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It is an ongoing challenge to monitor application of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) in a way that reinforces and eventually guarantees child rights. Rights-oriented programmes need detailed evidence on what sub-groups are most at risk, and which mix of interventions works best. To act effectively for a sub-group with inadequate protection from vaccines, inadequate water quality or little voice in governance, hard data are required to identify the subgroups concerned and as a benchmark from which to monitor progress over time. Benchmark indicators must also be enriched by qualitative dimensions, so local nuances are not lost. It is important to monitor the situation of children *not* in contact with health or education services, since their condition is usually more precarious. In addition, the monitoring must be sustainable -- meaning development of local skills and an evaluation culture.

Costa Rica makes a worthy test-bed for new approach to monitoring child rights. A stable democracy with longstanding legalist traditions, Costa Rica is widely recognised in the subregion for its massive investment in health and education, and its highly developed social sector institutions. Because of the far-sighted social development strategies of the country, survival of children has improved considerably over the last 40 years. Some inequities remain but, with the almost historic political will to combat inequity, the declining quality of social services and the lack of community participation, the country provides a best-case example of what is possible in monitoring child rights.

A ground-breaking audit of child rights was set up through a three-way agreement between the Costa Rican Ombudsman *(Defensoría de los Habitantes)*, UNICEF and CIETinternational. The eventual purpose is to develop a prototype national scheme for active monitoring of child rights, involving children and adults in a way that promotes their increased recognition and dialogue about rights. By December 1998, the target is to have this scheme working in each of the five regions of Costa Rica.

An early challenge of the project was *where* to monitor the rights. In Costa Rica, ample high quality data are available from the extensive national network of social institutions. Even with the enormous investment in maintaining these information systems, many children are left out. It is seldom enough to register new cases of abuse of child rights using institution-based data (data from events "captured" by institutions like clinics or schools) -- and that on its own is difficult enough to do comprehensively. The Costa Rica Active Monitoring scheme audits rights beyond the institutions, in the community. In practical terms, this meant selection in each participating canton of a representative panel of sentinel communities (8-12 per canton) where several monitoring tools are applied. In each community, a household survey was linked to a review of institutional performance.

The second challenge was *what* to measure. Over 200 different indicators have been proposed to monitor the CRC; this glut of information makes concrete action difficult. In the selection of the local priorities, the mechanism whereby children do with selection is one innovation of the

Active Monitoring project. In the pilot exercise in Puriscal, a rural area not far from the capital city, over 60 children aged 6-16 years were drawn from the 10 representative communities. The children were divided into three age groups and spent five days working together on which of their rights adults should begin to address first. This was done by each child choosing a card to represent a right, and telling the rest of the group what that right meant for them; each child chose five rights and told five stories; after each story, other children could add their comments. Using nominal voting with the cards, on the fifth day each age group of children elected their three priorities for monitoring. Protection from sexual abuse was in third place for each group; education was in first place for one group and second place for another.

The first cycle in Puriscal thus focused on the right to education. The instruments used permitted linkage of quantitative and qualitative data on school attendance, repetition and drop out through combining a household survey, an institutional review of schools and interviews with teachers -- all in the same sentinel communities. Key findings were discussed with focus groups, to formulate solutions and a way to present these results to the Ministry, to teachers and to parents. (The full report is available, as are similar reports from CIET projects in Nicaragua, Nepal and Pakistan).

Designing instruments to obtain indicators of survival and access to basic services is not difficult; a much bigger problem is to benchmark progress in the right to participation, the right to an identity or issues like sexual abuse.

Most epidemiological instruments are designed for adults, or adults views of children. It is difficult for us to see things through their eyes and this limits what we can do about child rights. CIET pioneered development of a new instrument for recording child perceptions with street children of Acapulco. Based on the idea of the Rorschach test, the "photo interview" could have wider application in monitoring child rights. The researchers showed street children a series of photographs -- pretested over several months -- that depict children in different occupations, talking to an adult, climbing in a car, or sleeping under a bridge. The interviewer noted responses on the risks they perceive, or their experience from a similar situation. Each interview probes a particular risk: children "disappearing" after being solicited by an adult, beatings from older gang members, or especially high risk child labour; interviews were in groups of four to six children, so interviewer was able to remember the responses.

In Puriscal, field workers were trained during the piloting of instruments. Community-based fact-finding used several techniques: a household survey, key informants and an institutional review in each sentinel community. The data were processed in the canton, with results turned around rapidly for discussion by focus groups (one of teachers, one of parents and several of children). This step of feeding back data to the communities for their discussion *before the final analysis* adds a strong element to the method: it is an effective way to build the community voice into development planning. The focus groups also discussed a communication strategy aimed at three "constituencies": the communities and schools (including those not in sentinel sites), the service workers and the politicians. Thus, data from the households were aggregated (attendance

and dropout rates, and individual risk factors); these were analysable in the context of data on teachers (age, sex, experience, training, attitudes, etc) and institutions (school facilities, location, latrines, water, etc). The picture emerging from this combination was then processed through another community-based instrument, the focus group, and the product of these aggregated across the sentinel sites as the definitive analysis.

A basic premise of the Active Monitoring initiative is that the actual process of enquiry can help to change sensitivities at a local level, increasing awareness and, dealing with the problem, increase the confidence of communities that they can combat it. Results were shared with all schools in the canton, not only those in sentinel communities. The combination of participation in monitoring and the sharing of results turns Active Monitoring into an empowering process -- perhaps the beginnings of a real guarantee that the rights will be respected.

Capacity building also follows the cyclical implementation process. In the first cycle, municipal counterparts were trained in design of instruments and logistics of the audit process. In the second cycle, training will focus on communication techniques, for downloading of data through schools, to the *Defensoría*, through the mass media and local NGOs. The third cycle will focus on analysis techniques to consolidate skills in computerised data management gained in the course of the previous two cycles.