

The Effectiveness of Formal and Informal Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms in Rural Areas of Tanzania: Evidences from Selected World Vision Tanzania Projects

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate the helpfulness of formal and informal community based child protection systems in rural set up in Tanzania using four World Vision Tanzania Projects (Kongwa ADP, Lake Eyasi ADP, Mtinko ADP and Makindube ADP). Specifically, the study aimed at establishing the proportion of children who are living free from harmful practices; examining the operations of the formal and informal community based child protection mechanisms and assessing community mechanisms for reporting of child abuse cases. A total of 1,873 respondents including parents or caregivers, children aged 12-18 years, community members and duty bearers (VEOs, Police, Social Workers and Teachers) were involved in the study. Data were collected using questionnaire, semi-structured interview, focus group discussions, documentary review and field observations. Data entry was done using CSPro then posted to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Study findings showed both formal and informal community based child protection mechanisms exist but not effective and efficiency. This implies that, children in rural areas are not adequately protected as such they might be easily abused, exploited and molested. It is recommended that, government should capacitate and train duty bearers in rural areas so that they effectively prevent and respond to child protection issues in the community.

Key Words: Child Protection Mechanism, Rural, Effectiveness, World Vision, Community-Based

1.0 Introduction

Children need protection at all stages of their growth, in order for them to grow well physically, intellectually, spiritually and morally. Child protection therefore, enables children to grow into good citizens who are responsible for their own and national development (URT, 1996). In uncomplicated form, child protection may be referred to a process whereby children's rights are safeguarded so that they are not subjected to harm (Bogohe et al., 2012). Protecting children necessitates close collaboration between different stakeholders, a procedure which engage putting in place policies, programs, legislation and organizational systems and strategic interventions both at macro (i.e. national, sub-national levels) and micro (i.e. community, household, institutional levels) in order to guarantee that children are protected from any significant harm (de Waal and Roberts, 2005 cited by Bogohe et al., 2012). With this regard many countries have taken serious steps in improving structures responsible for child protection. While considerable steps have been taken to improve legal framework for protection of rights of the children in Tanzania, many children are vulnerable to violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse (UNICEF, 2012)

In Tanzania, many cases of child abuse are believed to be happening in rural areas where the structures and systems to protect children are either weak, under resourced or non-existent (UNICEF, 2012). It is common to find the very institutions, and individuals that are supposed to protect children – VEOs, teachers, parents, police, and relatives- are cited as the perpetrators of violence and abuse. A National Survey on Violence against Children, launched in 2011, exposes that about a third of females aged 13 to 24 experience at least one confrontation of sexual violence by the age of 18. The common type of sexual violence experienced was unwanted sexual touching followed by attempted unwanted sexual intercourse. Among males of the similar age group, more than 13 per cent confirmed that they had experienced at least one incident of sexual abuse prior to the age of 18. Few of those who experienced sexual violence received any service. Victims of sexual violence

are often reluctant to let others know about their experiences due to confusion, feelings of guilt, shame, fear of not being believed, or even being reprimanded for what has occurred.

The policy framework recognizes and encourages participation of the private sector including NGOs in improving and eventually protecting children rights. World Vision Tanzania (a child focus organization) is one of such organization that has been working with households in rural areas in Tanzania since its establishment in 1981 to ensure the basic rights of the children are safeguarded. It is implementing in most parts of the country, integrated development interventions commonly known as Area Development Programs (ADPs). ADPs cover a specified geographical area (usually three wards or division) and are implemented for up to 15 years. Against this background, this paper is based on a study that was undertaken in Kongwa ADP, Mntinko ADP, Lake Eyasi ADP and Makindube ADP. The study aimed at establishing the status of children rights in the aforementioned ADPs so that a specific program is established to intervene the situation.

Since it is apparent that incidents of child abuse, exploitation and violence are still increasing in rural Tanzania, the need to strengthen formal and informal community-based child protection structures in rural areas is inevitable. This study therefore, sought to investigate the effectiveness of the conventional structures responsible for child protection available in rural areas of Tanzania. Specifically, the study aimed at establishing the proportion of children who are living free from harmful practices; examining the operations of the formal and informal community based child protection mechanisms and assessing community mechanisms for reporting of child abuse cases.

2.0. STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Mtinko, Makindube, Kongwa and Lake Eyasi Area Development Programs of World Vision Tanzania. Specific villages in each area were selected using lottery method where by one village in each ward in the area was sampled. In selecting the desired sample, a Probability Proportion Sample (PPS) was used. This approach allowed the selection of clusters to be proportional to the number of household in a given geographical area. A sample of 300 households in each ADP was a target; this is a recommended sample size for precision level of 5%. 100 children aged 12-18 in each ADP were also sampled. CSPro was used for data entry then exported to SPSS for analysis. Figures were drawn by Excel from frequency tables generated by SPSS

Data collection tools include both quantitative and qualitative. All interviews and focus groups were conducted in “Kiswahili” whenever possible. If respondents are not fluent in Kiswahili, a bi-lingual villager was identified by the leadership to translate from the local language to Kiswahili.

