

VPRU: CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES

Intervention description

Child Protection Committees (CPCs) empower communities to prevent, identify, and address instances of child abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation. These committees are generally comprised of men, women, children of different age groups, and leaders in the community; such as teachers, political or religious leaders etc. The CPCs carry out awareness raising, identification, and referral into a case management programme, and play an important part in both prevention, as well as response.

Evidence by question

Is there systematic review (or impact evaluation) evidence that demonstrates positive and meaningful impact on the (sub-)outcome for all target groups? If not what other type of evidence is available?

There are no systematic reviews or impact evaluations addressing the effectiveness of CPCs. In light of this gap, an overview of available case studies, and ethnographic evidence is presented. A few literature reviews are also summarized.

Based on rigorous evidence alone, what is the impact of the intervention on the (sub-) outcome? If no rigorous evidence is available, what other type of evidence exists?

Disaggregate results by different groups/contexts where needed

OVERALL SUMMARY: Child protection committees (CPCs) are a popular mechanism by which to address child protection issues within a community, in both development and humanitarian contexts. They work as both, a first line of defense, as well as a means to connect the community with formal child protection networks. However, in spite of CPCs being widely employed, there is no rigorous evidence at this point, to validate their effectiveness. All available evidence comes from case studies or ethnographic studies as well as a few literature reviews, that also only, include poor quality studies. Nevertheless, there is rich evidence available from these studies, on key factors that potentially influence the effectiveness of such programs, and how those can be leveraged to improve the functioning and impact of CPCs.

These factors include communities i) having full ownership of the CPCs and how they function, ii) their ability to leverage already existing formal and informal community mechanisms for child protection, iii) their success in garnering the support and/or involvement of community leaders, iv) their success in balancing power and existing social divisions in the workings of the group, v) the extent to which children are themselves involved in their own protection, vi) their access to financial resources and training opportunities, and vii) their ability to establish linkages with other formal/informal child protection systems such as district-level child protection networks or local police or other systems of justice.

Disaggregated Analysis: Evidence from Literature Reviews

A widely cited literature review ([Wessells, M.G. 2009](#)), that identified and looked at 160 published and mostly grey literature, to assess the effectiveness of community-based groups¹ that work on child protection and wellbeing, found a very weak evidence base. The review found evaluations that lacked robust designs, were conducted post-hoc without baseline measures, and did not include the comparison conditions necessary for making causal attributions regarding the effectiveness of such programs. Most evaluations focused on process and output indicators rather than on outcomes for children and families.

Based on this limited evidence, the review made a few observations around outcomes for children in humanitarian contexts: a) CPC's reduce child participation in hazardous labour, b) they reduce child trafficking, c) they facilitate the reintegration of formerly recruited children into civilian life, d) they increase involvement of children in their own protection and the realization of their participation rights, and e) CPCs don't generally address gender-based violence and family violence or improve access to additional psychosocial support. These results primarily come from programs conducted in rural as opposed to urban areas.

Additional finding from another literature review ([Landis, 2012](#)), highlights that CPCs function as the "eyes and ears" of a community, and were effective in identifying cases of violence and abuse². CPCs were also found to increase people's

¹ Primarily NGO facilitated CPCs either broad spectrum groups or more focused on specific issues.

² These impacts were described in ways however, that were difficult to measure, and were not described in terms of results from evaluations investigating the effectiveness of these efforts.

access to necessary protection related services³ within the community. The review divided CPCs into i) child welfare committees (CWCs), ii) a community-based group called GBV observatory established to monitor and report cases of GBV against children, and help survivors access GBV related services, iii) children's clubs or groups that involved discussions and awareness around SGBV, sexual and reproductive health, as well as other gender issues, iv) male engagement programs, that involve discussion groups, formal training groups, as well as formation of male-led (adult and youth) committees in communities to monitor for protection concerns, and v) women's groups, that involve group sensitization and training around SGBV, and other key issues, as well as promoting women as protection groups in the community.

When disaggregating evidence for these different types of CPC's, the lit review found that children's groups were effective in improving children's sense of agency, and knowledge around protection and child rights. Male engagement programs improved attitudes, and behaviors towards girls and women, as reported by men and their significant others. Such programs also seemed to have considerable community buy-in. No evidence was reported for the other committees or groups.

Disaggregated Analysis: Evidence from Case Studies and Ethnographic Studies

Subsequently after his literature review, Wessells, published two additional ethnographic studies ([Kostelny, K. et.al. 2013](#) & [Wessells, M.G. et.al. 2012](#)) conducted in Kenya and Sierra Leone, respectively. These studies observed that CPCs can be effective, particularly for issues that the community finds important and/or those that are less taboo (e.g. teen pregnancy). What also makes a big difference to their effectiveness, is the way they are created, and then supported by non-profits (NGO's). Several of these factors are identified in more detail in the subsequent section.

