



Revision of Development Policy Statement: Children's Rights

Save the Children Statement February 2005

Introduction and Summary

Save the Children works for an EC Development Policy that promotes and protects children's rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

In this paper, Save the Children comments on the revision of the Development Policy Statement (DPS). Its focus falls somewhat outside the parameters of the public consultation document which does not provide the opportunity for specific comments on the treatment of children's rights in the DPS.

Save the Children welcomes the revision of the EC Development Policy Statement, which offers a crucial opportunity for the EU to revise its approach to children in developing countries and to make good on the EU's commitments to children's rights as set out the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Save the Children urges the Commission and Member States to ensure a transparent process and sufficient time for reflection and comment on a policy area that is of great importance to the EU.

In 2003, Save the Children's study "Invisible Children?" criticised the European Commission for its lack of focus on children and the failure to mainstream children's rights in its Development Policy and practice. Save the Children made several recommendations to address these shortfalls, some of which were subsequently addressed by the Commission.

However, Save the Children's forthcoming report on the European Commission's contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, shows that the overall situation has not significantly improved. Four years after the adoption of the Development Policy Statement, children's rights are still not mainstreamed, there is limited specific focus on children, there are no policies to support implementation of the commitments made to children's rights in developing countries and there is no child rights perspective in policy or practice.

There are now more children living in poverty than at any other time in history. Save the Children urges the European Commission and Member States to address this situation through its development co-operation by:

- ensuring the prioritisation of children's rights in the revised DPS,
- integrating a specific focus on children in the EU's contribution towards the achievement of the MDGs
- publishing an Action Plan for Children in the form of a Communication on Children's Rights and EC Development Policy.

The objectives of the EC's development policy - uniting behind a common platform of international commitments and principles

Save the Children insists that poverty reduction should remain - and be reinforced - as the primary objective of the EC's development policy. We support the inclusion of the EU's international commitments to children's rights and human rights, democracy and good governance, environmental protection and protection for vulnerable groups as guiding principles and objectives in themselves.

The Millennium Development Goals are the most broadly supported, comprehensive and specific poverty reduction targets ever agreed on internationally. The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals should lie at the heart of the EC's contribution towards poverty reduction.

As is well known, the majority of poor people in the world today are children. Every year, millions of children die from poverty related diseases that can be prevented or easily treated. World wide, approximately 104 million school-age children do not attend school, most of them girls. Millions of children around the world are affected by HIV/AIDS.

Six of the eight MDGs refer directly to children's rights to health, education, and equality, acknowledging the central place of children in the effort to free the world from poverty. The MDGs are children's goals and stepping stones towards the full realisation of children's rights. Children and their specific human rights must therefore be at the centre of the EU's contribution towards the MDGs.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified international convention ever. All EU Member States unite behind the rights and principles set out in the UNCRC. The importance attached to these commitments was confirmed by the inclusion of children's rights in the objectives of the European Union in the new **Constitution**, adopted by all EU Member States and approved by the European Parliament. This should be reflected in the new DPS by introducing a more explicit focus on children's rights which would ensure specific targeting of children and children's rights both as underlying principles and as objectives in themselves.

There is broad support for the inclusion of a specific focus on children's rights within the framework of EC/EU Development Policy and practice. Save the Children's report "Invisible Children" shows that EU Member States firmly acknowledge the need to give priority to children in development co-operation - closely related to the overarching goal of poverty reduction. Similarly, the European Parliament continues to insist that the EC's Development Policy should reflect the rights and principles set out in the UNCRC and has, at several occasions, called for concrete measures to be taken to this end, including the publication of an Action Plan.

Through its adoption of the **EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict**, the EU has shown its willingness to lead the way on a specific children's rights issue and to speak with one voice on behalf of children in war-torn countries, including interventions in the Human Rights Commission, and to finance specific operations for children affected by armed conflict.

The principle of securing the **ownership and participation** of partners should not be seen as an obstacle to making children's rights a development priority for the EC/EU - there is a solid platform supporting such prioritisation. All EU partners in

development have ratified the UNCRC. Many African partners have further committed themselves to children's rights under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The Cotonou Agreement refers to the UNCRC in its Preamble while article 26 states that cooperation under the Cotonou Agreement "shall support policies, measures and operations aimed at protecting the rights of children and youth, especially those of girl children." The ACP-EU JPA has adopted several resolutions on children's rights, including calls for a stronger child rights perspective to EC Development Policy.

Save the Children urges the Commission and Council to ensure that the DPS reflects the core common platform provided by the commitments of the EU and its partners commitments towards the MDGs and the UNCRC. This would contribute towards the increased effectiveness of EU development policy and practice due to increased consistency, coherence and complementarity.

The implementation of the EC Development Policy - uniting behind effective approaches

The Commission does not specifically target children and children's rights in its Development Policy. According to the DPS, children's rights are one of the **cross-cutting issues** that should be mainstreamed into all development activities.

Save the Children regrets that mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues has not been achieved in general, and is extremely concerned that this is particularly true for children's rights. Children's rights are not only invisible in programming documents and the vast majority of the Country Strategy Papers - they are also absent in action programmes, reports, strategy documents and most communications specifying policy relevant to children.

Save the Children is aware of, and has welcomed, the steps taken by the Commission to address the failure to mainstreaming children's rights, but remains concerned about the slow progress that is being made. Moreover, we are surprised that the self-acknowledged failure of the Commission to live up to one of the key components of its development policy - i.e. mainstreaming priority areas set by the Council and Commission - receives such poor attention in the Commission's Issue Paper and that the solutions proposed are limited merely to political dialogue. Save the Children urges the Commission and the Council to place much more emphasis on responding to the failure of mainstreaming and to develop their thinking on how to achieve its commitments through alternative approaches in the revised DPS.

The discussion around mainstreaming needs to be linked to concerns regarding the absence of **inclusive strategies** in the Commission, which results in the marginalisation of large groups of people in any developing society - such as children, the elderly, people with disabilities, etc - in its policy and practice. Inclusive development practice involves looking beyond sectors, and points instead towards understanding the complexity of societies as well as the relationships, contributions and reciprocal arrangements that are at the heart of any community. More effort and thinking around strategies to include all social groups in poverty reduction initiatives must be made.

Save the Children has welcomed the EU's commitment to take a **rights based approach** to its development policy. The revision of the DPS provides an excellent

opportunity for the Commission and Council to elaborate on this commitment and to seriously consider the merits of rights based approaches in terms of a more effective and inclusive development policy. A number of EU Member States have already developed strategies for taking a rights based approach, as well as a children's rights based approach, and could give evidence to this effect.

Finally, Save the Children notes that both the Development Policy Statement revision and the MDG review process have highlighted the need for the formulation of objectives, strategies, and priorities for children's rights in EU Development Policy and Practice. We urge the Council to take this observation into account in the April GAERC and to include a call on the Commission to start drafting a Communication on Children's Rights and EC Development Policy in the Council conclusions.

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