

An Assessment of Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms in Kalola Community of Chibombo District, Zambia

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Abstract: This paper is on the ethnographic mapping for community based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) to assess the main risk factors for children, mechanisms in place for protection, and to provide a guide for programming that promotes a protective environment in Kalola Community of Chibombo District, Zambia. The community faces many challenges, including few educational resources, remoteness from police stations, schools, and health clinics, low linkages to formal child protection systems, and limited resources to support education and interventions for child protection issues.

The core research questions of this qualitative study were designated into seven Thematic Areas: (1) Understanding general child protection concerns and prevalence, (2) Community attitudes around risks and protection, (3) Children's resilience skills and participation in their own protection, (4) Understanding the formal child protection system, (5) Understanding the informal child protection system, (6) Understanding capacities in the child protection systems, and (7) Accountability in the child protection systems. The study was conducted in six zones in the Kalola community, through a total of 37 focus groups that reached 648 participants, as well as 24 key informant interviews (KIIs) with local leaders and government/NGO actors. Data collectors completed social maps, transect walks, and observation sheets to gain an understanding of the community. For focus groups and KIIs, data collectors used specific questions under each thematic area to engage the different groups of participants. Additional tools, like body mapping and problem tree analysis, were utilized with children and adults. Notes were transcribed after data collection, and the team returned to the field several times to fill gaps that were identified. Challenges of the process included the length of time between data collection and validation, the Cholera outbreak which prevented gatherings for some time, and the deterioration of some road networks due to the rainy season.

Under Thematic Area 1, the main child protection risks identified by the community include drug and alcohol abuse, school drop outs, conflict with adults, teen pregnancy, early marriage, sexual violence, child labor, and neglect. When discussing causes of such risks, the common themes that emerged were poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and children lacking supervision from parents. Under Thematic Area 2, cultural and religious practices that protect or put children at risk were discussed further. During data collection, participants mentioned certain aspects of initiation ceremonies that put children at risk of harm, but during validation sessions it was agreed that most of those cultural practices are no longer prominent in the community. The practice that continues to exist is building separate houses for children, which exposes them to

sexual abuse or early sexual activity. In terms of religious practices, children are regularly unsupervised at church camps or night meetings, leaving them vulnerable to many harms. Positive parental guidance, peer groups, and religious values were cited as protecting children from harm. Under Thematic Area 3 it was found that children's voices are not greatly taken into account in the community. Adults do not seriously consider the perspectives of children because of their age. Children would rather confide in peers if they have experienced abuse, leading to most cases being handled at a family level, because of fear of reporting. Under Thematic Area 4, many formal structures were identified by participants, but most community members find it difficult to use these structures due to the distance, corruption, and limited capacity of these structures to respond to cases. Instead, under Thematic Area 5 it was found that most cases are handled between families or with the support of the village council (including traditional leaders) or religious leaders. Under Thematic Area 6, participants mostly expressed that they are dissatisfied with child protection services because structures are distant from the community, the structures lack the skills to successfully respond to and handle cases, and those who report are often victimized, perpetuating the culture of silence. Under Thematic Area 7, participants noted that the health facilities and schools seem to monitor their programs and provide a platform for feedback, but otherwise there are limited opportunities for people to express their concerns. Additionally, there are limited services for victims.

Validation took place during two sessions, first with a mixed group of 25 adults and youth, and second with a group of 32 youth. During both sessions, the participants were able to hear, confirm, and clarify the findings from all seven Thematic Areas. With both groups, the most significant revision was that initiation ceremonies are no longer prominent in the community, and participants did not agree that this cultural practice poses a risk of harm for children. Adult participants were more vocal about the difficulties in accessing formal structures, mostly due to distance and corruption. Youth participants discussed in detail the need for their voices to be considered and for sensitization programs on child protection, which could also help parents and children form better relationships. Among the key recommendations from both groups include: engaging community leaders to reduce alcohol consumption, sensitization programs for adults and children, a counselling or youth resource center, advocating for more local formal structures, and the introduction of income-generating activities or skill programs for youth. The conclusion and recommendation section of this paper gives more insights into the key findings and recommendations to support strengthening of CBCPMs in this community.

Key Words: Child Protection, Child Protection Committees, Child Protection Risks, Community Based Child Protection Mechanism,

I. INTRODUCTION

Children in Zambia, like in many other countries, need protection from harm that threatens their growth and well-being. Exposure to poverty and deprivation is widespread, whilst many children are also exposed to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, yet protection from harm is paramount to the growth and wellbeing of every child. Child protection refers to the prevention and response to all forms of violence, neglect, abuse, and exploitation against children. The dynamics of most violence in families and communities are complex and multifaceted, requiring a broader and deeper understanding of how protection is understood, compromised, and provided through multiple modes of service delivery and the creation of a protective environment¹. Violence against children is generally perpetuated by various factors such as economic, traditional and cultural practices, attitudes, social norms, and low penetration of formal protection services, among others. Protection is critical for the wellbeing, aspirations, and positive outcomes for children. Violence, neglect, exploitation, and abuse can undermine any other child wellbeing outcome, just as a safe environment provides children with the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. It is for this reason that this study was undertaken. Specifically, the study was done to discover the risk factors for children and understand other complexities that continue to perpetuate these problems, understand protective mechanisms in place, and to direct programming that is responsive to creating a protective environment for all children and young people. The mapping process was further necessitated by the need for local solutions, bearing in mind that external initiatives may not always be sustainable. Child protection mechanisms that exist at local levels have the potential to be more organized, sustainable, and appropriate than formal assistance provided by government or NGOs based outside the community, considering the inherent value CBCPMs have to respond to local child protection concerns

II. METHODS

The process started with selection of the local partners where the exercise was to be conducted. The local partner staff were trained in the child protection mapping processes, including socialization exercises of the participatory mapping tools. The training focused on having a deeper understanding of child protection and the systems approach to protecting children. An assessment of community child protection systems being implemented were evaluated to assess their strengths and weaknesses. The group also discussed the structures and processes and how these related to the larger formal child protection systems at district and national levels. Participating Local Partner (LP) staff were given an opportunity to explore

the tools in one of the communities for pretesting of the research questions. Thereafter, feedback sessions were provided by the consulting team to help in refining the process before starting the actual data collection in the selected community.

