



CASE STUDIES DECEMBER 2016

JOINING HANDS

STRENGTHENING THE CIRCLE OF
PROTECTION FOR THE WORLD'S MOST
VULNERABLE CHILDREN



Acknowledgements

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Cover photo © Ammala Thomisith, World Vision Laos

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| FOREWORD | 4 |
| NEPAL | 6 |
| INDIA | 8 |
| CAMBODIA | 11 |
| DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO | 13 |
| SIERRA LEONE | 16 |
| SOMALILAND | 18 |

Foreword

This compendium of case studies showcases some of the core child protection programming World Vision supports across the world, from the African to the Asian continents, in both fragile and development contexts.

The projects represented here were all funded by the UK's Department for International Development through its Programme Partnership Arrangement (PPA). Their aim is to provide an illustration of some of the child protection challenges communities face, the approaches used to tackle them, the lessons learnt and the plans made for the future. As such, they touch upon various themes of child protection: from tackling harmful traditional practices to addressing gender inequalities or challenging the exclusion of the most vulnerable children. What they all have in common is the use of World Vision's Systems strengthening approach (See Figure 1).

As can be seen in its graphic illustration, this approach uses three foundational principles and works with five main actors to strengthen the "continuum of care" so that girls and boys are protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation and all other forms of violence. The PPA grant has been instrumental in strengthening collaboration between formal and informal actors, at both local and national levels, to take action for child protection. It has enabled communities to address root causes of harmful traditional practices

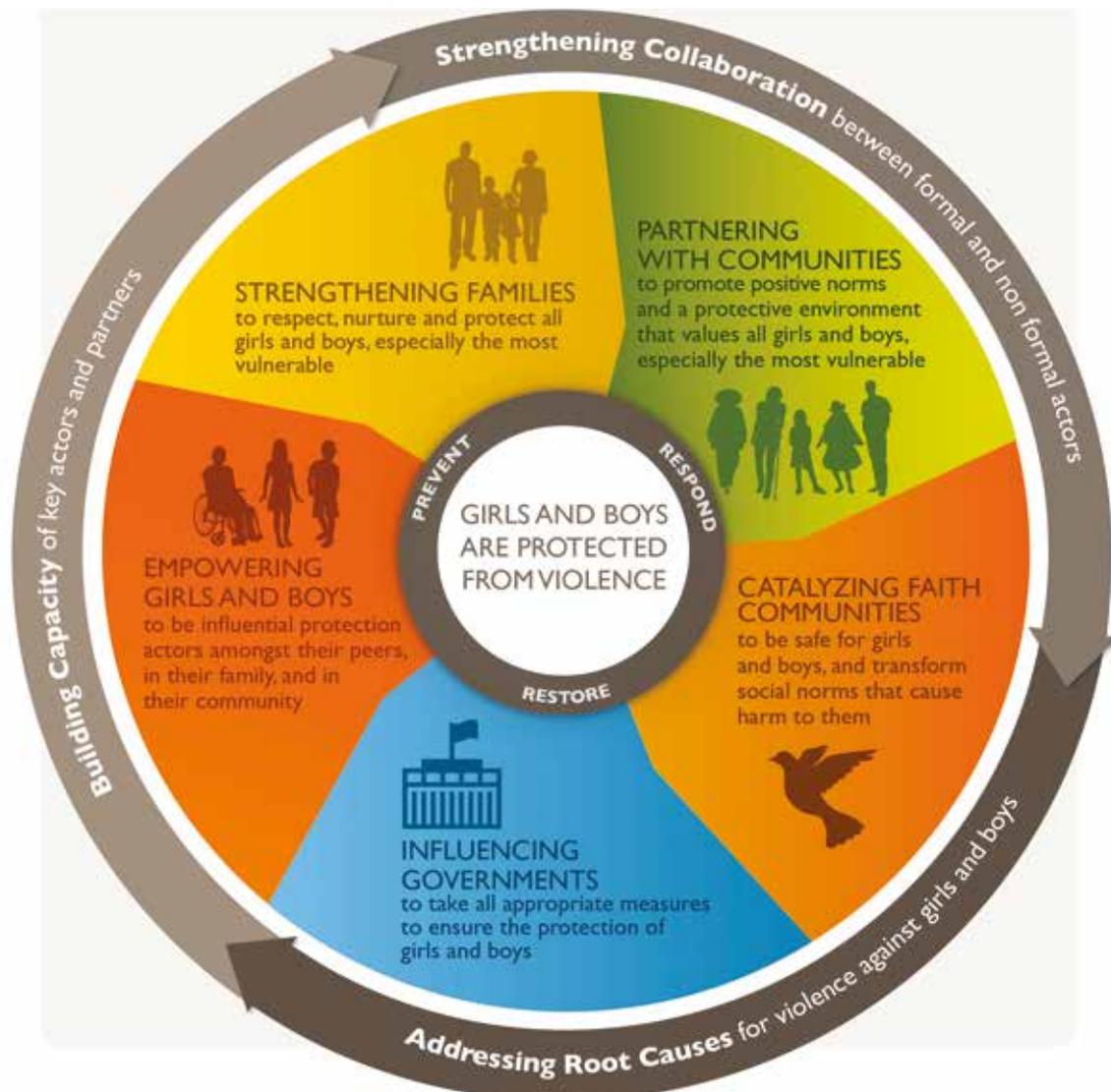
such as child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting and child labour and put in place sustainable strategies to combat them. It has provided girls and boys with the life skills and tools needed for them to become influential protection actors in their communities. It has allowed the implementation of proven approaches, such as World Vision's Channels of Hope approach, which transforms faith leaders into catalysts for child protection within their faith communities. It has allowed communities to focus on their most vulnerable children, including children with disabilities, to include them in the circle of protection.

