Child Protection Learning Symposium

“Adapting a systems approach to child protection in Uganda: What is the way forward?”

October 2-3, 2013
Silver Springs Hotel, Bugolobi

ABSTRACTS
Child Protection Learning Symposium

Theme
The theme for the symposium is: *Adapting a systems approach to child protection in Uganda: What is the way forward?*

The theme is anchored on the key question – What are the gaps in the Uganda Child Protection Systems and how can these be effectively addressed in the best interest of children?

Objectives
a) To adapt a common understanding of what constitutes “a systems approach to child protection”

b) To share the status and trends of existing child protection systems in Uganda.

c) To jointly reflect on what is required to achieve a systems approach to child protection. This will include an analysis of resources, existing systems and capacity.

d) To map out the way forward in supporting the strengthening of child-friendly protection systems in Uganda.

Activities
*To engage on the theme, the Symposium will:*

- Convene child protection experts, practitioners, researchers, the academia, policy makers and government representatives to facilitate the sharing of innovative child protection systems initiatives, best practices, and research.

- Provide a framework for the adaption of a systems approach to child protection in Uganda.

- Provide a forum for dialogue and networking so that the opportunities and challenges in instituting effective child protection systems are fully discussed.
Foreword

Child protection systems have unique structures, functions, capacities, and other components. These are typically assembled in relation to a set of child protection goals. These systems have traditionally neither been the particular focus of child protection discourse nor that of child protection practice and action.

Traditionally, child protection has focused on singular issues, for example – child labour, children living on the streets, child headed households, violence against children, justice for children, etc. As a result responses to these issues have taken place in isolation without having a deliberate understanding of how they relate to each other and the overall child protection system. To illustrate this; a child who is abused by one of the parents and ends up with a broken leg; will be taken to the Doctor, who may focus on addressing the medical needs of the child without sufficiently dwelling on the non-medical background information to refer such a case to relevant service providers for further redress beyond the medical aspect.

The above example is a clear illustration of the complex interface between systems and the context. The line is thin, but it exists. A clear understanding of how the two interface is critical in being able to articulate a systems approach to child protection, which is a major factor that has been missing over the years.

Taking on board a systems approach means an internal critical review (taking stock), being clear on the boundaries (between systems and issues), understanding the external forces (forces against and the risks), and embedding in child protection programming the critical role of the informal systems. These are core aspects that this symposium will seek to address.

This is a set of abstracts of the presentations at the Symposium that provide learning among a cross-section of stakeholders. Upon the completion of the Symposium, proceedings will be prepared to further document the discussions and way forward.

We wish you all a very rewarding Symposium.

Organising Team
The global shift towards systems strengthening is now recognised and acknowledged as the preferred way to deliver on child protection goals in an effective and sustainable manner. Key findings from the interagency working paper on strengthening National Child Protection Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa have made the case for national child protection systems. Country specific initiatives and engagements as well regional and global conferences have further provided opportunity for reflections, experience sharing and learning on arguments for investing in national child protection systems as a critical contribution to an Africa fit for children. Yet the understanding of what constitutes a systems approach to child protection is still varied. Responsibilities for child protection components are often spread across government agencies, with services delivered by local authorities, non-State providers and community groups, making coordination between sectors and levels, including routine referral systems, a real challenge to delivering as one.

Whereas there is agreement that child protection is a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary affair that requires the involvement of everyone, there is no common understanding of what constitutes a system and adapting a the approach is largely dependent on the national context, the character of leadership and the willingness of actors to clearly define roles and respect the comparative advantages in a complimentary manner. A systems approach to child protection may mean a “process whose ultimate goal is to protect all children, unite all actors behind a common set of goals, and create a long-term response that is robust, properly coordinated, and adaptable to new problems” (UNICEF). Therefore, how the different systems and sub systems relate and whose perspectives or priorities should determine what to change, how to change it and how to train social workers to provide services with the goal of protecting the human rights of all children, needs attention.

