



# Democracy, Human Rights and Governance

*Empowerment and Inclusion Division: Children in Adversity/Displaced Children and Orphans Fund*

**The Empowerment and Inclusion Division (EI)**, Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG), works to reduce risks to and reinforce the capacities of communities, local governmental organizations and governments to provide services and protection to vulnerable populations. Its programs and policies help vulnerable populations gain access to opportunities that support their full participation in society.

EI also manages five congressional directives and the Center on Children in Adversity. Each has its own purpose and strategy, but they share a focus on providing assistance to poor and vulnerable populations, child and adult. Each emphasizes the value of family and community as the first resort in providing protection, care and support to vulnerable children, civilian victims of war, torture survivors and people with disabilities. These are the Disability Program, the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF), the Center on Children in Adversity (CECA), the Leahy War Victims Fund (LWVF), the Victims of Torture Program (VOT) and the Wheelchair Program.

In Spring 2014, USAID merged the Center on Children in Adversity (CECA) with the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF). This strategic move aligned program, policy, coordination, staff and budget resources to better fulfill the legislative mandate set forth under Public Law 109-95. The Act established USAID as the primary U.S. Government agency responsible for coordinating identification of and assistance to orphans and other vulnerable children in developing countries. The U.S. Government special advisor, a position mandated by the Act, and the CECA/DCOF program are housed within USAID's Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG), Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA).

## Action Plan on Children in Adversity

Public Law 109-95, which called for a comprehensive, coordinated and effective response on the part of the U.S. Government to the world's most vulnerable children, became the basis for the U.S. Government Action Plan on Children in Adversity (APCA). The Action Plan focuses and coordinates programs throughout the U.S. Government to achieve three primary objectives: 1) build strong beginnings, 2) put family care first and 3) protect children.

Launched from the White House in 2012, APCA is the first-ever, whole-of-government strategic guidance for international assistance to children. APCA strives to achieve a world in which all children grow up within protective family care, free from deprivation, exploitation and danger. The plan is grounded in evidence that shows a promising future belongs to those nations that invest wisely in their children, while failure to do so undermines social and economic progress. Child development is a cornerstone for all development, and it is central to U.S. development and diplomatic efforts. The plan seeks to integrate internationally recognized, evidence-based practices into all of its international assistance initiatives for the best interests of the child. Under this framework, six countries are being identified as priority countries and will receive targeted financial and technical assistance.

## Center on Children in Adversity

To better coordinate its efforts on behalf of children, USAID established a Center on Children in Adversity in 2012. Alongside the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund, CECA supports U.S. Government and host governments and civil society partners to develop and implement programs and policies that address the objectives of the Action Plan on Children in Adversity.

Through DCOF and CECA, USAID plays a particularly strong role in the achievement of Objective 2, "Putting Family Care First," by applying relevant national child protection legislation and policies, strengthening coordination among key actors, developing information systems to identify and monitor



photo: Sue Eitel/USAID

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children at risk, building social service workforce capacities, strengthening community capacities to identify vulnerable children and increasing their access to protective interventions in countries.

## A Focus on Results

While the Action Plan on Children in Adversity applies to U.S. Government assistance globally, it also identifies a more targeted starting point for these efforts: to achieve three core outcomes in at least six priority countries over a span of five years. To date, the U.S. Government has identified Cambodia, Moldova, Rwanda, and Uganda as priority countries. In the six countries, through U.S. Government collaboration with other government, international, private, faith-based and academic partners, the plan will focus on achieving significant reductions in the number of:

1. Children not meeting age-appropriate growth and developmental milestones
2. Children living outside of family care (by placing them in appropriate and protective family care)
3. Children who experience sexual violence or exploitation

## Displaced Children and Orphans Fund

USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund provides financial and technical assistance for the care and protection of vulnerable children, particularly those who are outside of family care or are at risk of losing family care and protection. In its implementation of DCOF, USAID has given particular attention to children in institutional care, affected by war, on the street, or with disabilities.

Most DCOF projects aim either to restore or preserve family care for children. DCOF emphasizes strengthening family and community capacities to protect children and provide for their safety and well-being, including identifying and responding to children's physical, social, educational and emotional needs. DCOF supports programs to strengthen national child protection systems, recognizing that families and communities are at the core of these systems.

USAID uses DCOF's dedicated resources to support promising projects that yield lessons that can be applied globally. It shares those lessons as widely as possible with practitioners, funding organizations and governments.

Global research has shown that poverty is the primary cause of children's vulnerability. However, most economic development programs do not give attention to their effects on children. Consequently, USAID has developed programs using state-of-the-art methods to strengthen the economic capacities of vulnerable families to provide for their children's needs. Typically, such programs address social as well as economic needs. DCOF is also helping

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build networks of practitioners and governmental personnel to inform and improve programming practices and policies to benefit vulnerable children and families. It has played a catalytic role in starting several technical networks, including the Better Care Network, the Washington Network on Children and Armed Conflict, and the Children and Youth Economic Strengthening Network.

Over DCOF's two and one-half decades of operation, USAID has played a significant role in the development of effective responses to highly vulnerable children. DCOF led USAID and the U.S. Government in directly addressing needs and problems among children orphaned or otherwise made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS, and it played a key role in developing interagency consensus on the five basic strategies for addressing these issues. It was the first donor program to support tracing and family reunification for children left unaccompanied after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and it supported the development and use of groundbreaking methods to trace families of young children who were left in institutions there. In 2002, USAID was the primary funder for family reunification and community reintegration of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone, and it has supported two phases of follow-up interviews with a sample of these children to inform future policy and programming globally.

### The Action Plan on Children in Adversity

#### Principal Objectives

**Objective 1 – Build Strong Beginnings:** Ensure that children under five not only survive, but also thrive by supporting comprehensive programs that promote sound development of children through the integration of health, nutrition, and family support.

**Objective 2 – Put Family Care First:** Supporting and enabling families to care for their children, prevent unnecessary family-child separation, and promote appropriate, protective and permanent family care.

**Objective 3 – Protect Children:** Facilitating the efforts to prevent, respond to, and protect children from violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect.

#### Supporting Objectives

**Objective 4 – Strengthen Child Welfare and Protection Systems:** Support to build and strengthen holistic and integrated models to promote the best interests of the child.

**Objective 5 – Promote Evidence-Based Policies and Programs:** Building and maintaining a strong evidence base on which future activities to reach and assist the most vulnerable children can be effectively planned and implemented.

**Objective 6 – Integrate this Plan within U.S. Government Departments and Agencies:** Institutionalize and integrate the components of this Plan as reflected in U.S. Government diplomatic, development, and humanitarian efforts overseas.

For more information on U.S. Government international assistance for children in adversity, go to [www.childreninadversity.gov](http://www.childreninadversity.gov)