Introduction

Child Protection in Crisis, a network for research, learning and action, is a collaboration of humanitarian agencies, local institutions and academic partners working to improve the protection of children in crisis-affected settings.

The Program Learning Group (PLG) in Liberia was established at in January 2011. Liberian representatives from a wide variety of Liberian and international non-governmental organizations, the United Nations, government ministries, and community-based organizations, gave extensive input into the development of new learning priorities. The PLG is dedicated to research and learning that will inform child protection policy and programs in Liberia. It is meant to complement and contribute to other existing child protection bodies, such as the Child Protection Network, and work in close collaboration with government institutions and its CPC global network partners. The PLG has a Steering Committee whose members provide guidance on identifying priorities, profile and partnership development, program development, and resource mobilization.

Priorities

- Community Systems Mapping (formal & informal)
- Human Resource Capacity Development

Mission Statement

The CPC Network’s Program Learning Group in Liberia exists to create a safer and improved environment for children in Liberia by influencing the formulation and implementation of policies based on evidence-based research; promoting stronger collaboration of child protection actors to create synergies and complementarities; and institutionalizing child protection as a profession.

Strategic Partnerships for Change

The Program Learning Group has a vibrant Steering Committee comprised of representatives from UNICEF, the University of Liberia, Mother Patern College of Health Sciences, International NGOs including ChildFund and Save the Children, Liberia Government Ministries including Justice, Gender and Health, local NGOs represented by Don Bosco Homes and Youth Groups represented by the Federation of Liberian Youths. The PLG partners firmly believe that the leadership of the Steering Committee has the energy and resilience to tackle child protection issues with a holistic and systemic approach. Through the support of over 38 other agencies, forming the larger PLG and its Steering Committee, the PLG research results will be used to influence global child protection policy and practice.
Approaches and Principles

Recognizing that child protection is a crosscutting issue that encompasses child rights, social welfare reform and broader social sustainability, we address child protection from a broad multi-disciplinary perspective. The PLG in Liberia is committed to a field-based research approach, informed by demand at the national and community levels. The PLG has direct links with national and local networks, and relevant stakeholders have been onboard since the inception stage, taking time to understand the context and dynamics of the communities in which we work, thus ensuring a focus on the priority areas where research leading to change is needed. Research findings and outputs are shared with key stakeholders and are disseminated both nationally and internationally through policy briefs, reports and academic papers. Key partners in this work include government ministries, universities, local community groups, humanitarian and human rights agencies, the United Nations, and other intergovernmental groupings.

Six key principles govern our work:

• We are child-focused—putting children at the center of our work.
• Our approach is ethical, respectful, and based on the ‘Do No Harm’ principle.
• We value partnerships and actively involve these partners in our research.
• We are committed to supporting and developing national and local research capacities.
• We are committed to widespread dissemination of our research findings.

Critical Areas of Enquiry

Priority One: Community mapping (formal and informal systems)

The challenge
Community mapping in order to identify the various risks faced by Liberia’s vulnerable children is an urgent area of concern. The challenges include limited available data, lack of coordination and information sharing, and difficulties translating results and findings into policy. Child protection actors in Liberia have been tackling these issues and need a holistic approach to move forward strategically.

What we have achieved to date
The PLG has piloted a mapping project of community child protection systems; this will be used in conjunction with the work undertaken by UNICEF and Save the Children. The challenge

The PLG has piloted a mapping project of community child protection systems; this will be used in conjunction with the work undertaken by UNICEF and Save the Children. The PLG has piloted a mapping project of community child protection systems; this will be used in conjunction with the work undertaken by UNICEF and Save the Children.

What we will do
The PLG proposes an active research agenda on this issue over the next three years. With the findings from the pilot research, the PLG will conduct a nationwide child protection systems mapping and development project, starting with two counties to be agreed upon by the Steering Committee. The results of the mapping exercise will be used to guide the PLG’s efforts to strengthen national child protection systems and strengthen policy and practice.

Priority Two: Human resource capacity

The challenge
There is a recognized shortfall in trained social service professionals in Liberia, including social workers, psychologists, vocational counselors, psychosocial counselors, marriage and family therapists, rehabilitation specialists, etc. Especially apparent is the gross shortage of professionals with training in many fields relevant to care for deprived, excluded and vulnerable children. Instead, the sector is dominated by para-professionals, some with limited or no formal training in the social welfare professions. In addition, there is also a lack of knowledge in best practices and new social technologies, which affects the prevention, early diagnosis, and early management of socioeconomic factors that contribute to the vulnerability of children. Also critical is the fact that the sector lacks adequate capacity planning for the long-term development and management of its workforce. The pool of skilled child protection specialists and practitioners in Liberia is limited. While the need to strengthen local capacities in this area is recognized, specific competencies that are required are less well defined. Therefore a capacity mapping exercise is required, followed by the development of specialized training curricula to increase local capacities in child protection. The PLG includes the active involvement of two national universities, that will be involved in developing and delivering this capacity building initiative.

What we have achieved to date
• Training institutions offering degrees in social work (Mother Patern College of Health Sciences, United Methodist University)
• Degree courses in Sociology (University of Liberia, African Methodist Episcopal University)
• Discussions with the law school to include juvenile justice in the curriculum
• Justice institute courses being taught at James A. Pear Judicial Institute.

What we will do
• Analyze the child protection human resource gap; findings will inform next steps for best practices in Liberia
• Capacity building for Steering Committee members
• Literature review on the impact of existing child protection structures and interventions
• Discussions with the Ministry of Education and training institutions to include child protection in their school curriculum
• Government of Liberia to make special budgetary allocation for child protection resource training
• Set standards and procedures for licensing social workers in Liberia
Support Structures

Steering Committee
ChildFund Liberia serves as the PLG host in Liberia and is the seat of the PLG Coordinator and other CPC Network staff who visit Liberia to oversee the research component of our work and help move the program forward. The finances of our operations are handled by the host organization, in this case ChildFund, who will oversee finances through its fiscal management structures. It also has its own Steering Committee comprised of senior-level government officials, heads of international agencies, and prominent deans and chair persons of universities. The Steering Committee’s mission is to advise on the PLG’s strategic direction and promote its standing and wellbeing.

Global Linkages
The CPC Network is comprised of more than 100 agencies in 12 countries committed to promoting critical learning in the area of child protection. Through the CPC Network, the Secretariat is able to contribute to and draw on research and lessons learned in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. It also partners actively with other global actors and networks including: the Child Protection Working Group, International Institute for Child Rights and Development, Better Care Network, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, and the Global Coalition to Prevent Attacks on Education.

Finance and Management
The host agency ChildFund, through its fiscal policy and procedures, will manage all PLG financial resources.

Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 Year Annual Budget</th>
<th>Year 1 - USD</th>
<th>Year 2 - USD</th>
<th>Year 3 - USD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operating Expenses</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>175,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and Administration</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Projected Budget</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>160,000</td>
<td>225,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>