

**10<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium on Poverty Research in Sri Lanka**

**Child Poverty: an alternative understanding to inform policy and practice**

**4-5 December 2009, Colombo, Sri Lanka**

**Concept Note**

**Background**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium on Poverty Research in Sri Lanka is scheduled to be held in Colombo in December 2009. The Symposium is organised by the Centre for Poverty Analysis, International Alert and Save the Children in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Nutrition – Sri Lanka, Fedrich Ebert Stiftung Sri Lanka, and Berendina Foundation Sri Lanka. The Symposium brings together scholars and practitioners to discuss research on poverty and required action for poverty reduction. The symposium includes an alternative communications component showcasing documentaries and visual imagery as a means of communicating research on the theme. Papers presented at the event and proceedings are published in an Edited Volume within the CEPA Publication Series to encourage further dissemination of the research and discussion.

**This year's theme: Child Poverty: an alternative understanding to inform policy and practice**

This year's thematic focus on child poverty provides an alternative understanding to inform policy and practice. The body of research on children in Sri Lanka is vast, focusing on various contextual factors, and trying to understand the impacts of these factors on various facets of children's lives. As such the Symposium will provide a platform to;

- **Showcase the vast body of knowledge on child poverty** in Sri Lanka by providing researchers a space to share their work with various stakeholders.
- **Enhance the understanding of child poverty** in Sri Lanka in order to inform policy and practice.
- **Build partnerships** amongst children, researchers and decision makers for more effective research communication that would inform child poverty practices.

**Definition of child poverty**

Poverty is caused by a variety of different reasons and can be experienced in different dimensions. CEPA has studied child poverty using a wide lens of analysis. This comprises an economic approach, that includes the lack of access to sufficient income and income sources as well as a non-economic approach that takes into account vulnerabilities and exclusion children face in their environments (including disaster, conflict and economic crisis). This dual approach, emerging from Christian Child Fund's global agenda, recognises that poor children are affected by a multitude of factors that perpetuate poverty and that they are part of various structures and systems (households, communities etc) that affect their wellbeing.

This approach also recognises the importance of including children's perceptions and agency in the debate about influencing change in their lives. Although organisations have started working with children in an effort to put them at the centre of development, research tends to be adult focused often involving children as respondents and not as influencers.

**Child participation at the Symposium**

CEPA sees the child participation at the Symposium as a key component. It is working with Save the Children Sri Lanka to develop this component. This piece of work is linked to an ongoing project within Save the Children that focuses on improving conditions for marginalised children in Eastern Sri Lanka to prevent them from being institutionalised. The child-led research project will involve children doing research to define child wellbeing and how children themselves feel their wellbeing should be tackled by different stakeholders in different contexts, including conflict situations. The involvement will be linked to an on-going area of work to ensure that the children stay engaged with key stakeholders in trying to influence change in their lives even after the Symposium.

### **Potential themes for research presentations and panel sessions for the Symposium**

Please note this section is being developed. Presentations/panels will explore these themes:

- **Discourses on child poverty:** changing debates and alternative frameworks of analysis
- **Recent contextual changes and its effects on child poverty:** economic crisis, conflict, climate change, and natural disaster
- **Looking ahead:** Child and youth aspirations in a post-conflict context
- **Child participation:** Including children's agency and improving their participation in research and practice
- **Practices that are changing child poverty:** policy processes and practice
- **Bridging the research and policy gap:** ensuring more effective use of child poverty research by various actors and stakeholders

### **Partnerships for the Poverty Symposium**

In an effort to maximise impact of the Symposium and facilitate linkages between research, policy and practice CEPA seeks to involve state and non-state organisations. Organisations are invited to participate in organising the event with CEPA and/or provide financial support for the event. This involvement includes;

- Being a part of the working group organising the event, which will provide exposure to these organisations
- Contributing to the development of the agenda and structuring the sessions
- Financially supporting the event and dissemination efforts after the event, including producing the publication and supporting participation at the event (due in 2010)
- Contributing papers on empirical research and practice to address child poverty issues in Sri Lanka and
- Preparing a joint publication (components of which will be translated into Sinhala and Tamil) that documents the proceedings and compiles the papers presented from the event, and facilitate a dissemination strategy with CEPA
- Develop a set of key recommendations that can be presented to policy makers working in the sector of child development.

### **Participation at the Poverty Symposium**

The Symposium attracts researchers, practitioners, academics, students, private sector representatives and civil society activists working on poverty related issues. This includes individuals from academic and research organisations that engage in poverty research as well as local and national government, international, and technical or consulting organisations working in the sector. The Symposium is held in English with simultaneous translation in Sinhala and Tamil, to widen participation and discussion.

### **About CEPA**

The Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) is an independent, non-profit, Sri Lankan company that specialises in the provision of independent analysis on the causes, characteristics and impacts of poverty in Sri Lanka. CEPA aims to be at the cutting edge of independent and policy relevant analysis of poverty as well as to improve the capacities of development organisations and professionals to practice more appropriate and effective ways of reducing poverty. The organisation of the event is coordinated by the Poverty Assessment & Knowledge Management (PAM) Programme at CEPA. Please visit [www.cepa.lk](http://www.cepa.lk) for more information.

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