WHAT ARE WE LEARNING ABOUT PROTECTING CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY?

AN INTER-AGENCY REVIEW OF EVIDENCE ON
COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD PROTECTION MECHANISMS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING ABOUT PROTECTING CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY?

AN INTER-AGENCY REVIEW OF EVIDENCE ON
COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD PROTECTION MECHANISMS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary report has been written by Mike Wessells, lead consultant and author of the full review (see the attached CD-Rom).

The views and recommendations expressed in this summary report are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisations represented on the Reference Group.

Cover photo: Members of the Orphans and Vulnerable Children Committee in a village in Zambezia province, Mozambique. The committee identifies and supports vulnerable children in the area. (Photo: Boris Heger)

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Community-based child protection mechanisms are at the forefront of efforts to address child protection in emergency, transitional, and development contexts worldwide. The mobilisation of such grassroots groups has become a common programming response in many settings, particularly in areas affected by armed conflict or displacement. For international agencies, they are a favoured approach in places where local and national government is unable or unwilling to fulfill children's rights to care and protection.

These groups are a vital means of mobilising communities around children's protection and wellbeing. Organised with care and in a contextually appropriate manner, they make it possible to: identify, prevent and respond to significant child protection risks; mobilise communities around child protection issues; and provide a base of local support and action that can be taken to scale through links with other community groups and with national child protection systems. These national systems include more formal, governmental mechanisms and also less formal, civil society mechanisms, such as traditional justice systems.

Although this approach is widely used and supported by international agencies, there is at present a lack of robust evidence about the effectiveness, cost, scalability and sustainability of community-based child protection mechanisms. This lack of systematic evidence impedes accountability and makes it very difficult to define

effective practices, develop appropriate inter-agency guidance for practitioners, and harmonise and strengthen the quality of practice. The lack of systematic evidence also impedes efforts to obtain the funding needed to support children's protection and wellbeing, advocate effectively for increased investment by governments in child protection systems, and encourage policy leaders to promote the most effective practices and policies.

To address this evidence gap, a number of child protection agencies (see Acknowledgements, page v) came together to conduct a review of the available global evidence on community-based child protection mechanisms and their impact on children's protection and wellbeing. The review is the first part of a two-phase process and raises key questions that will be pursued in the field research that will form part of phase two.

This report is an executive summary of the first phase findings. The full report presents the findings and methodology in greater detail, analyses more fully key issues and challenges, discusses a greater variety of case studies and models of promising practice, and explores the implications for national child protection systems. Annexed to the full report, is also a full set of descriptions and analysis of each of the documents reviewed according to a standardised matrix. The full report is included in the CD ROM attached and is also available at www.savethechildren.org.uk/onlinelibrary.

I THE REVIEW PROCESS

FOCUS OF THE REVIEW

The review focused specifically on community-based groups that work on children's protection and wellbeing and looked mostly at groups initiated or supported by external agencies. Only a small number of documents relating to groups initiated or run by local communities, without any external support, were included in the review. However, these groups will be explored more fully in phase two.

Community-based groups that work on children's protection and wellbeing are given diverse names, such as child protection committees, child welfare committees, local anti-trafficking groups, community care groups, orphans and vulnerable children committees, child rights committees and community watch groups. Not all these groups focus solely on child protection issues, and some do not call their work 'child protection'. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this review, they are referred to collectively as community-based child protection groups.

Community-based child protection groups are defined in this review as a collection of people, often volunteers, who aim to ensure the protection and wellbeing of children in a village, urban neighbourhood or other community – for example, a camp or temporary settlement for internally displaced people. These groups operate at the grassroots (such as village) or district level, although they are often linked to groups at the national level.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the review were to:
*   provide a broad mapping of the scale and coverage of community-based child protection groups supported by external agencies and governments
*   document common models and approaches used by agencies to establish, support or promote such child protection groups, including defining roles and responsibilities of group members and supporting training
*   document common roles, responsibilities and the key activities of these community groups
*   assess the strength and quality of the evidence base for community-based child protection groups, and to identify critical gaps in knowledge
*   synthesise the available global evidence on the impact, reach and effectiveness of community-based child protection groups in different contexts, including crisis/emergency, early recovery and longer-term development
*   provide a broad review of lessons on community mobilisation that can be drawn from other sectors, such as health and HIV and AIDS
*   inform the second phase field-based research, including the prioritisation of research questions, geographic scope and methodology.

METHODOLOGY[1]

Because much of the documentation on community-based child protection groups consists of unpublished programme evaluation reports conducted or contracted by implementing external agencies, the review concentrated mainly on this 'grey literature'. Lessons learned from the published literature were included through a broad search of the social science journals via the EBSCO database and other sources. Since this is the first global review of its kind, the review took a broad and inclusive approach across all types of child-focused community groups that address children's protection and wellbeing. For the purposes of this review, child protection was defined as 'from all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect'.

