Better Care Network Strategic Plan 2014 – 2017

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Letter of Introduction from the Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee

The quality of care that children receive is a fundamental determinant of their development and the degree to which they can fulfill their potential. In recent years more and more impacts of poor quality care have been identified, including emotional, cognitive, physical and social impairments over the short and long term with implications throughout adulthood. The latter can include risky behaviors such as substance abuse and early sexual activity that cause disease, injury, mental and social problems. As this evidence accumulates, the quality of care is being increasingly recognized as a key issue in social development and in efforts to fulfill children's rights. However, the continued proliferation of inappropriate forms of institutional care, the strain placed on kinship carers by the impact of HIV/AIDS, and the movement of children out of vulnerable families onto the street continue to challenge progress in this area.

With growing attention to this issue, there has been corresponding interest in knowing more about good practice in policy and practice in this field. This includes a desire to know more about the evidence on 'what works' in supporting families to care for their children and providing appropriate alternatives for children who cannot be cared for by their parents. The Better Care Network [BCN] exists to help answer these questions by providing a knowledge hub where policy-makers and practitioners can find the information they need and the inspiration to develop solutions best fitted for their situation.

Over the last few years the Better Care Network has established a range of services including a web-based library of key documents, a regular newsletter, the provision of technical information and the development of tools, discussion papers and other resources. At the same time BCN has helped to convene or facilitate a range of events that have brought together global, regional and national actors to address the changes that are needed to improve children's care outcomes. Working in partnership with these actors BCN has also been an increasingly vocal advocate for technically sound policy and programmatic action to reform care services.

The strategy outlined in the following pages builds on these strong foundations. Based on positive feedback from its users, BCN will continue to maintain its current platform of services and to create opportunities for people to come together to share their learning and experiences and find ways to collaborate. At the same time four strategic priorities have been identified that will provide the focus for much of BCN's work in the coming period:

1. Supporting the implementation of the *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* and technically sound child care related policies and practices,
2. Facilitating the development and implementation of a comprehensive child care research agenda that informs policy and practice,
3. Contributing to positive changes in social norms and behaviors that will result in improved care practices and better outcomes for children,
4. Maximizing BCN's role and value as a network.

We believe that this strategy will enable the Better Care Network to play an even stronger role in accelerating efforts to strengthen families and improve the care of children across the world. We commend this strategy to you and look forward to working with you to deliver it.

Bill Bell & John Williamson
Co-Chairs of the Better Care Network

Acknowledgements

The Strategic Plan was prepared with the leadership and support of the Better Care Network's Steering Committee and Secretariat. The Strategic Plan was developed through a collaborative process that included 60 interviews with key informants and an on-line survey to which there were over 140 respondents.

The Better Care Network wishes to thank all its members, the Advisory Group and those we regularly connect with who provided invaluable input to the strategic planning process.

We wish to thank those individuals who put aside time to be interviewed during this process and participated in the on-line survey. The interviews and information provided added real depth and offered excellent input to how BCN could have most impact in the future to strengthen the response to children without adequate family care.

Thank you to the Secretariat and Steering Committee who took time out from busy schedules to identify and agree on the way forward for BCN over the coming four years. The Committee's level of commitment to BCN enables the network to continue to deliver a real impact for children without adequate family care.

And finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to Global Child Protection Services who supported BCN in developing this strategic plan.

Executive Summary

Introduction

This Strategic Plan identifies the main strategic focus of BCN's work over the next four years. The plan is based on an analysis of BCN's achievements to date, the strategic areas in which BCN can have most impact in the future by working with key actors to strengthen the response to children without adequate family care, and the organizational arrangements that best supports BCN's particular role and value as a network.

The Strategic Plan was developed through a collaborative process that included: 60 interviews with key informants; an on-line survey to which there were 141 respondents; and internal and external literature reviews. The information gathered was presented in a Background Paper, which formed the basis for discussion at a two-day workshop with the Steering Committee and Secretariat, at which strategic priorities and organizational arrangements for the next four years were agreed.

BCNs role and added value as a network

The purpose of BCN is to facilitate active information exchange and collaboration on the issue of children without adequate family care and to advocate for technically sound policy and programmatic action at global, regional, and national levels. Since its initiation in 2003, BCN's primary role has been that of **knowledge management** on family strengthening and alternative care, mainly through its online library and newsletter. BCN has also published papers that have been frequently cited in the literature.

BCN has developed **technical resources** and also provides **technical guidance** on child care[1] issues, by responding to individual requests, providing input to inter-agency working groups and technical support to implementing actors. BCN is currently piloting an inter-agency collaboration model through the "Increasing the Momentum of Child Care Reform in Eastern and Southern Africa" initiative. BCN has also played an influential role in **standard setting,** such as through its involvement in the development of the *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* welcomed by the UN and supporting their implementation. It has been the co-**convenor** of several international and regional conferences and inter-agency working groups to promote care issues on international, regional and national agendas.

The situation of children without adequate family care

Many different contextually dependent factors play a role in why children lack adequate family care. These include poverty; lack of local access to affordable education and family support services; social problems; HIV/AIDS, chronic illness or disability; discrimination and social exclusion; social norms that support poor care practices; and emergency situations. Vulnerable families seldom receive government support to enable them to care better for their children, and family strengthening activities tend to be provided by non-governmental organisations in an ad hoc manner. Responses to child protection issues in families are largely reactive, of low coverage and poor quality, resulting too often in the removal of the child and his/her placement in a residential facility.

Lack of access to basic services, particularly education, and specialised services at community level are key drivers of family separation. Kinship care is the main form of informal care but these caregivers are rarely provided with the support they need. In many countries, formal alternative care relies mainly on large-scale government or privately run residential care facilities. Despite evidence of the harm that residential care can do to children's wellbeing and development, in many countries recently there has been an unregulated increase in the number of residential child care facilities, which are often self-perpetuating and sustained by established social norms and behaviors, a lack of public awareness of their dangers, and vested interests.

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[1] In this document, child care refers to family and alternative care of children.

Many developing countries have been going through the process of harmonizing their legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Guidelines on Alternative Care for Children and other international and regional child rights instruments. However, implementation is often weak and systems for the delivery of social services are severely underdeveloped in many countries, particularly child and family support services needed to support appropriate decisions and placements for children needing alternative care.