Before kick starting the process, community mobilization was initiated through the engagement of traditional leadership, specifically the Chiefs Council, which is the supreme body of traditional leadership. During this engagement, various child protection issues that are eminent in the community were discussed and support was solicited for the mapping process. Others engaged during the initial process included community stakeholders such as education, health, and agriculture staff, community social workers, and community volunteers. After the community entry meetings with the leaders, engagements started by social mapping to understand social services available, protective and risk environments in the communities, among other resources. Social mapping was followed by transect walks with caregivers and children to have a deeper understanding of the state of various social services. During the mapping process, extensive observations were undertaken in the community as the team members immersed themselves to understand the occurrence of certain phenomenon as it relates to the protection and wellbeing of children. Several participatory tools were implored to capture information in the seven thematic areas of the study. The tools included focus groups, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, participant observations, and other interactive activities such as body mapping and drawings with children. The process continued until saturation was reached, meaning that issues began to be repetitive. This was followed by an orientation for the data collection team on conducting qualitative data analysis, through coding and creation of themes that commonly arose during the community engagement process.

The mapping of community based child protection mechanisms employed a bottom-up, participatory process in Kalola community. The following were the seven thematic areas that were examined with key research questions under each thematic area.

1. General child protection risks in the community
2. Community attitudes and understanding of risks and protection
3. Children's resilience, skills, and participation in their protection
4. Understanding the formal child protection systems
5. Understanding the informal child protection systems
6. Understanding capacities in the child protection systems
7. Accountability in the child protection systems

Under the above thematic areas, the following were the proposed core questions for each of the thematic areas which the study sort to answer,

- What are the key child protection risks of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and abuse (for boys and girls

with consideration of age), what are the drivers of these risks (to explore social, cultural, traditional, economic) and where do they occur in the community?

- What traditional or informal mechanisms exist (social, cultural and or religious values, norms and attitudes)? How do they put children at risk of harm or are protective to the children, including how they function?
- How are children able to manage these risks and participate in their own protection?
- What formal measures and services are available at community level to enhance the protection of children?
- What local social norms, values, laws, and institutions are available at community level and how they contribute to the protection of children?
- What capacities exist in both formal and informal child protection systems?
- How accountable are the formal child protection systems? Are community members provided with feedback of quality of services? How satisfied are community members? How are community structures liked with other formal child protection actors?

The overall goal of the CBCPM mapping process was to have a deeper understanding of protection risks, social norms that perpetuate violence, and the available mechanisms in the community that support the protection of children from harm. Further, the study takes a bottom up approach to examine the community understanding of protection and how local systems prevent and respond to harm. Harm refers to risks from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence which were described broadly, though expected risks could be described within the four forms of risks

Description of methods selected

A range of data collection methods were implored during the mapping process which included key informant interviews, participant observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews with various individuals, and secondary data review. The questions posed to children and adults for each method are detailed in Appendix I. These various methods enabled the research team to triangulate information from different sources and to tabulate frequencies in order to understand occurrences of particular issues.

During focus group discussions, participants free listed issues regarding key child protection risks and why such issues were a threat to children. Ranking methods and the problem tree analysis tools were used to narrow down the free lists and to get a deeper understanding of the issues. For children aged 10 to 14 years, body mapping was implored to enhance the engagement process. Body mapping involves tracing the outline of one child, vertically splitting the picture into a side of “likes” and a side of “dislikes”, and discussing the likes and dislikes for different parts of the body. For example, the facilitator may ask the children to discuss what the ears like

and dislike; children may respond that the ears like hearing music, but dislike hearing insults.

Team members in the data collection team undertook several transect walks with participants to understand social services that are in the community and make observations of various activities that people were doing, in light of the core research questions. These observations were participatory and helped to identify and interpret interactions between children and other community members and helped in making interpretations as it relates to the protection or vulnerability of children. The researchers wrote transcripts describing these observations and their experiences. The team members also visited areas or locations that are perceived as risky for children and made observations of the interactions of children and other community members. The team members were encouraged not to make observations with pre-conceived ideas but pay attention to how people interacted and what children were doing.

Description of Data Analysis Methods

The CBCPM mapping process employed a bottom up, participatory process of engaging with various stakeholders who included caregivers, children in different age categories, community development workers, and traditional leaders, among others. The time period of data collection and various participatory tools employed enabled the team to collect massive data related to the protection of children in this community. Data analysis was ongoing throughout the data collection process, especially as the team had to go back for further clarification and collection after the initial analysis when gaps were identified. Further, the cross collection of data from various sources helped in the verification of the validity of the information.

Firstly, the mass of data that was collected was summarized and organized according to themes and meaningfully reduced or reconfigured into tables that picked key responses and questions from the field transcriptions. The key responses were then developed into themes through a process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data from the field notes into simplified notes or transcription, including picking quotations from the responses for firming up the findings.

Data reduction helped to pick aspects of the assembled data that provided emphasis and responded to the key research questions and the broader scope of the mapping process. The aspect of data reduction helped in the development of themes from the large volume of qualitative data compiled that was uncategorized for further analysis. After development of themes, frequency tables were developed in excel worksheets to mark the most prevalent responses for further analysis to provide reasons for such occurrences.

