many agencies engaged in this conversation are already doing to develop specific tools. For example, World Vision, who I am a little bit familiar with has the Adapt Tool, which is an assessment tool that allows child protection workers located within the formal system to better understand the non-formal system as they begin to assess the context before initiating child protection programs and communities are much involved in that process. Plan has a similar approach with the community based model that they use where communities are actively engaged in identifying local risks factors, coming up with solutions, etc. At the IICRD, we have developed the CAPE approach which is a child-centered evaluation and assessment model so I think there are various organizations that are developing these approaches. What is important is that we continue to expand this thinking and not limit it as these bigger frameworks for example the SDGs and perhaps some of the programs that Bill is representing on the context of the Global Partnership positive parenting, etc., are now rolled out. And that we continue to explore creative space for working with communities as we move forward." – Philip Cook

"I think it is a really important and challenging question in terms of the dynamics. I think we have to resist the desire for child protection to be simple and predictable and universal in terms of how things are done. There are universals in terms of the rights of children around protection and lessons to be learned across context but I think we have to build into the process of (just as we do in education and health) the delivery mechanism, what will make sense, and is feasible at scale and be legitimate in terms of local populations. What sort of delivery mechanisms and also in terms of how things are framed such as language, etc. must go through a process of being localized and making sense before they are scaled-up. And we know this. If we look across Europe and North America, look at child protection systems, they differ in neighboring countries, why? Because child protection systems have to be, and those that are functioning, are a reflection of history, culture and assets as well as efforts to achieve universal outcomes for children, which we are not calling into question in any way, So taking some of the really good lessons from interventions that work elsewhere is obviously very important but I think they do need to go through a process of contextualized adaptation and particularly in terms of looking at how will these services and support be effectively accessed by and useful to children and families in communities themselves". – Bill Forbes

2. You mentioned child well-being outcomes. Could you provide specific examples of what types of outcomes and indicators you are suggesting, compared to what types of outcomes and indicators you are suggesting we avoid?

“This is also a great question. It is less about avoiding certain measurements of outcomes but rather looking at their relationship to well-being. Currently in child protection, we tend to focus a lot on mitigation, or reduction of risk factors in children’s lives so things like violence, abuse, neglect, social isolation, marginalization, etc. It’s not that we shouldn’t be measuring these things, of course we have to because that’s one of our criteria that we are using to measure the effectiveness of children’s safety, but I think it is important to introduce this concept of well-being and to also look at what children need to thrive. Here we can look at both internal outcomes (there’s a mixture here of important subjective and objective criteria for well-being) and some of the subjective ones are children’s own experience of the world and the importance of factors like agency. So children’s ability to participate whether it’s full agency or thin agency, for example, a young girl may have very few options when it comes to her agency in relation to early marriage in certain context but to look at where there is a space for her to exercise that agency and how she could be supported by others. The importance of children’s sense of hope, children’s sense of happiness in the world, their sense of safety, certain skills that they might have in relation to well-being, communications skills, there are a lot of life skills outcomes that can be derived here. I think in terms of some of the objective criteria of well-being, its important here to look at other aspects of children’s lives that can mitigate these child protection threats; the ability to go to school, the importance of livelihoods for children, economic security for children. This is where the working children literature is so important because a young boy or girl’s ability to work and have an income may critically offset some of the risk factors that they’re facing and it’s not that those children shouldn’t have the right to go to school too but it’s to look at that aspect of children’s well-being that mitigates some of these risk factors. So I think in terms of well-being it’s important to look at it in relation to outcomes; both the subjective dimensions of well-being as well as the objective dimensions of well-being and then to relate them more closely to do this in an empirical way that allows us to understand how they mitigate specific risk factors that children are facing. And if that is not complex enough, I think we also need to then understand that across the lifespan of childhood because we know that vulnerability shifts as children grow older; vulnerability is very different for an infant than it is for a young child before they go to school, etc. It is really this relationship between looking at outcomes of well-being and risk factors as well. I hope that answers your question” . – Philip Cook

3. Are there specific examples of effective ways to engage young people in the process of change?

“We are learning a great deal and have a rich body of experience already in our circle here, to create safe spaces for children to come forward and share their own experiences about what they feel as challenging and where they see the opportunities in their lives, which is often easier to do before getting into the some of the harsh aspects of child protection. One of the unique aspects of child protection is that we are often focusing on the dark side of human nature, it’s an effort focused on better understanding of human cruelty, which can be deliberate or not deliberate. And I think that it is often easier with children and vulnerable populations to engage them before getting into these hard issues such as anti-trafficking, or come into the community to address sexual abuse and create safe spaces where you can look at what children fear as threats in their lives. Also where their aspirations are, where they see where they have their own strengths, abilities and capabilities that they can contribute to their lives and the lives and others, and would second that to the lives of families. We often do not understand or support the importance of family participation particularly when it comes to work with younger children where the role of family is so key. A

