

GNRC – UNICEF joint study project CHILDREN IN WORLD RELIGIONS

March 2007

1. Background

The joint GNRC – UNICEF project “Children in World Religions” is an undertaking under a PROJECT COOPERATION AGREEMENT between UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) signed on May 19th 2004 in Geneva. This agreement aims at researching and documenting resources on teachings, approaches, perspectives and practices in world religions vis-à-vis the individual child, children and young people.

2. Brief Project Description

The study project will assess how the child, children and young people are portrayed in religious scriptures, are cared for, are ministered to and are treated in religious communities and how young people view themselves in their religious context.

It will involve experts, such as religious scholars within their own religious traditions and related fields, as well as educators and practitioners, including young people. They will be selected from major world religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, East Asian religious traditions, Islam, Judaism, Indigenous traditions, and Hinduism. This selection, in this first phase of the project, is based on two criteria: contemporary demography and historical geographical spread. This choice is not comprehensive of the much broader diversity of religious traditions worldwide today, which a second phase of this project will address.

This study seeks to examine how, over centuries, major world religions have developed their respective views on the child, including their rights and obligations, and how their communities (parents, family, educators, etc.) have internalized these norms. These norms will then be compared to those reflected in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which is fundamental for the scope of the study. The CRC sets the frame for the issues to be addressed in the study. Suggested aspects of the CRC as focus of the study are:

- freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion
- protection and education
- health and access to clean physical and healthy environment
- the child's right to a name and nationality
- participation and role as agents of change

The study will provide information as well as tools and material addressing how religious communities relate to and can contribute to the implementation of the CRC.

The overall outcome is envisaged as both a resource and an advocacy tool for a multitude of constituencies, most importantly for religious communities, religious and faith based NGOs and for UNICEF country offices. Several products will emanate from the overall outcome, including a manual with information for advocacy initiatives, leaflets on specific issues and ideas for discourses on specific issues.

The study is about harnessing the resources and outreach of religious communities in support of children and to empower religious leaders, practitioners and young people to better effect change for children and young people. It is also about creating greater harmony and understanding among religious traditions and will emphasize peace education, ethics and respect for diversity.

The outcome will be informed by a series of steps which will take into account the unique ways in which religious teachings in theory and practice relate to children. The outcome will be mindful of the involvement of people of different religions in the drafting of the CRC and of the reports of the Committee on the CRC, its findings and recommendations with respect to issues related to religion.

3. Rationale

Religious beliefs are central to the lives of most people worldwide. While the 1990 Princeton Declaration, the 1990 World Summit for Children Declaration and Plan of Action and the 2002 UN Special Session on Children present consensus for religious support of the CRC, it does not provide information about the understanding of specific perspectives of world religions on the child, children and young people.

Religious leaders and organizations have moral authority and power to influence families, communities and in many countries, even the political process. The results of this study can be used to increase both the involvement of each religious community in promoting the CRC within their respective institutions as well as help to develop a deeper rationale for inter-religious cooperation at a broader level, contributing to more harmonious, pluralistic societies.

4. Process for undertaking this assignment:

GNRC and UNICEF have jointly developed the scope of this project and its working budget. Arigatou Foundation will provide the bulk of the financial means for the project and UNICEF will contribute with staff time at Headquarters as well as in country offices. GNRC and UNICEF will jointly

- identify resources for the project
- identify issues and perspectives in the CRC as focus for the study
- identify experts for the study team, assuring gender balance and geographical representation within its selected number of major world religions
- identify the project coordinator
- supervise the work undertaken by the project coordinator and study team
- fundraise for any additional funding required beyond Arigatou Foundation's commitment.

The Arigatou Foundation Office in Geneva and the Office of Public Partnerships, UNICEF will jointly accompany and assist the project coordinator and the study team in its process of producing relevant and useful outcome documentation.

The Arigatou Foundation Office in Geneva and UNICEF will explore with the chairperson of the Committee on the CRC the possibility and modalities of a CRC General Discussion Day on “Religion and the CRC”, with the participation of the experts from the study team.

The GNRC Coordinators and UNICEF Regional offices will provide input to the study, where necessary, through Arigatou Foundation and UNICEF headquarters.

5. Nature of assignments

The assignment as project coordinator is a remunerated part time engagement to coordinate and develop the relevant expected outcome and share it with GNRC and UNICEF. Any outcome documents / publications will be the property of the GNRC and UNICEF.