It is necessary to identify those components that blend formal models with the informal, and be clear on how to recognise and negotiate the influence of culture and social norms on child protection systems building. I share reflections, experiences and thoughts on what adapting a systems approach in Uganda calls for. Patterns and interactions determine the outcome of a system and a systems change shifts the status quo by shifting the form and function towards set goals. The learning symposium therefore needs to stretch beyond embarking on a child protection system merely as a buzz word and break through existing paradigms to create the changes that establishing a functional system entails. This requires attention to legal and policy reforms, institutional capacity development,
planning, budgeting, monitoring and information systems. It calls for strong leadership by government through carefully delineated and understood referral mechanisms.

**Remarks – A Systems Approach to Child Protection**

*Prof. Neil Boothby, Allan Rosenfield Professor, Director, Program on Forced Migration and Health Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University*

While child vulnerabilities are clearly multi-dimensional, child protection programs have tended to be fragmented—dividing children into different issue areas based on categories of vulnerability, survival, poverty and child rights. Programs to assist highly vulnerable children are often fragmented by legislation and agency mandates. Separate, vertically organized programs assist children categorized according to the consequence of their vulnerability (e.g., HIV/AIDS-affected, exploited as child laborers, trafficked, orphaned, disabled, and displaced, including refugees). Interventions targeting vulnerable children are often similar, yet programs tend to focus on addressing the needs of children according to their category of vulnerability rather than building sustainable child protection systems that effectively address the needs of all vulnerable children.

In recent years, however, child protection development efforts have increasingly focused on systemic change consistent with a holistic approach to children and building on the formal and informal social sector workforce, including the shift in emphasis from service delivery to systems strengthening. There’s an ongoing shift to a comprehensive systems approach, drawing on burgeoning country efforts in numerous low to middle income countries, including most countries in Africa and substantial numbers in Asia and the Near East; Latin America and the Caribbean; and Europe and Eurasia. Many of these countries have launched or completed a mapping and assessment of their child protection systems, and some have begun to identify programs that might contribute to systems strengthening efforts underway in Uganda.

**Strengthening the Linkage between Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms (CBCPMs) and National Systems to improve Child Protection Programming**

*Timothy Opobo, Program Leaning Group Coordinator, ChildFund Uganda*

ChildFund and TPO-Uganda, implemented an innovative pilot project titled: “Linking Communities and Strengthening Responses” to address the problem of childhood sexual violence in schools and communities in the post conflict region of northern Uganda. This was in response to the fact that currently, there is
limited information about the Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms (CBCPMs) that protect children in Uganda. There are few guidelines, training materials and established good practices relating to programs specifically addressing sexual and other forms of violence against children.

**Methods:** At inception the project conducted a community mapping exercise using ethnographic research methods of participant observation, childhood timelines, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews, the project conducted a community mapping exercise to document current community-based and formal child protection systems that respond to incidents of child protection violations, including sexual violence, in rural locations of northern Uganda. The project also piloted different approaches aimed at improving the linkage between the formal and informal systems.

**Results:** One noteworthy finding of the community-based system mapping exercise is that 85% of child abuse cases are handled informally, meaning that only 15% of child protection violations cases in locations that were mapped are referred to social services and/or law enforcement. This finding illustrates the disconnection between the needs of children in communities and the accessibility and perhaps relevance of public services to meet these needs.

**Conclusion:** CBCPMs are foundational of a national child protection system for reasons of scale, sustainability, and systems building. CBCPMs offer a means of prevention response on a large scale to diverse child protection issues that arise at community level. In addition, they are potentially sustainable means of protecting children and promoting their wellbeing. Many CBCPMs are indigenous, developed solely by local people who own and manage them and work to insure their effectiveness over time. They are also important in building national child protection systems.

