

Teresa Carpio answers about:

# The situation of children in Peru and actions to enforce their rights



Teresa Carpio is the Director of Save the Children in Peru.

A culture on children's rights expressed in a legal framework and greater awareness is being installed in Peru. However, there is still a wide gap between State policies and everyday life of children. This interview presents an analysis of the National Plan for Children, discusses the reality of children in poor families, how their rights are infringed, their limited access to health services, education and protection against violence, and calls for strengthening the role of children, and their organizations, to participate in monitoring public policies.

**José Luis Carbajo (JLC):** *What is the reality of childhood in Peru? In what conditions are their rights? What is the most vulnerable sector?*

**Teresa Carpio (TC):** A few months after 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Children, we can say that Peruvian children's situation now is very different: Children today have a legal framework that protects them, with plans of action for the realization of their rights - the most important, the National Action Plan for Children (NAPC) - budget and strategic plans that should produce better education, nutrition, health and protection. Nobody would say at this stage, children have no rights and can not be consulted on issues that concern them. However, there is a big gap between legal and programmatic framework and the realization of rights. The Peruvian government, for example, has signed the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, but has not submitted the report on the Protocol adapting our legislation to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

As the vice-chairman of the committee, Jean Zermatt, pointed out during his visit to Peru, if the Peruvian State had submitted its report, it would have become aware of the problem and taken some measures against the abuse and illegal enlistment of children into armed forces and their recruitment by non-state armed group Sendero Luminoso. Last year, a hundred of these cases were denounced by the Ombudsman, the National Coordinator of Human Rights and Save the Children, including the unfortunate deaths of three children recruited by armed forces in a clash with Sendero Luminoso among the complaints.

Where did those children come from? Most of them from the Amazon region, from Pucallpa and the Andes: poor children with little opportunity to study and work. It is precisely in these regions where the majority of children see their rights violated: Children from the Andes excluded, Quechua speaking children, children of peasants, and children from indigenous communities in the jungle with little access to health services, education and protection from violence. Physical punishment, labor exploitation and sexual violence are violations that children suffer with impunity, as the representative of UNICEF said quoting a study on violence against children in the region and as the rapporteur on the rights of children of

the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights also stated in December 2009 in its report on corporal punishment and human rights: "The IACHR notes that the right of children and adolescents to live free from violence and discrimination, has a priority challenge in systems of protection of human rights at regional level."

**JLC:** *2010 is the final year of the National Action Plan for Children and Adolescents 2002-2010. How much progress has been made to address and reverse the indicators on poverty, malnutrition and lack of education?*

**TC:** According to the United Nations Fund for Development (UNFPA), Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions with the greatest inequalities, and Peru is no exception to this situation.

The poor in Peru reaches 36.3%, which is above the expected figure by the government and its plans; in 2007, 60% of children lived in poverty, and we know that children require a distinct measurement, for their impact on levels of malnutrition, access to school, learning achievement and protection. Inequity is manifested most strongly when comparing this figure (36.3%) with 82% of poor people in Huancavelica, 69% Apurimac and 65% in Ayacucho.

As indicated by the World Bank's Vice President in February 2010, Peru should not forget the poor. The Government has the task of eradicating poverty or boosts the fight against it better. The national rate of malnutrition has decreased to 18.3%, but again, this figure conceals large inequalities: in rural areas it is 33% on average, although some regions reach 49% and up to 56% of chronic malnutrition and even higher figures inside. 56% of malnutrition is comparable with countries such as Burundi and Afghanistan which face serious problems of governance and administration. A country like Peru, with steady growth, should not have such a high number of children suffering chronic malnutrition. Still, it is important to note that this achievement is due to an articulate program of intervention, political will, targeted social programs and a sustained and relevant work of civil society.

As for infant mortality, it has declined significantly through a program of care for rural pregnant mothers, an intercultural and rights approach, and close follow-up to pregnant women and childbirth. These practices

should be extended to all rural areas. But we need to reduce it further to get closer to the countries of the region with more rapid progress.

Education is the sector that shows less progress in recent years, which will be evident at the end of NAPC. According to UNICEF, many children finish second grade unable to read or write. Rural schools are inaccessible to children, who must walk long hours to get to school.

I remember my visit to a school in the highlands of Ayacucho accompanied by European aid workers who asked me: "Why are children walking? Aren't there any school buses?" 37% are single-teacher rural schools and teachers themselves say that this system does not help the progress of children, so it is very difficult to achieve the required learning outcomes. Widespread primary education has not been achieved; there are about a million and half children out of school, almost the same number of children who work and require an education that meets their specific needs; the few that have a program in Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) do not have all the necessary resources, nor do they have a good record and a good database in the sector, so the figures are not very reliable.