Qualitative data analysis employed in the mapping process focused on real people’s views, experiences, observations, and events as they occur in the community. For example, during the time immersed, specific locations that were perceived to

be risky to children were visited. One such observation and experience held was that girls who were weekly borders or migrated to the community for exams were staying in places of drinking, a situation that could be leading to the consistent problem of teen pregnancies mentioned in various discussions. From observation, probing, and experience, such places put girls at risk of indulging in sexual relationships with bar patrons, especially that such girls are not monitored nor do they have sufficient supplies during such a stay, away from home and caregivers. The last step of the analysis was to draw conclusions from the findings in terms of possible implications related to the questions and responses that were coming out.

III. FINDINGS/RESULTS

The study focused on seven main thematic areas with core questions for each area.

Thematic Area 1: General Child Protection Risks in the Community

Community Understanding of a Child

Contrary to international and national definitions of childhood based on age, as outlined in international instruments such as the UNCRC, ACRWC, and other child-related laws in Zambia, the community has various interpretation of understanding a child. In the engagements with the community members, there were various understandings of a child that were focused on status, ability, and age. This situation poses a concern because forms of violence that could be affecting children may not be of concern among community members.

“One who is not married, being looked after by parents or below the age of 12, while others said below 18 years or generally a child entails someone who is not yet matured.” - Adult male.

These discrepancies of not having a clear understanding about who a child is could be a serious threat to exposing children to dangers such as sexual abuse, child marriages, and other forms of harm.

Major Child Protection Risks

Community members identified a number of risks as being prevalent to children of which the main ones include the following:

- Alcohol and substance abuse leading to children dropping out of school, delinquency, and conflicts with caregivers.
- Teenage pregnancy out of wedlock, child marriages, and sexual violence among girls.
- Children doing heavy work beyond their age.
- Parents and caregivers not providing for children’s basic needs (neglect or lack of parental care).

Of all these risks alcohol, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, child marriages, and sexual violence were consistently cited across the community as being the most prevalent. Several other risks exist in the community, including conflicts among children and parents on understanding rights and responsibilities for children.

“Parents marry off their children whilst they are still attending school. One child that was sponsored by a certain organization was married off at an early age. Parents and children are not sensitized because of being in a rural setup. Parents are very difficult in this area because it is a settlement area (farms), so no traditional leaders to guide them, it is different from a village setup. So they do not oblige to anyone but themselves.”- Head Teacher

“Girls are mainly affected by child marriages due to pregnancy as it is viewed as an embarrassment to have a child outside marriage. When a child gets pregnant or sleeps out of the home they will automatically be married off. Boys are mostly affected by the abuse of alcohol and other drugs and child labor, specifically cattle herding.”- Neighborhood health committee

Other risk factors not consistently mentioned included children dropping out of school, child battery, and poor to limited access to social services, especially health and education.

Factors causing child protection risks

The factors involved in the exposure to all forms of violence against children in the community are complex and interdependent. These issues in the community arise from socio, economic, traditional, and cultural factors. Through the different information collected from community members, the traditional and cultural practice of initiation ceremonies for girls was cited as a driver of sexual violence and child marriages. The explicit nature of the teachings that girls are exposed to are focused on orienting girls to marriage responsibilities around conjugal obligations. There is a practice of committing children to marriage at a tender age where an elderly person can commit to marrying a young girl from childhood. This practice, though not widely practiced across the community, puts children at risk of harm by encouraging early sexual debut, as the two view themselves as husband and wife. Additionally, the separation of children from the main house into separate huts when there are considered as grownups poses a risk of engaging in sexual activities early, since parents or caregivers have limited control in monitoring and mentoring children.

“Some parents engage or allow the men to pay Lobola whilst the girl is still at school, which makes it easy for them to meet and have sexual intercourse as it is allowed by both families who see the two as husband and wife to be whilst at school”- Male Adult

“Culture is now misunderstood and destroying our children through having initiation ceremonies. This is

where a child is physically prepared for marriage. The girl child is taught how to satisfy a man and a boy is taught how to keep a home. This encourages them to start practicing what they learnt during the initiation ceremony before the right time” Male Adult

The problem of child labor is driven by the need for children to contribute to family labor and income. Generally, children are expected to contribute to family labor, but this should not be at the expense of their education. Unfortunately, the problem of child labor results in children foregoing attending school and subjecting them to harsh conditions, such as not having adequate food and other health hazards associated with cattle herding.

Furthermore, there are limited mechanisms in place for the protection of children in the community as people usually discuss amongst themselves to resolve child protection concerns at the expense of the victims.

“When abuse happens, parents would rather settle the issue amongst themselves, as a result abuse cases are always happening because there is no punishment given to the perpetrator”-Female Adult

“When a child spends a night out of home, this makes the beginning of marriage according to the local tradition and culture in this area, and the practice has seen a number of children married in the community in this manner.” - Parents Teacher Association (PTA)Member

Another social factor perpetuating child protection risks that was consistently cited relates to religious gatherings in the form of camp meetings and overnight prayers. Children sometimes without the guidance of their parents end up engaging in sexual relationships or abuse alcohol and drugs during such gatherings, especially those that are held at night. Such gatherings create an important opportunity for young people to socialize, but are unfortunately leading to exposure to abuse.