Having established a set of criteria to guide the search for relevant documents, Reference Group members collected information from different offices of their own and other agencies in 60 countries. These were then filtered using specific inclusion criteria to identify documents for full review. Once selected, each document was reviewed using a standardised matrix, a key aspect of which included exploring how the group was initiated and formed. This was analysed using a four-category typology developed as part of a separate project, the Inter-agency Learning Initiative,[2] and classified as follows.

Category 1 Direct implementation by agency: the agency is a service provider, and community members are beneficiaries.

Category 2 Community involvement in agency initiative: the agency is a promoter of its own initiative, a planner and a trainer, and community members are volunteers and beneficiaries.

Category 3 Community-owned and managed activities mobilised by external agency: the agency is a catalyst, capacity builder, a facilitator of

linkages, and a funder after community ownership has developed. The community members are analysts, planners, implementers, assessors and also beneficiaries.

Category 4 Community owned and managed activities initiated from within the community: the agency is a capacity builder and funder, and community members are analysts, planners, implementers, assessors, and also beneficiaries.

All matrices were then reviewed holistically to identify common themes. Some of the programmes that were identified as promising were then followed up with telephone calls to field practitioners.

THE DOCUMENT SET

In total, the review identified 265 documents of which 160 were fully reviewed. The fully reviewed documents included 130 evaluation reports and reviews of community-based child protection groups (referred to as the 'primary review set'), 4 documents from the health sector (for multi-sectoral learning) and 26 papers from the social science literature. Although the documents from the social science literature focused on experience in developed countries, they highlighted key insights from fields such as social work, community psychology, sociology and anthropology.

Of the documents fully reviewed, 60% related to groups in Africa, 29% to groups in Asia, 7% to groups in Latin America and 4% to groups in Europe. Two-thirds related to long-term development, 15% to emergencies, and 18% to transitional contexts. Almost a third (29%) related to the care and protection of children affected by HIV and AIDS, while 68% related to other child protection issues.

[1] For a full description of the methodology and the five stages of the review see the full report and the Appendix of this executive summary (page 20).

[2] Behnam, N (2008) 'Agencies, communities and children: a report of the Inter-Agency Learning Initiative: Engaging communities for Children's Well-being', pp. 12–19, Inter-Agency Learning Initiative

LIMITATIONS

A significant limitation – and one of the significant findings – of the review was the low quality of evidence regarding community-based child protection groups. In the absence of a strong evidence base, it is inappropriate to draw definitive conclusions about effectiveness, cost, scalability, sustainability or other aspects of community groups. Findings, lessons learned and recommendations of the review should therefore be regarded as provisional. In phase two, some of these findings will be tested in a more systematic manner.

The review is also limited by the fact that it looked almost exclusively at externally initiated or supported community-based child protection groups. Community-initiated or local mechanisms and systems of child protection at community level may be equally important. The geographic scope is also limited since relatively few reports came from Latin America or East and Central Europe, and relatively few non-English documents were reviewed.

2 THE STATE OF THE EVIDENCE BASE

Overall, the state of the evidence regarding community-based child protection groups is largely anecdotal, impressionistic, unsystematic and underdeveloped.

In the primary review set of documents:
- measures of actual outcomes for children were rare
- the vast majority had no baseline measurements
- 84% of the evaluations used only ex-post methods
- only 3% of the evaluations included comparison groups with pre- and post-intervention measures
- few measures of household and family wellbeing were used
- quantitative data were typically for output or process indicators
- qualitative data were typically collected on convenience samples
- methods of analysing data were seldom described
- many of the interviews and focus group discussions that comprised the bulk of the evidence were subject to numerous biases, which evaluators seldom mentioned.

In addition, very little published, peer reviewed literature was identified relating to community groups in low- and middle-income countries. This lack of strong evidence represents a low standard of accountability and limits efforts to improve practice.

Despite these limitations, however, numerous themes and trends arose consistently and frequently across a number of regions, agencies and evaluators. These themes related more to the initiation and activities of community-based child protection groups than to outcomes for children and the sustainability of those outcomes beyond the period of funded projects. The themes and findings presented are therefore useful provisional learning about the current state of practice and can help begin to guide efforts to improve practice.

3 WHAT DO GROUPS LOOK LIKE AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

Community-based child protection groups were found to be a highly diverse, adaptable and replicable approach to child protection in different contexts. Although the reviewed documents did not permit detailed classification of groups, two distinctions were visible.