The criteria for a school to be considered as IBE or inclusive are so broad that it is enough to have a teacher who speaks Quechua to qualify as such. Attention to early childhood (0-5 years) only reaches 67%, and that percentage drops to 56% in rural areas; and care for children 0-3 years is even much less.

Nor can we say that schools are places where children feel and are protected: the allegations of abuse and physical

and humiliating punishment have been widely disseminated by the media and have come to the Ombudsman. We can not say that we have a security system working. Judicial workers overlap their tasks, procedures are unclear, there are no defined protocols and the staff is not trained, so in most cases the victim is re-victimized.

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**JLC:** *We have policies for children in the National Accord and the NAPC. What hinders these actions and improvements in education and health?*

**TC:** There are four main problems. The first, lack of political will to work for children from a perspective of rights and allocation of necessary budget. Two, the absence of a true governing body that brings together all sectors to work in concert to obtain the same accomplishments. This we know for years: the problem is that there is no office at management level to help implement plans, and lack of trained staff of the sectors involved from the planning of strategic programming and budgeting to monitoring and performance measurement.

The third problem is that there is not a movement for children that works in a comprehensive and articulated way. As the State, the boy and the girl are seen individually, compartmentalized, segmented, and each one works according to their specialization, without incorporating the added value of the other, ignoring real social monitoring.

Finally, we have a culture of non-respect for commitments, lack of transparency in public action and a generalized corruption.

**JLC:** *How can we understand that the country is doing well and children aren't? Why investing in children does not go along with economic development?*

**TC:** The main difficulty in realizing the rights of children is that we live in a country with great inequality, discrimination and inequity in income distribution. This inequality brands public policies that in turn become disadvantages for the poorest children in the country, the gaps that remain and are accentuated in many cases among the sectors of higher and lower income, between the coast and the mountains and within the regions themselves.

According to the results of research conducted by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), Peru is one of the countries that has grown the most in the region in recent years and, in 2008, had the biggest growth. However, the results of growth were not distributed to the poorest.

**JLC:** *Where are the poorest in the country? In the rural Andean region, inhabited by Quechua-speaking children, children of peasants, and in certain regions of the Amazon. So it is important to visualize the relationship between lower investment-exclusion-discrimination, which gives us greater poverty as a result.*

**TC:** To avoid further investment in children two problems combine: children are not seen as persons with rights, first discrimination; and Quechua speaking people, peasants and indigenous people of the jungle are not a priority in the country. It's like asking: Why so many poor people die on the roads? Answer: Who are the most who travel on them?

In almost all countries - as in Chile, which appeals to our president - there are large inland terminals with controls and one great place where you can control the quality of transport units; prices are regulated by competition and consumers have all services to get a safe trip. That's thinking on the client as a citizen with rights.

**JLC:** *What policies should the Government prioritize in order to address the rights of children? Is it possible to break the cycle of poverty? How?*

**TC:** As I noted, we need more investment in social programs; an increase in the supply of services; social programs articulated with public policy of health, nutrition, education, job and citizenship. An education that focuses on life skills for people to see themselves and act as citizens with rights, so they can see the possibilities around them, and to carry out actions to solve local problems along with the State. It is essential to train professionals in the State in the design and implementation of strategic budgetary programs (SBP), including judicial officials, social and children's organizations.

**JLC:** *What action does Save the Children develop to promote the rights of children and adolescents? How difficult is to work for this sector in our country?*

**TC:** Save the Children develops advocacy actions for the State to comply with international commitments and standards on children's rights. Watch and help the State to implement the recommendations of the Child Rights Committee of United Nations by promoting the strengthening of civil society, including children's organizations, to fulfill the obligations of the State and to improve comprehensive care to children.

We participate in networks and task force groups because we believe in a structured and organized work, at medium and long term stage as the only way to make big changes on the rights of children in the vision of adults. Our work seeks to contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals: reducing poverty, fighting hunger, helping to ensure that all school children complete primary education, that the girl

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is visualized in order to achieve gender equity and reduce maternal and infant mortality.

Together with its national and local partners, Save the Children develops expertise in the areas of Education and Protection, focusing on the most excluded areas of the country with programs of IBE, inclusive education for disabled children and early childhood. We promote experiences towards active participation of the community and authorities, their commitment to policies and budget allocation; the role of children, with their full protection, access to health and identity.

We also work to generate regional systems of protection articulated at national level with participation of

committed public sectors and with civil society, including children. We support experiences of youth organizations working for greater access and protection of sexual and reproductive health by improving care for children with HIV / AIDS, health and care of pregnant mothers and the generation of specific risk prevention experiences in schools.

Finally, we promote the role of children and strengthen their organizations for monitoring and surveillance of public policies regarding children. We support organizational experiences of children and coordinated actions with NGOs and grassroots organizations for generating a joint effort that contributes to building a movement for children. **1**

