

A change of paradigm and practice?

Towards family based care-
Synthesis of first day

A slow shift towards family based care options

- Residential care is still the major and primary response to children without primary caregivers in the region.
- At the same time there is increased awareness of the importance of family based care and countries are developing legal and regulatory frameworks for alternative care systems.
- Seems to be good awareness, at least theoretically of the need to move towards family based care and away from institutional reliance
- But prevention of separation still not a priority and family support schemes ad hoc or not prioritised.

Residential care system

- Still massive and still the first option.
- Some managed by governments, but most privately run, (NGOS and faith based organisations).
- Majority of children in these institutions have parents and families.
- Majority of children spend prolonged periods of time in institutions
- There are few screening systems and permanent care plans for children entering institutions are rare.
- Parental poverty is a key pull factor for institutionalising children and this has to be addressed through inter-sectoral approaches and a focus on building social protection systems.
- Other important pull factors include parents feeling that they are unable to care for children with special needs including disability and stigmatisation.

Residential care systems

- Regulatory systems very weak and quality standards either not in place or not implemented.
- Data on the situations of these children is still fragmented due to poor data collection systems and lack of monitoring mechanisms.
- Institutionalisation of children can also take place through boarding schools including religious boarding schools (ie Pesantren in Indonesia, Pagoda systems in Cambodia or boarding schools for ethnic minorities. (Myanmar)

Alternative care systems

- In all countries kinship care is deeply rooted and widely practised, however remains mainly informal.
- Majority of children deprived of parental care are in extended families.
- If so, why is institutionalisation still used and supported so widely by government and agencies?
- Prevention of separation and family support schemes and strategies – Still very ad hoc and not prioritised but some countries have grants and subsidies (China) schemes, some have schemes developed in emergency/crisis situation. I.e. Tsunami.
- In many countries family based non kinship care (ie fostering) is a new concept and there are few countries with formal fostering system (except Philippines and China)

Alternative care systems

- Regulation and support for foster care arrangements still big issue: children can be at risk of abuse or discrimination, i.e. used as domestic helpers.
- Adoption is provided for and regulated in most countries but it varies. Some countries have cut off age for adoption; others have poor regulation of inter-country adoption. In other countries, legal adoption is mostly by relatives.
- In some countries (Philippines, Fiji) legal adoption mostly by relatives
- Guardianship system, both formal and informal also exists in the region but needs to see how it is applied in a way that protects the most vulnerable children (children who have lost both parents)?

Challenges

FRAMEWORK

- All countries have some national laws for the protection of children, and new laws are being developed reflecting greater focus on child rights.
- But major gaps in implementation, from policies to practice particularly focusing on supporting families to care for their children.
- Detailed standards of care and regulatory systems are still missing in many countries or are not operational.
- Legal framework for caring for children still patchy, often stretched over a number of laws, adoption laws, child protection laws etc.

Challenges

SERVICES

- Services often inadequate due to lack of capacity and lack of resources.
- Professionalisation of social work practitioners is needed and development of strong curriculum.
- Responsibilities scattered over different ministries and lack of coordination undermines efforts. Need coordination with other sectors in particular Education, Health, Justice but also Finance ministries.
- Need to engage with faith based organisations on family based care.

DATA and ANALYSIS

- Still major lack of systematic data on institutions and data collection systems often poor or non existent.
- Definitions and concepts needs to be clarified and agreed to be able to analyse the data properly and have common framework. Ie. in most countries orphans perceived to be both single and double orphans
- Very little data on children in alternative care because no monitoring and regulatory framework.
- Some countries are undertaking assessments and evaluations of alternative care models as well as institutions but needs to be more systematic.