Church gatherings like overnights, camp meetings, choirs, and crusades. During some gatherings children are without the guidance of the parent and as such they are free to do whatever they want, ending up drinking and having premature relationships which end up onto sexual abuse and teen pregnancies, and most times early marriage”- Male Adult

Common Child Protection Risks for Boys

Among the four main child protection risks faced by boys, alcohol and drug abuse was found to be the biggest risk factor. This was followed by child labor, mainly in the forms of cattle herding and undertaking work at the expense of education to contribute to family income or for other personal use, including buying alcohol and drugs. Boys pointed out drug and alcohol abuse followed by child labor. The problem of sexual abuse is not a direct problem to them, although they are sometimes given the responsibility when younger girls are impregnated, even if they are not the ones responsible. In

these cases, other elderly men within the community are putting them at risk to engage in exploitative labor to meet additional needs and the risk of contracting other sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

“Girls are being impregnated sometimes by elderly men. Poverty is a cause of such abuse as girls need money to buy food and meet their needs. This is caused by negligence from parents, as they refuse to pay school fees for their children, hence discouraging the pupils. Negative attitudes from parents is a source of harm and abuse. Neglecting of children as some come to school without shoes. This shows lack of care and support.”- Head Teacher

“In this community there is a problem for boys to look after animals at the expense of schooling and giving children heavy load to carry especially during fetching water, children travel long distances with heavy buckets on their heads.”- Boy Child

Common Child Protection risks for Girls

Sexual violence in a broader perspective was cited as the biggest risk among the girls, as it happens in various forms. Often it results in teen pregnancies, which can be stressful for the victim if the perpetrator refuses responsibility. In most discussions teen pregnancy was seen as a significant problem, which results in girls dropping out of school and subsequently getting married. As earlier noted by one of the head teachers in an in-depth interview, not all cases of pregnancies are caused by young men and boys, but elderly men in some cases. The distance to schools also causes a serious strain on the girls and a source of risk, as girls could be exposed to other forms of violence. Further, some household chores can be fire hazards or strenuous and were cited as risk factors for the girls.

“Our parents send us to bars to buy for them alcohol which exposes us to being touched or insulted by the fellow adult males who later propose to love us and give us money.”- Girl Child

Locations in the Community That Pose Harm for Children

In this community, contrary to the perception that church gatherings could be a stable source of protection for children, locations where these gathering are held, especially at night, were noted as a serious source of harm. Other places include drinking places where children are exposed to substance and drug abuse. Generally, unregulated gatherings were noted to be a source of harm for children.

Thematic Area 2: Community Attitudes and Understanding of Risks and Protection

Participants were asked to explain the term “child protection”, in order to have an understanding of their perceptions around the protection of children. Across various engagements, child protection was related to educational support and the need for parents and caregivers to send their children to school. Education was viewed to be a key pillar in the protection of

children, due to the guidance children receive in school to avoid any form of harm. From the perspective of children, educational support and remaining in school was seen as paramount to protecting them from vices such as child marriages, alcohol and drug abuse, among others.

Additionally, parental guidance and love and care for the children were felt to be the key elements of protection of children among both children and adults. However, there is a general feeling that this element of protection is compromised by the lack of discussion on pertinent issues around sexuality, which affects children's growth and wellbeing and continues to rob children's resilience to withstand harm. Another aspect of protection viewed by caregivers was discipline, including beating.

"In our community children do not feel safe and content to report abuse because parents don't spend enough time with children, they only talk when something strange has happened. Furthermore, as per culture, parents don't talk about the bad side of sex or private parts. So they get to hear about sex outside home. As a result, they want to practice what they hear from friends outside their home. Most of the parents are not free to share issues of sexuality. In simple terms, children are not free with their parents especially fathers." - Male Adult

How Children are protected from Harm

The common form of protection that was cited was parental guidance, mainly by teaching good values to children and being able to provide them with basic needs so that they are not compelled to engage in activities that could pose harm. But as eluded above, parental guidance was seen as something that becomes challenging as children grow and begin to make personal choices, thereby making it difficult to protect them from harm. Parents and other community leaders felt that the imposition of child rights was posing a challenge to providing parental care and discipline, as child rights were regarded as a top down approach that is counterproductive to the protection of children. The aspect of rights and responsibilities in this respect may be compromised by the misunderstanding among children in the absence of proper guidance, which often has led to harmful effects such as many incidences of teen pregnancies.

"The promotion of rights has made most of our children to be uncontrollable. For instance, they put on skin trousers that do not show respect in the name of rights. If you beat them, they will threaten to report you to police, do we need to start fearing them because of these so called rights?" - Traditional Leader

Love and care is also viewed to be of paramount importance in the protection of children, although there are some children in the communities who are mistreated, such as orphans, as cited by one of the girls during a focus group discussion.

"Concerning child marriages, the girl said some of my girl friends who are mistreated by their guardians, especially orphans, choose to get married in hope that

life would be better. Some girls are caused to get married due to lack of money." - Girl Child

"Children, especially orphans that are kept by old people as well as those who are alive but left to be kept by aged grandparents, are the ones who are mostly vulnerable to abuse." - Female Adult

Children also cited peer groupings, such as those at church or school clubs, as another key protective element, as it provides them an opportunity to discuss various issues that affect them, including finding comfort when experiencing harm. Further, through such associations children may get the courage to report cases of abuse as opposed to being isolated.

Traditional and Cultural Practices that Put Children at Risk

While cultural practices play a key role in the protection of children, by enhancing values in children that promote positive behaviors and teaching adulthood responsibilities, there are certain aspects of culture and traditional practices that pose a threat to the wellbeing of children. Among the positive aspects include guiding girls on the dangers of teen pregnancies and other sexually transmitted infections if they engage in unprotected sex. Traditional initiation ceremonies committing children to marriages while still young and building separate houses for children as they grow older are among some of the prominent practices that put children at risk of harm. Traditional ceremonies result in children beginning to focus on marriage and reinforce the culture of silence in children, such that even when harmed they are unlikely to report. In this community there is also the practice of polygamy, especially among the Shona people who have settled from Zimbabwe. Children pointed out that those from polygamous families are likely not to be fully supported due to limited resources to fend for the many children and wives in the family.

