Global Coalition to End Child Poverty

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Briefing Paper

Child-sensitive Social Protection



Contents

Introduction	1
Definitions and Scope	4
Why Does Social Protection Need to be Child- sensitive?	6
How is "child-sensitive" Social Protection Pursued and Implemented?	7
Social Protection and Priority Sectors for the Life Cycle of Children	8
Principles of Child-sensitive Social Protection	9
How can Child-sensitive Social Protection be achieved?	10
Coalition Partners' Roles in helping to advance Child-sensitive Social Protection	11
Notes	15

Cover Photo: Usha, 13 years old from the Kapilvastu province, Nepal Credit: Egan Hwan/Save the Children

Introduction

Poverty is a fundamental barrier to realizing the rights of all children, including targets of the Sustainable Development Goals to end preventable child deaths, ensure quality basic education for all children and protect children from all forms of violence. Currently, an estimated 385 million children live in extreme poverty, at rates much higher than those among adults.¹ The harm poverty inflicts on children is often irreversible and is transmitted from generation to generation. It is further exacerbated during humanitarian crises as households are pressured to adopt coping strategies that can negatively impact on girls and boys.

Social protection is a basic human right for children, enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC Articles 26-27). Based on the Convention, children have the right to social security and an adequate standard of living, both of which can be guaranteed for children and families who live in poverty through publicly-funded social protection. At the same time, social protection is a key investment in building human capabilities, reducing financial barriers that families face in using basic services, and in breaking intergenerational poverty traps.

Across the full range of social and economic contexts, social protection can;

- Protect poor and marginalised households, including children, against the hardship and negative consequences of poverty and deprivation
- Prevent poverty, individual deprivations or the worsening of deprivations as a result of shocks
- Promote economic opportunities and human capital development
- Transform the power imbalances in society that create and sustain vulnerabilities.

Social protection, overall, is now widely recognised as one of the foremost interventions as part of the policy package for fighting child poverty.² Child-sensitive Social Protection (CSSP) is a well-proven approach within social protection to help realize the rights of children.³ CSSP helps families to cope with chronic poverty, stresses and shocks and enables them to invest on an adequate and continuing basis in their children's well-being. CSSP encompasses programmes that aim to maximise positive impacts on children and to minimise potential unintended side effects.⁴ This includes both direct interventions (i.e. child-focused or targeted) and indirect interventions.⁵

CSSP can be implemented in both humanitarian and development contexts, and across sectoral areas, to advance the rights and wellbeing of children, including - particularly - those who are poorest and most deprived. In that regard, it is important that CSSP does not only focus on children living with their families, but also recognises and addresses the needs of children living outside of households, such as children without parental care.⁶

Definitions and Scope

Social Protection as a whole can be described as:

A set of public policies, programmes and systems that aim to help poor and vulnerable individuals and households reduce their economic and related social vulnerabilities, help them cope with risks and shocks and enhance their economic and social rights and status.

Social Protection is the set of all initiatives that provide: social assistance to extremely poor and/or socially excluded individuals and households; social insurance to protect people against the risks and consequences of economic losses and health shocks; social services to groups who need special care or who need extra support to access basic services like health or education; and policies, legislation and regulations to protect people against discrimination or abuse⁷ see Table 1 below.

We consider anything that enables access to basic services (e.g. birth registration, tuition fee waivers, stipends for girls) as social protection. We also consider as social protection, complementary elements of social assistance, services or interventions bundled together with social protection transfers. These are sometimes referred to as 'Cash Plus' (e.g. behavioural change communication that promotes household spending on children; psychosocial support; measures to reduce financial and administrative barriers to service access; information provision or training, parenting support programmes that support families and help to prevent unnecessary placements into alternative care).⁸ The provision by Governments of sector-wide services (e.g. schooling, clean water) is seen as falling outside the scope of social protection; while some agencies view the guaranteeing of access to essential health care as a component of social protection.9

Child-sensitive Social Protection (CSSP) includes all social protection measures that address children's needs and rights and which improve elements of child well-being. It is an approach under which all social protection measures aim to maximise impacts and minimise any possible harms for girls and boys, across all ages, by systematically incorporating child risk and benefit (impact) analysis into each stage of policy and programme design, implementation and monitoring. It recognises and takes into account the long-term benefits of investing in children that not only help realize the rights and potential of individuals but also strengthen the foundations for economic growth and inclusive development of society as a whole.