In general, family strengthening and alternative care have been neglected in many international and regional development policies, such as in the Millennium Development Goals. Globally there remains a weak evidence base on the nature and solutions to child care issues in developing countries. Adequate financing of family and child welfare systems remains a key issue worldwide.

BCNs role within the child care sector

During the strategic planning process, BCN identified the main challenges facing families in caring adequately for their children, barriers to addressing the problem, key interventions that are needed, and the role that BCN plays in strengthening responses. Since 2011, BCN has organized its work under **three Strategic Pillars** that identify the main approaches that BCN uses in its work: **information exchange**; **standard setting, technical support and guidance;** and **leadership, brokerage and convening**.

Over the next four years BCN will focus its work around **four Strategic Priorities,** which involve activities across all three Strategic Pillars. BCN will work at different levels as a core approach to implementing its Strategic Priorities, strengthening its global reach and effectiveness by fostering collaboration with regional and national networks.

Strategic Priority 1: Supporting the implementation of the Guidelines for Alternative Care and technically sound child care related policies and practice

BCN will continue to support the implementation of the *Guidelines on Alternative Care for Children* and technically sound child care related policies and practices. It will further develop its website to share information about national care systems and reform initiatives. BCN will also pilot specific national and regional approaches to supporting child care reform through its *'Increasing the Momentum of Child Care Reform in Eastern and Southern Africa'* initiative, which will inform future approaches in other regions.

Strategic Priority 2: Facilitating the development and delivery of a comprehensive child care research agenda that informs policy and practice

BCN will support the development of and deliver a coherent research agenda to support the development of a more comprehensive body of knowledge about children at risk or deprived of adequate family care. The initiative will foster coordination and partnership between academics, policy makers and practitioners at global, regional and national levels. BCN will publish and disseminate research findings in different formats for a range of audiences through its website and will facilitate discussions on the policy implications of the evidence.

Strategic Priority 3: Contributing to positive changes in social norms and behaviors that result in improved child care practices

During the next four years, BCN will work with its members to explore what influences child care-related social norms and how they determine behavior by different actors, including government, civil society and private sector responses. BCN will build on the Faith to Action Initiative with the Christian community to engage with other faith-based communities. It will scope options for interagency action to promote ethical volunteering, with a specific focus on volunteering to support families and communities rather than residential care facilities. BCN will share learning about supporting positive social norms and behaviors on children's care and addressing negative practices through the website and newsletter.

Strategic Priority 4: Maximizing BCNs role and value as a network

BCN's role and added value as a network is to strengthen and contribute to the response of key actors to children without adequate family care. BCN will continue to develop its website and newsletter with efforts to extend their reach to a wider range of users and stakeholders, particularly the staff of national NGOs and governments. BCN will increase its partnerships with other organizations and facilitate exchange within and between national and regional networks. The interactive nature of its website will be increased and BCN will seek to increase the involvement of its members in the activities of the network.

BCN's Governance, Management and Administration

Changes to BCN's governance, management and administration will reflect its maturity as network, and enable BCN to operate with more independence. These changes will ensure:

- BCN's governance is more representative of the child care sector with an expansion of its Steering Committee;
- BCN fully capitalizes on the technical expertise at its disposal by reviewing the functioning of the Advisory Group to align it with the Strategic Plan;
- The Secretariat is expanded, subject to securing funding, to enable it to deliver effectively on the four strategic priorities;
- BCN is identified as an independent network by being fiscally sponsored by an independent agent and securing its own office space[2];
- BCN actively mobilizes resources, aiming for medium to long term stable core funding as well as project funding from a wide range of donors.

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[2] BCN will not be registered as a legally separate organization during this strategic period.

Introduction

Purpose of the Strategic Plan 2014-17

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to identify the main strategic focus of BCN's work over the next four years. The development of the plan has been based on an analysis of BCN's achievements to date, the strategic areas in which BCN could have most impact in the future by working with key actors to strengthen their response to children without adequate family care, and the organizational arrangements that would best support BCN's particular role and value as a network. The plan will form the basis for decision-making, the preparation of annual work plans, and monitoring progress and evaluating the outcomes of BCN's work. The Strategic Plan is designed to remain flexible enough to allow for effective responses to emerging issues and new opportunities as they arise.

Process of Developing the Strategic Plan 2014-17

BCN's Strategic Plan was developed though a consultative, collaborative process, facilitated by the consulting group, Global Child Protection Services (GCPS). The process involved the BCN Steering Committee and Secretariat, members of BCN's Advisory Group and a number of external experts and practitioners working at global, regional and country levels. GCPS carried out 60 interviews with key informants, and an on-line survey was distributed to members through BCN's newsletter and other child protection and care related networks to which there were 141 respondents. GCPS also undertook literature reviews of BCN's internal documentation, the key external literature on children without adequate family care, and the literature on the role of networks in international development.

The data gathered as a result of these activities were analyzed by GCPS and presented in a Background Paper, which included:
- an analysis of the external policy and practice environment on children without adequate family care;
- a review of BCN's achievements and challenges during the previous strategic period;
- an overview of the positioning of other networks in the area of family strengthening and alternative care;
- the strategic options available to BCN during the coming period, including how BCN could maximize its role and value as a network;
- an analysis of the options for strengthening current organizational arrangements in order to facilitate its work.

The findings presented in the Background Paper formed the basis for discussion at a two-day workshop with the Steering Committee and Secretariat facilitated by GCPS. Participants constructed a Theory of Change for the child care[3] sector, discussed the role of other organizations in addressing child care issues and BCN's own distinctive contribution, and considered the range of issues that BCN could prioritize in the coming years. Participants also discussed BCN's organizational arrangements. Agreements were made on some actions to strengthen key organizational arrangements and to further explore certain other recommendations. These agreements are outlined in the transition plan.

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[3] In this document, child care refers to family and alternative care of children.

BCN's role and value as a network

BCN's Mission

The purpose of BCN – confirmed during the strategic planning process - is to facilitate active information exchange and collaboration on the issue of children without adequate family care and to advocate for technically sound policy and programmatic action at global, regional, and national levels in order to:

- Reduce instances of separation and abandonment of children;
- Reunite children outside family care with their families, wherever possible and appropriate;
- Increase, strengthen and support family and community-based care options for children who cannot be cared for by their parents;
- Establish international and national standards for all forms of care for children without adequate family care and mechanisms for ensuring compliance; and
- Ensure that residential institutions are used in a very limited manner and only when appropriate.