"Cultural and traditional practices have affected children in that girl children get to sleep in separate houses where they are at high risks of having sexual affairs." - Male Adult

"Culture is now misunderstood and destroying our children through having initiation ceremonies. This is where a child is physically prepared for marriage. The girl child is taught how to satisfy a man and a boy is taught how to keep a home. This encourages them to start practicing what they learnt during the initiation ceremony before the right time." - Male Adult

From the above cited quotes, it is very clear that these practices are viewed to be a threat to children's wellbeing and protection. Additionally, religious gatherings were noted to be a source of harm, especially during night gatherings that put children at risk of being abused, despite the church being seen as installing moral values to community members.

Thematic Area 3: Children's Skills, Resilience, and Participation

Coping with Harm

Most societies often hold children back from participating in issues that affect them, due to social and cultural beliefs that children are not supposed to express themselves but that adults should make all decisions on their behalf. Denying children a voice encourages impunity for abusers, while failing to hear their views leads to making wrong decisions that impact negatively on children's wellbeing². Despite this argument, children are not afforded an opportunity to express themselves or be part of offering a solution. Child participation is one of the core principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which asserts that children and young people have the right to freely express their views and that adults have an obligation to listen to children's views and to facilitate their participation in all matters affecting them within the family, schools, local communities, public services, institutions, government policy, and judicial procedures. Children pointed out that they are not provided opportunities to voice issues that affect them, as they are considered not to have knowledge on such issues and parents' and caregivers' decisions best suits their needs and desires. When harm happens to them they usually report to trusted friends and relatives or keep it to themselves for fear of being victimized. In this community the lack of a police station further worsens the situation, as most of the cases are resolved within families at the expense of the victims.

"When a case of abuse happens, such as a child being married early or an issue of pregnancy, the families usually try to settle by making payment such as animals or cows or money. Up to K16,000 (approximately \$1600) is paid as a maximum without involving formal structures such as the Police." -Senior Headman

From the above statement it is clear that most of the cases are resolved at the family level, which makes it difficult for children to receive any specialized services such as counselling. Additionally, young expectant mothers are not provided with the opportunity to receive counselling services that are tailored towards their individual needs as they have to attend group counselling sessions like any other expectant mothers, making it very difficult to cope with the problem of teen pregnancy.

"One of the challenges we face as regards to young expectant mothers, especially teen girls who come for antenatal, is not having time to conduct personalized counseling services, but the young teens are part of the group counselling, making it difficult to effectively attend to individual needs." - Health Facility Staff

Feeling Safe to Report Cases of Harm/ Modes of Reporting by Children

During discussions, children pointed out that there are limited opportunities that are given to them to be heard at community level. Generally, children stressed that due to age their views are not taken seriously by most of the community members.

"I feel afraid and too young to report some cases of abuse." -Girl Child

The common mode of reporting cited by children was through their caregivers or friends. However, the reporting through caregivers or relatives becomes challenging when the perpetrator is a close relative. Children fear consequences such as death threats as well as other members concealing such cases, especially when the bread winner is the perpetrator. Other avenues of reporting include at school through teachers or other peers.

"Children in this community are not confident to report cases of abuse because most cases that are reported go unheard, so children do not have the morale to report." -Female Adult

How Children protect themselves from Harm

Children pointed out that being part of peer gatherings, such as clubs at church or school, provides a good platform for seeking advice and getting solace when they are faced with the psychological stress of suffering harm. Generally, there are limited opportunities for children to voice out on issues that affect them in the community, apart from some of the school based clubs that are available, such as Anti-AIDS clubs and Sanitation clubs. The limitation in such groupings disadvantages children from being able to identify, prevent, and respond to harm as they lack confidence to do so, despite the school being cited as the major source of learning about harm.

Thematic Area 4: Understanding the Formal Child Protection System

The focus of this area was to get an understanding about formal measures and services that contribute to the protection of children and how such measures were being applied in this community. Through interviews and group discussions, participants were asked to explain what national laws they are aware of and if such laws are applied in the community. The most common law that participants referred to was related to ending child marriages, which is being widely tabled by various stakeholders such as the media, state, and non-state actors. The most commonly known international law was the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a number of respondents pointed out the national laws around providing children with shelter, clothing, and basic needs.

"The international laws from the United Nations Charter on the Rights of a Child such as right to health, education, association, shelter and life." - Deputy Head-Kalola

"The commonly known law in the community is child marriage for children below the age of 16 years, due to a lot of awareness that is being done especially on radio."

However, these cases are quite common in this community." - Senior headman

"We only know of a few laws like right to good health, education, shelter and identity." - Neighborhood policemen

"Right to shelter, education, good and quality health and protection." - COVCC chairperson

"Children have a right to education, health, shelter and clothes." - Adult Woman

"Laws known are rights to health, education, association, shelter and speech." - Male Man

"Laws are there but the community does not know or understand them. Examples of laws available in the community include: If a parents do not take his/her child to school they should be reported to the police. In the community child defilement, murder and assault is not allowed." - Neighborhood policemen

"There are no laws and regulations so far known in the community." - Community leader

The research also sought to find out whether the child protection laws and regulations were applied in the community. The research discovered that there are different opinions of whether the child protection laws and regulations were applied in the community.