Child-sensitive Social Protection involves:

Designing and implementing specific policies and programmes that directly address children's needs and rights and improve child development, as well as;

More widely, ensuring that all social protection programmes are child-sensitive, by planning to maximise beneficial impacts and minimise any potential harms for children, girls and boys alike.

Table 1: Definitions/examples of Child-sensitive Social Protection Interventions

Category of Interventions for CSSP	Examples of how programmes can be child- sensitive
Social Assistance (Social Transfers) to extremely poor and/or socially excluded individuals and households	Regular, predictable transfers (cash or in kind, including fee waivers) from governments and community entities to individuals or households that can reduce child poverty and vulnerability, increase affordability and access to basic services for children, and reduce the risk of child exploitation and abuse. ¹⁰
Social Insurance to protect people against the risks and consequences of livelihood shocks	Support for access to health care and education for children, including community-level risk-pooling mechanisms, preferably with contribution payment exemptions for the poor, that reach all households and individuals, including children; and that offer a buffer against shocks such funeral expenses, illness or failed harvests.
Social Services to groups who need special care or would otherwise be denied access to basic services	Family and community services to support families and promote youth and adult employment; Support for children in alternative care, including through the process of family reintegration and the transition to independent life; Additional support to children with disabilities and to include vulnerable or excluded children in education; Financial support, often coupled with information and education, through social welfare systems; and assistance in accessing other benefits.
Policies, Legislation and Regulations to protect people against societal risks and practices such as discrimination, ¹¹ exclusion or abuse	Measures that protect families' access to resources and services, promote employment and support them in their childcare role - including ensuring affordable, safe and equitable access for people who are poor to basic services and entitlements; maternity and paternity leave; inheritance rights; communication to change discriminatory norms and practices; and enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation.



Why does social protection need to be childsensitive?

Fully half of the world's people who live in extreme poverty are children, and their experience of poverty and vulnerability and social exclusion is different from that of adults. Social protection is one of the most effective strategies for preventing, mitigating and reducing poverty for both adults and children, as recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals, Target 1.3. Small differences in the design and implementation of social protection programmes can make a huge difference for children. Making social protection child-sensitive has the potential to benefit not only children, but also their families, communities and national development as a whole.¹²

There are several arguments for making social protection more strongly responsive to the specific needs and universal rights of children. Firstly, it is widely recognized that effective investments in children's wellbeing, particularly from an early age onwards, can lead to major and sustained benefits for children, households and society as a whole.¹³ These impacts can include: improved child health and nutritional development; stronger learning performance and achievement, linked to future earnings and productivity; and a range of improved child protection outcomes, such as reduced harmful labour and exposure to violence. Moreover, children are dependent on adults for the fulfilment and realisation of their rights. Children's vulnerabilities to the multiple dimensions of poverty and deprivation can have

long-lasting detrimental effects on their physical, emotional and cognitive development and put their lives, future well-being and livelihoods at risk. Therefore, any intervention addressing poverty should take into account and explicitly address the needs, rights and vulnerabilities of children.

Social protection which is child-sensitive also has great potential to reduce the intergenerational transfer of poverty. Evidence shows that welldesigned social protection programmes can successfully address several dimensions of child well-being. If social protection programmes take into account the specific needs, vulnerabilities and rights of children, in poverty and in crisis situations, they can achieve better results for girls and boys of all ages across a range of deprivations and reduce the need for coping strategies that may harm them. Conversely, insufficient consideration of children in programme design may lead to adverse impacts, such as increases in harmful child work, domestic violence or inequalities; and/or the disruption of schooling or family child care arrangements. Programmes that reliably increase income for households or provide support in meeting children's needs, coupled with child-sensitive design and messaging, will enable and encourage families to invest in children's education, health and nutrition, both in normal times and during crises.



How is "child-sensitive" Social protection Pursued and Implemented?

Child-sensitive social protection encompasses both policies and programmes that address the specific patterns of children's poverty and vulnerability and recognize the long term developmental benefits of investing in children. In particular, CSSP policies and programmes:

- Seek to maximize positive impacts on children's rights and wellbeing, while minimizing or avoiding any adverse impacts on them; and
- Analyse and monitor, on an ongoing basis, the impacts of interventions on children in each context by age, gender and different types of vulnerability and ability; and
- 3. Take meaningful, practical steps, starting at the local level, to seek out and take into account the views and perspectives of children and their caregivers on the design and impacts of policies and programmes.

