Working to ensure improved policies and programs for children around the world
Children’s Well-Being

Giving children the best possible start in terms of health, development and education is the most effective investment in the economic and social future of a country. Yet in many countries around the world, children are still victimized by violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect; they suffer from extreme poverty, disease, and the effects of armed conflict. Vast arrays of government, multi-lateral and private agencies have made it their mission to address these issues and advance the rights and well-being of children. However, a fundamental gap often hampers their efforts: the lack of effective means to measure and evaluate the results of their programs and policies on children’s lives.

Environmental and cultural factors can serve as obstacles to information gathering. Often practitioners and policymakers simply don’t have the time, resources, or skills to effectively perform this necessary step. They are forced to rely on inadequate information that often is little more than guesswork.

Accurate measurements and evaluations are critical components of any effective program or policy to benefit children. We do this by working with the best researchers in the field of child protection, producing new and relevant research, and making the research methods, innovations, and findings easily accessible and available to those who develop and implement programs for the well-being of children.

The Unique Mission of the CPC Learning Network

The CPC Learning Network was established in 2008 as the Care and Protection of Children Learning Network to fill the need for critical information on the needs of children in crisis and the effectiveness of programs to meet those needs. By convening national and international researchers, practitioners and policymakers, we stimulate and exchange learning, build capacities, and undertake and promote innovative, scientific research to inform policy and practice on the care and protection of children. We do this by working with the best researchers in the field of child protection, producing new and relevant research, and making the research methods, innovations, and findings easily accessible and available to those who develop and implement programs for the well-being of children.

How We Work Around the World

The CPC Learning Network is an open, adaptive network whose stakeholders include academic institutions, governments, NGOs, UN agencies, donor agencies, and affected populations working together toward the goal of a world in which all children receive the care and protection they need. More than 250 agencies have collaborated in CPC Learning Network programs in more than 35 countries to develop the evidence base for the child protection community.

The work of the CPC Learning Network is coordinated by a secretariat based in the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. The secretariat convenes the broader learning network, produces new research and methodologies, and provides capacity strengthening support to our partners. The secretariat is supported by an advisory board of technical experts and leading advocates in the field of child protection and family welfare.

We Advance Our Mission on Four Fronts

Research

We undertake innovative, scientific, longitudinal, and comparative research that focuses on hard-to-measure and difficult situations and contexts. Methods and tools range from program-level evaluations to large-scale research focused on developing and informing public policy.

Learning & Knowledge Exchange

We promote the application of learning and advocate for the inclusion of relevant evidence as a key component of policies and programs that benefit children. We also build capacity to strengthen program and policy evaluation practices through:

I. Research and advocacy training and mentorships with academics, practitioners, and policymakers throughout the network; and

II. Development of child protection and family welfare curricula for use in universities in the global South.

Convening & Partnering

Always building upon the three pillars of actors involved in our work—academics, policymakers, and practitioners—we collaboratively develop shared agendas for child protection and well-being. We establish national platforms and networks, including in-country learning groups or learning institutes, and coordinate with national, regional and global networks.

Building & Strengthening Institutions

The CPC Learning Network develops sustainable hubs or centers of excellence that broker and build capacities in the countries where we work. These hubs can take the form of either of inter-agency groups that convene policymakers, practitioners, and academics or institutional centers of excellence that are based at universities in the global South.

We envision a world in which children and families worldwide.

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Learning Network convenes academics, policymakers, and practitioners to promote innovative research, nurture communities of learning, and build the next generation of researchers and advocates for children and families worldwide.

We advance innovative, scientific, longitudinal, and comparative research that responds to national and global learning needs. One niche of the CPC Learning Network is the design of new research methodologies that focus on hard-to-measure and difficult situations and contexts. Methods and tools range from program-level evaluations to large-scale research focused on developing and informing public policy.