As World Vision, we will continue to work with this approach to address violence against children across the continuum of care, through interventions that prevent risks from happening, respond to them when they occur and ensure the restoration of children affected by them. These case studies showcase how this work has changed lives and, if supported, will continue to do so. We hope they prove to be a rich source of knowledge and inspiration to all who read them, from practitioners to policy makers, to funders and supporters of development programmes for children.

Haifa Ungapen

Child Rights Programme Advisor, World Vision UK

World Vision's systems approach to the protection of girls & boys





A game of scrabble between Kevin Jenkins, President of World Vision International, and some of the amazing children driving child protection work, through children clubs and parliaments, in Beni Town and across the DRC. Tiles, at the end of the game, read: energy, love, health, education and freedom!

Strengthening law-mandated structures to achieve sustainable child protection



Hem, leader of her district's child club network, discusses a poster on the harmful effects of child, early and forced marriage with a VCPPC member.

The challenge – The gap between legislation and service provision

Nepal's 1992 Children Act founded the Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB), a national statutory body whose remit was to set up a formal system of child protection across the country. Since then the government has struggled to get the district and village-level structures of this system established and operational. Insufficient resources and a lack of expertise are the cause.

In 2009, an Inter-Agency Working Group on Child Protection - including UNICEF, Plan, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes and World Vision - tried to support the system by providing funds to recruit a district level child rights officer. However, this was still not enough to get the systems up and running. Children were left dealing with multiple child protection issues - child, early and forced marriage, child labour and violence against children - with no one to turn to or help. Child, early and forced marriage specifically was widespread. Steeped in social norms and traditions, it was completely accepted and encouraged across communities.

LOCATION

Sunsari and Udayapur Districts, in the Eastern Region of Nepal.

THEMES

- Child protection systems strengthening
- Accessing budgets for child protection
- Reporting and resolution of child protection cases

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Formal and informal child protection structures, Children Clubs

OUTCOMES

- Formal systems for child protection established and running at district and village level - 2 functional District Child Welfare Boards and 13 functional Village Child Protection and Promotion Committees
- 15% of the yearly village development budgets allocated to child protection
- Increased reporting and resolution of child protection cases (from 0 to 421 cases - 2011 to 2016)

WHY IS THIS APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

Using law-mandated child protection structures to create a sustainable child protection system, from the local to the national level, works well in countries where the government has already put in place specific child protection policies, but is struggling with their implementation. Supporting communities to align to the government strategy through this work also boosts sustainability.



The approach – Creating a sustainable child protection system, aligned with government priorities

Step 1 – Establishing an evidence-based dialogue and taking action

World Vision Nepal's project in Sunsari and Udayapur started with an ADAPT¹ child protection assessment. Armed with evidence of child protection abuses happening in communities, the project worked closely with the appointed child rights officer to strengthen the non-functional District Child Welfare Board (DCWB) in both districts. By fostering dialogue between the various government departments that ought to have been involved in child protection, the project managed to guide them towards the establishment of the prescribed village-level child protection structures: the Village Development Committees (VDCs) and the Village Child Protection and Promotion Committees (VCPPCs), to whom children could report child protection abuses.

Step 2 – Fostering multi-stakeholder engagement

Once the system was up and running, the project worked with the VCPPCs to ensure they had a full understanding of the child protection system, and the roles and responsibilities of each of its parts. To further strengthen the system, the project also brought in the police, health workers, school management committees and teachers into child protection planning at the village and district levels.