"The community does not understand most of the child protection laws. Each part of the community has a way it understands its laws." - Deputy Head

"They are applied although there are gaps in certain areas." - Neighborhood policemen

"Some are applied, like right to shelter and education. Only the laws known to the community are applied." - COVCC chairperson

"Right to education is not really applied on the girls because some of the girls are married off by their parent." - Adult Woman

"The laws are there but people do not understand them. Some community members claim that the rights have made children to start disobeying their parents. If you beat your child, the child might take you to the police Victim Support Unit (VSU)." - Adult Man

"The families can report but cases do not end well as they end up losing the child future." - Community leaders

"Yes they are applied but the problem is that people in the community do not understand the rights of their children." - Community leaders

Formal Child Protection Structures in the Community

In this community, the most common structures that support the protection of children include the Community Orphans and Vulnerable Children Committee (COVCC), which is facilitated by the local partner and had received some form of training, and the Village Development Committee (VDC), that comprises traditional leaders. Other formal structures

available include the local health facilities that refer some of the more sensitive cases to the district level One Stop Centre (OSC) and the police. However, the police are located about 25 kilometers from the community, making it difficult to effectively respond due to lack of transportation and other constraints. Other structures include the community Crime Prevention Unit members or neighborhood committees that are linked to the Zambia police and deal with local crime issues on a voluntary basis. One of the most prominent structures where children access services are the schools, which offer counseling services through the guidance and counselling section. This can be difficult for girls in some remote schools, due to the absence of female teachers. Additional structures that were mentioned include pupil councils, Child Protection Committees (CPCs), Child Rights Clubs, church leadership, the Victim Support Unit (VSU), and health facilities. Some structures, such as the VSU, COVCC, and child assemblies, are known or facilitated by the government. However, some of the respondents mentioned that there were no structures that were formed or facilitated by the government, suggesting that these structures do not have an adequate presence. These institutions offer some services to prevent and respond to harm against children, namely sensitization activities, counselling support for victims, and material support for other local mechanisms. However, there are a number of shortcomings, such as limited capacity to respond, limited resources, limited coverage, poor quality of services offered, and inadequate workforce. From the views below by various respondents, it is clear that the available formal structures have some influence, but also significant constraints.

"They train members of Child Rights clubs, strengthen other child protection groups by providing them with t-shirts and Child Protection I.E.C materials and educate them on Child Rights." - Deputy Head

"Psychosocial Support, support to the vulnerable through funding and sensitization on education and other rights." - Neighborhood policemen

"Sensitization on child rights, educate the community on child rights, provide basic needs to the vulnerable in the community, and improve education and health structures." - COVCC chairperson

"Sensitize the community of child protection, act as ambassadors of Child Protection, offer counselling services to the victims and perpetrators and they are whistle blowers as they report cases of child abuse to relevant authorities." - Adult Male

"There is no police presence in the community, making it difficult to report cases of child abuse." - Traditional leader

"The mechanisms are not effective because most of the cases are not finished, as they end without any tangible action and we suspect corruption on the side of those

charged with the responsibility of responding.”- Headman

“The One Stop Centre Facility is very distant and services are only at district level. Even when they are called upon they do not respond promptly due to the distance.”- Community Health Provider

Other non-state actors conducting child protection in the community who have been conducting some sensitizations and training of community members, specifically the COVCC, and Restless Development, whose interventions focus on building children’s and youth’s resilience to sexual reproductive health risks.

Thematic Area 5: Understanding the Informal Child Protection System

Informal child protection systems consist of structures and mechanisms at community or family level. These are embedded in the social and cultural settings and may not be recognized by outsiders, although they play a great role in the protection of children from harm. In this community, the village council, headmen, and COVCC are the most common avenues for reporting child protection concerns. The concerns are mostly discussed between the two affected families and referred to the local traditional leaders so that an amicable solution is reached, which in most cases involves settling the aggrieved by paying money or animals. Others that are consulted in the process include religious leaders, teachers, or the Village Development Committee, which is constituted by various traditional leaders, depending on the magnitude of the case.

“The headmen and COVCC are mostly consulted.” – Adult Female

“In this community when abuse happens, the case is first reported to the village headman, if the village headman has failed to handle the case, he refers it to the police or health. During this process all the parties (victims and perpetrators) are engaged.” – Adult Male

“When there is a case of a girl being impregnated, the family to the girl would try to find from her the person responsible for the pregnancy. Thereafter the man or boy responsible is asked whether he is accepting or refusing the responsibility. If the man or boy accepts, he is then asked to pay some money in form of animals.” – Adult Female

“When abuse happens parents would rather settle the issue amongst themselves, as a result abuse cases are always happening because there is no punishment given to the perpetrators.” - Female Adult

“Some cases of abuse are kept as a secret just within the families especially if the perpetrator was a trusted family member.” – Adult Female

In this community, the avenue that reinforces the protection of children is mainly parental guidance, by imparting moral

values, such as respect for elders. Children pointed out that this aspect is mostly applicable by parents of the same sex, girls for instance hardly discuss with their fathers or male caregivers.

Other aspects include various social norms such as providing educational support to children. However, this is constrained by limited appreciation of education by most caregivers and the balance between investing in education for children and the need to own wealth through livestock and agriculture, as a means of maintaining a higher social status in the community.

Thematic Area 6: Capacities in the Child Protection Systems

The main focus of this area was to get an understanding of the capacities existing in both formal and informal child protection systems. Several ways of how cases are handled were shared by the community members.