BCN is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (welcomed by the UN General Assembly in 2009).

BCN's Profile and Achievements

BCN engages with a wide range of 'member'[4], through their use of the website, as subscribers to the newsletter and as recipients of technical assistance. In 2013 BCN's organisational structures consisted of:
- A Steering Committee formed of five organisations;
- A Global Secretariat of two staff, and one staff for the Eastern and Southern Africa region;
- An Advisory Group of over 45 individuals and organisations who are experts in family strengthening and alternative care.

Since its initiation in 2003 as an informal network with no paid staff, which exchanged information and ideas on children without adequate family care, BCN's activities have expanded considerably.

- BCN's primary role has been that of **knowledge management** on family strengthening and alternative care, which has included information exchange and providing technical resources and guidance. BCN's library of over 1,150 documents (September 2013) is the largest on-line collection of documents on these topics. Subscribers to its newsletter rose from just over 300 in 2003 to 3,356 in 2013[5]. Between July 2010 and July 2013, the website was visited by over 53,500 different users[6], based in over 190 countries. BCN's contribution to information exchange is its most recognised and valued role, and is regarded as a unique achievement by members and stakeholders.

  > "Excellent resource, first place to go for information" (key informant)

- BCN has also published a range of policy and other papers that have been frequently cited in recent literature on care issues. These include papers on the importance of quality family care[7], the scientific

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[4] BCN membership is informal and includes all subscribers to the BCN newsletter, users of the BCN web site and resources and recipients of technical assistance.
[5] http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs188/1103522065169/archive/1114373951710.html#LETTER.BLOCK56
At http://bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/Newsletter.asp(seen August 2013)
[6] Unique visitors
[7] Williamson, J., Greenberg, A. (2010). Families, not orphanages. Better Care Network.

evidence on the harm caused by institutionalisation[8] and the priority that needs to be given to children with disabilities in reforming child care[9].

- BCN has supported improvements in technical competence in the field by developing **technical resources**, such as its on-line toolkit on alternative care[10], and the Manual for the Measurement of Indicators for Children in Formal Care[11] produced in partnership with UNICEF. BCN also provides **technical guidance** on child care issues arising at national, regional or global levels. The Secretariat responds to 30 to 40 individual requests per month for technical assistance, this service being described as 'indispensable' and of 'great value' by key informants to this strategic planning process. BCN established a national chapter in the Netherlands in 2007 and supported the

  > "BCN added value, was a serious, professional, modest partner with good technical expertise, working at the strategic level" (key informant)

  formation of the Malawi BCN Alliance in 2012. BCN's experience of providing technical support to implementing actors at the national level, such as in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake and in Rwanda during its deinstitutionalisation process, demonstrates that it can make a significant impact when its services are tailored to country-specific needs. In Sub-Saharan Africa, BCN is building on regional efforts such as conferences in Nairobi[12] and Dakar[13] and its more recent support to national child care reform to develop and pilot an inter-agency regional collaboration in Eastern and Southern Africa initiated in 2013.

- BCN has played an influential role in **standard setting**. It played a key role in supporting the development of the *UN welcomed Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* and their implementation, including as a key contributor to the inter-agency handbook '*Moving Forward: Implementing the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*[14]. With the New York Working Group on Children without Parental Care, of which it is the co-convenor, and the Geneva Working Group, BCN has also been working on their promotion and use worldwide.

  > "At global level: unique, neutral, acts with integrity and is credible" (key informant)

- BCN has been engaged with a wide range of actors that influence child care. BCN has been the co-**convenor** of several international and regional conferences[15], which have contributed to promoting care issues on international, regional and national agendas. It has provided technical input to inter-agency expert working groups providing guidance on care terminology and the enumeration of children outside of family care. It also engages with the faith community through its support to the Faith to Action Initiative. This started as a BCN working group, but now functions independently to encourage US Christian based organisations to orientate their support to family based initiatives, rather than residential care for children.

  > "BCN helped to shift donor agendas" (key informant)

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[8] Browne, K. (2009). The risk of harm to Young Children in Institutional Care. Better Care Network, Save the Children UK.
[9] EveryChild. BCN. (2012). Enabling Reform. Why supporting children with disabilities must be at the heart of successful child care reform
[10] http://www.crin.org/bcn/toolkit/
[11] BCN, UNICEF (2009). Manual for the Measurement of Indicators for Children in Informal Care
[12] http://www.crin.org/BCN/KeyInitiatives.asp
[13] http://www.conf-famillepriseencharge-dakar.com/Documentes.htm
[14] http://www.alternativecareguidelines.org/Home/tabid/2372/language/en-GB/Default.aspx
[15] The main conferences at which BCN has played a convening role have been:
- The Neglected Agenda: Protecting Children without Adequate Parental Care Conference, Wilton Park, UK, 2009;
- International Conference in Africa on Family Based Care for Children, Nairobi 2009;
- Quality in Alternative Care Conference, Prague, 2011;
- Social Welfare Workforce Strengthening Conference, Cape Town, 2010;
- Francophone African Conference on Family Strengthening and Alternative Care, Dakar 2012.

The situation of children without adequate family care

Save the Children defines children without adequate family care as children who are not receiving suitable, continuous, quality care, nurture and guidance either from their families or from other primary carers that are meant to replace the family environment[16].

Children without adequate family care include children who lose parental care through the death of parents, as a result of conflict or disaster, or children whose parents are unable to care for them appropriately for a short or long period of time or who are in situations in which social norms dictate that they are better cared for by the government or other institutions. Children of single mothers and of 'reconstituted families' are particularly vulnerable to separation[17]. Extended families provide the bulk of care for children without parental care, often with little support from governments[18]. When extended families lack the capacity, support or willingness to care for these children, children risk falling outside of family care. Many different contextually dependent factors play a role in why children lack adequate family care. Factors that undermine the ability of families to care adequately for their children and that risk separation of children include:

- poverty;
- lack of local access to affordable education;
- social problems such as substance abuse and domestic violence;
- HIV/AIDS and other chronic illness or disability, including mental health issues;
- discrimination and social exclusion;
- negative social norms and practices; and
- crises or emergency situations.