The Project Coordinator will be assigned with the following responsibilities:

- to plan and coordinate the joint project by assuring the necessary contacts with experts and institutions as well as providing logistical and technical assistance to the project participants and its study team in particular;
- to organize the two meetings where the study team is convened to share findings, identify commonalities and challenging areas, vis-à-vis the defined scope of the study both from intra-faith and inter-faith perspectives;
- to assure travel arrangements, reimbursements, and stipends of all participants to the meetings;
- to supervise the work of the Project Assistant;
- to study and consider the inclusion of the research undertaken on the contributions of people from different religious traditions during the drafting of the CRC as well as the research undertaken on the Reports of the Committee on the CRC, its findings and recommendations with respect to issues related to religion including reservations in country reports both in its initial reports and subsequent submissions;
- to assist study team members, if needed, in engaging religious institutions and scholars for the preparation of documentation on teachings, approaches, perspectives and practices in world religions related to the identified issues in the CRC.

- to produce a documentation of the outcomes of the study for dissemination to the GNRC network, to UNICEF and other networks, knowledge centres, affiliates and all those in the business of child rights and an alliance for children.

The Project Coordinator should be a person experienced in research and coordination of studies. The person needs to have worked in interfaith settings and have a sensitivity to interfaith relations and dialogue, have significant knowledge about the CRC and have a reputation of credible work in religious as well as UN settings.

Qualifications and/or specialized knowledge/experience required include:

- knowledge and experience of working with people of different religious traditions
- knowledge about teachings and practices related to the child
- knowledge about the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- documented writing skills

Members of the study team need to have significant knowledge about teaching, approaches and practices in their own faith tradition vis-à-vis the individual child, children and young people. Experience in interfaith settings as well as a sensitivity and appreciation of the key elements of the CRC is highly desirable. In the composition of the study team consideration will be given to gender and geographical balance. The members of the study team need to have good reputation in their own faith tradition.

The members of the study team are expected to attend a first meeting in July 2007 to jointly confirm the relevancy of the suggested aspects of CRC to be included in the study project. They will then undertake the necessary consultation and research within his/her religious tradition to produce a written contribution of around 7000 words. They will present their findings at a second meeting in October 2007. Costs related to attending meetings, consultation and research will be covered by the project. In addition, each expert on the study team will be granted a symbolic honorarium.

6. Proposed Methodology

The methodology for this project is in five phases:

- 1) a first encounter between scholars and expert practitioners from the various chosen religious communities will enable a first face to face meeting that will ensure a common basis of understanding for this project;
- 2) a second phase will include the research and writing, by each expert, of a paper addressing the topic;
- 3) a third phase will bring each expert to engage in consultation with practitioners of his or her own community, for feedback on the article. This phase will include consultation with leaders of religious schools networks;
- 4) a fourth phase will bring the expert team together for a second face to face encounter to share their respective articles and respond to a draft paper by the coordinator on how to develop common, where possible, joint outcomes for this project;
- 5) the last phase will be to edit a book and prepare the framework for the future

development of material for websites through which the dissemination of these outcomes can take place to reach a broader public.

7. Duration of the project

This project will take place over a period of 16 months, from 1 January 2007 - 30 April 2008. The schedule includes the following:

10 January 2007	Finalizing the agreement for the project
15 March 2007	Sending out official invitations to study team experts
15 -17 May 2007	First study team meeting in Tokyo
15 -18 October 2007	Second study team meeting in Florence
November-December 2007	Finalization of all documents
January-April 2008	Editing, Translation, Final Editing, Review, Printing
May 2008	Launch of the final study report and documentation at the GNRC Third Forum

8. Supervisors of the study project

Ms. Farida Ali (UNICEF)
Mr. Atsushi Iwasaki (Arigatou Foundation – GNRC)
Ms. Agneta Ucko (Arigatou Foundation – GNRC)

9. Advisors to the study project

Rev. Dr Hans Ucko
Ms. Rima Salah
Mr. Peter Crowley
Mr. Samuel Koo

10. Regional input

GNRC Coordinators
UNICEF Regional Offices

11. Secretariat

Dr. Patrice Brodeur, Project Coordinator
Mr. Shahram Nahidi, Project Assistant