



**Strengthening the Sectoral Focus on Children and Youth:
A Submission for the Study of Country and Sectoral Priorities in International Development
Submitted to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development
Submitted by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children**

May 26, 2016

Introduction

Twenty-five years ago Canada ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has major implications for international development, including the choice of sectoral priorities. The Convention, which has been ratified by all middle-and-low-income countries, provides a useful, holistic framework to ensure maximum impact from Canada's international assistance programming in all countries. More recently, Canada has adopted the the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which contain historic promises for children and for youth in particular.

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) appreciates this opportunity to suggest ways that Canada can strengthen its international assistance program through greater use of the Convention. The CCRC is a national network of organizations and individuals who are committed to the implementation of children's rights.ⁱ

Children and Young People as a Priority

Giving priority to children in the allocation of resources, one of the core principles of the Convention, is both an ethical and a practical recommendation for the next phase of Canada's international assistance program. It is practical because young people are a large proportion of the population in many developing countries and developing their potential is a critical factor for sustainable economics and global security.

In addition, the recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) mark two important shifts in the world's approach to development: the need for universality, ensuring that we achieve the goals both at home and abroad; and the need to address exclusion by focusing on populations in the most vulnerable situations in the world. Greater use of the Convention would assist in these goals, including focused consideration of vulnerable groups of children, the different situation of girls and boys in the context of international assistance programming, and gender equality in all aspects of programming.

Recommendation: that Canada continue to make children and youth a sectoral priority for its international development programming, including consideration of vulnerable groups and the differential impact of policy and program options for girls and boys.

Convention on the Rights of the Child: Framework for Next Phase

Last year the Committee's review of child protection emphasized the importance of an integrated approach to child development.ⁱⁱ The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a helpful comprehensive framework that is internationally recognized, but needs more consistent implementation.

The previous Child and Youth Strategy for Canada's international assistance program referred to children's rights in the protection component, but not in the components relating to health and education. As the Committee has noted, provision rights in such areas as health, education, and income security, are directly related to the rights of protection from violence and exploitation. The Convention integrates protection, provision, participation, and good governance for children.

Canada's international assistance program would be more effective if all components were integrated, using the Convention as a guiding framework. Within the sectoral focus on children, investing to reach the most marginalized and vulnerable children and youth is both ethically and economically sound. It allows for faster progress towards key targets and is more cost-effective than focusing on those children and youth who are easiest to reach.ⁱⁱⁱ Greater use of the Convention would also help to ensure all rights are considered, including gender equality and sexual and reproductive health rights for adolescents, and appropriately incorporated into program plans.

Using the Convention as a framework would also address good governance for children as an essential element for sustainable development. This approach would also comply with the Official Development Assistance Act, passed by parliament in 2008, which requires that international development programming comply with Canada's commitments to international human rights conventions.

Recommendation: that the Convention on the Rights of the Child be explicitly named and used as the framework for implementing all components of the sectoral priority on children and youth in Canada's international assistance programming, and that annual reports provide public accountability for the amount and proportion of resources allocated for this purpose.

Children and Country Programs

The CCRC agrees with last year's Committee report on child protection which found that the protection and well-being of children are impacted by other aspects of development. As a tool for implementing the recommendation that the government "*integrate child protection across its*

international policies and programming”^{iv} the CCRC recommends the use of a Child Rights Impact Assessment as part of planning bilateral assistance programs and all other development projects and initiatives.

One example of the need for integration is response to the issue of child labour. An effective strategy will include a range of protection, education, alternative household income strategies, and incorporating respect for children’s rights into partnerships with the private sector for business development, as also recommended by the Committee’s report on child protection. ^v

The consistent use of a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) would prevent the possibility of one aspect of development assistance undermining progress in other areas and enhance the total impact of Canada’s programming. Canada could be part of a global initiative to engage the private sector in using CRIA to plan development activities, using recently developed Child Rights and Business Principles.

In addition, planning of country programs should ensure agency and knowledge of the rights-holder as well as building supportive social environments by mobilising moral duty-bearers i.e. parents, community members and local leaders.

Recommendation: in order to ensure consistency and greater impact, planning for bilateral assistance programs and other major development programs should include the use of a Child Rights Impact Assessment.

Children and Access to Justice

In 2011 Canada, along with other nations in the General Assembly of the United Nations, adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure. This provides an avenue for children to report violations of their rights and seek justice. Effective implementation of this mechanism will increase the sustainable impact of investments in the well-being of children. It will help to ensure good governance by all countries with respect to children. It warrants specific attention, along with the Optional Protocols on Children and Armed Conflict and the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography, in the next stage of Canada’s development program.

Recommendation: that Canada pursue ratification of the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure and give specific attention to the effective implementation of this and the other optional protocols in the next phase of its international development program.

Summary

Canada can have greater impact from its investments in international assistance by intentional pursuit of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by all nations. This can be achieved through: full integration of the Convention in all activities that affect children; use of a Child Rights Impact Assessment for major bilateral and other development programs that impact children; and pursuing implementation of the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure, along with the other optional protocols, to give children greater access to justice.

Recommendations:

1. that Canada continue to make children and youth a sectoral priority for its international development programming, including consideration of vulnerable groups and the differential impact of policy and program options for girls and boys.

2. that the Convention on the Rights of the Child be explicitly named and used as the framework for implementing all components of the sectoral priority on children and youth in Canada's international assistance programming, and that annual reports provide public accountability for the amount and proportion of resources allocated for this purpose.

3. that, in order to ensure consistency and greater impact, planning for bilateral assistance programs and other major development programs should include the use of a Child Rights Impact Assessment.

4. that Canada pursue ratification of the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure and give specific attention to the effective implementation of this and the other optional protocols in the next phase of its international development program.

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ⁱ Further information about the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children is available at www.rightsofchildren.ca.

ⁱⁱ Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, "Beyond Survival: Protecting and Empowering Children and Youth," Report 13, June 18, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ UNICEF "Narrowing the Gaps", 2010.

^{iv} Ibid, Recommendation 1, page 18.

^v Ibid, Recommendation 7, page 19.