Step 3 – Putting communities at the heart of the child protection system

With community participation and ownership at its core, the project ensured informal groups – mothers groups, health volunteers, traditional healers and Children Clubs – were driving the work as active agents of change, especially in terms of identifying and reporting cases of child protection abuse in their communities.

The impact - From zero to over 400 reported and resolved cases

- From no child protection structures being in place, Sunsari and Udayapur now have 2 functional DCWBs and 13 functional VCPPCs. In 2014, the VCPPCs managed to put in place their yearly child protection plans and, for the first time, access the child-specific budget allocated to them by law, within the VDCs. This is now a continued yearly feature of the VCPPCs.
- In turn, the DCWBs have managed to complete their five year strategy on child protection, which they are just starting to implement.
- From zero child protection cases being reported, Sunsari and Udayapur have 421 child protection cases² that have been reported and resolved between 2011 and 2016, with many

others being informally resolved in the communities. This comes in conjunction with qualitative data reporting a substantial increase in children's identification of and resistance to abuse and increased community trust in mechanisms for the reporting and referral of child abuse cases.

- The Chandbela village in Sunsari has been declared child marriage free, with other villages heading toward the same status.

What's next?

Nepal's government is currently championing a national campaign seeking to declare child-friendly local governance VDCs and a child, early and forced marriage free country. This means that there is now space and scope to replicate and scale up this project's systems strengthening approach to support the government in its child protection strategies and work-plans.

Subak Lal Sardar, member of his village's VCPPC in Sunsari has said: "It has been a good guidance of child protection project for facilitating the child protection system and structure for the protection of children. It supported in building our capacity through knowledge, skills to deal with the children cases at the community level. We will surely carry on the good works further. With this effort, we have declared Chandbela village as child marriage free."

Key learning

Staffing empty departments is not enough. Building the capacity of people at all levels is key to a sustainable child protection system, as it increases the supply of good service delivery. This in turn leads to a rise in the demand for these services, as trust in their quality increases. A crucial part of World Vision Nepal's approach is to put capacity building at the heart of communities, investing in children and young people, listening to them and taking their feedback on board.

A CHILD'S STORY OF CHANGE

"I feel my future is bright because I have built skills by participating in different training and activities by child protection project of World Vision. With those skills, I am working in radio as radio jockey. I share my learning through mass communication. I am working to raise awareness through this. I earn my pocket money too. I am supporting 5 children from Prakashpur school for their study also. I was victim of violence and I believe it is my responsibility to save others from this violation of child protection."

A child member of the Children Clubs - Sunsari.

¹ For more on ADAPT you can go to www.wvi.org/child-protection/publication/adapt-child-protection

² From the review of documents held by both the District Child Welfare Boards and the Police of Sunsari and Udayapur.

Empowering community-led child protection systems to reduce child labour



Children in this school in the Himalayas enjoy their right to play, away from the threat of child labour.

LOCATION

Ratan Lal area of the city of Siliguri, in the West Bengal state of India

THEMES

Informal child protection systems • Child protection monitoring register • Child labour

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Children Clubs, Child Protection Units, the police

OUTCOMES

- A community-led monitoring system for child labour and other child protection issues
- A decrease in child labour and an increase in school enrolment and attendance levels
- Linkages between child protection systems and the education, health and welfare sectors

WHY IS THIS APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

Where formal child protection systems will not reach community-level, empowering the community to become the driver for child protection ensures a bottom-up approach that nudges community-led child protection towards becoming part of more formal systems.

The challenge – High child labour and school dropout rates

Siliguri is one of the fastest growing cities in India, with many industries settling there, thus making it a fertile ground for child labour. Because the surrounding areas are poor, many children migrate into Siliguri in search of work. Siliguri has 154 residential areas classified as slums that are home to about 36% of the city's population. In the Ratan Lal area of Siliguri, there are no proper shelters and few formal schooling structures. Families are almost entirely dependent on daily labour. All of this puts pressure on children to engage in labour, usually as rag pickers, in places where they are exploited by employers.

The approach – Empowering community-led child protection systems

Step 1 – Setting up the systems

In order to address child protection issues in Ratan Lal, World Vision India worked with the community to set up Children Clubs (CCs) and a Child Protection Unit (CPU). The CPU included duty-bearers, such as parents and teachers, from the community. It also included child representatives, elected by the CCs. Child labour having been identified as a prominent issue in the community, WV supported the CPU with training on how to identify it, raise awareness on it and address it. The CPU took the training to other stakeholders, including Community Health Workers, to ensure child protection was fully integrated into health work.

Step 2 - A monitoring register for child protection issues

Going around their community, door-to-door, the CPU put together a register of the community. This included details on every family and individual resident, including details on the age and schooling/work status of every child within the community.

