

Preface

PER MILJETEIG

This book is one result of a global trend that is not so much in the forefront when “globalization” is being discussed: the movement for children’s rights. Its roots date back almost a century, when the British pioneer Eglantyne Jebb in the early 1920s started the Save the Children movement. She also convinced the League of Nations that children’s rights should be on the agenda for international cooperation and spelled out in legal terms. This seed lay dormant for many decades, and sprang to full bloom with the International Year of the Child in 1979 and the drafting of the new Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The prospect of a new international human rights treaty addressing children’s human rights was controversial among governments, but it set in motion an engagement among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide. News about the negotiations in UN conference rooms spread quickly to interested groups around the world, and more importantly, these groups scrutinized the drafts and gave their feedback to the drafters. Some governments, such as the Brazilian, started drafting their own national legislation inspired by the budding CRC.

In the years since the CRC was adopted, we have seen an unprecedented early entry into force of this treaty. If skeptical in the outset, governments finally realized its importance. NGOs, both at local and international levels, started using it as guidance for their own work. At the same time they advocated strongly vis-à-vis governments to adhere to its principles, and vis-à-vis the public to make it widely known. Other groups were then inspired to take an interest in children’s rights. One such group consists of academics and researchers, particularly from the social, medical, and legal sciences. They observed that CRC posed two main challenges to them: (1) To help interpret the spirit and principles of CRC—both in general and in relation to specific local settings, and thus help the implementation of it; (2) To develop a research approach whose results could benefit children. They meant research **for** children, rather than just research **on** children. This research approach required an inter-disciplinary approach not commonly seen before. It also was very conducive to international collaboration. The establishment of Childwatch International Research Network

and the Scientific Committee on the Sociology of Childhood of the International Sociological Association are two examples of initiatives that are at the same time both the result of and contributors to this development.

Despite the very global nature of this new research approach, it was not very concerned with the effects of global trends on children and their daily lives. It has focused on certain issues of world-wide concern, such as child labor, street children, abuse and neglect, and children's participation to mention a few. Only in the last few years have we seen initiatives to gain understanding of how children are affected by global developments in general. What do the often dramatic changes in political and economic structures mean for children? How do they impact their lives and their understanding of their own situation? How do the less dramatic but quite influential developments in communication structures, such as e-mail and Internet, change the world for children and their access to information? Against this backdrop, a series of workshops was organized by Childwatch International and some of its member institutions. Scholars from various parts of the world were invited to share their views and discuss papers they were asked to prepare. This process also included people from disciplines previously not commonly associated with child research, such as political science and economics. They were invited to help introduce the necessary macro perspective and thus help expand our own perspectives. The organizers also had a "hidden agenda" which was to challenge people from these disciplines to take an interest in children's issues.

It is to be hoped that this book is just the beginning of a long series of efforts to look into global trends as they influence the lives of children, and seen from their perspectives. By being one of the first of its type, I also hope that it could help set the agenda for expanded international research collaboration.