

on LOCATION

Sombor, Serbia

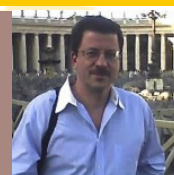


An End Child Poverty Update, 10th August 2016

Faith Communities Partnering To End Child Poverty and Violence Against Children



Essential Actions to ADDRESS CHILD POVERTY



In his presentation at the workshop Mr. Richard Morgan, Co-Convenor of the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty and Director, Child Poverty Global Initiative, Save the Children stated that poverty is complex and multi-dimensional and can be both absolute and relative. He further stated that it is a product of multiple causes and can have diverse, interconnected short and long-term negative consequences in the lives of children. Such varied causes and drivers of child poverty include; in equality, exclusion, discrimination, violence and lack of access to social services. Such complex drivers can easily be overlooked by policymakers who are often tempted to tackle single causes and specific outcomes.

He called on the faith communities to use their moral and social capital to amplify the voices of children. In making reference to the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty, he recommended 4 strategies to be considered: Child sensitive social protection; provision of essential, quality, basic services to children; making economic opportunities available to care-givers and advocacy for policy change and implementation.

“*In almost all societies where we have the data, children are more likely than adults to be living in poverty, we need to make the issue visible rather than continuing to make it hidden under household measure. Intervening with very young children has the most impact and benefit.”*



Child poverty is, undoubtedly, the most brutal and unforgiving form of all poverty. It is the main underlying cause for millions of preventable child deaths each year. Indeed, violence against children and poverty are interlinked and it is therefore not possible to fight against one vice without confronting the other.

In this light, Arigatou International's Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty (End Child Poverty) and the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) collaborated with the Somborski Educativni Centar (SEC) to organize a sub-regional round table meeting and a workshop in Sombor, Serbia.

Two main themes guided the meeting:

- 1. The Nexus between Child Poverty and Violence Against Children.**
- 2. The Role of Faith Communities and Children in Aligning Ending Child Poverty Actions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**

The meeting took place from the 26th -28th of July 2016 at the Garni Hotel. The goal of the meeting was to explore ways to act against child poverty and violence against children in the Balkans.



The Round Table

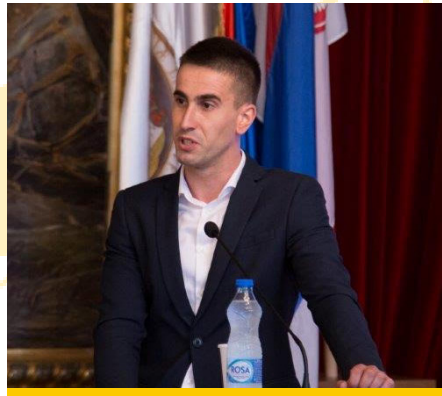
The Executive Director of the Somborski Edukativni Centar (SEC), Mr. Srđan Vlaškalić, the moderator of the session, set the tone by welcoming the participants and setting the context of the Round Table. He then invited Mr. Antonio Ratković, the Deputy Mayor of Sombor City to officially open the meeting. In his remarks the Deputy Mayor welcomed the idea of a faith-inspired process towards ending child poverty and violence against children, as well as expressed his wish that the reflections would be followed by concrete actions.



A Focus on Data Collection...

Mr. Saša Stefanović, President of the Network of Organisations for Children of Serbia-MODS, highlighted the need for data in mitigating child poverty as well as strict implementation of laws that protect children from different forms of violence.

“While there are many laws and policies in place, not enough is being done at the local level to respond to the needs and fulfill the rights of all children”, he said. He further highlighted the need for action plans that address child poverty and violence against children at both the municipal and national levels.



Together We Can End Child Poverty and Violence Against Children

Rev. Fred Nyabera, Director, End Child Poverty–Arigatou International, shared an overview of Arigatou International and its initiatives. He highlighted the importance of working together to end poverty and violence against children. “We are fully aware of the importance of working together, with various stakeholders, as well as children and young people. As a faith inspired organization, we realize the importance of riding on each other’s strength towards catalyzing change... Such partnership should provide a platform to learn from each other’s experience, and foster concrete and measurable results. Together we can end child poverty and violence against children”, he said.



Reflections and Action!