Step 3 - Evidence-based action

Based on this register, the CPU addressed child labour with families. This was done partly through positive parenting training that encouraged parents to value education more and partly by supporting families with access to non-formal education.

Step 4 – Working in partnerships

To further increase its credibility, the CPU partnered with the police, who then started coordinating with its members to address child labour. The CPU also partnered with the government established Child Line. CCs members worked with their peers to raise awareness of the value and purpose of reporting systems such as the Child Line, the police or the CPU.

The impact - Returning children to education

- As a result of the work above, 228 children labourers (out of 252 identified children) have gone back to informal education. Sandeep Mahato, a member of Ratan Lal's CPU says: "Almost 80% of child labour in the area has been reduced and there are high levels of parents' and guardians' awareness on child-related issues..."
- A further 646 children - who had also dropped out of education, due to seasonal family migration or poverty, have returned to it. This is particularly important as these children are amongst the most vulnerable to sexual trafficking and exploitation.
- Out of all the above, 180 children have currently been mainstreamed back into formal education. Their schools have reported an increase in the retention of at-risk children.
- The District Social Welfare Department of Darjeeling now comes to the CPU for awareness raising activities on child labour, but also child abuse, early and forced marriage and trafficking.

"There is a difference in my mother's and my life. I am literate, she is not literate. If there would have been no child centre, then I would end up just like my mother, married at an early age and unable to get an education. I felt happy because education will help me become somebody when I grow up."

Subera – Ratan Lal

What's next?

The register put in place by the CPU is regularly updated and used to keep children in schools. The CPU is going outside Ratan Lal to duplicate its approach to other communities. The CPU is linking up with local legal departments, such as the District Child Protection Society. Its members are hoping to convince the district's administration to formally register them as an organisation and allocate funds to child protection in the community.

Key learning

Child protection systems can start small and with simple tools. A monitoring register focussing on child protection allowed the community to take action against child labour. It has also led to the identification of other child protection issues the CPU is now working to address, including early and forced marriage and trafficking.

Magdalene Das, a member of Ratan Lal's CPU says: "If this child protection unit was not formed by World Vision and the training not been given to us about child protection, how to follow cases and report to the right people, we wouldn't have been able to save children of our community. People here would still have an indifferent attitude towards trafficking, they wouldn't care much. But thanks to the formation of such units, we are on alert, the community is alert and we are willing to fight against trafficking."



Children are now back to learning at the child centre in Ratan Lal.

Using inclusive vulnerability mapping to support most vulnerable children



In addition to continuing her education, Sievmey now supports other children with theirs.

The challenge

– An exclusive definition of poverty

In Saom, the local authorities' poverty reduction services and support have always been solely focused on supporting families with low incomes. Because of this restrictive view of poverty, a large number of the most vulnerable children have traditionally been excluded from accessing the services and support they need. Amongst these are, for example, out-of-school children whose families send to work outside the community. Out-of-school children work tending animals, in brick factories, as domestic workers, or as seasonal migrants. Because these children bring money back into their families, the latter do not qualify for the services and support lower-income families can access.

LOCATION

The Saom commune in Kiri Vong in Cambodia

THEMES

- Inclusive vulnerability mapping
- Most vulnerable children
- Relevance and accessibility of services and support

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Child Protection Committees, Children Clubs, most vulnerable children, local authorities

OUTCOMES

- An all-encompassing inclusive definition of vulnerability, as defined by the community
- Most vulnerable children and families identified by child protection actors and local authorities
- 76 newly identified most vulnerable children (29 girls and 47 boys) and families accessing needed services and support
- Increased social capital, throughout the community, through the inclusion of most vulnerable children

WHY IS THIS APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

Inclusive vulnerability mapping is an effective tool for identifying and accessing the most vulnerable children, who otherwise often remain invisible to child protection actors. When championed by the community, inclusive vulnerability mapping is a driver of change. It can be used to bring about more inclusive social welfare services, as well as integrated support to the families - which in turn benefit the whole of the community. While this project focussed on child protection, inclusive vulnerability mapping is versatile and scalable and can lead to a multi-sectoral response to reduce vulnerabilities.

The approach

– Inclusive vulnerability mapping

WorldVision Cambodia's project in Saom helped communities to set up Child Protection Committees (CPCs) and link them to the government-mandated Child Protection Networks, which the project also helped to strengthen. At the same time, WorldVision worked with children and young people to set up Children Clubs (CCs) that gave children a voice on their villages' CPCs. Through these child protection systems, the communities were able to come together to conduct a village mapping to identify the most vulnerable families and children. The mapping identified:

- The characteristics and identities of vulnerable families and children
- Their specific needs
- The reasons behind their inability to access specific services/support

The impact – An inclusive community where most vulnerable children are protected and valued

As a result of this mapping and analysis, the most vulnerable children of the community became visible. Their needs also became visible, which meant the CPCs and the CCs were able to better tailor the relevance and accessibility of their support and services to them. The resources to achieve this came from initiatives led by the CCs and funds specifically being allocated to the newly identified most vulnerable children by village leaders and the commune council.