CSSP interventions in development and humanitarian contexts need to be designed on the basis of in-depth analyses of the types and causes of vulnerabilities and deprivations that children face in each context, across the full range of their rights. Child-sensitive programmes should either: include specific objectives for improving child well-being, and monitor impacts on children, disaggregated by sex and age to identify both positive benefits and any negative unintended effects; or (in cases such as public works and pensions) should, at the minimum, take stock of their implications for children and monitor their impacts on girls and boys of different ages. Risk analysis, design and monitoring efforts should systematically seek to obtain, incorporate and respond to the voices and views of children and their care-givers.

A broader, more inclusive targeting approach, while possibly more expensive, is more likely to be able to address the various needs and vulnerabilities that different groups of children face; while narrower targeting of highly vulnerable groups may run the risk of reinforcing stigmatisation and perpetuating their marginalised status. Attempts at highly precise targeting - based on characteristics such as household income and wealth which are difficult and costly to measure and subject to rapid change - are also more likely to leave out families and children in who are in urgent need of social protection support, resulting in avoidable suffering, human costs and denial of rights. The benefits provided under social protection programmes need to be reliable in their delivery, easily accessed, and of sufficient size to make a difference to families' ability to afford basic necessities and services for their children. The adequacy of cash transfers and other benefits can be assessed in different situations, including of humanitarian crisis and economic stress, using tools such as Household Economy Analysis and Cost of Diet.



Social Protection and Priority Sectors for the Life Cycle of Children

Social protection systems and programmes that are linked and coordinated with other key areas of basic service provision for children's rights are more able to address risks and vulnerabilities across the life-cycles of girls and boys. Child outcomes can be promoted by building linkages between social protection and other sector policies and programmes.¹⁴ This can be achieved through, for example:

- Coordination with other sectoral policies and services, inter-ministerial planning, local government service integration and crosscluster coordination for humanitarian response;
- Establishing single registries of beneficiaries and referral mechanisms across different services (e.g., from child grant programmes to child protection services), as well as integrated, mobile and home-based services that focus on children's holistic needs;¹⁵
- Co-responsibilities between programme providers and participants, including soft (unenforced) conditionalities; and
- Messaging or 'labeling' to promote childfriendly norms, expenditures or care behaviours;¹⁶
- Introducing awareness-raising, behavioural change communication and local mobilization activities alongside the social protection programme.

Inter-sectoral linkages - such as cash transfers that contribute towards children's nutrition, health or education; or subsidies to very poor families that improve access to social health insurance benefits - can greatly strengthen the impact of social protection for tackling child poverty and vulnerability. With effective delivery and proper accountability, publicly-provided social protection can contribute to the same child well-being outcomes sought by sector-based Ministries and programmes. For instance, birth registration, child care provision, and school feeding can boost school attendance; child support grants, maternal nutritional supplements and access to antenatal care can improve health and nutritional outcomes; awareness promotion, regulations and support to the most vulnerable children can decrease gender-based and other forms of violence and exploitation; financial support, access to social services and parenting support can help to prevent family breakdown and unnecessary placements into alternative care; and cash transfers, child care, maternity/paternity leave and anti-discrimination legislation can promote employment among the most vulnerable families and address issues of discrimination in access to basic services. While a difficult challenge, Child-sensitive Social Protection should also be designed to be able to effectively respond to rapid, slow-onset and protracted crises that affect children's rights and wellbeing - for example, by increasing the amount or frequency of cash transfers for existing recipients, relaxing eligibility criteria and extending coverage to newly-affected groups. This is an area where long-standing national precedents exist but where evidence of good practice is limited and needs to be urgently developed. As in development contexts, emergency responses should also build in systematic efforts to ensure that all children, including those lacking adequate care, are fully safeguarded and protected in the implementation of CSSP measures, based on the principle of 'Do No Harm'. These will need to be complemented by overall humanitarian responses that are childsensitive and safe for children across all sectors of operation. CSSP requires programmes to include effective mechanisms to ensure accountability to beneficiaries, as well as specific actions to reduce barriers to access for excluded and marginalized groups, including both children in family contexts and children who lack family care. It is also essential to establish participatory, safe and accessible monitoring and feedback systems to help ensure the minimisation of harm and protection risks in both the design and implementation of CSSP.

