

# Most Vulnerable Children

Most Vulnerable Children  
World Vision Australia's  
Public Policy Position

# World Vision Australia's position on most vulnerable children

World Vision Australia applies the concept of the most vulnerable children as defined by World Vision International:

Children whose quality of life and ability to fulfil their potential are most affected by extreme deprivation and violations of their rights. These children often live in catastrophic situations and relationships characterised by violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, exclusion and discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

Child vulnerability varies significantly by local context; vulnerability can also be layered (children can experience multiple vulnerabilities concurrently).<sup>2</sup>

World Vision Australia centres its work on reaching and supporting the most vulnerable children and their communities, affirming that it is these children and their communities who can benefit most from WVA's support.

World Vision Australia views the most vulnerable children as key change makers and partners in their own and their community's development.<sup>3</sup> Through focusing on the most vulnerable children and their communities, WVA works to achieve the greatest change possible and the sustained well-being of children.

## World Vision's mandate to advocate for the most vulnerable children

World Vision's overarching goal is the sustained well-being of children within families and communities, especially the most vulnerable.<sup>4</sup> This means empowering children – especially the most vulnerable – with good health, spiritual nurture and the basic abilities and skills they need to be productive, contributing citizens and agents of change throughout their lives (including literacy, numeracy, life skills and vocational/entrepreneurial training).<sup>5</sup>

The World Vision Partnership works with some of the most vulnerable children in communities throughout the world. Consequently, World Vision, has deep knowledge of the needs of the most vulnerable children and what support the most vulnerable children need in order to experience sustained well-being. For example, World Vision works with the following most vulnerable children:

- **Children who have been displaced through conflict:** As a result of the on-going Syrian conflict, half of the 6.6 million people displaced inside Syria are children.<sup>6</sup> These children are experiencing multiple vulnerability factors.<sup>7</sup>

- **Improving maternal, newborn and child health:** World Vision's global Child Health Now campaign has coordinated and connected efforts to reduce preventable deaths of mothers and young children through mobilisation and policy action.<sup>8</sup>
- **Children who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the home:** Through its new Global Campaign to End Violence Against Children 2017-2021, World Vision Australia will be contributing to addressing the problem of physical and sexual violence in the home in the Pacific region.

The World Vision partnership is in the process of developing an approach to effectively measure its impact on the most vulnerable children.<sup>9</sup> World Vision understands that as it works to expand its focus on the most vulnerable children, it must take a rigorous approach to identifying the most vulnerable children, understanding their characteristics, collecting data and facilitating and listening to community feedback on its work with the most vulnerable children.<sup>10</sup>

# World Vision Australia's policy recommendations for change

## **World Vision Australia calls on the Australian government to:**

Place a central focus on children and the protection and realisation of their rights in its overseas development programme by taking a child rights approach and:

- ensuring it invests in programmes and interventions that will reach the most vulnerable children;
- introducing child wellbeing as a metric for poverty reduction through its aid development programme to achieve sustained, measurable improvements for child wellbeing, contributing towards ending extreme poverty;
- introducing and integrating a child rights mainstreaming model into its development aid programme, so that children and their rights are made a priority and to ensure the impact on children's rights of all development aid interventions is considered; and
- including and listening to children's experiences and views in order to support the implementation of effective systems-based responses (from the community level to the government level) to protect children's rights, including the rights of the most vulnerable children.

## Background

In While all children<sup>11</sup> are, due to their age and stage in life, at risk of their rights being violated, some children are at a greater risk of this than others due to the context they live in or the particular conditions or events they endure. This is the group of children identified by the World Vision Partnership as 'the most vulnerable children'.

The concept of the most vulnerable children helps guide World Vision to place special focus on the children and their communities who can benefit most from its work around the world.<sup>12</sup> This means that World Vision tailors its work towards the specific needs and situations of the most vulnerable children.<sup>13</sup>

World Vision's focus on the most vulnerable children does not mean that less vulnerable children are excluded from what we do in favour of the most vulnerable, but rather that World Vision takes necessary steps to ensure that the most vulnerable are identified, included, and impacted by our work.<sup>14</sup> However, reaching the most vulnerable children is an on-going challenge which World Vision continues to contend with.<sup>15</sup>