Tools used in this study include:

- Care giver survey tool (for Household Survey). This is questionnaire that was used to gather data from household heads in ADPs surveyed. This tool was useful in exploring the manner to which parents and guardians are making themselves involved in child protection issues. It was also used to gauge their understanding on the same.
- Modified Child Protection Outcome Assessment Survey tool (CPOA) - for children aged 12 – 18 years. This tool was adapted from PPA (Project Partnership Agreement) and was first constructed by WV UK for projects with child protection component. It was used to gather information from children in schools and outside. This instrument was very useful as it allows friendship and privacy and that’s makes respondents free to talk.
- Focus Group Discussion Guide for selected groups in the community. This tool was used to collect important information from men and women. Through the use of this method sensitive information were easily collected. Men and women had separate sessions and they were free to speak on what is happening in their communities with regard to child protection.
- Key Informants Interview. This was used for Police, DCDOs, DSWs, WEOs, VEOs, Nurses and Doctors. All interviews were semi-structured. With this regard, key informants were able to provide sufficient information on child protection status in their areas of jurisdiction.

Before using these tools, they were tested in one of the village in Mkulat ADP which was not part of study area. The design of the questionnaire and other tools were such that they capture specific indicators given in the Terms of reference. The following table summarizes the demographic information of respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

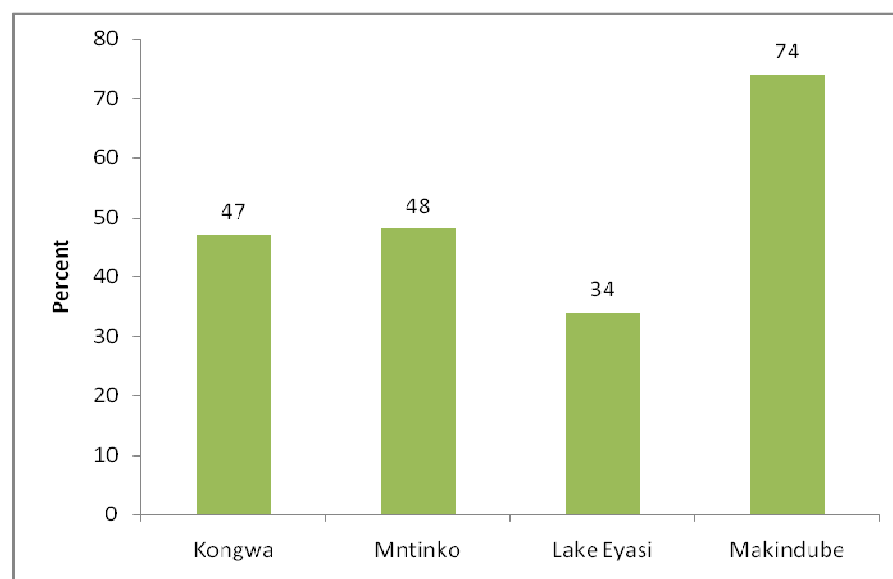
ADP	HH Head Sampled		Youth 12-18 yrs		FGD		Key Informants		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Lake Eyasi	288	12	50	50	30	30	1	1	462
Mtinko	274	26	50	50	40	40	3	1	484
Makindube	292	8	50	50	30	30	2	1	463
Kongwa	266	34	50	50	30	30	2	2	464
Grand Total	1120	80	200	200	130	130	8	5	1,873

3.0. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Children Living Free from Harmful Practices

To explicitly establish existence and effectiveness of the both formal and informal community based child protection mechanism, the study investigated the proportion of children who are free from harmful practices in the last 12 months. Cited harmful practices in the study area given were forced early marriages to young girls, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child battering, given household chores that do not relate with age and child molestation. With exception of Makindube ADP, all ADPs surveyed had less than 50% of children living free from harmful practices (Fig 1). This finding implies that majority of children in the last 12 months, in areas where this study was carried out, were confronted with harmful practices more especially traditional and customary practices that are not protective of children. Moreover, the finding motivated the need to be acquainted with kind of community based child protection mechanisms in a bid to hold back harmful practices in these areas.

Figure 1: Proportion of Children Living Free from Harmful Practices (n=400)



3.2. Formal and Informal Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms

3.2.1. Formal Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms

Study findings show that, there are both formal and informal child protection regulations and structures in all surveyed ADPs. Formal mechanism for child protection in rural areas observed was that of each village having a security committee within a village government's structure. Qualitative data shows that this committee is responsible for all civil and criminal cases in the village including child protection cases. A community member accused for child abuse is normally arrested by members of the security committee and later taken to a duty bearer such as Village Executive Officer (VEO) for case hearing. VEO together with other members of the Village Government will decide the verdict. In case a VEO has failed to decide on a case it will be referred to a nearest police post or primary court. It was however, revealed in this study that, VEOs have powers that they even decide on whether to proceed with a case or not without giving grounds for their decisions. It can now be argued that, VEOs may side with defendant against plaintiff on deciding on a matter. Furthermore, it was shown from discussion with community members that, VEOs often takes bribes from defendants with intention to

demolish evidences from plaintiff. It was also noted by the study that, a good proportion of VEOs and parents are not adequately informed on existing country’s child protection laws, policies and guidelines. The study revealed that, VEOs in most cases are deciding on child abuse cases without consideration of provision given by these laws, policies and guidelines. Thus, surveyed areas have weak formal institutional frameworks to handle child protection issues.