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Our Theory of Change

This diagram represents the CPC Learning Network’s Theory of Change, which illustrates and clarifies the specific contributions that the CPC Learning Network makes to the lives of children, families, and the child protection community worldwide. The circular nature of the diagram is critical because of the inherent interconnectivity of the strategies and outcomes used by the CPC Learning Network at the different levels at which it operates—nationally, regionally, and internationally—which, when combined, contribute to our singular mission and vision.

VISION

A world where learning informs policy and practice to support the protection, care, development, and well-being of children everywhere

MISSION

INNOVATIVE AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Convening and partnering

BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS

LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

STRATEGIES

Researchers undertake relevant, user-informed, child-centred, innovative, and scientific research that address emerging needs at the national and global levels.

Practitioners, researchers, and policy makers identify learning gaps and elaborate shared learning agendas, supported by strong networking, collaborative exchange, and resource mobilization capacities.

CPC Learning Network Centers of Excellence on the care and protection of children are established and/or strengthened, reflecting shared learning agendas, and are responsive to emerging needs at the national, regional and global levels.

Researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and others from many generation of evidence that improves policy and practice for children and families.

Network platforms and resources to be innovative and collaborative in the sectors across national, regional and global levels use CPC Learning

VALUES

Strong capacity will lead to good research, evidence and practice

Good evidence leads to better outcomes

Collaborative research agendas will strengthen child protection

International research and innovation is relevant to national and local contexts

National research and innovation can be adapted, translated, and applied to other contexts

Policy makers and practitioners will value and apply research and innovation

Engages in complex contexts and focuses on hard-to-measure issues

Applies culturally and contextually appropriate methods

Supports long-term, ongoing engagement

Shares learning to inform policy and practice
Task Forces

Task Forces are formed around specific issues of particular concern to CPC Learning Network stakeholders. Current Task Forces include:

Livelihoods and Economic Strengthening

The protection and well-being of children is directly connected to issues of economic stability and livelihoods; the impact of war, natural disasters, or other crises on economically vulnerable families can be severe. This task force, housed at the Women’s Refugee Commission, improves the effectiveness of programming to help children and families by generating and synthesizing the evidence needed to promote sustainable livelihoods approaches and economic strengthening of households.

Assessment and Measurement

CPC Learning Network affiliates often work in countries affected by natural disasters, armed conflict, and deep-rooted poverty, making the collection of reliable data especially challenging. Such lack of data hinders the ability of service providers and policymakers to ensure that children receive appropriate care and protection. This task force, co-convened with Save the Children on behalf of the global Child Protection Working Group, is committed to developing creative and innovative methods and tools to measure issues of child protection and family welfare in the challenging settings where these methods are most needed.

Systems Strengthening

In collaboration with Plan International on behalf of the global Child Protection Working Group, this task force explores ways in which international humanitarian organizations can strengthen the national child protection and family welfare systems that exist in the countries where they work. This task force also studies the relationship between humanitarian emergency response efforts, systems strengthening, and disaster risk reduction initiatives. The goal is to develop guidance to strengthen emergency responses so that they support and complement national child protection and family welfare systems rather than acting in parallel to or undermining them.

Engaging Southern Universities

Universities are central to the activities of the CPC Learning Network, and we are committed to building the capacity of our partners in the global South to conduct research, advocacy, and professional training on child protection and family welfare issues.

In some countries, our activities are housed within universities—from the Center on Child Protection at the University of Indonesia (Pusat Kajian Perlindungan Anak, or PUSKAPA), to the AfriChild Centre of Excellence for the Study of the African Child at Makerere University in Uganda to the Universidad de los Andes in Colombia.

In other priority countries, universities play a critical role in setting and pursuing the learning agenda in a rigorous way. These partnerships include the Université de Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, notably the Institut Supérieur des Sciences de la Population, the University of Liberia, and other universities in that country, and the Open University in Sri Lanka.

