

Interagency Learning Initiative on Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms and Child Protection Systems



What exists in communities to protect children? What processes or mechanisms are used by families and communities to support children who are affected by various protection threats? Are community based mechanisms that are linked to formal child protection systems more effective? How can external agencies most effectively support communities to protect their children?

These are some of the important questions that are explored in a four-year interagency learning initiative on community based child protection mechanisms. Running from 2010-2014, the initiative involves action research in Sierra Leone, Kenya and a third country in Southeast Asia, and the establishment of a global community of practice for learning exchange.

What are community based child protection mechanisms?

Community based child protection mechanisms are defined broadly to include all groups or networks at grassroots level that prevent and respond to issues of child protection and vulnerable children. These may include family supports, peer group supports and community groups such as women's groups, religious groups, and youth groups as well as traditional community processes, government mechanisms and mechanisms initiated by civil society and international agencies such as child protection committees.

Why are they so important?

Community based child protection mechanisms are at the front line of efforts to protect children from abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation. They are foundational elements of the national child protection system for reasons of scale and sustainability. It is in the community that children and families experience and interact with the wider child protection system, making community mechanisms the face of the system for many people.

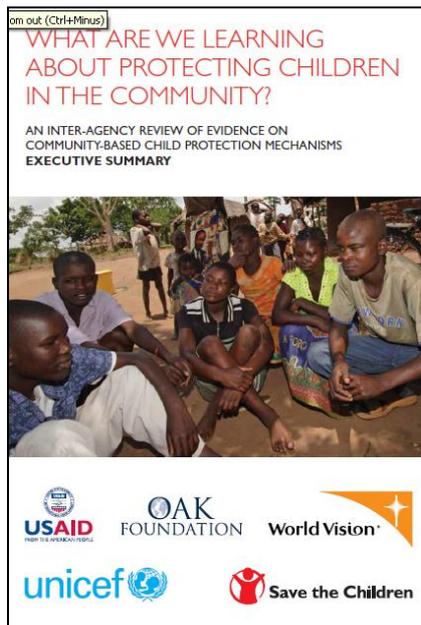
An inter-agency learning process

Since January 2009, a group of child protection agencies has come together around this interagency learning initiative. Prompted by a collective need for increased evidence and the development of standards for practice in supporting communities to better protect children, the agencies began a collective process of grounded learning in this important area of child protection.

The initiative is implemented through strong interagency partnerships and overseen by a global reference group involving 10 national and international agencies. Save the Children serves as the coordinator of the initiative and lead of the community of practice. The Columbia Group for Children in Adversity serves as the technical lead for the action research.

The initiative is funded with generous support from the Oak Foundation, USAID, UNICEF, Save the Children and World Vision.

A global desk review of evaluation evidence was conducted as the first phase of work and foundation for this initiative. A significant finding was the low quality of the evidence base and severe lack of evidence of impact of community based mechanisms on children's outcomes. The issue of linkages between community mechanisms and the national child protection system was highlighted as a potential factor for effectiveness.



The report is available to download in English and French at www.savethechildren.org

Action research

A core component of the learning initiative is a multi-year program of action research in three countries – Sierra Leone, Kenya and a third country in Southeast Asia. The research objectives are to:

- Identify and learn about the functioning of community based child protection processes and mechanisms, whether indigenous or external
- Construct rigorous measures of child protection and well-being outcomes, that reflect local definitions and understandings
- Test the effectiveness of community-driven models for strengthening linkages between community mechanisms and the national child protection system, on children's outcomes

The action research will take place over three years in each country. The research design emphasises depth of evidence and robust measurement of change in children's protection and well-being outcomes. The action research methodology in each country involves:

- Facilitation of extensive consultation and engagement with national stakeholders including Government, NGOs, INGOs, donors and UNICEF
- Quasi-experimental research design with intervention and comparison communities
- Rapid ethnography
- Community-driven development of models to strengthen the linkages between communities and the national child protection system
- Construction and repeated measurement of locally relevant outcome measures at baseline and 12 and 24 months following intervention

Child Protection Exchange Forum

The Community Child Protection Exchange Forum will provide an online environment for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers who are engaged with community-based child protection mechanisms to come together to advance the state of knowledge, policy, and practice. The forum will include a facilitated exchange forum in which practitioners share experiences, learning, ideas, and thoughts and engage in debate and dialogue. It will also have a resource hub compiling, organizing, and annotating the various resources available to practitioners who are supporting community-based endeavours. The forum will also host learning events such as periodic webinars or teleconferences in which individuals or groups of individuals present and lead discussion on a topic relevant to forum members.

The Exchange Forum will be open to anybody who is interested in learning about and contributing to discussions and debate around community-based mechanisms to protect children; membership will be free of charge. Members of the Exchange Forum will have the opportunity to be at the cutting-edge of developments in this field, and we are seeking dynamic, passionate, opinionated individuals to engage in these discussions. If you are interested in joining the Exchange Forum when it launches in September 2011 or if you already have ideas or resources to share, contact Mark Canavera at the below address.

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