The concept of the most vulnerable children is not one that is defined under international human rights law, but one which World Vision International has defined. World Vision International's general definition of most vulnerable children is: "children whose quality of life and ability to fulfil their potential are most affected by extreme deprivation and violations of their rights. These children often live in catastrophic situations and relationships characterised by violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, exclusion and discrimination."<sup>16</sup> Child vulnerability varies significantly by local context; vulnerability can also be layered (children can experience multiple vulnerabilities concurrently).<sup>17</sup>

World Vision views vulnerability as a scale, not a permanent state of being.<sup>18</sup>

Four vulnerability factors have been defined to assist in identifying the most vulnerable children:<sup>19</sup>

- **abusive or exploitative relationships:** relationships which are characterised by violence or use of a child to benefit others sexually or commercially, or which consistently harm the child through intentional acts or negligence
- **extreme deprivation:** extreme material poverty or deprivation of caregivers
- **serious discrimination:** severe social stigma which prevents children from accessing services or opportunities essential to their protection or development

- **vulnerability to negative impact from a catastrophe or disaster:** natural or man-made events can seriously threaten the survival or development of a child, and certain children are more likely to be affected negatively and less likely to be able to recover.

The fact that a child experiences one of these factors does not automatically mean a child is among the most vulnerable.<sup>20</sup> Further defining who are most vulnerable children is context-specific and dependent on understanding the underlying causes of vulnerability, drawing on the knowledge and experience of local communities.<sup>21</sup> However, the more vulnerability factors that a child experiences, or the longer they experience those factors, the more vulnerable they become.<sup>22</sup>

## Children and Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA)

Australia's ODA does not include a primary focus on children as a cross-cutting priority focus, nor does it place a specific focus on the most vulnerable children. Where Australian ODA does focus on children, it does so primarily in the areas of education and health, in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>23</sup> The Australian Government does not, in its ODA, subscribe to any definition of the concept of the most vulnerable children, however in the Australian Government's *Strategy for Australia's aid investments in education 2015-2020*, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade does state that "Young girls, children with disabilities, or children who face geographic, ethnic or socio-economic disadvantage are even less likely to benefit from a decent education."<sup>24</sup>

# Key resources & references

## Key resources

World Vision International, *World Vision's Development Programme Approach*, 2011, available at: [http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Brief\\_Overview\\_Development\\_Programmes\\_1.pdf](http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Brief_Overview_Development_Programmes_1.pdf)

World Vision International, *World Vision's Child Well-Being Reference Guide*, (n.d.), available at: <http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/ChildWell-beingReferenceGuide.pdf>

Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, available at: <http://www.end-violence.org/>

United Nations Special Rapporteur on sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Children/Pages/ChildrenIndex.aspx>

United Nations Secretary General Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>

United Nations Secretary General Special Representative on Violence Against Children, available at: <http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/>

## References

<sup>1</sup> World Vision International Public Policy Positions on A Guide for Staff, 2013, p.18.

<sup>2</sup> World Vision International, *Compendium of Indicators for Child Well-being*, 2014, p.9, available at: <http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Compendium%20of%20Indicators-English.pdf>

Furthermore, World Vision International recognises that children experience poverty differently than adults due to their vulnerability and lack of legal and economic status in society. Children are a barometer of poverty and how children are doing in all aspects of their lives is a reflection of the overall development and health of families, communities and societies. Thriving families, communities and societies value all children, especially the most vulnerable, and protect and uphold their rights.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion: World Vision International, *Child and Youth Participation Strategic Direction FY2015-FY2020*, 2015, available at: [http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Direction%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Participation%202015-2020%20World%20Vision\\_1.pdf](http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Direction%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Participation%202015-2020%20World%20Vision_1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> World Vision International, *Building a Better World for Children: Child Well-Being Summary Report 2015*, 2016, p.2 available at: [http://wvi.org/sites/default/files/2015%20CWB%20Summary%20Report\\_0.pdf](http://wvi.org/sites/default/files/2015%20CWB%20Summary%20Report_0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> World Vision International, *Compendium of Indicators for Child Well-being*, 2014, p.9, available at: <http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Compendium%20of%20Indicators-English.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Syria Crisis Dashboard, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

<sup>7</sup> World Vision International, *Bringing Hope to Forgotten Faces: 2015 Syria Crisis Response Report*, 2016, p2 available at: <http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2015%20Syria%20Response%20report%20-%20Bringing%20Hope%20to%20Forgotten%20Faces.pdf> In addition to their displacement, many of these children are experiencing interrupted education, limited access to health

services, food insecurity, psycho-social trauma as a result of the conflict and extremely limited protection from harm and abuse. World Vision's Syria Crisis Response is providing a range of support to these children and their families, including but not limited to sustainable water and sanitation, psychosocial support and health services.