Because of this, 76 most vulnerable children identified through the mapping:

- Gained life-skills, increasing their resilience to abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect.
- Were able to access safe and appropriate livelihood training, as needed – alongside their families.
- Got involved in the CCs of their villages, becoming key agents for child protection awareness and change in their communities.

The work of World Vision with the local authorities of the Saom commune, has meant that they:

- Decided to revise their operational definition of most vulnerable children and move to an all-encompassing definition of vulnerability, as defined by the community.
- Are currently supporting most vulnerable children and their families, with purposefully allocated resources and tailor-made services.
- Value most vulnerable children as agents of change in their communities, as they have seen the contributions these children have made through CCs.

IDENTIFIED CATEGORIES OF MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN SAOM

- Children labourers
- Children who are out of school
- Migrant children
- Children living in temporary accommodations
- Children with physical or mental health disabilities
- Children whose carers have physical or mental health disabilities
- Children living in families with domestic violence
- Children suffering from neglect
- Orphaned children
- Children who have lost one parent
- Children not living with one or both of their parents
- Children whose carers are elderly
- Children affected by substances and alcohol addictions
- Children affected by HIV/AIDS

What's next?

World Vision Cambodia has been trialing a Social Accountability approach to child protection. Inclusive vulnerability mapping is a tool that can be readily replicated and scaled up within this approach to influence the decisions and actions of local duty bearers, thus making sure they serve and support the most vulnerable in their localities.

Key learning

Small changes can lead to big impact. By shifting the definition of vulnerability from one that's solely based on income to one addressing a range of factors, the project managed to achieve significant changes in the lives of most vulnerable children and their communities.

FROM MOST VULNERABLE CHILD TO TEACHER POTENTIAL



Sievmey and her mother now look forward to a brighter future.

Sievmey lives with her mother - a widow with a mental health condition - and her 3 siblings, in a remote village of the Saom commune. In order to take care of her mother, Sievmey decided to leave school and get work. Through the inclusive vulnerability mapping, Sievmey was identified by her village's CPC and CC as a most vulnerable child. Her peers involved her in their CC as well as in other social and life-skills activities. As a result, Sievmey became more socially resilient and confident. The CPC also worked with Sievmey's mother to strengthen the family's economic resilience. This included involving Sievmey in her village's Youth Saving Group. Sievmey is now back at school. She is an active member of her CC and advocates for the inclusion of other most vulnerable children. She says: "I want to be a teacher. I really want to see all the most vulnerable children included and protected. They need support, please do not discriminate and exclude them".



In Guangxi in China, the road to school takes over 90 minutes. It is difficult and dangerous. For 9 year old Meiqian it has already been a cause of injuries. Now, Meiqian and her friends help each other get to school safely, while advocating for safer roads with the adults and authorities of their villages.



In Nankoma in Uganda, children, parents and leaders have taken on policing and upholding child rights and protection in their community. Cases of child abuse, once very frequent, have now decreased. In this photo, World Vision community-based monitor, Karim, is on a monitoring visit with 12 year old Salim, a World Vision trained child activist for child rights and protection.

A child-led complaint mechanism to address sexual violence against children



Jean-Bosco, Child Parliament's President of Media and Communications in Beni, speaks at a local radio station. The station gives weekly airtime to the Child Parliament to allow them to spread their child protection messages.

The challenge – Sexual violence against children

“Imagine yourself: In the evening, you go back home. You find your daughter of two years crying. She is totally desperate, trying to wipe away her tears, and you learn that she has been raped by your own brother, her uncle”.

This is the story of the parent of a child rape survivor. In North Kivu, in the east of the DRC, these stories are too numerous. According to the Gender Ministry report, in 2013, 6,898 cases of sexual violence were reported in North Kivu, with 846 cases located in Beni. The average age of survivors in these cases was between 13 and 15 years.

