

Children's Rights and Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy: Submission by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children

Introduction

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) appreciates and supports the government's commitment to develop and implement an effective national poverty reduction strategy. We agree with much of the analysis in the discussion paper, but suggest that a more coherent, detailed, and integrated approach is needed to understand children living in poverty and support them to escape it.

The CCRC appreciates positive changes being made in several areas of public policy that affect children, such as the Canada Child Benefit, parental leave policies, early childhood care and development, and social housing. Many of these initiatives are in early stages, making it difficult to assess the following: impacts in the daily lives of children; differential impacts for vulnerable groups; gaps toward fuller realization of children's rights that might be addressed through the poverty reduction strategy; and possible unintended consequences.

One important policy area that still requires focused attention is food security and nutrition, an essential piece for reducing child poverty. It was part of the ministerial mandates following the last election, but it has not moved forward publicly yet.

The current situation highlights the problems of not having a coherent and coordinated framework for public policies that impact the well-being and rights of children. It also shows the potential benefits for children if Canada would move in that direction. The CCRC is focusing its first submission for the poverty reduction strategy on this gap in Canada's approach to developing policies that would reduce child poverty and progressively realize the rights of children in Canada.

Recommendations

As Canada moves from general analysis to action strategies, the CCRC recommends the following:

1. Children should receive focused, high priority attention in specific provisions and implementation of the national poverty reduction strategy.
 - a. Persistent high rates and the depth of child poverty in Canada, through strong and weak economic trends, suggest focused attention is required to address it.

- b. The impacts and costs of deprivation in childhood carry into adulthood, resulting in higher costs for public programs. Reducing poverty in childhood makes good economic sense as well as being right in principle.
 - c. Going beyond poverty to focus on developing the full potential of every child will have long-term benefits for Canada's economy and well-being.
- 2. A multi-dimensional approach is needed for analysis of the situation of children living in poverty, for public discourse about child poverty, and for measuring progress toward its reduction and elimination. The CCRC endorses the concept of the Multiple Overlapping Deprivations Analysis (MODA) and recommends that a specific form of MODA be developed for the Canadian context, with participation of young people.
 - a. Multiple factors contribute to the deprivation that hinders healthy development of children and multiple supports are needed to help children get out of poverty.
 - b. Numbers of children above or below a particular household income level is not adequate for analysis, effective solutions, or measuring progress. Some children in households above an arbitrary income line experience deprivation and factors that are as significant as financial resources may be missed for those below the line.
 - c. Multiple factors and indicators of progress facilitate cooperation between actors and help to build a culture of progressive realization within Canada.
 - d. Strategically, multiple indicators can assist in maintaining engagement in the initiative and momentum toward identified goals.
- 3. To be effective, the national poverty reduction strategy should use multiple, short-term rolling targets, with regular, public reporting on both national and provincial levels.
 - a. Canada's experience with one longer-term target illustrates its weakness as a tool for change. It is easily ignored, and once broken, it is no longer an effective motivator. Canada's positive experience in using short-term targets in other areas of public policy, such as deficit reduction in the late 1990's, suggest using that approach could help ensure that poverty reduction receives a high level of attentiveness every year.
- 4. Program components within the strategy need to combine targeted household income supports for individual children with broader-based community programs that support child development and reduce inequities while benefitting all children, including opportunities for social and cultural development. Decision-making about the mix of income support and community services needs to involve young people at local, provincial, and national levels.
- 5. Food security, including adequate access to affordable, nutritious food and regulations to prevent the exploitation of children in food advertising, is a policy area that requires focused attention as an essential component for reducing child poverty.
 - a. The current government recognized its importance by including it in the mandate for the Minister of Agriculture after the 2015 election.

- b. A number of concrete policy and program initiatives have been recommended to improve this area of public policy for children, from regulation to provision.
 - c. Local involvement in effective food security planning is essential because factors differ across the country.
 - d. Mechanisms to link local food security plans with national policies could contribute to an effective national poverty reduction strategy.
6. To foster coherence in public policy for children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child should be explicitly used as a guiding framework. Basing indicators, targets, chosen strategies, and reporting on the Convention will foster integration of policies and programs for children across departments and jurisdictions.
- a. Coherence and integration of policies that affect children is sadly lacking in Canada. Using the Convention as a holistic framework for the poverty reduction strategy will model how Canada's commitment to the Convention translates into practical action for children.
 - b. All provinces have ratified the Convention and have duties for progressive realization of the provisions.
 - c. Public transparency and accountability to children as rights-holders will result in more effective implementation by all parties.
 - d. The Convention provides a basis for learning through international comparisons of progress for children.
7. Using Child Rights Impact Assessments in the development of specific initiatives will maximize benefits and reduce potential for unintended consequences. It would help to identify differential impacts for different groups of children and it provides a tool to bridge gaps between federal and provincial governments.

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