Children who lose the care of their families may be placed in a range of alternative care settings, both formal and informal. In many countries formal alternative care relies mainly on large-scale government or privately run residential care facilities, although other options exist which include foster care and small group homes. Many private child care facilities are run by faith-based organisations, including Christian and Islamic organisations, and Buddhist temples[19]. In low and middle income countries, few of these facilities are adequately regulated and children are often placed in these institutions for prolonged periods of time, with little if any oversight. Kinship care is the main form of informal care and has the advantage of preserving children's identity and bonds with their family environments. Kinship carers are often grandparents who are older and poorer, and who often face challenges in accessing social services and support[20]. A better understanding of kinship care arrangements is needed to prevent potential situations of abuse or neglect and ensure appropriate support is provided. As well as kinship care, informal care includes children who live outside the care of their own families in households where they have been placed (often in return for domestic labor[21]). Other children without family care live on the streets, in child-headed households or with employers,

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[16] Save the Children (2010) Children without appropriate family care. Fact Sheet. This definition builds on the definition of children without parental care which is contained in the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, but expands it to include reference to family care, which is in line with BCN's mission.

[17] Martin, F. & Sudrajat, T. (2007). Someone that Matters: The Quality of Care in Child care Institutions in 6 Provinces of Indonesia. Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs, Save the Children UK and UNICEF, 2007.

[18] Ainsworth & Filmer, 2006, p. 1106. Seen in: Roby, J (2011) Children in Informal Alternative Care. Discussion paper. UNICEF, New York.)

[19] Christian Aid. (2006). A matter of belonging. How faith based organizations can strengthen families and communities to support orphans and vulnerable children.
Martin, F. & Sudrajat, T. (2007). Someone that Matters: The Quality of Care in Child care Institutions in 6 Provinces of Indonesia. Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs, Save the Children UK and UNICEF, 2007.
Liberia Editrice Vaticana. (2010). Statistics Yearbook of the Church. Chapter V, Welfare Institutions.

[20] Roby, J (2011) Children in Informal Alternative Care. Discussion paper. UNICEF, New York.

[21] ibid

often experiencing multiple deprivations and severe forms of violence[22].

Lack of access to basic services and specialised services at community level are key drivers of family separation. Lack of access to education pushes parents in some contexts to send their children to stay in residential facilities[23]. Poverty alleviation programmes have inadequately addressed inequalities and the needs of vulnerable groups[24] and social protection programmes have not generally been designed to strengthen the capacity of families to care for their children[25]. Vulnerable families seldom receive government support, such as counselling, day care, livelihood support and specialist services, to enable them to care better for their children, family strengthening activities tending to be provided by non-governmental organisations in an ad hoc manner[26]. Support to families should strengthen positive family and community responses, however, capacity to accomplish this in resource poor environments is limited. Responses to child protection issues in families are largely reactive, of low coverage and poor quality, resulting too often in the separation of the child from his/ her family and his/her placement in a residential facility.

Despite evidence of the harm that residential care can do to children's wellbeing and development[27], worldwide it continues to be the main response of governments to children without adequate family care, other formal family based alternatives such as foster care being little used outside of North America, Australia and Europe. An unregulated increase in the number of residential child care facilities has recently been reported from many countries[28]. These facilities tend to be self-perpetuating and sustained by established social norms and behaviors, a lack of public awareness of their dangers, and vested interests (such as patronage by government officials; a profit motive; misguided philanthropy, volunteering[29] and faith based charity). Over-reliance on residential facilities distracts attention from the need to develop family and community based support services and alternative care, moreover, a number of studies have found that the cost per child is substantially higher than supporting the care of children in families[30].

Many developing countries have been going through the process of harmonizing their legislation with the CRC, the Guidelines on Alternative Care for Children and other international and regional child rights instruments. However, there is often a lack of procedures, guidance, training and resources to enable adequate implementation of legislation, policy and practice that is better aligned with these international norms and standards[31]. Given their generally weak position within government and poor funding, social welfare departments find it difficult to orchestrate the inter-sectoral collaboration necessary to coordinate the wide range of interventions required to improve family based care[32]. In addition, systems for the delivery of social services at the sub-national and local level are severely underdeveloped in many countries[33]. Many national social services departments do not have functioning data management systems and there is a lack of basic information on which decision-making about child care can be based[34]. Systems of human resource

[22] Thomas de Benitez, S. (2007). State of the World's Street Children: Violence. Consortium for Street Children.

[23] Martin, F. & Sudrajat, T. (2007). Someone that Matters: The Quality of Care in Child care Institutions in 6 Provinces of Indonesia. Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs, Save the Children UK and UNICEF, 2007.
http://bettercarenetwork.org/BCN/details.asp?id=18882&themeID=1001&topicID=1006

[24] UNRISD. (2010). Combating Poverty and Inequality. Policy Brief 1. Policy Brief of the Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs.

[25] Roeleen, K., Sabates-Wheeler, R. (2012). A child-sensitive approach to social protection: serving practical and strategic needs. Journal of Poverty and Social Justice. Vol 20. No 3. 2012. 291-306.

[26] Child Frontiers. (2012). Family Support Services and Alternative Care in Sub-Saharan Africa. Background Paper.

[27] Dozier, M. (2012). Institutional Care for Young Children. Review of Literature and Policy Implications. Social Issues and Policy Review, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2012, pp. 1--25

[28] EveryChild. (2011). Scaling Down: Reducing, reshaping and improving residential care around the world.

[29] Richter Linda M and Norman, Amy (2010) "Aids orphan tourism: a threat to young children in residential care', Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies, 5:3, 217-219

[30] Williamson, J., Greenberg, A. (2010). Families, not orphanages. Better Care Network.

[31] Child Frontiers. (2012). Family support services and alternative care in Sub Saharan Africa. Background Paper.

[32] Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (2011). Way Forward Project Report.

[33] USAID. (2010). Investing in Those Who Care for Children. Social Welfare Workforce Strengthening Conference. Conference Report.

[34] Delap. (2011). Scaling down, reducing, reshaping and improving residential care around the world. Positive Care Choices.

development for the social services work force are poorly developed in many countries, leading to difficulties in hiring and retaining staff and a lack of technical capacity by staff at all levels.

Although there are many differences between countries in their responses to child care issues, there are some clear regional trends. A critical appraisal of the needs and rights of children without adequate family care emerged strongly in Central and Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) countries following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and in Eastern and Southern Africa due to the impact of HIV/AIDS on families. While awareness is growing among the public and governments in Latin America and the Caribbean, and East Asia and the Pacific, child care reform is still given a very low priority in South Asia, West and Central Africa, and particularly the Middle East and North Africa.