One distinction was between child rights groups and child protection groups. The primary work of child rights groups was to raise awareness about children's survival, development and participation rights, to monitor and report violations of children's rights, and to advocate for improved policy and legislation to support children's rights. In contrast, child protection groups emphasised children's protection rights (which are a sub-set of all children's rights) and complemented awareness-raising, monitoring, and reporting with direct responses, such as mediation, problem-solving, referral, support for survivors, and development of local solutions to the child protection threats.

A second important distinction was between groups that worked on a broad spectrum of child protection issues and those that were focused on a particular child protection issue or set of issues.

BROAD SPECTRUM GROUPS

Broad spectrum groups had a wide scope of work and addressed a combination of diverse child protection and wellbeing issues, such as family separation, discrimination, sexual exploitation and abuse, displacement, family violence and gender-based violence, living or working on the streets, recruitment into armed groups, HIV and AIDS, and stigma related to disability, with the particular focus or foci being selected according to context.

These broad spectrum groups were usually called child protection committees or child welfare committees, and were typically made up of 10–20 people, most of whom were unpaid. Most committees included women and men, and some included a smaller number of children, typically one to three teenagers. In ethnically diverse contexts, they included people from different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups.

The functions of broad spectrum groups varied according to context yet typically were:
- to raise awareness about risks to children's protection and wellbeing
- mobilise communities to respond to and prevent those risks
- monitor child protection risks on an ongoing basis
- help to develop local solutions to problems
- make referrals of difficult cases
- organise psychosocial support for affected children.

Most groups networked with elements in the formal child protection system, such as police, magistrates, district- and national-level committees, and social services and education officials. Many also networked with elements in non-formal systems, such as traditional justice mechanisms.

A CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In West Bengal, home to nearly 7% of India's millions of child labourers, Save the Children helped to set up village-level child protection committees. Typically, the committees had 13–20 members, including influential people, parents, school teachers, employers, and representatives of children's groups.

The main roles and responsibilities of the committees were to:
- raise awareness about child protection issues, particularly trafficking, abuse of children at work places, and use of corporal punishment
- take cases of abuse, exploitation or violence to appropriate authorities or facilitate a local solution
- provide information about where people should go if they have concerns about a child's wellbeing
- disseminate information from the formal child protection system
- work as pressure groups for the appropriate implementation of laws and for improved service delivery by the government.

The committees collaborated with police, local government, the social welfare department, parents, teachers and children. They also connected with village children's groups, which enabled children to raise their concerns and also provided the child protection committees with information about trafficking ploys, child marriage and child abuse.

Over three to four years, the committees helped more than 1,200 children leave work and return to school, and aided the arrest of 100 traffickers.

Source: Save the Children (2008) 'Community-based child protection mechanisms: Save the Children's experience in West Bengal', unpublished paper

FOCUSED GROUPS

In contrast, focused community groups concentrated on a particular child protection issue or narrower set of issues, such as child labour, trafficking or HIV and AIDS. Typically, these groups consisted of 10–20 participants (usually unpaid), although in the HIV and AIDS work there were often larger numbers of participants in community groups, which usually did not include children. The activities of these groups varied according to the specific issues they addressed.

The primary functions of most groups were to:
- raise awareness about specific child protection and wellbeing issues
- mobilise communities to respond to and prevent those risks
- monitor specific child protection risks on an ongoing basis
- refer difficult cases
- organise psychosocial support for affected children.

Like broad spectrum groups, focused groups usually networked with formal and non-formal child protection systems, and they facilitated the development of local solutions.

Numerous factors affected whether groups took a broad or a focused approach. Externally-initiated groups typically reflected the mandate or approach of the supporting external agency, the results of a needs assessment, or both. Most broad spectrum groups had been initiated by an agency through a category 2 approach (see page 3) and were guided

to assess, respond to and prevent diverse child protection issues. Focused groups often reflected donor priorities, such as child labour, recruitment into armed groups or HIV and AIDS. Evidence from the HIV and AIDS area showed that community-initiated work typically focused on issues that were most visible and had awakened deep concern among community members.

There was some evidence that protection groups that had begun with a very narrow focus could expand that focus over time to include different protection threats. Whether and how this expansion could be intentionally fostered was unclear.

4 WHAT MAKES GROUPS EFFECTIVE?

The weight of the evidence indicated that community-based child protection groups can be effective means of improving children's protection and wellbeing in different contexts. Significant outcomes for children included:

- reduced participation in hazardous labour
- reduced trafficking
- improvement in the psychosocial wellbeing of orphans and other vulnerable children
- increased realisation of children's participation rights
- reintegration of formerly recruited children into civilian life.

