

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Child Protection in Crisis Network in Uganda is promoting new interdisciplinary approaches to addressing child and youth security and wellbeing concerns across a range of crisis contexts. Drawing expertise in humanitarian emergencies, HIV/AIDS, and abject poverty contexts, the CPC Network seeks to establish leadership in developing integrative analyses of critical and complex child and youth security challenges and formulating and evaluating innovative strategies to address them.

The Uganda Program Learning Group with support from Columbia University held an inaugural learning forum to focus on Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms and their linkages with the National Child Protection Systems of Uganda. This event was held on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> March at the Common Wealth Speke Resort and Conference Centre-Munyonyo. The two-day retreat brought together over 70 participants who included representatives from government, academic institutions, researchers, community based organizations, national child protection actors and International agencies. Special guests from the government of newly created country of Southern Sudan also joined in to learn from the Uganda experience.

### **Overall Workshop Goal**

The workshop goal is to take stock of our understanding of formal and informal child protection systems and to initiate planning for systems strengthening based in this understanding.

### **Specific Workshop Objectives**

1. To identify what we know—and what we need to learn—about community-based child protection mechanisms and how these mechanisms can be strengthened over time.
2. To examine what evidence is available regarding the viability of the national child protection system—and how its formal systems may be strengthened.
3. To prioritize knowledge gaps and human resource development needs as part of child protection systems development over time.
4. To build consensus on a learning agenda and sharing initiatives for undertaking national capacity development that will lead to improved child and youth wellbeing in Uganda.

## **KEY LEARNINGS/OUTCOMES FROM THE WORKSHOP**

The workshop provided reflective space where the role of research, human resource development, national systems strengthening and community action programs within a child protection development systems frame work was discussed at length. Important child protection discussions included identifying and utilizing community based child protection systems, lessons from informal child protection systems, sector wide approaches to systems strengthening, institutionalizing child protection and setting the Ugandan learning agenda for 2012-2015.

**Key issues emerging from the workshop include:**

- There is growing recognition among child protection actors in Uganda that system strengthening is needed for improved national responses to violence, abuse, and exploitation of children.
- Increasingly, government, civil society organizations and international organizations are moving towards using a **systems approach** in the establishment and strengthening of child protection system mechanisms. Guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the systems approach shifts attention to a larger systemic framework that includes legal and policy reforms, institutional capacity development, planning, budgeting, and monitoring and information systems.
- Child vulnerabilities are multi-dimensional yet global and national programs are fragmented. It is important to understand that Child protection is a sector in its own right, but to protect children effectively, it must be closely linked with other sectors. There's need to cut across the divisions that have been created between child protection systems, and address protection needs of children holistically.
- It is very difficult to go to the government to ask for funding, because thus far it is difficult to present concrete numbers about the number of children who are at risk and the number that have been affected. We need to be able to quantify the problem in order for it to get the attention and resources needed to address it.
- Integration Child Wellbeing Indicators into the Uganda National Household Survey Instruments and the upcoming UBOS research about the prevalence of childhood violence will be an important tool in addressing this gap, but once you know what's wrong you also need to know what's effective to address it;
- We need to develop universal best practices for addressing the needs of and protecting children, how can we develop this to ensure that the programs targeted to children and meeting their goals. These criteria don't exist globally yet, nor does it exist in Uganda either. **Something to consider here in Uganda is to develop a framework for assessing practices as good, so we have criteria with which to assess interventions.**

- There is a lack of funding to support research and building empirical evidence as people want to directly help children, but first you need to know what works before you can implement effective programming. **We need to get more coherent about learning and research in Uganda, and thus figure out a framework or agenda that each study enables us to learn more not just about individual people, but that builds upon the risk/resiliency framework.** Longitudinal research is part of this, research outcomes are lengthy and expensive to research, but can provide crucial information.
- In order to promote joint learning there's need for all actors to fully comprehend their role and responsibilities in the learning process. We **need to adopt a knowledge transfer model where government, civil society, and academics sit down together and try to figure out what we need to learn to better protect children.** Their needs to be coordination about what is done and what is taught and what is learnt, everyone needs to be in this together. The time to do your own thing has to come to an end if you are truly committed to pursuing a systems approach.
- Examining Systems puts child protection violations within a larger context of a range of interrelated factors, including immediate and underlying causes. A systems building approach to child protection is required, especially in settings where formal systems are weak and communities must assume the majority of the child protection burden.
- Mapping formal and informal child protection systems will provide evidence up which to base future programming. We cannot move forward to strengthen systems until we know what presently exists.

### **Child Protection Systems:**

- “A child protection system is a series of components (e.g. laws, policies, regulations, services, capacities, monitoring, oversight), organized around the goal of preventing and responding to protection risks, such as abuse, abandonment, exploitation, and neglect.”
- Building a system means enabling actors to establish connections between themselves around the domain of child protection to improve efficiency and efficacy. Definitions matter because they provide us with the common understanding of the subject and will consequently define the limits of the mapping and assessment of the child protection system, what falls in and what falls out of it.
- The way we define systems affects our work. Formal and informal are both part of the system and are both shaped around restorative principles and social rehabilitation. People often trust informal actors because they are closer and more applicable to the local context.