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**Pioneering Child Protection Initiatives in Uganda**

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**Child Protection and Advocacy (CPA) Project Model**

*Richard Wamimbi Wotti, Regional Child Protection and Advocacy Lead, East Africa, World Vision International*

**Goal of the Project:** Strengthening the child protection system (both formal and informal elements) at the community level, thus empowering local communities to strengthen the protection of children, especially the Most Vulnerable, from abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence.
How to achieve?
CPA uses a systems strengthening approach which emphasizes prevention, protection and response, coordination between sectors and integrated responses that can benefit all children and the most vulnerable in particular. There are four core components suggested in the model with guidance on specific interventions that impact child protection issues and child protection system gaps which are commonly found in numerous contexts. The four core components in the project model are: building community awareness and conscientisation; establishing and strengthening reporting and referral mechanisms; providing quality support to vulnerable families; and building children’s life skills and resilience. This project model is accompanied by a toolkit which provides further guidance on implementation. There are six steps for mobilizing the community to implement this model.

Target participants involved: Local CPA groups (Child Protection Committees) consisted of local level organizations interested in child protection (including children’s organizations). The CPA group decides on interventions and leads them based on the issues, gaps, needs and opportunities identified through Child Protection Assessment Design and Planning Tool (ADAPT).

Ways the CPA model contributes to learning or effective programming with the Most Vulnerable Children: CPA project model suggests a set of practical guidelines developed to provide a comprehensive framework for child protection work at the community level and creates an integrated platform for various sectors and units, such as Child Protection, Christian Commitments, Gender, Disability, Humanitarian Emergency, Education and Peace Building, as well as Sponsorship and Advocacy, to join efforts and resources for more efficient and effective contribution to the wellbeing of children, especially the most vulnerable. CPA model is intended to partner with Universities and Research Institutions to establish an evidence base for advocacy efforts at national, regional and global levels.

Outcomes/impact: Children, especially the most vulnerable are cared for, protected and do participate as a result of strengthened protective environment for all children.
With support from OAK Foundation, ANPPCAN Uganda is implementing a three year project that focuses on building and strengthening community-based child protection systems in Busoga and Acholi sub-regions.

Community-based child protection mechanisms have been recognized as an important way of mobilizing communities around child protection, and for preventing and responding to child abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence (Wessells, 2009; Yiga, 2010). Typically, community-based child protection efforts seek to enhance community capacity by expanding formal and informal resources and establishing a normative cultural context capable of fostering collective responsibility for positive child development.

This experience is focused on prevention work geared towards building the capacity of families and those caring for children to provide a safe environment through initiating parenting discussions, home visits to selected households, strengthening traditional support structures for children and linking communities with the formal child protection structures. The involvement of parents in the implementation of the project has been the fundamental intervention for child protection since parents guide and determine the child’s upbringing and welfare at all levels.

Key to note is that, the role of the informal systems in child protection has been paramount. Cultural and religious leaders have the will to support the intervention and have been cooperative since the project seeks to promote and build upon protective cultural practices as well as on the functionality of social systems both formal and informal. However, it is also acknowledged that there are capacity gaps in handling issues of child protection.

To create a child protective environment in the community we need strong partnership and linkage between the formal and informal child protection systems, with clear communication lines for referral in the child abuse case management.

This paper will share the experiences including, active utilization of the available structures and resources by the communities to address child protection issues, creation of space for voice and accountability within the communities on child rights issues, re-awakening of community’s opinion on child protection issues and positive parenting, increased reporting of child abuse cases among others.
Community based child protection is composed of different existing mechanisms/structures that support the wellbeing of children. The community mechanisms are essential and play different roles at different levels. The paramount role played by the government structure is that of policy enforcement, planning and coordination of services. The community level mechanisms such as child protection committees (CPCs) interconnect different levels of national child protection systems. They are significant in community education, identification of child protection cases and reporting of child violations.

In the community, traditional support structures are so helpful in family tracing, reintegration and social mobilization. Support from NGOs as a community based mechanism mainly focuses on response to child abuse. This mechanism plays a significant role in service delivery and capacity development. It gives evidence based knowledge management.