Principles of Child-sensitive Social Protection¹⁷

While the diversity of programmes and contexts means there can be no "one size fits all" or single definition of what makes a social protection programme child-sensitive, there are several key principles that should be considered in the design, implementation and evaluation of any programme. These are founded in the human rights principles found in the UNCRC and other global conventions.

Overarching Principle

All children have a right to social protection and to an adequate standard of living.¹⁸ The primary duty of governments and their partners in fulfilling this right is to build national systems and capacities that work with communities to implement social protection interventions that reach the poorest families and children and which effectively improve child well-being and help fulfil children's rights.¹⁹

Key principles that guide decision making, programme design and resource allocation are drawn from the widely-recognized 2009 Joint Statement on CSSP:

Principles of Child-sensitive Social Protection

The following principles should be considered in the design, implementation and evaluation of childsensitive social protection programmes:

- Do no harm: assess risks and plan to avoid adverse impacts on children, while monitoring regularly for such risks as well as planned benefits to children.
- Intervene as early as possible where children are at risk and in extreme poverty, in order to
 prevent irreversible impairment or harm.
- Consider the age- and gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities of girls and boys throughout the life-cycle.
- Plan and design programmes to mitigate the effects of shocks, exclusion and poverty on families, recognizing that families raising children need support to ensure equal opportunity.
- Make special provision to reach children who are particularly vulnerable and excluded, including children without parental care, and those who are marginalized within their families or communities due to their gender, disability, ethnicity, HIV and AIDS or other factors.
- Take account of the mechanisms and intra-household dynamics that may affect how children are reached, with particular attention paid to the balance of decision-making power between men and women within the household and broader community.
- Regularly and explicitly include the voices and opinions of children, their caregivers and youth in the design and monitoring of social protection systems and programmes.



How can Child-sensitive Social Protection be achieved?

All Governments, as primary duty-bearers for children's rights, together with their national partners and, where relevant, with international development partners, can take the following steps to progressively extend social protection and to ensure that it is child-sensitive. These actions should be guided by the principles of CSSP detailed in the previous section.

Ensure existing social protection policies and programmes are child-sensitive. Review the design and implementation of existing policies and programmes to ensure they are child-sensitive, including taking into consideration the viewpoints of children, youth and their caregivers.

Progressive realization. Set priorities and sequence policy development, budget allocations and implementation to progressively realize a basic social protection package that is universally accessible to all those in need, is fully child-sensitive and adequate to meet basic needs.

Increase available resources. Seek to improve fiscal space through a range of possible tax and expenditure reforms in order to increase available resources for child-sensitive social protection programmes on a continuing basis.

Increase capacity and co-ordination at all levels. The design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of CSSP involves a wide range of development actors. Accordingly, broad efforts are needed to build awareness, political will, capacity and inter-sectoral coordination.

Ensure balance and synergies between social transfers and social services. Adequate investment in and linkages between transfers and basic social services in health, nutrition, education, WATSAN and child protection is needed to ensure the reach, effectiveness and impact of social protection.

Continue to build the evidence base on child-sensitive social protection and ensure research findings are well-disseminated. Ongoing research, data disaggregation, monitoring and evaluation are vital to better understand effective programme design and implementation for maximum benefits and minimized harms on children, as well as how child-sensitive approaches benefit the wider community and national development. Central to this work are the voices and opinions of children who are poor and marginalised, and of their caregivers, in the design, monitoring and improvement of these systems.



