What are the key principles in developing government's social policy for children?

Stefanus Sampe
(Political Science Program, Sam Ratulangi University, Indonesia)

ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to asses the key princssiples in developing government's social policy for children. Social and economic changes have affected children so much. This often threatens the physical and personality development of children. This needs the role of government to protect children from the social changes through an appropriate policy for them. This paper focuses on the key principles required to design government's social policy to children which are the children's need-oriented principle, the children's right-oriented principle and the children's quality of life-oriented principle. This paper argues that there is no single principle the best among the others because they each have strengths and weaknesses in providing properly basis for designing government's social policy for children. Government should combine three key principles because they are complement each other in providing basis for designing social policy for children. This study was conducted using literature review to reach its objectives. This study contributes to deeper understanding of the key principles in designing government's social policy for children.*
Keywords: *Children's needs, children's rights, children's quality of life, convention on the rights of the child, government's policy*

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper will answer the question on what are the key principles in developing social policy for children and examine the existing key principles which are *the children's need-oriented principle, the children's right-oriented principle and the children's quality of life-oriented principle* in developing social policy for children while arguing that no single principle is the best among the others in providing fundamental for designing social policy for children because each has its own strengths and weaknesses. These strengths and weaknesses make the government should combine these existing principles so that they are complement each other in underlying social policy making process for children adequately.

II. THE CHILDREN'S NEED-ORIENTED PRINCIPLE

This principle is mainly reflected from the theories of developmental psychology which see childhood as a developmental process of personality towards adulthood. In the developmental process of personality, a child has particular needs [1] which are different with those of adult. These particular needs should be progressively completed as a requirement to develop children's personal development into adult maturity.

Theories of developmental psychology which mainly influence this approach are 'theories of evolutionary development', theories of psychodynamic development and theories of cognitive development [2]. These theories argue that children are on the development process to be a mature adult. In the developmental process children experience an important transformation gradually. Children should successfully complete this critical transformation in order to achieve the fully mature adult. As a consequence, children who fail to fulfil these needs in the developmental process will experience dysfunctional personality in the future.

This children's need-oriented principle requires serious attention of parents and society as well to keep children can meet their needs. Children in their developmental process have needs which they should fulfil with adults' assistance. Parents and society play important role in guide children to pass 'the critical period' in their personality development process because this principle perceives children are so weak to complete their needs. For successful developmental process from childhood to maturity children are completely dependent on adults [3].

Social policy for children which adopts this principle focuses on children's welfare for which parents, society and state should makes an effort. This social policy is directed to support children to complete their needs for example providing education, leisure activities and playgroups. Then, identification of children's needs is so important in developing social policy based on this principle. However, this social policy still requires adults' responsibilities to protect and to meet children with their needs as well.

The children's need-approach this principle has criticism because this principle positions children as uncompleted person which is so weak, not autonomous and depends on the adult's guidance. This principle fails to explain survival strength of street children in Jakarta who live freely and autonomously. The street children

look after their brothers and sisters and even their poor, weak and old parents. Even still young age, they can survive and live in streets autonomously [4]. Moreover, it cannot prevent children abuse in family.

III. CHILDREN'S RIGHT-ORIENTED PRINCIPLE

This principle criticises the children's need oriented principle which positions children as a bunch of needs. This children's right-oriented principle is constructed by idea which perceives that children are human being as well as adults. As human being, children have rights which should be realised [5]. Recognition of children's rights positions children as citizens. This leads children are endowed rights as citizens [6]. Therefore, as citizens, children should be supported as well as protected by parents, society and state to realise their rights.

Children's right-oriented principle is brought into discussions in international level to get universal view on forms of rights for children. In 1991 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) identifies the forms of rights for children to *provision* which encompasses children's rights to survive and to get access in distribution of development such as proper health care, education and appropriate standard of living; *protection* which means that state has responsibility to protect children by ensuring facilities, institutions and services match with standards of safety and health; and *participation* which includes freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom to get access to information. Through this convention document UNCRC has set goals for designing policy for children [7]. Moreover, this principle provides opportunity to children to do things for themselves and to take advantages from the development process in their country [8]. Therefore, this benefits children in the countries which ratify this convention document because this can enforce the countries to do appropriate efforts to protect and to realise children's rights.

However, the children's right-oriented principle emerges criticisms. This principle is difficult to implement in developing countries because limited resources available in the countries forces the government to give priorities to other policies rather than to policy for children. Moreover, this principle is too individualistic in providing freedom to children. Endorsement of rights for children can lead children's rights constrict with parents' rights such as right to safeguard and social values as well. This principle can decrease authority of parents to look after their children. Whereas, children still need professionals to help them to solve the negative circumstance which they can face [9]. In addition, this principle is inapplicable for some cultures. In Africa children are viewed as components of a broader network rather than as an individual [10]. Therefore, this principle is not appropriate to be the single principle in providing basis for developing social policy for children.

