

Children in Focus: Using Child Rights Impact Assessments to Make Progress for Children

Introduction

Children are often invisible when policy decisions are made, but the impacts for them are real. Understanding the impacts from the beginning leads to better decisions and saves money. Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) are a practical tool to ensure that impacts for children are considered before decisions are made about policies and programs that affect their lives.

Twenty-five years ago Canada ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but implementation has been slow. Too many children continue to fall through the cracks of fragmented support systems. Developing the full potential of every child is the goal of the Convention and a Canadian value; that requires earlier, focused attention by all levels of government and community leaders. CRIA is a tool for achieving our common goals.

Tragic stories draw our attention to violations of children's rights; it is often impossible or very expensive to repair damage done. Preventing harm is preferable and cost-effective. CRIA is a preventive tool.

Benefits of CRIA

Experience shows the following benefits:

- Impacts for children receive focused attention before decisions are made
- Negative or unintended consequences are reduced.
- Maximum benefits are achieved through focused consideration of options.
- Best research evidence and stakeholder input provides a strong basis for decisions, within a rights-based framework.
- Bridge between different departments and levels of governments improves policies.
- It helps policymakers balance competing interests and objectives.
- Progress in fulfillment of our obligations to our children can be tracked.

Features of a CRIA process

Essential elements include:

- Flexible guides that can be adapted to fit different circumstances
- Step-by-step process, that fits in the policy cycle: clarify issues, collect relevant data, consider options, identify most effective solutions
- Templates provide questions to consider (not checklists)
- Convention framework ensures all aspects are considered in advance
- Participation by young people and community stakeholders, based on available resources, leads to practical solutions

- Commitment to take process seriously reduces room for polarization of children’s issues
- CRIAs could be embedded in other impact assessment processes, to address the concern of too many steps in a decision-making process.

Sample of the Questions in a CRIA Process

- What is the aim or purpose of this proposal? What issues will it address?
- What articles of the Convention are related to this proposal?
- How will it impact different groups of children? Positive? Negative?
- What can be done to mitigate negative impacts?
- What alternative options are there? What are their impacts?
- What consultations have been held? Have young people provided input?
- What recommendations should be considered by decision-makers?

Resources Available

CRIA Community of Practice: Visit www.criacommunity.org to learn more about various experiences with CRIA, application tools, and research about it from a global perspective.

Bringing Children in from the Margins: Learn from discussion among experts in the *Report from a Symposium on Child Rights Impact Assessment*, held in Ottawa, Ontario in 2013. Available at www.rightsofchildren.ca/.

Worksheet on Child Rights Impact Assessment: Sample what a CRIA might include in your situation. Available at: <http://criacommunity.org/knowledge-base/child-rights-impact-assessment-cria-worksheet/>

Children’s Rights Impact Assessment Form, used by the Government of New Brunswick. . Available at: <http://criacommunity.org/knowledge-base/childrens-rights-impact-assessment-government-of-new-brunswick-canada-form/>.

Tools for Child Rights Impact Assessments. Introduction to the concept and guides for application, developed by UNICEF Canada. Available at: http://criacommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/gravity_forms/1-1baf9042c4fceeee12b9dcd57a5f0b68/2015/10/CRIA.Tools

CRIA in International Development: “Child Impact Assessments, Module 5 in *Child Rights Toolkit: Integrating Child Rights in Development Co-operation*. Guidelines prepared by the EU Commissioner for International Development and UNICEF. c. 2014. Available at: <http://www.unicef.org/eu/crtoolkit/toolkit.html>.