SEVEN FACTORS INFLUENCING EFFECTIVENESS

Inductive analysis identified seven factors as having influenced the effectiveness of community-based child protection groups.

1 Community ownership

Communities that felt collectively responsible for addressing locally defined child protection issues and experienced a sense of ownership over the group's process and activities were more effective than groups that had less or no sense of ownership. Key determinants of community ownership included: acceptance of collective responsibility; agencies' patient cultivation of ownership over time; use of facilitation approaches that enabled community dialogue, mutual learning, and collective decision-making; a community sense that "this is our programme"; volunteerism motivated by wanting to help address a collective problem; and mobilisation

of community resources. The highest levels of ownership occurred among faith-based groups that addressed HIV and AIDS issues, and had initiated support for orphans without external intervention.

The manner in which external agencies engaged with communities strongly affected the level of community ownership of the groups. The analysis showed that high levels of community ownership of community-based child protection groups (categories 3 and 4, see page 3) was somewhat rare. The vast majority of projects had been agency initiatives that stimulated partnership and volunteer efforts in the community (category 2), but did not stimulate high levels of community ownership. Also, there was often a trade-off between ownership and the scope and depth of work on child protection. In particular, the groups that demonstrated relatively high or very high levels of ownership focused on a narrower range of child protection issues than were addressed by broad spectrum groups. This was true whether they had been self initiated or initially externally facilitated. Also, they tended not to address the more challenging issues, such as family violence and gender-based violence.

2 Building on existing resources

A concerning pattern was the tendency of many agency programmes to facilitate the formation of community-based child protection groups without first learning what protection mechanisms or supports for children were already present in the local context. Many programmes were initiated without a careful assessment of existing capacities and assets, and some were implemented in a top-down manner that left people feeling disrespected and that marginalised local culture.

A COMMUNITY MAPPING AND POSITIVE DEVIANCE APPROACH TO BUILDING COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

In East Java Province, Indonesia, the trafficking of girls was a widespread yet taboo problem, which communities did little to address in 2003. In a strategy to raise the issue and build community trust, Save the Children framed a first meeting with village development workers as a forum to identify and address general community problems. Having built trust using this indirect approach, they took three steps to get communities to recognise the problem of girl trafficking and to take responsibility for addressing it.

First, the village development workers mapped the entire village, identifying homes of missing girls or girls at risk of being trafficked. This mapping exercise highlighted the magnitude of the problem: 140 people were missing, and 90% of them were girls between the ages of 14 and 17. Seeing the scale of the problem, the village broke their silence and began to ask questions, such as, "Why do girls leave the village and not boys?"

Second, the village development workers identified positive deviants – girls who were at risk of trafficking yet had developed a positive coping strategy for avoiding it. Positive deviant families used strategies, such as engaging in diverse income-generating activities, helping their daughters to establish a small business to supplement family income, openly discussing the risks of working in the 'entertainment industry', and allowing daughters to work outside the village only after investigating the employer and kind of work.

Third, the community developed its own action plan. Community watch committees were established in every hamlet to monitor the brokers and traffickers and map the migration flow of girls. The community launched an anti-trafficking and safe migration campaign based on positive deviants' practices. The local government disseminated rules and regulations regarding travel documentation.

Two years later, no new girls had left the village to enter the sex trade, and the community had averted 20 attempts at girl trafficking. Also, the district government had committed funds to expand training opportunities for girls. Instead of it being a taboo, each hamlet held anti-trafficking poster contests.

Source: Singhal, A and Dura, L (2009) *Protecting Children from Exploitation and Trafficking: Using the positive deviance approach in Uganda and Indonesia*, Save the Children Federation

Numerous evaluations attributed programmes' limited effectiveness to their failure to work in partnership with religious leaders and other important cultural resources. A common criticism by community members was that children's rights were not part of their culture. An inherent challenge for all child protection workers is to work with communities in ways that respect local culture, build on positive practices and support the transformation of harmful practices.

3 Support from leaders

The support of non-formal and formal leaders, such as traditional leaders, elected community officials, religious leaders and respected elders, enabled effective work by child protection groups, since it built trust and legitimacy, and provided positive role modelling within the community. Leaders provided needed resources, such as land, and played a key role in mobilising other resources by, for example,

requesting the engagement of different groups. Leaders' support was particularly valuable in encouraging community support for child protection activities that ran counter to traditional practices, such as early marriage. In some cases, however, leaders' engagement was politically motivated or oriented towards maintaining power and traditions.