In general, family strengthening, positive parenting and alternative care have been neglected in many international and regional development policies. Goals and targets related to strengthening family care and child protection issues were not specifically included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There is also a lack of coordination on child care issues between states and regional inter-governmental bodies. There has been insufficient capacity to deal adequately with the child care issues brought about by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.   Emergency situations often act as the trigger for inappropriate responses such as institutionalization and premature recourse to international adoption. Reunification, reintegration, and transitional justice processes following conflict or disaster have not dealt adequately with children who have been separated from their parents.

The evidence base is limited concerning children's care both thematically and geographically, and particularly about the factors that undermine or strengthen families' capacity to care for their children and what constitutes effective and appropriate options for children in need of alternative care. Academic research is fragmented and difficult to access and there is a lack of sharing and exchange of information between researchers and development agencies [35]. Apart from BCN's library, there are few publicly available collections of documentation related to family strengthening and alternative care.

Adequate financing of family and child welfare reform remains a key issue worldwide. Funding from governments as well as private individuals and faith-based groups tends to be focused on support to residential care, rather than investing in family strengthening and family based alternative care[36]. There is often a lack of willingness by donors to engage with prevention and family based alternative care options as they are relatively complex to implement and the results are deemed costly and time-consuming to measure. Funding for child protection systems strengthening, including care reform, has yet to gain momentum among international donors.

Working Paper 1. EveryChild
[35] Maholmes, V. et al. (2012). Protecting children outside of family care in low and middle income
countries: What does the evidence say?_Child Abuse & Neglect 36 (2012). 685– 688
Ager, A. et al. (2012). What strategies are appropriate for monitoring children outside of family care and evaluating the impact of programs intended to serve them? Child Abuse & Neglect 36 (2012). 732-742
[36] Save the Children. (2010). Family Strengthening and support. Policy brief.

BCN's Role within the Child Care Sector

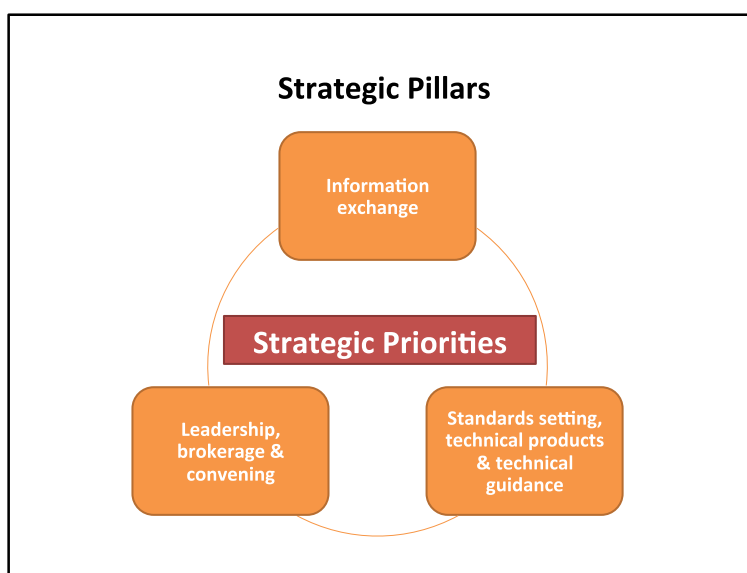During the strategic planning process, BCN identified:
- main challenges facing families in caring adequately for their children;
- the factors driving reliance on inappropriate forms of care;
- the barriers to addressing these problems;
- key interventions that are needed within the sector to improve family strengthening and alternative care; and
- the particular role that BCN plays in strengthening the response of the sector.

A wide range of governmental, private and civil society actors are involved in delivering family strengthening and alternative care at local, national, regional and international level, with a corresponding range of roles, responsibilities and mandates. These actors require adequate knowledge, skills, capacities and willingness to fulfill their roles and to work in a coordinated fashion, in accordance with the Guidelines on Alternative Care for Children. They need to be able to draw learning from the work being done by a range of actors across countries, sectors and contexts, identifying positive practices, testing and building on effective interventions[37]. A Theory of Change was drafted and can be found in the annex. This diagram is to be further developed informed by the broader sector.

Since 2011, BCN has organized its work under **three Strategic Pillars** that describe the role it seeks to play by supporting child care actors through: **information exchange**; **standard setting, technical support and guidance;** and **leadership, brokerage and convening**. BCN is readily identified by others within the sector for its leadership in these areas and is well positioned to continue to build its contribution as a network by extending its reach to a wider range of actors at global, regional and national levels, thus strengthening the responses to children without adequate family care.

The Strategic Pillars identify the main approaches and methods that BCN uses in its work: information exchange; the development and application of standards; technical products and technical guidance and leadership; and partnerships brokerage and convening. The pillars are clearly inter-related and operate in a complementary manner to ensure impact.

BCN is a global network with relevance at all levels. To date BCN's convening work has largely been focused at international and regional levels, though BCN has experience of working with national level actors on which it will build over the next four years. BCN's information exchange and technical guidance roles have facilitated learnings across many levels, in particular in sharing experiences in other countries, global guidance and responding to individual requests including on national level care reform processes. An identified need is to more systematically bring national level learnings to regional and global levels. Reinforcing its intention to work at different levels as a core approach will enable BCN to address the same key issues at multiple levels, building synergy and impact. This approach will also foster collaboration

Strategic Pillars

Information exchange

Strategic Priorities

Leadership, brokerage & convening

Standards setting, technical products & technical guidance

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[37] Examples of effective interventions can be found in *Moving Forward: Implementing the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children:* http://www.alternativecareguidelines.org/Home/tabid/2372/language/en-GB/Default.aspx

between BCN and regional and national networks working on care reforms, thus strengthening its global reach and effectiveness.

Working at different levels enables BCN to encourage the development, not only of national policy and practice that is informed by international guidelines, but also international guidance that is responsive to country realities and reflective of good national practice. BCN can reinforce its role as the hub of knowledge and 'the place to go to' for up-to-date and reliable information about care reforms globally.

Over the next four years BCN will focus its work around **four Strategic Priorities.** These Strategic Priorities emerged from a discussion of the interventions needed to improve the lives of children without adequate family care. They represent the unique contribution that BCN can make over the coming four years to this field within its role and mandate to support positive care responses for children. The Strategic Priorities involve activities across all three of the Strategic Pillars, complementing and reinforcing each other to bring about sound policy and practice at international, regional and national levels. The Strategic Priorities are:

1. Supporting the implementation of the *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* and technically sound child care related policies and practices;
2. Facilitating the development and delivery of a comprehensive child care research agenda that informs policy and practice;
3. Contributing to positive changes in social norms and behaviors that will result in improved child care practices;
4. Maximizing BCN's role and value as a network[38].