University-based CPC affiliates:

- Colombia: Universidad de los Andes
- Indonesia: Center on Child Protection, University of Indonesia
- Uganda: Center of Excellence for the Study of the African Child, Makerere University
- Burkina Faso: Institut Supérieur des Sciences de la Population, Université de Ouagadougou
- Liberia: University of Liberia, United Methodist University, Cuttington University
- Sri Lanka: Open University, University of Colombo

Developing curricula and coursework around child protection and family welfare is a key activity of the CPC Learning Network and our partners.

- In Indonesia, a child protection specialization has been developed for the University of Indonesia’s Master in Criminology.
- In Uganda, a multi-agency team under the leadership of TPO Uganda developed a three-level national child protection curriculum that was integrated in several universities’ social work programs.
- In Sri Lanka, our affiliate collaborated with the Open University to develop a certificate course on the care and protection of children.
- In collaboration with the International Institute for Child Rights and Development, the CPC Learning Network Secretariat is currently compiling all publicly available university-level courses and programs related to child protection and family welfare.
Priority Countries

At the country level, the CPC Learning Network collaborates with local learning networks known as Program Learning Groups (PLGs) or through institutional affiliates located in national universities. PLGs bring together academics, policymakers, and practitioners to determine national learning priorities in their countries and ensure that these priorities influence child protection policy and practice. PLGs determine their own research agendas and receive technical support from the Secretariat and relevant Task Forces. In some countries—such as Indonesia and Uganda—the CPC Learning Network has worked with partners to establish university-based centers of excellence for research and training around child protection and family welfare.

PLGs and institutional affiliates serve as hubs of learning or centers of excellence within their respective countries. They represent a focused, long-term effort to affect change through the development of an integrated knowledge transfer model engaging academia, government agencies, and practitioners in the field.

Efforts are underway in six priority countries.

**COLOMBIA**

A country that has been affected by armed conflict for decades, Colombia has the world’s second highest number internally displaced people; an estimated 75% are women and children.

Despite being a middle-income country, 29 percent of Colombia’s poor adolescents are not attending school, and 50 percent of those in school are lagging behind. A high percentage of the population in urban areas lacks access to basic services.

In 2013, a coalition of social policy researchers at the Universidad de los Andes and other entities determined to establish a Program Learning Group by which they would bring their analytical skills to bear to help practitioners and policymakers improve service delivery to children and families across the country. The Colombia PLG designs research projects that allow government officials at various levels—from municipal to national—to better generate and make use of the data to create environments in which children and families can reach their full potential.

**BURKINA FASO**

A small, landlocked country in West Africa’s Sahel region, Burkina Faso has a child population totaling more than half of the nation’s 16 million people; many children are vulnerable to violence, extreme poverty, and malnutrition, the last being a product of the region’s long dry season and cyclical droughts.

In this challenging environment, Burkina Faso’s Program Learning Group is creating the tools and evidence needed to measure the success of endeavors to help children and their families emerge from poverty and other forms of adversity. Hosted at the NGO Terre des hommes and affiliated with the country’s Child Protection Working Group, the Burkina Faso PLG is an inter-agency group overseen by the Ministry of Social Welfare and National Solidarity and the Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation. The group has established links with the Institut Supérieur des Sciences de la Population at the Université de Ouagadougou as well as to other research institutions, who have formed a scientific advisory board to ensure research quality. The Burkina Faso PLG is raising the prominence of child protection and family welfare in the national development agenda.
the protection and well-being of children. PUSKAPA is supporting the Government of Indonesia through research to inform the design of more effective social protection policies.

Juvenile Justice Initiative
Given high levels of pre-trial detentions among juveniles, with reports of mistreatment and limited access to legal and social services, PUSKAPA conducts research on pre-trial detention to better understand the determinants of pre-trial detention, the conditions and experiences of detained youth, and access to social and legal services prior to and during detainment.