4 Child participation

In general, the level and quality of children's participation were low to modest. Although children were often members of community-based child protection groups, their participation was either tokenistic or limited by the tendency of adults to dominate meetings and decision-making. Where children did participate more fully, their activities, creativity and resourcefulness tended to increase the effectiveness of the groups. Children were highly creative in their approach to communicating essential messages, as they engaged other children through drama, radio broadcasts, role plays and talk shows. Although only a small number of programmes achieved genuine child participation and enjoyed discernible improvements in child protection as a result, these findings offer encouragement in the pursuit of the long-term goal of fulfilling children's participation rights.

5 Management of issues of power, diversity and inclusivity

Effective community-based child protection groups tended to be those made up of both women and men, and in which representatives of diverse groups – including very poor and marginalised people – shared power in the discussions, decision-making

THE VALUE OF CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES – RISK MAPPING IN AFGHANISTAN

In northern Afghanistan in 2003–05, ChildFund Afghanistan used a child participatory approached in setting up child wellbeing committees in 150 villages. In each village, two groups (one for boys and one for girls), each with approximately ten children aged between 7 and 13, drew maps of their villages showing all the dwellings and geographic landmarks, and also the places that were dangerous or where accidents happened to children.

To communicate the results to the village, the children prioritised the risks and put on plays demonstrating the dangers they had identified. The children identified risks that differed from what adults had anticipated. In one village, boys identified uncovered wells as a risk, since a young boy had recently fallen into one and died. Animated by discussion of this incident, village members took action the following day, collecting scraps of wood and covering the wells, without asking for support from the NGO.

Amid the excitement and interest generated by the children's performances, Afghan staff facilitated a dialogue about establishing a local committee to help the village address the risks. Villagers decided to set up child wellbeing committees and selected members, including children. Subsequently the committees became active in mobilising their communities around issues of healthcare, hygiene, non-formal education and forced early marriage.

Sources: Kostelny (2006) 'Child Fund NGO Consortium for the Psychosocial Care and Protection of Children, October 2004–September 2007: internal evaluation', unpublished report

and work of the group. In general, few programmes appeared to have managed these issues well, and those that managed it did so through ongoing capacity building and the investment of significant amounts of time and energy. More typically, programmes made modest efforts to be inclusive and to balance power across groups. These efforts were often outweighed by entrenched social divisions, as men tended to dominate over women and adults tended to dominate over children in the discussions and decision-making.

6 Resources

To be effective, community-based child protection groups needed a mixture of human and material resources. The few documents reviewed that looked at community-initiated groups showed that they received resources, such as land for gardens, through grants from the local chief. Because most reviewed documents were from international agencies, they focused on resources provided by those agencies rather than by the government or local leaders. This raises the important question whether work on externally supported community-based child protection groups created systems parallel to those organised by governments or civil society.

Most groups received limited training that lacked appropriate depth and quality, and participants often requested additional training. Needed materials included items such as bicycles, which enable volunteers to go long distances to reach affected areas. Materials also included stipends to support volunteers whose work in child

PROMISING PRACTICE: COMBATING CHILD LABOUR THROUGH EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

The review identified many promising models of community-based child protection groups, including one that used education to combat child labour in the Philippines.

The World Vision/Philippines ABK Project (ABK stands for 'Education for Children's Future'), set out to change attitudes towards child labour, which, in the Philippines, was seen as normal. The pressure to work and earn money for the family – often in hazardous conditions – meant that school attendance rates were low.

The project helped to set up community watch groups (CWGs), made up of local leaders, parents, teachers and others chosen by the communities. The voluntary CWG members received training in children's rights and on child labour and helped to identify child participants who were engaged in dangerous work and who did not attend school regularly. They monitored whether children were in school, and persuaded parents to stop their children doing dangerous work and let them go to school. They also worked with local schools and officials, who took steps to ensure appropriate quality of education. Several CWGs became integrated into the official *barangay* (local government) structure, thereby making them sustainable.

The project achieved impressive results. Nearly 17,000 girls and boys gave up doing hazardous work – such as making fireworks (usually at home), harvesting sugar cane, deep sea fishing and sex work – and began attending school regularly.

Source: World Vision, Independent final evaluation of 'Combating Child Labour through Education in the Philippines: ABK Project', World Vision, unpublished

protection groups took time away from activities needed to feed their families. However, stipends tended to undermine volunteerism if they were large or introduced too early, suggesting that whether and how to provide stipends is highly contextual. In addition, stipends were viewed as undermining the sense of community ownership.

7 Linkages

Linkages with formal systems were instrumental both in supporting the work of community-based groups and in expanding their reach and scope of impact. Groups were often linked with district-level child protection networks that helped to mobilise resources and enable effective referrals, and, through the formal protection system, with the police and justice system. Linkages with

non-formal systems, such as traditional justice systems and religious groups, were highly valuable in engaging local networks, building trust and filling gaps in places where the government was absent or had little capacity.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: 'DO NO HARM' ISSUES

Child protection work can have unintended consequences, some of which are harmful. Throughout the child protection sector, the risks of unintentional harm are increased by the lack of a strong evidence base that indicates which interventions are effective and what negative effects interventions may have.