“The abused child is counselled by the school counsellors if the abuse happens in a school set up. Sometimes fellow learners are requested to investigate the matter and feedback is provided to the matron or patrons. Thereafter the case is reported to the higher authorities.” - Deputy head

“A case of defilement will start by taking the child to the clinic then to the police. Thereafter depending on the findings the perpetrator is arrested and prosecuted.” - COVCC chairperson

“Abuse cases are handled differently. Once abuse cases occur, the family members will either choose to tell the headman about the abuse or handle it at family level. Some others choose to directly report the case to the headmen who sit as a committee on the way forward. While others choose to report to the police.” – Adult Female

“Abuse cases are reported to the headmen. The headmen look at the cases and refer them to relevant authorities. However, some cases do not end up well because the headmen and people handling the cases are easily bribed.” – Adult Female

The research also sought to find out whether the members of the child protection structures had the necessary skills to handle child protection cases. Some key informants felt that some structures had the skills to handle child protection issues because of their position and training.

“The pupils’ council (Childs Rights Clubs) in the school have the capacity to handle child protection issues because they receive training from Restless Development on how to handle cases.” - Deputy head teacher

More often, community members pointed out that there are a lot of inadequacies in providing services, which hinder the effectiveness of available formal and informal mechanisms to protect children in the community. Among the causes of this dissatisfaction include the inability of the police and the One Stop Centre to coordinate and respond, limited presence of

formal structures in the community, distance to services, general corruption, and lack of technical knowledge on child protection. As cited below, there are a number of capacity issues that were pointed out by the respondents, including inadequate transport by law enforcement agencies and lack of knowledge and skills in informal structures available in the community.

“Community members do not have the skills to handle child protection issues, looking at the way the cases of abuse are handled.” – Adult Female

“People in the structures are not educated and do not understand child protection. Their skills are very poor because they do not have a mechanism on how to handle child protection issues.” – Adult Male

“The health facilities are not helping much in reporting cases of sexual abuse. For example, if young girls go for ante natal services, the health facility does not help the victims by reporting the case to the relevant authorities.” – Community leader

“There is limited capacity in the police as they have no transport in most cases. The other part on the police is that they are corrupt and certain cases that are taken to them are withdrawn prematurely.” – Community leader

“We don’t have the technical knowhow but we have the skills to handle child protection issues successfully.” - Neighborhood policeman

“For cases of sexual abuse, the problem is that people are mostly afraid of reporting as they are victimized once it’s known that you are the one who reported. The absence of the police who are very far from this community makes things worse, as nearly all cases are resolved locally except very serious cases such as injury to the victim. Even then police hardly come to follow most of the issues that are reported due to lack of transport.” - Senior Headmen

“The available structures have low capacity. The people involved in these structures have high illiteracy levels and do not understand abuse and would rather sit on the child abuse cases when they come up. They do not know how to resolve cases.” - Health Care Worker

Lastly, this area sought to find out the changes that are needed to improve the child protection prevention and response mechanisms in the community. Many respondents suggested that the community and relevant actors should be trained in child protection issues, in order to build skills and capacity to handle such cases.

“One thing that needs to change in the communities is the attitude of community members.” - Deputy head

“All the people involved in solving child protection cases should have necessary skills and undergone child protection trainings.” - Neighborhood policeman

“The people in child protection committees should be trained in child protection to equip them with the needed skills to deal with child protection cases. The Government should have a deliberate policy to fund the structures to reduce vulnerability and empower them.” - COVCC chairperson

“We want to see people who are trained and able to handle child protection cases properly. We want to see the perpetrators being arrested, such that other people who want to commit similar cases learn from them.” – Adult Female

“The headmen should be trained in child protection because they are very much involved in issues of child protection. They should also be held accountable for each child abuse case they handle.” – Adult Male

“The child protection structures need to be strengthened with support from the police and local leaders including parents, so that when they handle the case, there should be no threat of bewitching and burning the whistle blower.” – Community leader

Thematic Area 7: Accountability of the Child Protection Systems

Under this thematic area, the focus was to examine the accountability of the formal child protection systems, as well as linkages between formal and informal systems. First, community members were asked if they are provided with feedback on the quality of services. This is mainly done during general community meetings and PTA meetings. However, some respondents disagreed, saying that the community is not adequately provided feedback on such cases.

“They are provided with feedback on how the cases were handled and the results during meetings at the school.” - Deputy head

“They are provided with feedback during PTA meetings and Village meetings.” - Neighborhood policeman

“Most of the times feedback is given during community meetings on how the case was handled.” – Adult Female

“It is rare that feedback is given in the community. Cases in the community go quiet and people do not know what happens with most cases.” – Adult Male

This area also sought to find out whether community members were satisfied with the current child protection services and the way that cases are handled. Some community members shared that they are satisfied with the way cases are handled. Respondents also shared that the health facilities, through various cooperating partners, do conduct community outreach activities on sexual reproductive health rights for young people, utilizing volunteers. These volunteers have received training and their outreach activities are monitored by the health clinics.

“They are satisfied because the members of the child rights clubs are fully trained and know how to handle child protection cases.” - Deputy head

“When cases of teens or young girls are reported to the health facility, they are referred to the One stop Centre at Liteta, about 25 Kilometers from the community, who depending on the nature of the case do respond within a day after two days, depending on availability of transport and nature of the case.” - Health clinic staff

Aside from these cases, there are limited feedback mechanisms available to community members on how cases are resolved, nor are there local services to offer counseling to the victims of abuse. Especially corruption in handling reported cases is resulting in community members to be unsatisfied with the general service delivery to enhance the protection of children. Most respondents shared that these structures are not monitored, or are inadequately monitored, by the government, allowing corruption to continue.