The participants had the opportunity to visit various historical sites in Sombor including places of worship - The great Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church of Holy Trinity and Franciscan Monastery; the Sombor Town Museum and a Home for children without parental care “Mika Antić”. The interaction with the children in the orphanage in particular was quite enriching. The children were each given a gift pack of school stationary.



Partnerships

Mr. Aleksandar Trudić, Youth worker, SEC expounded on his practical experiences working with the youth and regretted the lack of personal and collective sense of responsibility among most youth as citizens. He praised SEC for having achieved what many other organizations had failed to do in regard to youth mobilization and action.

Ms. Tanja Marović, from the Foundation SOS Children's Village Serbia, provided examples of pragmatic actions that are being effectively implemented by SOS Villages across Serbia, to end child poverty and violence against children. SOS works with foster families, specifically women caregivers who provide nurturing care to 5-6 children at a time. Despite the inadequate presence of a father-figure in the children's upbringing, Tanja saw this as a viable option due to its sustainability. The women involved are volunteers who have offered themselves as a form of service to humanity.

Ms. Emma Grindulis, Advocacy and Parliamentary Officer, Eurochild, called attention to the historic opportunity provided by the SDGs towards ending child poverty and violence against children. "Faith based communities can use the SDGs to accelerate a child rights-based approach to ending child poverty", she emphasized.

Mr. Stephen Katende, Local Level Advocacy Learning Hub Lead / Development, Learning, and Impact / MEERO, from World Vision Bosnia and Herzegovina, highlighted the staggering statistics that amplify the dire state of children living in poverty and violent situations in the Balkan countries. He lauded the faith led initiative but urged the faith communities to do more by maximizing on their comparative advantage to mobilize their constituencies towards policy and social change and citizens participations in the municipal legislation and the delivery of social Services.

Faith Speaks>>>

Fr. Srđan Nešić, Priest at the Church of St. John the Baptist in Sombor; Mr. Igor Jakobfi from Beli Manastir, a representative of the Catholic Religious Community in Sombor; and Effendi Veton Zorjani representative of the Muslim community in Vojvodina; all referred to the importance of commitments from faith communities to preventive and responsive actions to tackle child poverty and violence against children. They highlighted the strategies that are being implemented within their respective faith communities to address these issues, including the use of faith inspired resources and tools such as sacred texts, worship spaces, advocacy for policy and social change and practical action and support to the economically disadvantaged.





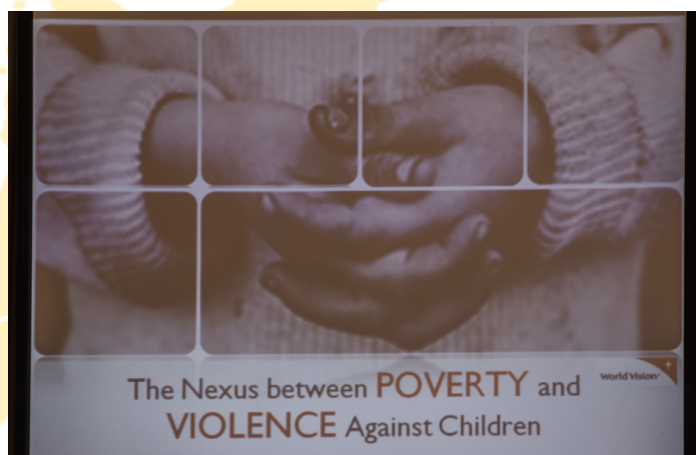
Children are Change Agents

The call for child participation in mitigating child poverty and violence against children was a common thread throughout the deliberations. This was practically exemplified in the creative participation of the children from SEC through documentaries and the sharing of their reflections on the Round Table themes. The children described exclusion as a form of poverty and violence and called on adults to do more to protect children and provide for their needs. The need for gathering evidence, supporting national plans of actions, doing global advocacy, raising awareness, enabling legislative frameworks and creating a social movement was also exercised.

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We expressed our commitment to mobilize faith-based resources to end child poverty, to challenge the unequal distribution of resources, war and violence, poor governance and corruption, and to utilize interfaith advocacy and grassroots action to overcome poverty.”

Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, President, Arigatou International



THE WORKSHOP

Children and Youth organization leaders and representatives from the Balkan countries committed to take action towards ending child poverty and violence against children in the region.