IV. CHILDREN'S QUALITY OF LIFE-ORIENTED PRINCIPLE

This principle emerges as criticism to the need-oriented principle and the right-oriented principle. This principle offers alternative way to develop social policy for children [11]. This principle is built on the basis of theory of social construction which sees children's attitudes, beliefs and understandings as products of social dynamics. Children's attitudes, beliefs and understandings are reflected by their circumstances. Moreover, this principle sees welfare not only as material conditions such as, food and housing, but also how children enjoy their lives. However, this principle still requires adults' intervention not only to meet children's needs and to protect children's right but also to help children to solve difficulties which they face in their circumstances. So, this principle attempts to accomplish the need and right principles.

According to Roger [12] this principle is underpinned by two elements which are of resilience and children's view. Resilience is ability of children which is formed by difficult circumstances to face and to deal with problems. Parents should encourage children to activate their resilience by making them autonomous and teaching them how to build communication with other people. This is important to make children brave to face and deal with their problems. Moreover, parents should also listen to and appreciate children's view, even though it is contrary with parents' view. Therefore, by these elements this principle positions children not as weak person to realise their needs and right, but it makes children active to develop their personality.

This principle has advantage in providing basis to develop policy for children. The policy can provide a remedy to children which grow in hard circumstances such as living without parents and becoming heads of households to look after their brothers and sisters. This policy can help children who are affected by their hard circumstances and get maturity well beyond their age to solve their problems because this principle sees them as a full person. Therefore, this policy provides appropriate treatment for children to realise their needs and rights in a hard circumstance.

Even though this principle is more holistic and so respectful to cultural diversity [13], it has criticism. This principle would abandon children's normal childhood period. As children grow within adult circumstance without parents' guide, they are more likely to adopt adult life style. They are not aware that the adult life style is not suitable for them. They imitate adult attitude because adult persons surrounding them perform it. This would be a part of social construction process which makes children become adult maturity before their age. Therefore, this principle can make children neglecting their normal childhood period.

V. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that there are three key principles in developing social policy for children. These key principles have strengths and weaknesses in providing properly basis for designing social policy for children. Government should combine three key principles because no single key principle is better than the others.

REFERENCES

[1].   Rogers, W.S., 2004. 'Promoting better childhoods: constructions of child concern', in M.J. Kehily (ed), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, p. 128.

[2].   Rogers, W.S., 2004. 'Promoting better childhoods: constructions of child concern', in M.J. Kehily (ed), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, pp. 128-9.

[3].   Hodgkin, R., 1997. 'Effective government structures for children', *Children and Society*, 11( ):60-2, p. 62.

[4].   Rogers, W.S., 2004. 'Promoting better childhoods: constructions of child concern', in M.J. Kehily (ed), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, p. 130.

[5].   Klasen, S., ____. Social exclusion and children in OECD countries: some conceptual issues, Unpublished Paper, Department of Economics, University of Munich, Munich, p. 2.

[6].   Rogers, W.S., 2004. 'Promoting better childhoods: constructions of child concern', in M.J. Kehily (ed), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, p. 134.

[7].   Saraswathi, T.S. and Larson, R.W., 2002. 'Adolescence in global perspective: an agenda for social policy', in B.B. Brown, T.S. Saraswathi and R.W. Larson (eds), *The World's Youth: adolescence in eight regions of the globe*, Cambridge, 344-63, p. 351.

[8].   Saraswathi, T.S. and Larson, R.W., 2002. 'Adolescence in global perspective: an agenda for social policy', in B.B. Brown, T.S. Saraswathi and R.W. Larson (eds), *The World's Youth: adolescence in eight regions of the globe*, Cambridge, 344-63, p. 351.

[9].   Rogers, W.S., 2004. 'Promoting better childhoods: constructions of child concern', in M.J. Kehily (ed), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, p. 138.

[10].   Obibi, I., 2003. Slide in Presentation of Children and Social Policy 1 August 2005 by Dr Sharon Bessell.

[11].   Rogers, W.S., 2004. 'Promoting better childhoods: constructions of child concern', in M.J. Kehily (ed), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, p. 137.

[12].   Rogers, W.S., 2004. 'Promoting better childhoods: constructions of child concern', in M.J. Kehily (ed), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, pp. 139-42.

[13].   Rogers, W.S., 2004. 'Promoting better childhoods: constructions of child concern', in M.J. Kehily (ed), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, p. 143.