“Child protection cases are delayed when they reach the police because the police are bribed and evidence is tampered with.” - Neighborhood policeman

“The services are good but the way they are handled at the police level is not satisfying as they end in a negative way of corruption.” - COVCC representative

“The way they handle the cases is not satisfying because most cases they handle; the perpetrators are sent free without being given the punishment they deserve.” - Adult Female

“The community is not satisfied because cases do not end up well. The perpetrator bribes the people handling the case and in most cases run away before the case is finished.” – Adult Male

“The community is not satisfied because the people offering the services and handling child protection issues are community members who have low knowledge and capacity to handle child protection issues. Anyone can handle child protection issues in a way he/she best understands it in the community.” - Community leader

Most feedback suggested that the child protection structures in this community do not receive support from the government. However, there is some evidence that certain structures have been offered training and other support from the government. As cited above, the health clinic volunteers have been trained to conduct their outreach activities in the community. Additionally, many respondents confirmed that various linkages between district and community structures do exist. Therefore, some form of support occurs, but the accountability is not perfect and it may not be easily visible to community members

“Health volunteers who deal with various cases including child protection concerns such as teen pregnancies have

undergone trainings and are supported with materials to conduct their work.” – Health facility staff

“The health facility connects with the One Stop Centre at Liteta who sometimes responds to cases and provides support in form of counselling and legal services, although the facility is quite far. Actors present in the community include Youth Groups working mainly with Restless Development to conduct same outreach activities. Others include JSI and ZPCT who support PMTCT activities in the community, awareness and counseling services. Traditional leaders have also been very helpful in supporting outreach activities through supporting mobilization and resolving of cases.” – Health facility staff

“They are connected to relevant bodies who promote child protection and development, for example the pupils’ council is empowered and trained by NGOs such as Restless Development and is linked to the One Stop Centre.” – Deputy head

“The working systems look good but it lacks consistence and support from the government. The ground structures in all sectors and partners work hand in hand, but law enforcers reverse the cases.” - Neighborhood watch representative

“The structures try to work with NGOs although there is need to ensure that the structures and the people holding positions in these structures fully understand their roles and responsibilities.” – Adult Female

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Strengths identified in the community

The community members have an understanding of the various child rights especially the rights to education, shelter and good health, and certain rights such as education, shelter, and good health are applied in the community. Various child protection structures exist in the community including the pupil councils, CPCs, Child Rights Clubs, COVCCs and Village Development Committees (VDCs). Other structures include the church leadership, VSU, Neighborhood Police, Home Based Care, Neighborhood Health Care, health facilities, and the schools. Some of these structures are known by the government (VSU, COVCC) and there are also some government departments that are working in the area of child protection including: department of social welfare, VSU, health facilities, Neighborhood Health Committee, schools and Home Based Care units. Other organizations mentioned to be involved in child protection work include ChildFund, World Vision, Environment Africa, DAPP and Restless Development.

There are several services that are provided by the child protection structures. These services include: training of members of child rights clubs; strengthening other child protection groups by providing them with t-shirts and Child Protection I.E.C materials. Other services include providing

psychosocial support; support to the vulnerable through funding; sensitization of communities on child protection; arresting the perpetrators; conducting counselling services; acting as ambassadors of Child Protection; offering counselling services to the victims and perpetrators; and being whistle blowers as they report cases of child abuse to relevant authorities.

Resolving child protection cases

There are different ways in which child protection cases are resolved at family or community levels. These include using the child protection structures within schools, involving stakeholders such as traditional leaders, police, and other structures at community level. There are certain cases that are resolved with within families, while some cases are concealed. There are several people and structures that are involved in resolving child protection cases including traditional leaders, school authorities, and church leadership. The structures involved in resolving child protection cases include the One Stop Centre, police, neighborhood watch, Village Development Committee, and the COVCC. The people mostly consulted are the traditional leaders, church leaders, and parents. The structures mostly consulted include the Village Development Committee, COVCC, Neighborhood watch, and health center. From the feedback, it is clear that most cases are resolved through the traditional leadership structures.

Recommendations

- There is need to build capacity of the community members and the various child protection structures on properly resolving child protection cases.
- There is need to build strong linkages between the child protection structures and the government.

Capacities and needs in the child protection systems

There are several ways that cases that are reported to the child protection structures are handled. Within the school set up, learners and guidance teachers discuss together before reporting to the higher authorities. At community level, some cases such as defilement are reported to the health center and then the police. Other cases are reported to the family members, traditional leaders, neighborhood watch, COVCC, and to the police. It was reported that child rights clubs have the necessary skills to handle child protection issues, as a result of trainings from other NGOs. Otherwise, child protection structures do not have the capacity to handle child protection cases. Community members suggested a need to change attitudes toward child protection issues through sensitization and capacity building. There needs to be more government support to the child protection structures, especially to ensure that cases are handled properly and perpetrators are prosecuted.

Recommendations

- There is need to build capacity of child protection structures in handling child protection cases.

Accountability of child protection systems

Feedback is provided to community members through PTA and village meetings. However, it is mostly the structures handling the cases that provide feedback to the people instead of a platform for community members to provide their own feedback. There is some satisfaction with the way child protection cases are handled, especially by the child rights clubs. However, there is general dissatisfaction with the way child protection cases are handled by other structures. Child protection structures are not monitored by the government. Some counsellors and paralegals are monitored by the health centers that support them. There is no other support in terms of finances and capacity building that the government provides to child protection structures. Again, only health volunteers are supported with materials to conduct their work by some health centers.

Community members reported that child protection structures at community and district levels work collaboratively, but there is an inadequate understanding of roles and responsibilities among the various structures. Most concerning is the report that law enforcement agencies are a weak link, as they are associated with not to handling cases conclusively due to corruption.

Recommendations

- There is a need to ensure that proper feedback mechanisms are created within the communities, with a platform for community members to also have a voice.
- There is need to create linkages between child protection structures and the government so that the child protection structures are well supported.

Finally, Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms create an enabling environment for communities to prevent and respond to child protection issues in the communities. It provides the much needed support that is required to tackle child abuse issues in the community.

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