### **Community based Child Protection mechanisms:**

- The informal child protection system was defined as any mechanism that is not instituted by or funded by the government. These include, families, clans, NGOs, religious institutions, community groups.
- **The informal system** is: more localised, more varied in quality, harder to scale up, but do provide a wide range of protective support for children. Often resource constrained, and are more inclined to offer support that does not involve substantial financial costs. In Uganda there is always great overlap between the formal and informal structures.
- Communities have more trust the informal child protection system as opposed to the formal system. This is evidenced by the fact that 85% of child protection issues are handled within the informal system as revealed in the research findings;
- There's therefore an urgent need for investment in strengthening the child protection responses informal sector. In spite the fact it handles the bulk of cases; the evidence reveals that this is not necessarily done in the best interest of the child. In fact many times children are the losers in informal child protection system.
- Dialogue involving both formal and informal system is viewed as a key intervention to strengthen child protection systems. There's need to strengthen the linkages between the two systems. An example is community conversations that are working well in northern Uganda.
- There is a danger of over-glorifying informal traditional systems and ignoring their limitations – they are deeply rooted in cultural beliefs and value systems that are discriminative and abusive. Over dependency on community structures can result in underinvestment in the formal structure.

### **Income and Child Outcomes**

- Households with lower incomes more likely to report more shortages of food, more difficulty to provide basic needs. Children in these households were at a greater risk for abuse and emotional distress, often related to school drop-out.
- Higher income households were also more receptive to the importance of child rights.

### **Social Welfare Workforce Strengthening:**

- The quality of joint work between the child protection system and other systems is central to the effectiveness of the child protection system, since these systems also provide services to children and directly influence their protection.
- Many people who are part of the social welfare workforce in Uganda lack specialized training in child protection, and therefore do not have the capacity to perform the duties which they are responsible for.

- Social Welfare and Protection systems development critical for long term effectiveness and sustainability, but adequate time required for building necessary resource base in Local Governments
- Systemic constraints have a direct impact on service delivery for vulnerable children and families.

### **Institutionalizing Child Protection Capacity Building in Uganda:**

- Uganda through the Program Learning group has developed a national curriculum for child protection. Three different course levels were developed tailored to the specific needs and competencies of the target audience. This is being rolled out in different universities and training institutes.
- The Program Learning Group in Uganda is in the process of establishing a center for the study of the African child. This center will serve as a leading regional center for child protection research, piloting interventions and coordination of related programs for theory and practical use.

### **Three- year Learning Agenda for Uganda (2011-2015)**

Over the next three years, the PLG strategic direction will seek to implement learning initiatives identified by PLG members across crisis contexts including conflict, chronic poverty and HIV/AIDS to generate knowledge through research and documentation of good practices to inform child protection policies and practices. Specific priorities include:

- **Promoting Learning through applied research:** The PLG pilots new and innovative program interventions. It promotes learning through modeling these interventions and uses what is learned to replicate and scale up program activities.
- **Strengthening linkages and interface between academic institutions and practitioners in Uganda:** The PLG network is involved in the interagency development of child protection curriculum to professionalize the field of child protection and to promote the accreditation of the curriculum in learning institutions in Uganda. The network will collaborate with Columbia University to train academic institutions in research and evaluation methods, to build skilled communities of academicians.
- **Child Protection Systems Strengthening:** The demand for child protection systems mapping has steadily grown in recent years, emanating from a realization that informal and traditional child protection systems play a sustainable role in creating a protective environment for children. The Uganda PLG is supporting action research in selected districts on how to strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms by supporting better linkages with national child protection systems.

## **Group Work – Suggestions for Changes to the 3-year Strategic Plan**

### Group 1

- 1. Child protection should be a joint response and prevention system with other sectors (health, education, justice, faith-based institutions etc)
- 2. Standardization within country context of key concepts within child protection
- 3. Ensuring referral systems are functional resources (links to costing of CP system as a whole)
- 4. Platforms and avenues are created for children to participate at all levels (meaningfully by all child protection actors)
- 5. Determine value-addition for proposed research institute – what will it add that does not yet exist

### Group 2

- 1. Discuss the need to develop a knowledge management and learning strategy so we can figure out how to collect store and retrieve data. Make sure data collected is disseminated and used.
- 2. Mechanisms to confirm that learning is taking place and how effective that learning strategy is.
- 3. Strengthen capacity of academic institutions to do research that enhances child protection.
- 4. Develop meaningful outcomes indicators so we can measure change.

### Group 3

- 1. We need communication strategies to effectively engage policy makers in our strategy, and to translate research to policy improvement.
- 2. We should be looking at constituting a wider forum of agencies to create the PLG learning agenda so everyone has input.
- 3. PLG should engage at a wider range of stakeholders so all of them can participate and learn about the findings.
- 4. Interagency outcome study to document program impact – PLG could lead, document, and share

### Group 4

- 1. Research dissemination and application in programming, and programming influencing research and the use of research in advocacy and scale up of funding for CP work.
- 2. Harmonization of terminology and concepts of CP in Uganda. Including indicators and outcomes, and standardization of case management.
- 3. PLG should give guidance on ethical issues related to research with or about children
- 4. The meaning of CP systems in the Uganda context (formal and informal and how they can be integrated).
- 5. Expand PLG to include members from other sectors, including health, private sector, education, etc.

### Group 5

- 1. Harmony: After this workshop we need a common framework that harmonizes the system's elements and indicators.
- 2. Communication Strategy – we need to analyze what we do and involve all stakeholders and package the message for purposes of policy, practice and funding
- 3. Develop an effective national child protection system that involves the formal and informal sectors. A national child protection system should involve both.
- 4. Engage children more and more effectively.
- 5. How do we ensure that we don't only focus on response, but also on prevention?