Child Protection in Crisis
Uganda: March 2012 Learning Retreat

Community-based Child protection system mapping-A case of Lira and Dokolo in Northern Uganda

TIMOTHY OPOBO
PROGRAM LEARNING GROUP
Over View

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Background

• The research was carried out by 3 organizations namely ChildFund, TPO and Health Alert in Dokolo, Lira and Gulu districts respectively
• The above agencies are part of the Uganda Program Learning Group (PLG)
• The PLG is an Inter agency initiative that promotes evidence-based studies to inform policy and programs in child protection
• This presenter worked as the PLG coordinator
• The presenter thanks the PLG for the opportunity to share some of the findings of the study
Introduction

• The Agencies conducted an inter-agency child protection system mapping from July-August 2011.
• The research was conducted in the three post conflict districts of:
  o Lira,
  o Gulu and
  o Dokolo

in northern Uganda.
Purpose of the Study

• The ultimate goal of the study was to generate baseline information on key informal and formal child protection actors in Lira and Dokolo districts, their roles, and interactions within a child protection system and systemic capacity gaps.
Objectives

• To examine the role of informal/traditional child protection system in the protection of children from abuse and exploitation.

• To generate baseline information on current practices in responding to cases of child sexual abuse.
Objectives Con’t

• To explore how the informal/traditional child protection system can be linked with formal government policies and structures to better protect children.

• To assess the current levels of awareness on child sexual abuse and exploitation
Key Research Questions

• What are the key child protection issues as perceived by the community?

• What informal/traditional child protection systems exist to respond to and care for children when they [children] have been harmed by child protection issues?
Key Research Questions

- What informal/traditional child protection systems exist to prevent child abuse, exploitation, violence, and neglect from occurring?
- How can the informal/traditional child protection systems be linked with formal government policies and structures to better protect children?
Methodologies:

Ethnographic research methodology was used to explore communities’ perception on child protection issues.

Specific methods used included:

• Key informant interviews,
• Focus group discussion,
• Participant observation,
• Childhood timelines,
• In-depth interviews,
KEY FINDINGS
Risks & Sources of Harm

• Defilement, child labor, lack of school fees, verbal abuse and unfriendly home environments are key child protection risks.

• Poverty/Economic Difficulties,

• Cultural Decay,

• Conflict/instability,

• Misinterpretation of rights by children to mean they should do anything because they have their rights.

• Harmful traditional practices e.g. early marriage, witchcraft.
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.

Community level actors are responsible for about 85% of total child protection caseload in these districts, while government service providers respond to about 15% of the same caseload.
Informal/Traditional system

• The informal/traditional system is responsible for taking care of and mentorship of children.
• The clan system settles disputes, advise and counsel clan members.
• The clan system often perform rituals to cleanse both parties involved in criminal offences.
• Religious institutions instill morals among its members, sensitize communities on importance of educating children, and counsel families.
Informal/Traditional system

• However, they often work in isolation due to ideological differences with clan leaders in respect to handling child protection issues.
Formal Systems

• The formal system was defined as any mechanism that is instituted by funded or authorized by the government according to the law.

• These include the police, district courts, the probation and social welfare office and the local council system.

• The formal child protection system is responsible for handling serious criminal cases including sexual and serious physical abuse and theft.
Formal system

- The formal child protection system was viewed to respond to cases of abuse more than prevent / protect children from being harmed unlike the informal system that was viewed as playing both the prevention and response roles. Specific
The formal justice system does not adequately address the re-integration and rehabilitation needs of abused children and those in conflict with the law.

The financial requirements of taking cases to the police is a significant barrier to access justice by poor households.

Lack of guidance from adult members of communities significantly contributes to juvenile delinquency including alcohol, drug abuse, sexual violence and other anti-social behaviors.
Community members felt strongly that:

- Child protection issues should be handled by informal structures that seek to compensate, reconcile and re-integrate children into the communities.
- Government’s role should focus on the most egregious offenses (usually requiring formal legal proceedings).
- Reconciliation/reintegration of victims of sexual abuse in communities is needed to foster support.
- Community dialogue involving both formal and informal system is viewed as key intervention to strengthen child protection systems.
Recommendations

• Joint action oriented community meetings/dialogue with police, clan leaders, LCs, CPC, children and parents to:
  o Discuss child protection issues and concerns,
  o Generate home grown remedies to the problem of child sexual violence,
  o Demand for accountability and transparency from the formal system,
  o Strengthen linkages.
Recommendations

• Conduct training for children and youth in life skills to enhance self protection and to avoid risky behaviors.

• Adolescent boys in particular called for more guidance/mentorship from parents, teachers and male adults in communities.
Areas for further Research

• Prevalence study on the magnitude of the problem of abuse and exploitation.
• Handling cases of sexual abuse and exploitation involving primary care givers without doing further harm to children.
THANK YOU