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[38] The more outward looking actions that relate to development of the network are included in Strategic Priority 4, while the section on Governance, Management and Administration describes internal changes.

BCN's Strategic Priorities 2014 - 2017

In the detailed discussion of the Strategic Priorities below, outcome areas for each Strategic Priority are presented. The Strategic Priorities and the outcome areas will form the basis for the development by the Secretariat of annual work plans, containing measurable indicators[39].

Strategic Priority 1: Supporting the implementation of the Guidelines for Alternative Care and technically sound child care related policies and practice

BCN played a key role in supporting the development of the *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, which were welcomed by the UN General Assembly in 2009. Since then, through its information exchange, technical guidance and convening functions, an important component of BCN's work has been to promote the dissemination and use of the *Guidelines,* including the development of the handbook *Moving Forward: Implementing the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* in collaboration with the New York and Geneva-based Working Groups on Children without Parental Care, UNICEF and other partners. Progress has been made by a number of countries in adopting the *Guidelines* and producing their own context-specific legislation, policy and guidelines on child care.

Supporting the implementation of the *Guidelines* and technically sound child care related policies and practices will continue to be a major role for BCN during this strategic period. BCN will deliver this strategic priority through: the provision of information, technical guidance to key actors at national and regional level; working on strengthening policies and practices; and convening and encouraging actors to collaborate, coordinate and advocate for the necessary changes. More specifically, this will include:
- identifying and supporting the documentation and dissemination of good practices by countries;
- supporting monitoring of the implementation of the *Guidelines* in collaboration with the Working Groups and other partner organizations (including the systematic collection and use of data to promote compliance with the provisions of the *Guidelines*);
- encouraging regional and international treaty bodies to make recommendations on the application of the *Guidelines* in their responses to State Party reports; and
- encouraging technical exchange and advocacy by other relevant child focused networks and organizations.

BCN will further develop its website to share information about national care systems and reform initiatives through:
- individual country pages;
- bringing together legal and policy documents;
- situation analyses including relevant statistical data;
- documentation of programs and practice learning; and
- care related reviews of implementation under key international and regional conventions[40].

BCN will encourage key partners at national and regional levels to share documentation about care systems and reforms, ensuring a global database of laws, standards, policies, learning and tools on children's care is available and accessible to policy makers and practitioners working to develop and reform their systems.

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[39] The annual work plans will also include activities related to agreed changes to BCN's governance, management and administration highlighted in the following section.
[40] These conventions include: the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children

In addition to the support BCN will provide globally, BCN will also pilot specific national and regional approaches to supporting child care reform through its *'Increasing the Momentum of Child Care Reform in Eastern and Southern Africa'* initiative. BCN will support existing regional and national child protection and care collaborations. It will contribute to strengthening capacity through information exchange and facilitating peer support, and will promote the importance of family-based care through promoting and supporting research and advocacy. The initiative will contribute to child care reform in three 'priority countries for action' currently being identified and draw on lessons learnt and good practices in countries within the broader sub-Saharan African region.

The learning and good practices established through the Eastern and Southern Africa initiative will be monitored and assessed to inform approaches in other regions, such as West Africa and South Asia, where progress towards effective child care reform has not gained as much ground. In regions where there is greater momentum, BCN will continue to work with existing networks for learning and exchange.

BCN will continue to co-lead a joint initiative, together with partners and the Working Groups on Children without Parental Care, to call for a review by governments, UN and non-governmental agencies of the progress so far with the implementation of the *Guidelines on Alternative Care for Children* in 2014, to mark the 5-year anniversary of their welcome by the UN General Assembly.

BCN will scope out the required resources and feasibility of producing a regular flagship publication: *The State of the World on Children's Care*. Such a publication could serve several purposes: highlighting particular themes; providing a vehicle for the publication of case studies and best practices that might reach a wider audience than the website; and publishing the available data on children's care situations, including those living without parental care who are in informal or formal alternative care, which may provide a stimulus to governments to develop effective information management systems.

Outcome Areas
- Context-specific good practices on implementing child care reform documented and disseminated
- Country-level information on care reforms and the implementation of the *Guidelines on Alternative Care* available and disseminated widely through the BCN Website
- Comprehensive global data and analysis on children's care situations produced and forms the basis of global advocacy initiatives
- Capacity of and coordination among key actors to implement the *Guidelines on Alternative Care* increased at national level in selected countries including priority countries for action in Eastern and Southern Africa
- More systematic reference to the *Guidelines on Alternative Care* in the recommendations made by regional and international treaty bodies in their responses to State Party reports
- Increased focus and action on child care reform within regional and national child protection networks and inter-agency collaborations in Eastern and Southern Africa
- Increased awareness amongst identified key actors and calls to action on children in care globally

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Strategic Priority 2: Facilitating the development and delivery of a comprehensive child care research agenda that informs policy and practice

Over the last few years, BCN has contributed to research on child care issues. For example, it is currently providing technical guidance to Catholic Relief Services for its research on Catholic support to residential care, and is working with Save the Children on research into kinship care in West and East Africa. BCN is also providing technical advice to an expert group, set up under the US Government National Action Plan on Children in Adversity to develop guidance on the enumeration of children outside of family care, and has been advocating to Measure DHS, governments, UN and non-governmental agencies for better use of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) to understand children's living situations and care patterns. BCN has also been providing input to a range of global studies, including on the reintegration of children separated from their families, and on the linkages between child protection and children's care and sustainable

development in the context of the post 2015 Development Agenda discussions. It has also provided guidance to national organizations, in their efforts to build local evidence to support family care for children. BCN disseminates research reports through its on-line library and newsletter and commissions summaries of the literature that make the findings of academic research accessible to a wider range of actors through its Working Paper series. Jointly with UNICEF, it has recently commissioned and is overseeing the development of a Working Paper on Gatekeeping and in depth country care profiles in Sub-Sahara Africa, focused on Ghana, Liberia and Rwanda.