3.2.2. Informal Community-Based Child Protection Mechanism

With regard to informal community-based child protection mechanism, the study noted existence of elders councils mostly made with people of the same clan. This means that every clan had its own council that serves as court to decide on matters arising from members of the particular clan. Discussion with community members in areas where this study was conducted revealed that, elders have power to judge civil and even criminal cases brought before them. Most cases of wife and child battering and even child molestation are commonly handled by these elders. It was noted by the study in discussion that, mostly, a person found guilty of raping a child will be required to compensate a family of abused child with a cow or money of the same value as a cow. One of the discussant in Msisi Village (Mtinko) FGD was quoted saying...

“...in our community, if you are found guilty of raping a child you will be required to compensate a family of abused child, in most cases an animal will be given...”

Furthermore, it was observed that, elders do not have the tendency of referring cases to courts, even if they know that they don’t have power to decide on those particular cases. However, it was noted by this study that, utilization of these councils by community members in cases related to child abuse and exploitation is diminishing tremendously. Usefulness of them, in recent days, has remained in solving marriage misunderstandings.

3.2.3 Formal and Informal Mechanisms for Reporting Child Abuse Cases

Readiness of parents, caregivers and children to report cases of child abuse is an indication of the existence of mechanism of child protection as they would not have guts to report if they don’t know where to report. At least half of all parents, caregivers and children in all surveyed areas will report a case of child abuse if happen to eyewitness child exploitation, violence or abuse. It was revealed by the study that, majority of parents or caregivers would report a case of child abuse to VEO than police or other places (Table 2). The major argument attached to this is that, police posts and other facilities are not available in villages. This poses a question as to whether these VEOs are adequately trained and capacitated to handle issues of child protection in their respective areas of jurisdiction.

Table 2: Where will Parents or Caregivers Report Cases of Child Abuse

ADP	Where to Report a Case (%) n=1200		
	Village Executive Officer	Police or Court	Other People or Places
Kongwa	96	17	2
Mtinko	97	35	2
Lake Eyasi	93	14	8
Makindube	92	23	12

On the contrary to where parents were reporting, children are likely reporting cases of child abuse to parents and teachers. In all ADPs surveyed, majority of children said they will report a child protection case to parents and teachers

(see Table 3). Parents and teachers are close to children than any other group in the community. Any strategy that would make use of parents and teachers on child protection issues stands high possibility to achieve its intended objectives

Table 3: Where will Youth (12-18 years) Report Cases of Child Abuse

ADP	Where to Report a Case (%) n=400					
	Parents	Teachers	Village Executive Officer	Police	Dispensary	Other Place or People
Kongwa	37	20	17	0	0	26
Mtinko	42	16	10	4	2	26
Lake Eyasi	46	46	6	0	0	2
Makindube	18	10	8	18	22	14

Qualitative data obtained by this study from FGD indicate that, despite the fact that both parents and children knows where to report, there are a lot of incidences of child abuse that are not reported to authorities. It is common to most of community members not reporting just because they do not want to be blamed by family members as children are mostly abused by close relatives. It can be argued from the finding that, traditional arrangements restrict a member to freely report a case of child abuse to a respective authority.

4.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has looked at the effectiveness of both formal and informal community based child protection mechanisms in rural areas of Tanzania. It is indicative from the findings that, these mechanisms are apparent not effective as still tradition and taboos seems to outweigh operations of these mechanisms. This is evident from data that shows that, more than half of all children are not free from harmful practices. Duty bearers such as VEOs are vested with so much power to prosecute and decide on child abuse, exploitation and violence while they are not adequately trained for that. The study revealed that, informal community based child protection system is recently not focusing on handling child protection issues; instead it is mainly dealing with marriage misunderstanding in community. Furthermore, the study has revealed that there is underreporting of child abuse cases despite the fact that majority of community members knows where to report cases of child abuse. In order to have effective formal and informal community based child protection mechanisms; there is a need to build capacity to duty bearers more especially VEOs on preventing and responding to child abuse incidents in the community. Through this duty bearers will have reaction plans on anticipated cases. They will definitely know cases to give verdicts and cases to refer to higher authorities as most of them will probably be criminal cases. There is also a need to ensure basic education and training on related child protection issues. This will help to create awareness among community members on significance of reporting cases of child abuse to respective authorities.

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