From long experience in the field, World Vision knows these figures merely hint at the reality, with the majority of cases going unreported and unpunished. Although DRC law requires everyone to report concerns about child health and all forms of child abuse, and sets fines for failing to do so, this is rarely applied in practice.¹

¹ Article 192 of the Child Protection legislation in the DRC

LOCATION

Beni in the North-Kivu province in the Eastern DRC

THEMES

- Child-led child protection
- Sexual violence against children
- Child protection reporting and referral mechanisms

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Children Clubs, Child Protection Units, schools, the judicial and social care systems

OUTCOMES

- A functional child-led complaint mechanism, allowing child survivors of sexual abuse to come forward
- Functional linkages between children, communities, the judicial and care systems, enabling survivors to access care and take perpetrators to court

WHY IS THIS APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

The child-led complaint mechanism started a culture of children speaking up against child abuse. It increased their confidence and fostered a culture of reporting in the community, which led the community to take action on the reporting and legal resolution of cases of sexual violence against children.

The approach – A child-led complaint mechanism

As part of its child protection project in Beni Town, World Vision DRC supported a wide range of stakeholders to strengthen their knowledge of child protection and sexual violence laws. Beneficiaries included Child Protection Committees (CPCs) and networks, Children Clubs (CCs), child protection police, health workers, teachers, traditional leaders, faith leaders, child-mandated institutions and child parliament members.

As a result, the CCs designed and led a project through which they established a complaint mechanism, implemented in 4 schools in Beni Town. World Vision supplemented this initiative by helping key stakeholders to strengthen their skills in terms of monitoring and referring child abuse cases. Doing this helped these stakeholders connect with the judicial system: the police for investigations, and lawyers to bring offenders to trial.

The impact – Cases of child abuse and sexual violence successfully brought to trial

- The linkages between the child protection systems, which include the community, civil society and mandated state institutions, are enabling children and survivors of abuse and sexual violence to track down their abusers. On the one hand, children can bring their abusers to justice. On the other, they can access the care they need in the aftermath of the abuse.
- As a result, 26 cases of child abuse have been brought before the courts. Seven out of these cases were for sexual violence, three of which have already resulted in a successful ruling against perpetrators. Punishments have included a minimum sentence of 5 years in prison, as well as reparation and compensation fines.

What's next?

The hope of the Beni Town community is to support other communities to replicate this approach, with the aim of one day replicating it across the country.

As Adeline Bikuba, Head of Gender and Family Services in Beni says: "The project is being executed in Beni Town, but our expectation is to extend this good practice to the whole country for a better child protection".

Key learning

Throughout this process, children have demonstrated their capacity to lead a monitoring process, and to influence adults and leaders in their communities. Equipped with the necessary skills and connections, children survivors become the main agents of change in their villages.



As leader of the Child Parliament, Nicole is committed to sustain child protection across communities in Beni.

"Now I'm able to safely denounce abuse that's done to my peers and to be sure that perpetrators are punished. This will contribute to our protection."

Nicole, Child Parliament President – Beni.

A SURVIVOR'S STORY

"I was sexually abused by a boy I knew from the village. After the rape I denounced him to the neighborhood chief who linked me with the child parliament. The child parliament filed an accusation with the police. When the boy knew the police was looking for him, he ran away. Fortunately he was arrested after three months and brought to trial where he was convicted. Even if he is not able to compensate me for this act, I'm glad he is punished. For me it is already a solace."

Natasha², a sexual abuse child survivor.

² Name has been changed to preserve the dignity and ensure the safety of the child survivor

Youth-led advocacy results in by-laws against harmful traditional practices



Jenneh was due to be married when she was 11 years old. Thanks to the by-law now in place in her community, she is continuing her studies instead.

The challenge – Under-resourced systems and harmful social norms

In remote rural areas of Sierra Leone, structures created by law to help in the prevention of and response to child protection issues have struggled with capacity and administration. Knowledge related to child protection issues and the willingness to address them have both been lacking in communities where the problems are biggest. Indeed, many of the problems such as Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) and Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) are rooted in cultural socialisation and are, as such, accepted as a way of life. Such problems are further exacerbated by the lack of effective laws. This is particularly true of efforts to eradicate FGM/C.

The approach – Youth-led advocacy

Step 1 – Youth-led child protection assessment and plan

In 2012, as part of a child protection project in Jong, Kpande Kemoh and Sogbini, World Vision Sierra Leone conducted an ADAPT¹ child protection assessment. As the number one stakeholders in this

LOCATION

Jong, Kpande Kemoh and Sogbini chiefdoms in Bonthe District, Sierra Leone

THEMES

- Youth-led child protection advocacy
- Harmful traditional practices
- Child protection by-laws

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Young people (14 to 18 year old), Mothers' Clubs, Sowies (traditional female genital cutters), traditional chiefs

OUTCOMES

- Community by-laws on female genital mutilation/cutting and child, early and forced marriage.
- The two above practices have considerably reduced in the communities, as have teenage pregnancies
- Young people now have a voice on child protection issues in their communities

WHY IS THIS APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

Empowering young people to take action on child protection issues that affect them and their peers is a powerful driver for change. The process in itself equips young people with skills they can use to effect change in all areas of their lives. The change is sustainable because driven, implemented and monitored by those living in the community.

process, young people (14 to 18 years) in these communities realised that the major issues affecting the health, education and development of children around them were FGM/C, CEFM and teenage pregnancies. As a result, they decided to develop and implement a plan to target FGM/C and CEFM through advocacy. The young people's strategy was to target chiefdom traditional leaders and they communicated their intention to the project via the Children Clubs (CCs). As an organisation that values young people's participation, and sees them as agents of change in their communities, World Vision readily supported the group.