Coalition Partners' Roles in Helping to Advance Child-sensitive Social Protection

Particularly in countries where national social protection systems are in the earlier stages of development, the role and contributions of Child Poverty Global Coalition Partners' to CSSP may include:

- Supporting national and local governments and NGOs and other actors to strengthen the coverage, effectiveness and child sensitivity of existing programmes;
- Supporting the piloting of new child-sensitive approaches through carefully-designed small scale programmes to reach and include the poorest and most deprived girls and boys that are implemented in collaboration with government, while generating robust evidence and building capacity for larger scale roll-out;
- Supporting and promoting research and analysis to inform programme design and reform of existing programmes. This can include multi-sectoral child needs and child poverty assessments, analysis of childsensitivity to inform the design of long-term national programmes or humanitarian responses, and a particular focus on the needs of children by gender, age, location, types of deprivation and levels of ability/disability;
- Supporting initiatives to build social protection capacity, such as by supporting training and learning exchanges within and across countries;

- Advocating with national partners and, where relevant, international agencies, lenders and donors for social protection schemes to focus on maximising benefits and avoiding harms among the most deprived children and to increase and improve the effectiveness, equity and levels of public spending on social protection;
- Supporting the monitoring of impacts of and expenditure on CSSP, including by supporting analysis of government budget allocation and impacts, to help ensure that public investments are used in an equitable, efficient and effective way to achieve better outcomes for the rights and well-being of children.

In more fragile and conflict-affected states and for humanitarian responses, where national social protection systems are not in place, local and international partners can have a more direct role in the design and implementation of CSSP. This may include the operational delivery of cash assistance and other forms of resource transfers for essential needs, either independently or in consortium with other agencies. Market-oriented analysis for goods and services across the breadth of children's basic needs should systematically inform decisions on the most appropriate response modalities (e.g. different forms of cash, food and/or household goods-in-kind). Child Poverty Global Coalition Partners also can support analysis to strengthen the role of long term social protection programmes in building flexible capacity and protocols to respond to shocks and crises, such as by scaling up or modifying existing programmes.



"Cash Plus"

Evidence is increasingly indicating that the provision of cash alone is not always a 'magic bullet'. More nuanced understandings of the impact of social protection on children had led into debates on the most effective and appropriate social protection instruments for improved child outcomes, such as in the area of young child nutrition.²⁰ The need for more integrated approaches that combine cash with other types of social services is widely recognised and increasingly tested, sometimes referred to as 'Cash Plus' interventions. Such interventions²¹ - increasingly common in both development and humanitarian response - often incorporate communication and information to empower parents and caregivers in making decisions and getting access to local services; and to promote behaviour change, such as care and feeding practices which strengthen the impacts of cash for children. A distinction can be made between components that are integral to cash transfer programmes and implemented as part of those programme, such as behaviour change communication (BCC) and psychosocial support, and components that seek linkages to existing basic services such as education and health, such as through the provision of health insurance or case management.²²

Child-sensitive Social Protection in Nepal

Nepal's National Framework for Social Protection adopts a 'life-cycle' approach, ensuring that the social protection systems address needs and vulnerabilities across all stages of life. Although these programmes aim to address vulnerabilities in specific life stages, they all have effects on children - either explicitly or implicitly. A review of interventions in Nepal assessed the effect of programmes across on child poverty and vulnerability, considering their positive effects or potential adverse consequences. The Table below provides an overview of findings:

	Child Grant	Scholarships Programmes	Midday Meal	Safer Motherhood Programme (Aama)	KEP (public works)	Old Age and Single Women's Allowance	Full Disability Allowance	Partial Disability Allowance
poverty	+	?	?	?	+	+	+	+
nutrition	+	?	+/-	+	+	+	?	?
education	?	+/-	+/-	?	+	+	?	-
health	+	?	?	+	?	+	+	+
child labour	?	+/-	?	?	?	?	?	?
child care	+	?	?	+	+/-	+	?	?

Table 1: Relative impacts on child poverty and vulnerability across social protection programmes	
in Nepal	

*Continued...*Overall, Nepal's set of social protection interventions has a positive effect on children's lives. Effects are largest in areas of poverty, nutrition and health followed by positive changes with respect to education and child care. All these impacts are modest and do not lead to large changes in children's lives, largely as a result of small transfer sizes. The impacts of the scholarship and Midday Meal programmes and the public works programme (KEP) are more ambivalent with adverse consequences such as stigmatisation and community tensions related to targeting and compromised child care potentially outweighing the positive effects. Nevertheless, the current system serves as a good basis from which to address challenges in making social protection child-sensitive, encompassing programmes that focus on children directly and that affect them indirectly.

For more information see: Roelen, Keetie and Karki Chettri, H. (2016) 'How can social protection better respond to child poverty and vulnerability in Nepal?' Research report. Brighton/ Kathmandu: IDS and Save the Children. https://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/SCNepalIDSpaper2016Final.pdf



Notes

¹ Ending Extreme Poverty: A Focus on Children, UNICEF and the World Bank Group, 2016

² UNICEF and Global Coalition to End Child Poverty (2017) A World Free from Child Poverty. New York: UNICEF and Global Coalition to End Child Poverty.