A growing body of evidence demonstrates how children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS and other challenging circumstances are especially vulnerable to abuses of violence, neglect and exploitation leading to the deep disparities that exist for vulnerable children and families in access to social and economic services.

The role of social service workforce is critical towards reversing the child vulnerability trends. Planning, developing and supporting the government and community workforce is a mix that if adequately committed to and resourced can support boys and girls to attain an education, grow sustainability healthy and generally receive their entitlements to live at full potential for improved social cohesion, economic growth, political, environmental and social development of the world.

The government of Uganda has placed the responsibility of ensuring vulnerable children and families’ access services with multiple sectors of government at central and local levels including departments of education, health, production
and justice among others. However the CBSD at District and Sub-County levels plays a critical role of ensuring equitable access to services for the vulnerable groups and ensuring that they are provided with safety nets to prevent and alleviate their vulnerability.

However, there is an estimated one social worker for 6,000 children in Uganda according to MGLSD Issues Paper 2010, compared to the desired ratio of 1:200, which serve a population of 6,460,000 million (38% of the total children population) vulnerable children (UNHS 2009/2010). The Issues paper indicated that 72% of the CBSD staff did not have adequate skills in social work. The same paper showed that about 59% of total approved Community Development Officers (CDOs) and their Assistant positions in the Local Government were vacant.

The USAID Strengthening Uganda’s Local Government Responses for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children (SUNRISE-OVC) project has for the last three years since its inception in 2010; skilled and supported so far 1,378 sub county-based CDOs and selected Probation and social service staff from 96% sub-counties in 80 districts (through an in-service training program using a nationally approved Practice Oriented Child Protection curriculum delivered by Makerere University Kampala). The skilled frontline workforce is now more accessible, relevant, effective and efficient in serving an estimated 5,500 OVC in each sub-county, sensitizing NGOs/ CBOs/ FBOs and local communities on child protection and care needs and services, coordinating actors responsible for child protection and welfare, maintaining and monitoring children institutions and foster parents, supervision and managing official data. SUNRISE OVC is skilling community para social workers in a selection of the project 80 districts (2,423 of them so far) to work alongside government probation and CDOs in communities identified with high levels of child abuse and neglect.

With SUNRISE supporting strengthening of local government and community systems to become more vibrant in priority setting for vulnerable children and families, coordination of service providers, increased OVC data demand, analysis and utilization, services quality management and leadership development among other activities, has been possible with 156,875 and 1,790,978 orphans and other vulnerable children accessed protection, legal support, care and psycho social services, education, health, food and economic security directly and indirectly respectively.

The project is flagging up expanded community and family capacity building for further commitment and support in creating a sustainable response to HIV and child vulnerability.
Child sexual abuse continues to be one of the top most serious crimes against children in Uganda today with over 7000 children being sexually abused annually. Often times, children who experience the ordeal of sexual abuse fall among the poorest of the poor. To find medical redress, such children normally seek services from public health facilities where services are supposed to be free. This study was conducted to assess how public health facilities respond to the needs of sexually abused children.

The findings of the study aim to provide a platform for advocacy geared at improving service delivery to sexually abused children who access public health facilities. The key issues addressed in the report relate to availability, accessibility and affordability of services and the capacity of service providers at the different levels of the health care system to address needs of survivors of abuse in a child friendly manner.

In the context of working under a child protection system, the health system is strategically placed to address issues of prevention through health education and response through treatment, care management and referral to other service providers for legal, psychosocial support and any other services outside their ambit.

Aware of the inter-linkages necessary for delivering a holistic package of interventions for child survivors, the study also explores how different stakeholders such as the police, probation services and informal actors work together to ensure integrated responses and continuity of care for child survivors. Addressing the health and psychosocial consequences of sexual abuse does not only call for mainstreaming of child friendly service delivery but also for coordination of responses through proper referral and feedback mechanisms, which are vital to building a functional child protection system.
Responding to Abuse: Documenting Children’s Experiences of Child Protection in Luwero District, Uganda

Dr. Eddy Walakira, Acting Chair, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, Makerere University

Objective: To present the characteristics of children referred to as part of a larger baseline survey and describe the responses initiated by formal and informal actors within the local child protection system in Luwero District, Uganda.