Step 2 - Risk assessment and advocacy training

The exercise started with a risk assessment, guiding youths to determine and analyse possible risks they could face when tackling such sensitive issues. This assessment was updated at every stage of the plan, ensuring advocates were always protected and knew how to address dangers. Young people then participated in various types of training on child protection and advocacy. This meant that they were better positioned to engage with stakeholders when demanding their rights.

¹ For more on ADAPT you can go to www.wvi.org/child-protection/publication/adapt-child-protection

Step 3 - Safely and effectively accessing leaders

The advocacy journey started by ensuring the support of women in Mothers' Clubs, who harnessed their social and family networks to access traditional leaders and Sowies. Working in this way, the young people ensured access to these key stakeholders in the safest and most effective way possible. As a result the young advocates were able to successfully engage with two Paramount Chiefs, the highest traditional leaders in the area.

Step 4 - Evidence-based and reality-grounded advocacy

Sharing the evidence they had gathered on FGM/C and its impact on children and the community, the young people asked the Paramount Chiefs for their support in devising mechanisms that would end these practices. Harnessing the power of real life stories, the young people discussed a recent case with the Paramount Chiefs: that of a young girl of 16 who had just died of complications related to FGM/C and teenage pregnancy.

The impact - Functional by-laws are driving a decrease in FGM/C and CEFM

- As a result of the youth-led advocacy, and against all odds, Paramount Chiefs took action against 2 traditional practices. Previously, Paramount Chiefs would have been expected to uphold the cultural values of their chiefdoms and be the last to speak against these traditions. Instead, Paramount Chiefs worked with local authorities - including section and town chiefs, women and youth leaders, and constituency councillors - to develop by-laws, including fines for perpetrators, against FGM/C and CEFM.
- A substantial decrease in FGM/C, CEFM and even teenage pregnancy is being reported by the young people and the communities. In a recent end-of-project evaluation, 95% of respondents in Focus Groups Discussions rated these practices as much less common than before. In these groups, young people attributed the downturn to the awareness raised on child protection by the project as well as to the by-laws developed by the Paramount Chiefs. They also felt that the involvement of Sowies in the project contributed to the near-eradication of FGM/C.
- A similar dynamic has been reported by young people in relation to the decrease they have observed in child labour in their communities. They have indicated that awareness and by-laws on child labour have in turn opened the way for an increase in children in education.
- Successful youth-led advocacy has meant that young people now have a voice on child protection in their communities, whereas it had previously been taboo for them to even discuss these issues, much less participate in the decision-making process. In the

“Our hope is to see all children grow up well and realise their dreams. We shall continue to stand against anything that would disturb this purpose including female genital mutilation and child marriage.”

Paramount Chief – Sogbini

recent evaluation, young people indicated the biggest change in their lives has come from their empowered status, which allows them to play a big role in both the prevention and response spheres of the child protection system.

What's next?

The achievements of the young people in the Bonthe District have created a great platform for World Vision Sierra Leone to scale the discussion up to national level. World Vision has also begun working with other agencies to pressure the government to introduce national laws ending harmful traditional practices in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Key learning

Risk assessment is a crucial part of any youth-led advocacy, to ensure the protection of the young people advocating on sensitive issues. It is a process that should run throughout every stage of the advocacy process.

CHILDRENS' STORIES OF INFLUENCE

“We have gained confidence and knowledge that early marriage is unacceptable... I can now talk to people and tell them I don't agree with this and they listen.”

A child member of the Children Clubs – Bonthe.

“Child marriage and female genital mutilation have been two major issues that have been affecting children for a long time. Our cry has finally been heard by stakeholders to stop the practice for which we are proud to have influenced.” **17 year old boy – Mattru**



A community drama raising awareness on the harmful effects of FGM/C and CEFM

Challenging social norms to tackle female genital mutilation/cutting



Women in Gargara are now front and centre in the fight against femal genital mutilation/cutting.