The evidence base is limited and fragmented concerning children's care both thematically and geographically, an particularly about the factors that undermine or strengthen families' capacity to care for their children and what constitutes effective and appropriate options for children in need of alternative care. To overcome this barrier, BCN will work with partners to scope information needs and gaps, and how research findings can best be published and disseminated to reach the audiences that need them. On the basis of results of the scoping exercise, it will plan and deliver a coherent research agenda to support the development of a more comprehensive body of knowledge about children at risk or deprived of adequate family care.

This initiative will foster coordination between academics, policy makers and practitioners at global, regional and national levels, drawing on existing knowledge and data, and implementing a prioritized research agenda in a selected number of countries, representative of a range of socio-economic, cultural and governance contexts. It will seek to enable cross-country, regional, and international comparisons, providing analyses that draw on linkages with other key sectors with major relevance to ensuring adequate care for children. The initiative will seek to identify and deliver research on critical issues on which evidence is lacking, such as the effects of residential care on older children and the long-term life trajectories of children who have been place in different types of alternative care.

Acting as the global knowledge platform on these issues, BCN will also provide access to the research outputs to a range of audiences through its website by publishing and disseminating findings in different formats, and facilitating discussions on the policy implications of the evidence. Cross country learning will be particularly encouraged through case studies and the development of practical tools, such as resources on good research methodology for care and good practice advocacy for child care reform.

Outcome Areas
- Collaborative research initiative among policy makers, practitioners and academics established
- Priorities for the initiative determined and agreed, based on an analysis of significant gaps in evidence and potential impact for contributing to change for children
- Research outputs relevant to global, regional and national stakeholders and accessed by a broad audience through BCN information platform
- Capacity to use evidence for change increased amongst key stakeholders
- Evidence from the research initiative is informing policy and practice discussions

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Strategic Priority 3: Contributing to positive changes in social norms and behaviors that result in improved child care practices

Social norms and beliefs, both positive and negative, guide the behaviour of families in relation to the care of their children. There is growing evidence that interventions that help families and communities identify their positive child care and protection practices and build on them, while facilitating the recognition and renunciation of practices that are not in the best interests of children, can generate strong community motivation to care better for their children. Social norms and beliefs also influence policy makers and service providers in their interventions with families. Some negative beliefs and practices are also being maintained by strong vested interests, particularly with regard to residential care for children, and thereby have an adverse impact on the nature of the services provided for children.

Within donor countries, strong attitudes and beliefs are also held by some sections of the public in relation to the type of support that is appropriate for children without adequate family care in developing

countries. This determines charitable giving patterns and donor funding that often favor support to residential care rather than to family based care. BCN has begun to address this issue through its support of the Faith to Action Initiative, which provides information to and holds dialogue with Christian churches in the USA. It is also engaging with Catholic Relief Services in increasing knowledge and dialogue on the role of the Catholic Church in the care of children and more specifically in supporting child care institutions.

During the next four years, BCN will work with its members and partners to:
- explore further what influences child care-related social norms;
- how social norms determine behavior by families, communities and the general public; and
- how social norms influence responses by governments, civil society and the private sector in developing and donor countries, both in emergency and development settings.

Understanding of positive social norms and behaviors in different contexts and how these can be encouraged and negative practices discarded, will be deepened.

BCN will identify and share through the BCN website and newsletter relevant literature and learning about changing social norms and behaviors on children's care, including strategies and lessons relevant to country care reforms on how to engage key stakeholders such as policy makers, practitioners, civil society, faith based community and members of the public.

Building on the Faith to Action Initiative, dialogue and engagement with other faith-based communities, including Islamic and Buddhist actors involved with child care issues, will also be considered as this area of work is developed.

One initial initiative in this area will be scoping the options for interagency action to promote ethical volunteering, based on the findings of a current mapping exercise of the scale, nature and drivers of volunteer activities in residential care homes that are supported by education-related, corporate, faith-based and tourist organizations.

The role of 'champions' or change actors in child care reforms will be explored. This will include for example:
- identifying lessons learnt on engaging those who support or contribute to institutional care;
- mobilizing community level leaders on supporting positive care options;
- working with the social workforce to redirect services towards child and family centered approaches;
- empowering young people who are in care or have left care to advocate on their own behalf for system change; and
- understanding the role of parent/family advocacy in ensuring better family support services and more appropriate care.

Outcome Areas
- Increased knowledge base on the impact of social norms and behavior on child care and the key stakeholders for influencing change
- Strategy for action on social norms and behavior to address the most significant challenges and gaps in responding to children without adequate family care identified and collaborations for implementing these strategy facilitated
- Information and tools identified, developed as needed and disseminated with partners to support work on key areas of positive care practices and areas where behavior change is required in relation to children's care.
- Increased awareness of the impact of social norms and behavior on family strengthening and alternative care in target countries amongst target groups
- Action on social norms and behavior change included in the strategies for change of key actors within the sector
- Strategy on social norms and behavior contributed to changes in approach to the provision or use of institutional child care by key organizations

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Strategic Priority 4:   Maximizing BCN's role and value as a network

Networks can potentially reach large numbers of actors at different levels and can be effective in building knowledge, skills, capacities and motivation, facilitating coordination and advocating for change[41]. The majority of networks that work on issues related to child protection and care focus on knowledge management and convening, with a smaller number engaged as advocates, using knowledge and resources to directly press for change[42].

BCN's role and added value as a network is to strengthen and contribute to the response of key actors working to improve outcomes for children at risk of not having adequate family care or without adequate family care. BCN will continue to develop its website and newsletter with efforts to extend their reach to a wider range of users and stakeholders, particularly the staff of national NGOs and governments. It will do this by:

- increasing its efforts to facilitate the documentation of national experiences;
- building on current efforts to develop a francophone section to the website to provide access to resources in languages other than English;
- developing a wider range of products and activities, such as videos and webinars; and
- facilitating access and connections with national and regional networks.

BCN will increase its partnerships with other networks and organizations to strengthen its impact rather than supporting the creation of BCN chapters. BCN will support and strengthen regional networks, where appropriate, and will connect national networks with their regional counterparts where these exist. BCN will actively reach out beyond its historical focus on Sub-Sahara Africa and Eastern and Central Europe to encourage information exchange and cross-country learning in other regions, including South and Southeast Asia, and in partnership with La Red Latinamericana de Acogimento Familiar (RELAF), to South and Central America and the Caribbean. BCN will facilitate exchange within and between national and regional networks. Support to regional and national networks will include disseminating success stories and good practice to encourage collaboration across policy makers, practitioners, civil society, faith based community, academic and the private sector. BCN will develop further the interactive nature of its website to encourage stakeholders to submit quality resources for inclusion in the online library and to share documents, news item, videos, and to use the BCN website to connect to others in the care community that may be interested and can benefit from their learning.