Method: 3706 children from primary 5 (P5), 6 (P6) and 7 (P7) from 42 schools participated in a baseline survey on violence as part of the Good Schools Study. Children were referred in a triage manner according to pre-defined referral criteria based on the type, severity and timeframe of violent acts they disclosed. A local partner NGO, itself a component of the local child protection structure, was responsible for overall case management and monitoring of cases, including onward referral to other agencies. The research team followed the progress and outcomes of referrals up to four months after the study had ended. Responses by receiving agencies were classified into 3 categories: ‘plan for action only’, ‘some action taken’, ‘no action taken’, and the appropriateness of responses evaluated based on our own criteria of which agency responded, timeliness of the response, quality of the documentation and final status of the case.

Results: 529 children (14%) were referred from the baseline survey. Girls were more likely to be referred and to meet the criteria for a serious case than boys. Only twenty referrals (3.7 %) were adequately responded to.

Conclusions: In our study areas, capacity does not exist to deal with children’s reports of abuse even though some statutory and non-statutory (mainly NGO) referral structures are in place.

Violence against Children in Uganda: A National Prevalence Study and Implications for Response

David Mugawe, Executive Director, The AfriChild Centre

Violence against children is a serious global public health, human rights and child protection concern. According to the World Report on Violence and Health, child abuse or maltreatment “constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.
In many ways, Uganda has made remarkable strides in child protection. The country has pledged its commitment to many of the international instruments put in place to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of children, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. At the same time, however, significant gaps remain between the laudable intentions of such laws and policies and the experiences of children growing up in Uganda.

According to a new desk review on violence against children commissioned by the United Nations Children’s Fund, violence against children is pervasive in Uganda, occurring in homes, schools and communities. Unfortunately, while the UNICEF review illuminates many aspects of this problem, the reported research is incomplete. The authors acknowledge that their analysis is based on an ad-hoc collection of studies, reports and situation assessments largely conducted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Uganda over the past decade, many of which lack scientific rigor.

The proposed National Violence Against Children Prevalence survey, to be executed by The AfriChild Centre, aims to address the significant gap in data and understanding. Using methodologies that go far beyond those described in the UNICEF desk review, the proposed survey will provide the first scientifically rigorous understanding of the magnitude and scope of the problem of violence against children in Uganda. Central to this work will be the implementation of a detailed field survey that will be conducted using the Sampling Frame and Enumeration Areas that Uganda’s Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) relies upon for its Population and Housing Census. This approach will allow the survey team to generate the comprehensive and quantitative data that is needed as a foundation to design and evaluate evidence-based programs addressing violence against children. As a complement to such efforts, the project will conduct a smaller but highly focused qualitative study that will flesh out key findings identified in the preliminary analysis of the quantitative research and which will help inform programmatic responses and expand on potential causal linkages.

By carrying out such survey, Uganda will address serious gaps in existing understanding of violence against children in all of its forms along with the prevalence data that is needed to create a strategic national response. The findings of the survey will also inform policy makers and donors with regard to the priority areas of intervention.
After years of investment in child protection work with dismal success especially in the developing world, the global child protection community is undergoing a paradigm shift from a focus on the limited scale, disjointed and often project driven approaches to child protection that focuses on building and strengthening national child protection systems. Whereas this approach is not new as such at a global level, for many developing countries including Uganda it represents something radically different. The systems approach is based on the recognition that the protection needs of children are multiple, multi-dimensional and complex in nature.

Consequently effective response and provision calls for interventions should be multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral, comprehensive, coherent and multi-layered. The child protection systems mapping exercise in Uganda was commissioned by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development with support from UNICEF as a first step towards transforming and strengthening Uganda’s child protection system.