³ Hypher, N & Richards, K (2015): Lessons from practice in Child-sensitive Social Protection, in The Global Child Poverty Challenge, R Morgan (ed), Practical Action Publishing, 2016

⁴ DFID, HelpAge International, Hope & Homes for Children, Institute of Development Studies, International Labour Organization, Overseas Development Institute, Save the Children UK, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank (2009). Advancing Child-Sensitive Social Protection.

⁵ Roelen, K & H. Karki Chettri (2016). Improving Social Protection's Response to Child Poverty and Vulnerability in Nepal. Brighton/Kathmandu: IDS/Save the Children Nepal.

⁶ SOS Children's Villages International and Development Initiatives (2017), The Care of Children in Data. Evidence, gaps and opportunities for change in the SDGs.

⁷ Devereux, S. & Sabates-Wheeler, R. (2004). Transformative Social Protection. Institute of Development Studies.

⁸ See Roelen, K., Devereux, S., Abdulai, A-G., Martorano, B., Palermo. T. and P. Ragno (2017). How to Make 'Cash Plus' Work in Social Protection: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors. Office of Research -Innocenti Working Paper. WP-2017-10. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.

⁹ Based on UNICEF et al. (2009) "Joint Statement on Advancing Child-sensitive Social Protection". Available at: <u>http://www.unicef.org/aids/files/CSSP_joint_statement_10.16.09.pdf</u>

¹⁰ It is recognized that other forms of payments, such as to older people who are poor, can also have significant benefits for children through care and family relationships

¹¹ See specific measures to protect children against discrimination

http://www.chronicpovertynetwork.org/resources/2017/3/6/do-anti-discrimination-measures-reduce-poverty-among-marginalised-social-groups

¹² Joint Statement on Advancing Child-Sensitive Social Protection, Op Cit

¹³ OECD (2016), Enhancing Child Well-Being to promote inclusive growth, Meeting of the Council at Ministerial Level

¹⁴ OECD (2015), Integrating Social Services for Vulnerable Groups, Bridging Sectors for Better Service Delivery, OECD Publishing, Paris

¹⁵ OECD (2015), Integrating Social Services for Vulnerable Groups, Op Cit

¹⁶ 'Hard' conditionalities that are sometimes applied to the provision of cash transfers are not advocated by the Coalition due to the possibility that these will particularly disadvantage and tend to exclude the poorest families and children with the least ability to comply; and also given, in most contexts of widespread poverty and child deprivation, the weakness of administrative capacities to implement such conditions in ways that avoid excluding children who are most in need. Evidence for the effectiveness of strict conditions in improving child outcomes as compared to other options is also very limited. ¹⁷ See UNICEF et al. (2009) "Joint Statement on Advancing Child-sensitive Social Protection". Available at:

http://www.unicef.org/aids/files/CSSP_joint_statement_10.16.09.pdf

¹⁸ Articles 26-27. UN Convention on the Rights of The Child

¹⁹ See World Vision, Transformational Development Policy, Section 6 b).

²⁰ de Groot, R., Palermo, T., Handa, S., Ragno, L. P., and A. Peterman (2017). Cash Transfers and Child Nutrition: Pathways and Impacts. Development Policy Review, n/a-n/a. doi:10.1111/dpr.12255.

²¹ Watson, C. and Palermo, T. (2016). Options for a 'Cash Plus' Intervention to Enhance Adolescent Wellbeing in Tanzania. An introduction and review of the evidence from different programme models in Eastern and Southern Africa. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti.

²² See Roelen, K., Devereux, S., Abdulai, A-G., Martorano, B., Palermo. T. and P. Ragno (2017). How to Make 'Cash Plus' Work in Social Protection: Linking Cash Transfers to Services and Sectors. Office of Research - Innocenti Working Paper. WP-2017-10. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.



The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty is a global initiative to raise awareness about children living in poverty across the world and support global and national action to alleviate it. Our members work together as part of the Coalition, as well as individually, to achieve a world where all children grow up free from poverty, deprivation and exclusion.