LIBERIA

Liberia faces a number of daunting challenges, including an estimated 83% of the population living in extreme poverty.

Child protection concerns pervade the country, including child labor, early marriage, sexual exploitation and abuse, violent discipline practices, and children living without family care and traditional schooling. The 2014 Ebola outbreak has only exacerbated the challenges that children face in attaining their full developmental potential.

The Liberia PLG was established in 2011, bringing together representatives of key government ministries, non-government organizations, universities, and international agencies. The Liberia PLG conducted an ethnographic study of informal and formal child protection systems in rural Liberia that provided an opportunity for participants to explore existing child protection mechanisms in their communities. It also conducted an integrated review of sexual and gender-based violence programs.

The Liberia PLG has also developed a national child protection curriculum that it is working to integrate into university social work programs throughout the country.

INDONESIA

Around 11% of the population of Indonesia lives at or below the national poverty rate while nearly half the population survives on less than two dollars a day.

More than 23 million poor children and their families are facing difficulties meeting basic needs such as nutrition, health, and education as well as accessing social services.

The University of Indonesia established the Center on Child Protection (PUSKAPA) in December 2009 in partnership with the Indonesian Planning Ministry (BAPPENAS) and Columbia University and supported by development partners working in the area of child protection, such as UNICEF and Save the Children. PUSKAPA has several key priorities.

Legal Identity Initiative
In Indonesia, approximately 40 million children lack legal identity documents, such as birth certificates. PUSKAPA has made increasing access to legal identity ownership a research and programming priority. The multi-year Legal Identity Project explores the barriers to legal identity ownership and the impact of legal identity on education, health, and social outcomes; evaluates government-level interventions; and increases legal identity ownership among vulnerable women and children across the country.

To date, findings from the Legal Identity Initiative have made key contributions to the development of the Government of Indonesia’s National Plan to improve legal identity across Indonesia.

Child Protection and Well-Being in the Social Protection System
PUSKAPA promotes an integrated social protection system that aims to provide assistance to vulnerable families and communities. This assistance should ideally enable them to keep children in their families and to enable families to assume their responsibilities for
UGANDA

A large percentage of the population of the 30 million people of Uganda still live in poverty, stretching families’ capacities to provide a protective environment for children. Moreover, Uganda is one of the countries most affected by HIV and AIDS, an epidemic that has orphaned more than 1.2 million children and severely tested extended kinship networks’ capacity to care for children.

The AfriChild Centre of Excellence for the Study of the African Child is a multidisciplinary research and training center seeking to improve children’s lives in Uganda and elsewhere in East Africa by building the evidence base through rigorous research on children’s protection, care, well-being and development. Hosted at Makerere University, the AfriChild Centre is an institutional affiliate of the CPC Learning Network. The AfriChild Centre is currently coordinating Uganda’s first Violence Against Children Survey—the first attempt to measure physical, sexual, and emotional violence on a national scale—and is also working closely with the Ugandan government to ensure the use of rigorous evidence in the development of the country’s first child protection strategy.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka—an island nation in the Indian Ocean that is the diverse home to many religions, ethnicities and languages—continues to rebuild after a series of emergencies, including the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that devastated large swaths of the country and more than 30 years of armed conflict in the northern and eastern parts of the country, ending in 2009.

The Sri Lanka PLG was founded in 2009 in partnership with the Institute for Participatory Interaction in Development, the host organization that specializes in evaluating humanitarian and development efforts. The PLG is presided by a Steering Committee that includes the Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Affairs, the National Child Protection Authority, and the Children’s Secretariat. The PLG’s three key thematic areas are research, capacity-building, and knowledge-sharing in the field of child protection.

Moving Forward

The CPC Learning Network’s Theory of Change has application beyond the six priority countries. Through our Task Forces and other partnerships, we often work in additional countries where policymakers and practitioners demonstrate a keen interest to collaborate with academics to improve the evidence needed to more effectively support children, families, and communities.

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