<sup>8</sup> World Vision International, *Building a Better World for Children: Child Well-Being Summary Report 2015*, 2016, p.3 available at:

[http://wvi.org/sites/default/files/2015%20CWB%20Summary%20Report\\_0.pdf](http://wvi.org/sites/default/files/2015%20CWB%20Summary%20Report_0.pdf) Over 30 countries have registered impact in maternal and child health policy over the lifetime of this campaign, addressing issues for at least 427 million of the world's most vulnerable children.

<sup>9</sup> World Vision International, *Compendium of Indicators for Child Well-being*, 2014, p.9, available at: <http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Compendium%20of%20Indicators-English.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> World Vision International, *Compendium of Indicators for Child Well-being*, 2014, p.10, available here: <http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Compendium%20of%20Indicators-English.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Defined under Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as being all persons below the age of 18. United Nations Treaty Series (UNTS) vol. 1577, available at: [www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx) The World Vision Partnership has officially endorsed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. See: World Vision International, *Here We Stand: World Vision and Child Rights*, second edition, 2012, p. 1, available at: [http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Here\\_We\\_Stand.pdf](http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Here_We_Stand.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> World Vision International Public Policy Positions on A Guide for Staff, 2013, p.18.

<sup>13</sup> World Vision International, *Child and Youth Participation Strategic Direction FY2015-FY2020*, 2015, p. 20 available at:

[http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Direction%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Participation%202015-2020%20World%20Vision\\_1.pdf](http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Direction%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Participation%202015-2020%20World%20Vision_1.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> World Vision International, *Child and Youth Participation Strategic Direction FY2015-FY2020*, 2015, p. 20 available at:

[http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Direction%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Participation%202015-2020%20World%20Vision\\_1.pdf](http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Direction%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Participation%202015-2020%20World%20Vision_1.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> World Vision United Kingdom, *Most Vulnerable Children: World Vision UK Programme Inclusion and Impact, Summary of Key Points from a Literature Review, Key Informant Interviews and Case Studies in Tanzania, Cambodia and Eastern DRC*, 2014, p.8, available at:

[http://static.ow.ly/docs/MVC%20Final%20Report\\_FULL\\_WVUK\\_June2014%20copy\\_2UnV.pdf](http://static.ow.ly/docs/MVC%20Final%20Report_FULL_WVUK_June2014%20copy_2UnV.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> World Vision International Public Policy Positions on A Guide for Staff, 2013, p.18.

<sup>17</sup> World Vision International, *Compendium of Indicators for Child Well-being*, 2014, p.9, available at: <http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Compendium%20of%20Indicators-English.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> World Vision International Public Policy Positions on A Guide for Staff, 2013, p.19.

<sup>19</sup> World Vision International Public Policy Positions on A Guide for Staff, 2013, p.19.

<sup>20</sup> World Vision International, *Child and Youth Participation Strategic Direction FY2015-FY2020*, 2015, p. 20 available at:

[http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Direction%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Participation%202015-2020%20World%20Vision\\_1.pdf](http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Direction%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Participation%202015-2020%20World%20Vision_1.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> World Vision International Public Policy Positions on A Guide for Staff, 2013, p.18.

<sup>22</sup> World Vision International, *Child and Youth Participation Strategic Direction FY2015-*



FY2020, 2015, p.20 available at:

[http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Direction%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Participation%202015-2020%20World%20Vision\\_1.pdf](http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Strategic%20Direction%20Child%20and%20Youth%20Participation%202015-2020%20World%20Vision_1.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> See Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Australian Aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability*, 2014, pp.19-22, available at: <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/australian-aid-development-policy.pdf>; and Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Health for Development Strategy 2015-2020*, 2015, available at: <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/health-for-development-strategy-2015-2020.PDF> and Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Strategy for Australia's aid investments in education 2015-2020*, 2015, available at: <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/strategy-for-australias-aid-investments-in-education-2015-2020.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Strategy for Australia's aid investments in education 2015-2020*, 2015, p.1, available at: <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/strategy-for-australias-aid-investments-in-education-2015-2020.pdf>