'DO NO HARM' ISSUES AND STANDARD SETTING IN NORTHERN UGANDA

Child protection committees (CPCs) became a popular means of supporting children affected by the long-running armed conflict in northern Uganda. In less than a year in 2005–06, more than 130 CPCs were established. This rapid expansion raised concerns that the CPCs might not have the support, capacity, coordination and structure needed to actually protect children. In 2007, an inter-agency review was conducted to take stock of the work being done by the CPCs and to develop means of supporting and improving the quality of their work.

The review identified numerous 'do no harm' issues facing the CPCs, including:
• little or no child protection policies or codes of conduct for CPC members

• risky actions by CPC members, for example, housing children within CPC members' homes
• members overstepping appropriate roles
• poor coordination of CPCs
• the replacing and breaking down of parental responsibility.

At a workshop conducted as part of the review, agencies agreed to develop inter-agency minimum standards and good practice principles for community-based child protection structures. The review was an important step towards the development of national guidelines that could strengthen practice and limit unintended harm.

Source: Lenz, J (2007) 'An Inter-Agency Child Protection Committee review in Acholi, Lango and Teso regions in Uganda: findings, recommendations and the way forward', IASC Child Protection Sub-Cluster in Uganda

In the review, inadvertent harm was sometimes associated with excessive targeting of particular categories of vulnerable children, such as orphans or formerly recruited children, and also with perverse incentives. Unintended negative consequences were also caused by inadequate training. In some cases, community-based child protection groups understood their role but lacked the skills needed to carry it out effectively. In other cases, the groups lacked a clear understanding of their role and overstepped boundaries. Some groups, for example, operated without an appropriate code of conduct.

Another problem was the imposition of external concepts and approaches, particularly through the use of didactic, top-down approaches. This imposition often triggered a backlash or left communities feeling that their own beliefs, practices and resources had been disrespected and marginalised. There was also a risk that externally initiated child protection groups had weakened or undermined indigenous supports that had already been present in the communities.

5 SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

ACHIEVING SCALE

As used in the review, a 'scalable intervention' is one that achieves positive outcomes for relatively large numbers of children and over a wider geographic area beyond a particular community. The evidence in the review suggests that community-based child protection groups are a scalable means of benefiting significant numbers of at-risk children. In emergency, transitional and development contexts, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) often took programmes to scale by expanding their geographic scope of coverage. A commonly used approach was to facilitate the establishment of community-based child protection groups in one region first, and then extend this approach to a wider area that included greater numbers of communities and people.

In work on HIV and AIDS, a frequently used means of scaling up has been the mobilisation of district- and higher-level groups that work with many different partners who can reach down into communities on a significant scale. This social mobilisation approach, which entails extensive capacity building, networking, managing of sub-grants, and strengthening of child supportive policies, has yielded positive results. This approach was particularly effective when it was used to support the work of pre-existing child protection groups that are community initiated and owned. A third approach for achieving scale was to develop child protection networks that were part of non-governmental or governmental systems that had broad reach.

SUSTAINABILITY

The review explored two, inter-related aspects of sustainability: outcome and process sustainability. Outcome sustainability refers to the continuation of positive child protection outcomes beyond the externally funded period, whereas process sustainability refers to the continuation of child-focused community groups or related community mechanisms beyond the externally funded period. Although the sustainability of outcomes is of primary interest, sustaining process is also important because, in many contexts, communities need a means of achieving child protection and wellbeing.

Achieving sustainability emerged as a significant challenge for many community-based child protection groups, many of which collapsed at the end of the externally funded period. In general, the same factors that increased the effectiveness of the groups also contributed to the sustainability both of the groups and of positive outcomes for children. By far the most important enabler of sustainability was community ownership. Impressive levels of sustainability in the HIV and AIDS area, for example, came through the unpaid efforts of faith-based organisations.

Building on existing community resources also boosted sustainability. Community-based child protection groups that included or worked in partnership with religious and traditional leaders, and that activated pre-existing local groups and

networks – such as women's and youth groups – tended to be more sustainable. Another effective sustainability strategy was to integrate community-based child protection groups into government structures. A trade-off, however, was that in some cases communities viewed government structures as impositions, and this limited the level of community ownership and the effectiveness of the groups.