BCN will also seek to increase the involvement of its members in the activities of the network. For example, the Advisory Group will be encouraged to identify potential areas of joint work and will participate actively in the development of future strategic directions. Members will be asked to contribute to special editions of the newsletter, with a focus on particular theme or area that they have specific expertise in.

Outcome Areas
- Website accessibility and relevance significantly increased with broader range of resources and products available in English, French and Spanish, with other language sections being considered.
- Partnerships with regional networks in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and East Asia, and with RELAF, in South and Central America, delivering on key activities
- Significant increases in listserve and website users across global, regional and national levels
- Webinars and special editions of the newsletter delivered by members of the Advisory Group and other partners, engaging participants from global, regional and national level
- National child protection networks have increased capacity and focus on family strengthening and alternative care from their engagement with BCN

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[41] Henry, Leroi; Mohan, Giles and Yanacopulos, Helen (2004). Networks as transnational agents of development.
Third World Quarterly, 25(5), pp. 839–855 and Perkin and Court (2005) Networks and Policy Processes in International Development: a literature review, ODI

[42] Analysis of networks described in the BCN Strategic Review Full Background Paper

BCN's Governance, Management and Administration

BCN's Governance, Management and Administration arrangements have evolved over time and BCN is now better positioned to operate with more independence as a network. However, following an assessment of its options, BCN has decided against registering as a legally separate organization during this strategic period, due to the level of resources required. This decision will be reviewed during the development of the next strategic plan. During the current strategic period BCN will make changes to governance, management and administration to reflect its maturity as a network. These changes will ensure that:

- BCN's governance is more representative of the sector;
- BCN's fully capitalizes on the technical expertise at its disposal;
- the Secretariat's staffing complement enables it to deliver on the strategic plan;
- its fiscal and hosting arrangements identify BCN as an independent network organization.

The changes, and the timeframe for implementation, are set out in a transition plan.

Steering Committee

BCNs Steering Committee provides governance and leadership. Membership of the Committee will be increased during this strategic period to 9 organizations, managed by two co-Chairs. The Steering Committee will be developed to incorporate a group of key stakeholders that is more representative of the child care sector. Efforts will be made to connect to those working at regional and national levels and bring them into the Steering Committee in ways that can facilitate their active engagement.

Advisory Group

The current Advisory Group membership, roles and function will be reviewed to align the group more closely with the new strategic plan. Changes will include:

- adjustment to the profile of group members;
- consultation on the type of support the group can offer to the Secretariat and on a proposal to create a Chair for the group;
- facilitating the Advisory Group to feed into annual work plans by identifying areas of potential collaboration and to support strategic thinking in the future;
- annual online meetings for the group.

Secretariat

Subject to securing the required funding, the Secretariat will be expanded during this strategic period in order to effectively achieve the four strategic priorities. The existing Secretariat roles and functions will be reviewed to inform its expansion.

Fiscal sponsorship and hosting

BCN will remain an unregistered organization during this strategic period but will review the potential for registering as an independent organization during future strategic reviews.

The Secretariat will move towards being fiscally sponsored by an independent agent and securing its own office space during this strategic period.

Resource mobilization

BCN has successfully diversified its funding base over the last three years and it is now in a stronger financial position, reflecting its achievements as a network. Funding is now a mix of support from institutional donors (primarily USAID), trusts and foundations and contributions from organizational members of the Steering Committee.

Funding for the care sector is gathering momentum with recognition that child care is important and investment is needed. This is reflected in, for example, the US Government's Children in Adversity Plan and the EU Commission's recommendation to invest in early care and prevention, to strengthen the capacity of families to care appropriately for their children. Many funders are also very positive on the role and value of networks where these networks offer the opportunity for organizations to act collectively on a clear strategic issue, rather than in competition with one another.

To deliver on this strategic plan, active resource mobilization will be required by BCN to increase its funding, capitalizing on its role as a network which strengthens the capacity of the sector on family strengthening and alternative care. The funding portfolio will aim for medium to long term stable core funding as well as project funding and will be sought from a wider range of donors.

ANNEX: PROVISIONAL THEORY OF CHANGE ON CHILDREN WITHOUT ADEQUATE FAMILY CARE

During the strategic planning process, BCN drafted a Theory of Change identifying:

- main challenges facing families in caring adequately for their children,
- the factors driving reliance on inappropriate forms of care,
- the barriers to addressing these problems,
- key interventions that are needed within the sector to improve family strengthening and alternative care, and
- the particular role that BCN plays in strengthening the response of the sector.

This diagram is to be further developed informed by the broader sector.

Outcomes

- Increased capacity and knowledge of policy actors and practitioners to implement child care reform
- Strengthened evidence base for child care policies and practices
- Increased political will and public awareness of good care practices
- More effective collaboration across sectors and stakeholders to strengthen child care

BCN Strategic Priorities

- Supporting the implementation of the Guidelines for Alternative Care and technically sound child care related policies and practice
- Facilitating the development and delivery of a comprehensive child care research agenda that informs policy and practice
- Supporting positive social norms and behaviors and contributing to changes in social norms and behaviors that result in improved child care practices
- Maximising BCNs role and value as a network

Interventions - sector

- Build political will and technical capacity to legislate and regulate child care arrangements
- Support community mechanisms for child care and provide context specific services
- Raise public awareness on appropriate child care
- Improve government funding and certified systems for the social workforce
- Strengthen the evidence base on child care
- Foster collaboration on child care and protection

Barriers

- Lack of political will and technical capacity at all levels to support families and provide alternative care
- Inadequate context specific services to support informal and formal family/family type care
- Vested interests in maintaining certain forms of child care arrangements
- Under-resourced and under-skilled social welfare/services departments and workforce
- Dominant social norms that perpetuate inappropriate child care
- Poor coordination between governments and civil society service providers

Causes

Poverty   Violence   Social norms and harmful practices   Discrimination and social exclusion   Emergencies

Intra-familial conflict and stressors   Inappropriate responses to disability   HIV/ Aids and chronic illness

Problem

Children are separated from their families unnecessarily & inappropriate forms of alternative care are prioritized