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Children And Youth

# SIMPLY... WHY YOU SHOULD NOT SPONSOR A CHILD

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By the New Internationalist team

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You might want to help a poor child in the Third World. But sponsoring them is not the best way. Here is an *NI* summary of the disadvantages of child sponsorship. Not all of

these criticisms apply to every agency. But all sponsorship programmes have at least some of these defects.

### Illustrations: Jim Needle



### FAMILY RIFTS

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Focusing on individuals often means that aid agencies arbitrarily single out children or families for preferential treatment. The chosen few may receive extra food, education, clothes, medical treatment and gifts which others do not. Brothers, sisters or other families become jealous. And parents can feel humiliated because outsiders are providing things which they cannot - or frustrated that only one of their children receives help.



## POLITICAL PAWNS

The way in which a child or family is chosen for sponsorship may reflect the political orientation of the aid agency involved rather than the needs of the child. In order for a child to qualify its parents may have to cease certain forms of political or religious activity - or the child may be pressured to take up activities like reading the Bible. This conditional giving violates the rights of the child to choose its own beliefs.

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## MAINTAINING DEPENDENCE

The sponsored child is constantly reminded that they are the 'poor relation'. They must always be prepared to show gratitude to the 'rich cousins' on whose charity they depend. The best aid projects foster initiative and enterprise in those they help. Sponsorship programmes always run the risk of fostering dependence.



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## CULTURAL CONFUSION

The exchange between child and sponsor can be culturally insensitive to the child's way of life. Children may know nothing about Christmas, say, but find themselves encouraged to send Christmas

cards. Imagine you were a Christian and a wealthy Arab sponsored your child and sent them presents and pictures of their sumptuous lifestyle along with a copy of the Koran to read.



## PERPETUATING IGNORANCE

Sponsorship schemes claim to offer cultural interchange between donor and child. But this is generally very limited. Letters from child to sponsor are usually censored to remove requests for money, complaints from disillusioned families and all mention of politics. Professional letter-writers and translators are sometimes used to handle the correspondence - or staff may dictate letters to children according to a sample provided in a manual. The donor finds out little about the child or its culture.



## DISAPPOINTED LIBERATION

Programmes which give education to individual children can isolate them from family and friends. They are educated to uselessness, unable to obtain well-paid white-collar work in their own towns or village and unwilling to do low paid 'menial' labour. As adults they either remain at home dissatisfied, or take their skills further afield, away from the community that needs them.



## FRUSTRATED DESIRES

Child sponsorship programmes can create unfulfillable desires and expectations. A child who learns of a sponsor's large house and reads about their skiing holidays or big cars can become dissatisfied with his or her own community and want to be taken away to that affluent world.



## WASTEFUL SPENDING

Child sponsorship programmes are enormously expensive to administer. The letters, photos and reports prepared for sponsors are costly and time-consuming. It is sad that so much must be spent for the benefit of the donor rather than the child.



## FOSTERING RACISM

Child sponsorship advertisements distort our image of the Third World and perpetuate many negative stereotypes. Children are depicted in deprivation and degradation, as passive victims whose parents

are unable to cope. All we see usually is one poor helpless child or family; we are never offered explanations of the causes of their poverty.



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