This came as a result of a two-day workshop jointly facilitated by Arigatou International's Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty and the GNRC, in collaboration with the Somborski Edukativni Centar (Sombor Education Centre/ SEC). The workshop generated honest discussion and paved the way for partnership towards addressing child poverty, and more so, addressing the connections between violence towards children and child poverty. It also presented opportunity to use the pilot version of the Faith-Inspired Resource Guide to End Child Poverty, developed by Arigatou International's End Child Poverty Initiative.



"The definition of poverty must be looked at multi-dimensionally. Look at poverty from a broad spectrum, so that we can be comprehensive when defining child poverty."

Dr. Kiplagat (GNRC/AI)



In his introductory remarks to the workshop, Rev Nyabera, End Child Poverty, Director pointed out that End Child Poverty identified a critical gap in interfaith efforts to combat child poverty - the absence of common interfaith reference point on child poverty. It is in this light that End Child Poverty undertook to produce a comprehensive Inter-faith guide that brings together into a single resource the various faith traditions thinking and approaches to child poverty. The resource is further enriched by blending contemporary human rights based aspirations on children and child poverty. The guidebook is intended to serve as a model for faith communities to engage in year-round child poverty spiritual reflection, advocacy and action.

Voices from Participants

"In Macedonia, there are nearly 1,500 children without birth certificates. That is classic form of discrimination and a classic form of child poverty." - Mr. Dragi Zmijanac

"Look at the child – not as an object, but as a person. It is important to listen to the children – so that we can start the process of addressing child poverty." - Anna Znidarec

"In Romania, we have children who are so poor that they sometimes cannot afford to go to school or access medical care. Some kids eat only one meal a day – in school – the lunch provided by their school." - Ms. Laura Molnar

"A lot of parents are leaving Moldova to go work in other countries in Western Europe, leaving their children without parental care. That is a form of poverty." - Angela Chichu



The workshop gathered participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia), Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia; representing several Faith Inspired Organisations' (FIOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's), Civil Society Organisations' (CSOs) and the education sector. Also present were staff and volunteers from Somborski Edukativni Centar (SEC) and Arigatou International—Nairobi; including Mr. Srđan Vlaškalić Founder and Chairman of SEC; Ms. Bojana Nešović, Coordinator of Volunteers, SEC; Rev. Fred Nyabera, Director, End Child Poverty; Dr. Dorcas Kiplagat, Programs Manager and Coordinator, GNRC; and Ms. Nyambura Gichuki, Programs Officer, End Child Poverty.



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Intervening with very young children has the most impact and benefit – when children are in their earlier years and also looking at the different needs of boys and girls”



The three-day meetings created greater awareness and appreciation of the GNRC, provided opportunity for collaboration among the different groups and organisations in the region and within Serbia; enhanced interfaith cooperation and created space for linkages and possible synergies within the participating organizations.



REFLECTIONS FROM SERBIA MEETINGS

✍ Violence against children and poverty are interlinked and it is therefore not possible to fight against one vice without confronting the other.

✍ Child Poverty is multidimensional, including deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed (for children) to survive, develop and thrive.

✍ Poverty is a violation of child rights and impacts more acutely on children than on adults, as they are more vulnerable to the effects of deprivation.

✍ There is a need to encourage local solutions and community participation in mitigating the effects of poverty and violence against children. This should include active participation by the children.

✍ Unimplemented and/or limited implementation of policies and action plans that include low level citizen engagement was noted – especially at the municipality level.

✍ Faith communities should use their spiritual, moral and social capital to mobilize their constituencies towards policy and social change and citizens participations in the municipal legislation and the delivery of social services. In addition they should capitalize on the SDGs to accelerate a child rights-based approach to ending child poverty.

✍ The Roma communities in the region seem to be deeply affected by poverty in the region and their plight needs directed intervention.

✍ There is a need for gathering evidence, supporting national plans of actions, global advocacy, raising awareness, enabling legislative frameworks and creating a social movement to end child poverty and violence against children.

✍ Negative social norms and weakening family structures have led to the neglect of children.

✍ Faith communities should strategically collaborate and/or partner with resource based organizations, government, civil society organizations and other developmental organizations in their fight against poverty and violence against children.

✍ Such targeted and content focused regional meetings provide the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences, builds personal and working relationships among participants and subsequently strengthen the GNRC.



We Can End Child Poverty and Violence Against Children!



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