need to find physical space where you can have these discussion with families and children, if there is a need to migrate or to move to find employment, need to find approaches that are more sensitive to families and children's lived experience in terms of where they are located geographically, or the people who are trusted by children and sometimes that's our own organizations or might mean working with specialized organizations. For example, we worked with some of the bigger INGOs on the issue of street children, but often street children don't trust child protection workers, so then we need to work with people with whom street children do trust, and that may be people from their own communities or from peer groups, etc. They could be integrated into our child protection work once we do reach that point for example at the assessment stages that are appropriate, accessible and welcoming to children that are creative in their approach, that welcome their own ideas and that are still useful in terms of designing programs but create that safe space for children in their communities to be involved. I welcome others' experiences, I can see a number of people whose opinions I highly value in this area and I hope others can join in on this comment. I think it is such an important area to our practice and I know there are a lot of people who can contribute to this who are on the call today." - Philip Cook

4. How do protection systems work in emergency situation? Are they effective? Do you have examples?

"This is a rich area of learning at the moment. In emergencies, while government or formal systems are often severely eroded or non-existent because of the very nature of the emergency whether its conflict, a natural disaster, there are still systems that are often in place in children's lives and unfortunately many emergencies interventions don't recognize those systems. That might be the family systems that are still intact or could be there are elders within a camp or within a community who can still help intervene in setting up child protection interventions whether its monitoring children or actually providing direct services for children who experienced abuse or neglect, etc. And children have their own informal systems in those contexts of peer support. There is increasing understanding and attention being given to the way systems intervention, while they might be different in development context, can and should be applied in emergency settings. And I know that in many organizations such as Plan International, World Vision, Save the Children, and others, are moving in this direction. I think its proof and recognition that emergency settings aren't clear cut, and often in protracted emergencies you have an interaction between development context and emergency context. We work in Colombia, as mentioned earlier, in some way, that's a country that has been in an emergency for 50 years and so there are those interactions between emergency and non-emergency, so we must see this as something that requires specific attention but I think there can be more fluidity with the learning between the emergency and development context".

5. Are we learning ways about HOW to contextualize?

*"Yes we are. Some examples have been given in the paper maybe that would be a starting point for follow-up. I would love to have this as a follow-up question because it is a very long one. Part of it is in the assessment tools that we use and the way that we engage with communities. It's about entering into that relationship with communities in the spirit of learning and openness to better understand the way communities comprehend risk and protective factors in relation to children's overall well-being which there are a number of examples. I would like to also point people in the direction of the **Young Lives** research initiatives, which is one of the few longitudinal studies that has a lot on child protection and there's a lot of information there on contextualizing both protection approaches and*

research in working with communities. This could be a much larger discussion but certainly engaging in these endeavors in the spirit of learning.” - Philip Cook

6. **Is there anything in the study that addresses the issue of child friendly and accountability systems where governments , local partners and all stakeholders (including donors) are also accountable to what is implemented.**

“The whole issue of accountability is a really important one and it underscores the need for this focus on outcomes that we’ve referenced in the paper and better understanding of the impact of our programs and designing our programs in relation to the immediate outcomes and long-term outcomes for children. I think this is an area that we feel as authors that the evidence is still somewhat sparse and unfortunately as I mentioned, the compliance models that are in existence often point the arrow of accountability towards legislation. Child protection programs need to be compliant with the law, which is important and obvious, but as a result of that, sometimes they are not compliant or not accountable to the very people that are at the center of these programs, i.e. the most vulnerable children, their families and communities. There are a number of efforts underway to strengthen measurement of outcomes at the level of children, so that the system of accountability can be more oriented towards stakeholder and beneficiaries themselves.”- Philip Cook

7. **Considering the communications side, as opposed to implementation, has the increased need/popularity of digital storytelling exposed any further risks to vulnerable groups?**

*“This is a great tool! One of our partners at Royal Roads is the **Resilience by Design Lab** which is doing some wonderful work on storytelling in relation to children’s resilience. Colleagues in Dalhousie University are doing similar work doing digital storytelling. It’s obviously a very powerful tool because children can immediately relate to using storytelling as a way of describing their lives in a rich narrative that goes beyond just simplistic understanding of risk and protection but really highlighting some of those aspects in a longitudinal way that brings their own voice to the forefront. So thank you for mentioning that as a tool and I think there are other tools that mirror digital storytelling as an effective intervention approach.” - Philip Cook*

Resources

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (previously the Child Protection Working Group):
<https://alliancecpha.org/>

Young Lives: <http://younglives.qeh.ox.ac.uk/>

Resilience by Design Lab: <https://crossroads.royalroads.ca/news/official-launch-resiliencebydesign-lab>