LOCATION

Gargara village in the Awdal region in Somaliland

THEMES

- Social norms
- Female genital mutilation/cutting
- Gender equality
- Engagement of faith leaders

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Boys and girls, men and women, faith leaders, community media

OUTCOMES

- Female genital mutilation/cutting substantially decreased in the community
- A shift in social norms related to the practice, from acceptance as a religious commandment to rejection as an unwelcome tradition
- A more gender inclusive community, where girls and women have a voice and participate in decision-making

WHY IS THIS APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

By fostering dialogue and building a shared sense of responsibility around child protection, the project was able to engage faith leaders' and men's participation which is proving vital to issues such as female genital mutilation/cutting, as well as increase the participation of women and girls in decision-making.

The challenge – Gender inequalities

In Gargara, a village in the extreme North-Eastern end of Somaliland, it is an expected tradition for girls to go through Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) as a rite of passage for a girl child to become a “real woman”. The line dividing culture and religion being a very thin one in this context, every community arrives at its own understanding of the practice, without considering its true origins.

Throughout the project in Gargara, World Vision Somaliland worked with the community on child protection. In line with Goal 3 of the Millenium Development Goals¹, the project promoted gender equality and empowered women and girls. In this context, it sought to address FGM/C - as one of the main issues affecting girls in the community: impacting on their health, education, and psychological well-being.

¹ For more on Goal 3 of the Millenium Development Goals, you can go to <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml>

The approach – Empowering communities to challenge social norms

To ensure behavioural change, the project followed a 3-pronged approach:

- 1. Building knowledge and confidence** - By reaching out to women and girls, alone at first, putting to use their existing social spaces, the project was able to increase their knowledge of child protection and raise their confidence - thus preparing them to engage with the rest of the community.
- 2. Fostering community dialogue** - Somaliland being a fragile country with a conservative society, the project's perceived agenda was initially met with suspicion by the community. Only by co-opting both village and religious leaders in the drive to protect children did the project manage to move forward and get access to the whole community. The key to trust building was to use community media and the Channels of Hope approach². Involving imams in the communication process meant they were able to use their influence in the community to dispel myths that FGM/C is enshrined in religion.
- 3. Supporting direct collective action to address FGM/C** - In the context described above, it would have been very difficult for the project to address FGM/C too abruptly. Thus, the project established neutral spaces such as Child Rights Committees and Children Clubs, where everyone worked towards the common goal of child protection. This allowed the project to expand social spaces for women and girls. It also allowed it to start bringing men, women, boys and girls together; to then address FGM/C. Involving men in the process ensured its success. While women were the visible perpetrators of FGM/C, men were the silent force behind it.

The impact - On the way to eliminating harmful traditional practices

- Gargara's community has substantially decreased FGM/C in the village. A wider end-of-project evaluation has indeed shown that the practice is now cited by project communities as largely uncommon, as compared to the start of the project. Key informant interviews with FGM/C practitioners show them to have abandoned or greatly reduced their activities due to reduced demand. With this, communities such as Gargara are paving the way to fulfilling the new Sustainable Development Goals on the elimination of harmful traditional practices.
- Women and girls now have a decisive voice on issues affecting them in the community

“We have heard that in neighbouring villages, girls are still undergoing genital mutilation. It is not happening in our village anymore and we are going to talk to them so that they abandon that practice. It's not good for girls.”

Fadumo, Child Rights Committee member, – Gargara

- The approach has been taken up by other World Vision projects who are now addressing not only FGM/C, but also child, early and forced marriage under the umbrella of child protection.

What's next?

The relatively recently formed Somaliland Child Wellbeing Working Group has enabled World Vision Somaliland to share its experience on FGM/C in Gargara with other iNGOs. This means that FGM/C has been included in the recent draft Child Bill. FGM/C is now an issue of national focus on which World Vision will continue to lead.

Key learning

In fragile and very traditional environments, working with the culture, rather than against it, is particularly important. Meeting communities on their terms, and nudging them towards challenging their own perceptions is a key element of the change process.



Supported by World Vision, all over Somaliland, young girls like Hodan are speaking up at high profile gatherings against the harmful effect of FGM/C.

GIRLS' STORIES OF CHANGE

“When we are talking girls rights in our community we are talking 0% of voice in the community, Now I see something pushing us and saying come and be the front line. It was a first time a girls' been a part of leading team in our school but now we are vice chair and secretary of child rights committees in Garbo-Dadar and hugging up microphone to take a part in the awareness campaigns talking to my community for our rights to be in the school not to marry and forced married in youngest age and also stopping female genital mutilation. For now we think we have voice to protect our rights and others.”

Farduusa Yasin Ahmed,
Vice-Chair of Child Rights Committee – Garbo Dadar

² For more on the Channels of Hope approach, you can go to www.wvi.org/health/publication/channels-hope

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