Issues of funding and the use of stipends also affected sustainability. Two widespread donor practices – the provision of short-term funding and rapid, ill-timed infusion of large amounts of money into communities – impeded sustainability. A significant question is whether the provision of stipends by international NGOs may impede the formation of national child protection systems if governments cannot afford to continue paying the stipends.

6 CHALLENGES AND GAPS

CHALLENGES

The review identified six significant challenges that need to be addressed effectively in order to maximise the contributions of community-based child protection groups to children's protection and wellbeing. These challenges are to:

1 **Strengthen the evidence by regularly conducting systematic, ethically appropriate evaluations** of how the actions of community-based child protection groups influence children's protection and wellbeing. This will require a focus on sustainable outcomes for children, capacity building for staff and community workers, and careful attention to the 'do no harm' issues associated with evaluation and research activities.

2 **Enable community-based child protection groups to fulfill appropriate roles and responsibilities**. Addressing this challenge requires:
   - a clear definition of roles and responsibilities of such groups
   - not asking groups to take on too much or to assume contradictory roles, such as control-oriented roles versus help-oriented roles
   - helping groups to understand their place in the child protection system
   - providing the training needed to perform multiple functions well
   - attending to children's roles, striking an appropriate balance between respecting their participation rights and burdening children with excessive responsibilities.

3 **Produce sustainable, positive outcomes in regard to a broad spectrum of child protection issues**. This requires donors and agencies to decrease the emphasis on short-term results. It also entails developing means of enabling community-owned groups to address a wider array of issues than they have addressed previously. A high priority is to link with and build the capacity of national child protection systems, avoiding the creation of parallel systems.

4 **Take a respectful approach to child protection work at community level**. In place of the didactic, top-down approaches that are often used in addressing sensitive issues, it is essential to enable genuine dialogue and critical reflection on difficult issues, listen to and learn from communities, build on local assets and cultural practices, and introduce children's rights concepts in a manner that does not impose outsider approaches.

5 **Facilitate community ownership of community-based child protection groups, even during emergencies**. This will require management of the pressures for immediate results, which make it difficult to take the slower approach that is needed to build ownership, and deliberate planning for transition and longer-term work. It also requires the development and testing of ways of progressively handing over responsibility and decision-making authority to the community.

6 **Change donor and agency practices in regard to the amount, structure and orientation of funding for community-based child protection groups**. It is essential

that the funding be long term and oriented towards supporting community ownership. Also, the following negative practices should be ended: injecting too much funding into communities prematurely and too rapidly; excessive targeting of predefined categories of children; and the use of stigmatising labels.

GAPS

The review identified numerous gaps or areas in which there was a relative lack of child protection work by community-based child protection groups.

On the whole, community-based child protection groups were used more widely in rural settings than in the urban areas that are home to a rapidly increasing percentage of the global population.

Significant gaps in the levels of protection offered to children by the groups studied in the review included a relative lack of focus on:
• gender-based violence and family violence
• protection of young children
• provision of psychosocial support.

The latter was much more central in work on HIV and AIDS than in wider work on child protection.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the quality and sustainability of their practice, **practitioners** should:
- make systematic programme evaluation and programme learning high priorities
- develop and widely disseminate user-friendly, child-focused tools that facilitate systematic evaluation
- conduct all work on community-based child protection groups in a manner that supports the strengthening of national child protection systems
- use a dialogue-oriented, culturally sensitive approach to facilitate and support the work of community-based child protection groups
- plan for and take steps to promote sustainability, helping to build durable national systems of child protection
- develop improved systems of training and capacity-building, including follow-up support and ongoing supervision
- promote genuine child participation
- manage effectively issues of power, diversity and tolerance
- fill the identified programme gaps on gender-based violence (GBV), family violence, protection of young children, and provision of psychosocial support
- embed child protection supports within wider community development processes
- place greater emphasis on doing no harm, avoiding problems such as the creation of parallel systems and excessive targeting of specific groups of at-risk children.

In order to enable the above, **donors** in particular should:
- require and fund systematic, robust evaluation of their programmes that involve community-based child protection groups
- support longer-term funding that will enable the development of community-owned child protection groups
- avoid the use of stigmatising labels such as 'OVC' (orphans and vulnerable children)
- avoid excessive targeting of particular categories of at-risk children
- avoid the infusion of large sums of money into a community, particularly at an early stage before a sense of local ownership has developed.

These observations and recommendations are offered with the sincere aim of strengthening community mechanisms, processes and structures that support children's protection and wellbeing.

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

Since this is the first global review of its kind, the review took a broad approach and sought to learn from the work of all child-focused community groups that address children's protection and wellbeing. The review proceeded in five stages.