The mapping process was largely undertaken using secondary data from multiple sources with a limited number of key informant interviews and thematic group discussions involving multi-disciplinary child protection actors and practitioners from both government and the non-governmental sector.

The child protection systems mapping report provides a comprehensive but synthetized overview of the current status of the key elements that make up the child protection system in Uganda. The report focuses of six key areas namely; the normative/legal and policy framework; the system structure, functions and capacities; the continuum of care; public and civil society accountability; resource mobilization and fiscal accountability; and the availability of data for decision making.

The report makes recommendations for strengthening and harmonizing Uganda’s child protection system in seven areas namely; laws, policies, standards and regulations; cooperation, coordination and collaboration; capacity building; services and service delivery mechanisms; communication, education and mobilization for change; financial resources mobilization and management; and accountability mechanisms.
Violence against children has in many instances gone unabated due to the limited access to confidential reporting avenues. In Uganda, many children are extremely vulnerable to varied forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of maltreatment and majority of these are unable to seek and access help. With support from the Private sector, the first toll free CSO Child Helpline facility was launched in 2005 to provide a confidential avenue through which children could report abuse and access services.

There is increased recognition of the Child Helpline as a tool for child protection and critical in reaching out to children in need of care and protection to break barriers to reporting and respond to cases of violence against children. To expand and guarantee universal and sustainable access to reporting mechanism, efforts are underway to transition the Child Helpline into a government owned facility. Mobile and digital technology have become increasingly important in the development discourse.

Practical applications for information and technology have been developed for a wide range of development issues including child protection. Part of the strategy to scale up the Child Helpline Service will involve the use of ICT innovations to improve the outreach services for children in hard to reach areas. The paper will highlight the importance of confidential reporting mechanisms in strengthening child protection response. It will further explore the contribution of the private sector in protecting children as well as opportunities for systems strengthening afforded by the child help lines at national, district and community level. It will also highlight the importance of multi sector involvement building and sustaining and effective child protection system and demonstrate the application of ICT for child protection though the helpline.
Critical factors Influencing Outcomes for Children in the Justice Systems: Lessons arising from the Justice for Children Program (J4C) Implementation

Lydia Namuli Lubega, National Coordinator/Advocacy Manager, Centre for Justice and Innovative Study

In a bid to improve access to justice, offer better protection and services to child users of the Justice system, the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) initiated the Justice for Children Program (J4C) in 2011 currently implemented by the Centre for Justice Studies and Innovations (CJSI) on behalf of the Sector. The program was targeted at two operational levels of the justice system, namely the national level where focus is targeted at improvements in planning and policy development, and at the sub national level where efforts are targeted at enhancing service delivery to children.

Using the highs and lows of program implementation CJSI, will demonstrate that service delivery at the sub national level depends on adequate and systematic planning undertaken during the critical government planning period. Increased supervision and monitoring at the national level increases outcomes for children. Noteworthy is that in order for the District Chain-linked Committees to deliver, child justice must be highly functional and with vibrant leadership.

The importance of age as a key determinant of services offered to the child by the justice system will be showcased including the role played by the medical personnel in establishing age where it is disputed but also critical in enhancing evidence of violence against children thus calling for a medical-legal policy. Informal justice will be showcased in involving child related issues as well as the necessity of timely and adequate investigations in obtaining justice in cases of violence against children.

Outstanding challenges and recommendations to address these challenges will be shared to inform further research and programming. A crucial recommendation is the need for intense nationwide capacity development of the all key stakeholders in the formal and informal justice system to deliver justice to children.
As various stakeholders grapple with devising strategies and approaches to protect and ensure the safety of children, a lot remains undone.

A recent study commissioned by Panos Eastern Africa reveals that the problem is partly compounded by lack of coordination and collaboration among actors. Further one major actor the media has been a missing or weakest link yet very critical in amplifying and creating/providing platforms that could address issues of child protection. This is partly because the CSO’s and government agencies do not understand how media works and the media equally does not understand the way government systems work and the culture of work by CSO’s. This creates a glaring gap in an effort for the various actors including media to work together.

