

Child protection and social protection: two sides of the same coin?

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There is widespread recognition that children are a vulnerable group; they have different basic needs from adults, they are dependent on others for the fulfilment of their needs and the denial of those needs can have far-reaching and long-term adverse consequences (Roelen & Sabates-Wheeler, 2012; Sabates-Wheeler, Devereux, & Hodges, 2009; White, Leavy, & Masters, 2003). The policy areas of child protection and social protection are part and parcel of the response to vulnerable children. Nevertheless, both policy areas have largely developed in silos (Roelen, Long, & Edstrom, 2012). Whilst issues of child protection are mostly dealt with in disciplines of child psychology and childhood studies, social protection is largely appropriated by economists and social scientists. Similarly, national governments, international organisations and NGOs often deal with issues of child protection and social protection in different departments and through distinct sectoral policies. It is increasingly recognised that this dichotomy is artificial (Shibuya & Taylor, 2013), and that it compromises the effectiveness of the response to the wide set of needs of vulnerable children.

This paper assesses the synergies and linkages between the policy areas of child protection and social protection, and examines entry points for providing a more comprehensive response to vulnerable children. More specifically, it establishes a framework that sets out the causes and consequences of child protection violations and the role that social protection can play in preventing or mitigating the impact of such violations. Issues of child poverty and economic vulnerability feature heavily as this can be considered a child protection violation in and of itself and play an important role in causing or reinforcing other types of child protection violations, including child labour, trafficking, abuse and neglect (Jones, 2011; Roelen & Delap, 2012). This paper also considers issues of implementation in working towards a more comprehensive and coordinated response to vulnerable children that spans across sectoral policies of child protection and social protection. In particular, it will address questions around the appropriate role of community volunteers and social workers in the provision of services at household level (Roelen et al., 2012). The paper concludes that opportunities for synergies and linkages are plentiful, and should be taken advantage of to their full potential, but that methods of implementation involving community members and volunteers require scrutiny and a healthy dose of realism rather than romanticism.

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