STAGE 1

The Reference Group established broad inclusion criteria to guide the search for relevant documents. For purposes of focus and manageability, the search included only:

- documents that are evaluations, documentations or reviews, including broader reviews across several countries as well as evaluations of particular projects within a single country. Excluded were manuals, toolkits, 'how to' guides, and general monitoring reports or programme descriptions with no evaluation
- English, Spanish and French language documents
- documents written in the past ten years.

Using these parameters, the Reference Group members collected evaluation reports from many different offices of their own agencies and other agencies, and forwarded documents to the lead consultant.

STAGE 2

The review team used specific inclusion/exclusion criteria to select which of the received documents would undergo full review.

The documents selected pertained to:
- groups at the community and district level (but excluded groups at the national level)
- groups that are focused on children's (under 18 years) protection issues, excluding groups focused on adult protection issues only
- groups whose role consists wholly or in part of caring for and protecting children, and supporting broader wellbeing outcomes for children. (This includes multi-purpose groups that promote birth registration, access to education, access to and quality of healthcare, that support child-headed households, and that provide counseling and mediation, among others.)
- community-based child protection approaches that involve at least one or two community volunteers (eg, focal points for gender-based violence (GBV)), as well as approaches that are based on larger community groups.

In applying these criteria, the lead consultant took an inclusive approach. Of 265 identified documents, 105 were filtered out, mainly because they were how-to manuals, general programme descriptions, monitoring reports or duplicates of already selected documents.

The reviewed documents included selected items from the social science literature search. Although these papers focused on Northern contexts, they highlighted key insights from fields such as social work, community psychology, sociology and anthropology. To enable multi-sectoral learning, the review team also selected a small number of reviews and evaluation reports from the health sector.

STAGE 3

Each selected document was reviewed using a matrix that included five categories of information:

(a) document description (eg, title, source, language, publication status, project name, intervention context)

(b) description and analysis of the community-based child protection group or groups (eg, processes of group formation and participant selection, form, functions and role, resourcing (training, material, financial), activities, and linkages with formal and nonformal child protection systems)

(c) evaluation methodology (eg, design, qualitative and/or quantitative methods used, kind of outcomes measures used)

(d) key findings/lessons (eg, demonstrated outcomes (positive or negative) on children and communities, prerequisite factors and conditions for successful impact, effects of the mode of community engagement, sustainability)

(e) comments (eg, on quality of methodology, cautions in interpreting data).

A key aspect of each document that was explored was how the community group was initiated and formed. This aspect was analysed using a four-category typology developed as part of a separate project: the Interagency Learning Initiative.[1] These approaches and the roles of external agencies and community members within them are:

Category 1 Direct implementation by agency: the agency is a service provider, and community members are beneficiaries.

Category 2 Community involvement in agency initiative: the agency is a promoter of its own initiative, a planner and a trainer, and community members are volunteers and beneficiaries.

Category 3 Community owned and managed activities mobilized by external agency: the agency is a catalyst, capacity builder, a facilitator of linkages, and a funder after community ownership has developed. The community members are analysts, planners, implementers, assessors and also beneficiaries.

Category 4 Community owned and managed activities initiated from within the community: the agency is a capacity builder and funder, and community members are analysts, planners, implementers, assessors and also beneficiaries.

Extensive cross-checking, reflection, dialogue and revision processes were used whenever possible to ensure consistency across reviewers in regard to how they completed the matrices.

STAGE 4

All matrices were reviewed holistically in order to identify recurrent themes; areas of convergence and divergence of ideas, practices and findings; and significant gaps.

STAGE 5

The review team made follow-up telephone calls to a limited number of field practitioners in order to learn more about the promising programmes that had been identified as candidates for field work in phase two of the project.

---

[1] Behnam, N (2008) 'Agencies, communities and children: a report of the Inter-Agency Learning Initiative:
Engaging communities for Children's Well-being', pp. 12–19, Inter-Agency Learning Initiative

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING ABOUT PROTECTING CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY?

AN INTER-AGENCY REVIEW OF EVIDENCE ON COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD PROTECTION MECHANISMS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Drawing on findings from 60 countries and 160 documents, this executive summary:
- describes different types of community-based child protection groups
- identifies common factors that appear to make groups effective (including community ownership, building on existing resources, children's participation, links between formal and non-formal systems, and balancing power across groups)
- looks at examples of scaling up, and ensuring the sustainability both of groups and of positive outcomes for children
- sets out six key challenges to maximising the effectiveness of groups
- puts forward recommendations to practitioners and donors on how to strengthen community support for children's protection and wellbeing.

This summary will be of interest to everyone who works in this area – practitioners, policy advisers and donors. The full report is on the CD-Rom that is included.

Participating agencies
Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (USAID)
Oak Foundation
Save the Children
UNICEF
World Vision International