As a consequence, there are fragmented efforts by the actors, blame shifting, finger pointing, less media coverage and engagement in child protection.

The study which was both qualitative and quantitative scanned the media environment, coverage of child protection issues, working relationship between the media, CSO’s and relevant government agencies and mapping of the policy environment on child protection.

The study provides proposals of how best these actors’ relationships can be strengthened and lead/contribute to addressing the child protection issues as well as increasing media coverage (qualitatively and quantitatively), it recommends among other intervention: media literacy for CSO’s and relevant government agencies, equipping of journalists/media with skills on how to cover child protection and understanding CSO’s and government systems among others.

This paper therefore provides the highlights of the findings and recommendations from the study.
The Government of Uganda is committed to ensuring the care and protection of orphans and other vulnerable children and has taken great strides in developing policies and programmes to address the needs of this target group. In June 2011, the government launched the second National Strategic Programme Plan of Interventions (NSPPI-2) for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children and has undertaken a review of the Children’s Act to make it more protective of children.

In light of the NSPPI-2 and the review of the Children’s Act, the government is taking a proactive approach to make bold reforms in the area of alternative care. This is in response to the increasing mushrooming of babies and children’s homes who operate outside government regulations and who don’t necessarily reach nor benefit children most in need of alternative care. Family and community support for care and protection of children which is prioritized by government is not receiving due attention in NGO and FBO programming with respect to alternative care, and guardianship orders are being exploited to facilitate inter-country adoptions with no real safe guards for children. Foster care and national adoptions as options for alternative care have also not been adequately exploited. Overall, the provision of alternative care is ad hoc as no continuum of care is defined, making the implementation of safe guards for children close to impossible.

The National Framework for Alternative Care provides the framework for delivering and facilitating access to appropriate alternative care options for children deprived of parental care in a way that addresses existing gaps. It among others:

- Provides actors at different levels with clear guidelines and placement options for children in need of alternative care based on a defined continuum of care for children in the country
- Institutes gate keeping mechanisms to screen the entry of children into institutional care, taking into account the continuum of care for children in the country
- Puts in place mechanisms to support existing government structures to carry out their statutory responsibilities for overseeing the care of children in alternative care.

The framework prioritizes child welfare interventions based on the principle of the best interest of the child, with the belief that every child has a right to a safe family environment. Children at risk of a disruption or displacement in their living
circumstances require family support interventions that prevent disruption or displacement from taking place. Once disruption or displacements occurs, care options for the child should be based on the continuum of care. For Uganda, the continuum of care for children adopted covers six core care options for children in need of alternative care moving from family reunification which is accorded highest priority through to kinship and community care, domestic adoption, foster care, inter-country adoption and institutional care along the continuum.

Implementation of the framework will provide input and oversight to the other care options such as national adoptions, foster care and inter-country adoptions which are currently being facilitated and managed by a number of NGOs.

Guidelines for the Adoption of Child Protection Systems

There is general consensus among child rights actors that the child protection system in Uganda is weak and at most, non functional in a variety of ways so as to effectively respond to the protection needs of children in adversity. In fact we need to ask ourselves if indeed we have not missed a step to talk about a ‘child protection system’ before paying full attention to the ‘sub systems’ that serve as building blocks for a fully fledged ‘system’ such as; a) the justice system, b) the child welfare system, c) the education system, d) health system and, e) the non formal all round system among others.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide a framework and/ guidelines for the Government of Uganda and key actors to follow in building a homegrown effective child protection system using the limited resources available. Particular emphasis is placed on the need to understand the nature of non functionality of existing sub-systems, and how success in addressing weaknesses in the systems goes a long way in helping to build a functioning national protection system. In addition, the paper underlines the need for careful planning, rethinking the institutional frameworks, actors, roles, functions, resources and other considerations.

Ultimately, building an effective system is a long term process that requires commitment by government and development partners, and using a judicious mix of approaches including the use of best practices and evidence.