Other studies that have also been conducted around CPCs include: [Plan International 2017](#) (Case Study); [Wessells, M.G. 2011](#) (Action Research Study); [Rampazzo, E & Twahirwa, A. 2010](#) (Participatory Evaluation); [Sheahan, F. 2009](#) (Case Study); [War Child UK 2010](#) (Participatory Evaluation); [Prickett, I et.al. 2014](#) (Ethnographic study).

These don't provide evidence around the impact of CPCs on outcomes of relevance to us, with the exception of one study conducted in Rwanda ([Prickett, I et.al. 2014](#)), that highlights that, CPC's help with the identification of child victims of neglect, exploitation, and abuse. For example, the authors point out that "*committee members, especially those at village level, have a very good knowledge of what goes on in the every-day lives of community members, and are therefore able to identify family issues like children being out of school, or neglect. They do this, by either noticing themselves, or being approached by other community-members*".

What factors or pathways appear to be influencing the final outcomes measured? Are there any relevant program design or implementation related factors that are influencing the results and must be considered when analyzing the findings?

The Wessells review, amongst a few others, identified certain factors that potentially influence the effectiveness of CPCs, and tried to assess whether, NGO-led CPC efforts contributed towards, or hindered these factors. The critical questions that were explored, included:

- **Did NGO facilitated CPCs lead to high levels of community ownership?**

The review wasn't able to clearly answer which elements improve ownership, but it did highlight what didn't seem to work, which was a highly expert-driven, partnership approach where the agency conceptualizes what needs to be done, presents the idea to the community, invites them to participate as volunteers and beneficiaries, and provides training and funding as needed. The review observed that "*didactic approaches frequently led community people to see the work, and the ideas as agency lead rather than their own. In some cases, there was backlash against outsider-imposed ideas such as "child rights" that did- not fit the local culture*".

As per findings from the review, the author observed that it was important to generate: a) a sense of collective responsibility and commitment amongst community members, b) internal mobilization of community resources, and c) an emphasis on communities' decision making and action on behalf of children, with external agencies working as facilitators who "*rather than acting as experts, served as facilitators who listened, learned about local-power dynamics, identified natural helpers, enabled child-focused dialogues, and patiently cultivated community awareness of and action to support vulnerable children*".

³ These weren't really fleshed out within the review.

- **Did NGO facilitated CPCs leverage already existing resources?**

In a later literature review based on the Wessells 2009 review ([Eynon, Alyson & Lilley, Sarah 2010](#)) it was noted that several evaluations found limited effectiveness of CPC programs, particularly because they had not been initiated after a careful assessment of existing local capacities, and assets. Based on this result, the review recommended that since communities often consist of both formal and informal structures that are already mobilized to help people, the aim should be to build upon such already existing structures, as opposed to establishing new community mechanisms. New mechanism can often *“create confusion among community members, and demonstrate a lack of appreciation and knowledge of existing community structures and contexts”*.

- **Did NGO facilitated CPCs garner support and/or involve non-formal and formal leaders?**

The Wessells review also found that ensuring support/involvement of traditional leaders, elected community officials, religious leaders, and/or respected elders etc., often lends legitimacy, and builds trust towards the program. Leaders also play a key role in mobilizing human/ financial resources, and infrastructure needed by CPCs, and also serve as role models particularly in situations where ‘social norms’ or ‘traditional practices’ need to be challenged. Leaders must be carefully selected however, since some evaluations found that leadership engagement within the CPCs was often politically motivated, and oriented towards maintaining power, and traditions, which was actually quite counterproductive.

Additional ethnographic evidence also points towards the value of fostering relationships with other institutions, and groups within the community. As per one study conducted in Uganda ([Horn et al., 2013](#)), CPCs that are connected to other structures, such as schools, and religious leaders, are able to more effectively address issues in their communities, and are able to more effectively disseminate valuable information. According to this research, the impact of complicated issues, such as ethnic discrimination, can be reduced when CPCs cultivate relationship with schools, school authorities, and parent groups.

[Landis, 2012](#) also highlights studies, where it was found that, securing the support of local leaders when establishing CPCs such as; women’s protection groups, made the process far easier than if that support was not available. As per one key informant from a study *“I learned that if you get the heads of the community involved in your activities, it’s easier to go through.”*

- **Did NGO facilitated CPCs extensively involve the participation of children?**

A genuine participation of children, where they are given an opportunity to influence the decision-making process within CPCs, is essential. Several evaluations have reported that *‘children were found to be highly creative in their approach to communicating essential messages, and quite effective in engaging other children through drama, radio broadcasts, role plays, and talk shows’*. Such programs also reported improvements in child protection outcomes as a result.

- **How successfully did NGO facilitated CPCs balance power across the different groups involved?**

The review found that very few programs were able to balance power. Existing social divisions often outweighed efforts towards ensuring, that all members shared power in the workings of the group e.g., men tended to dominate over women, and adults tended to dominate over children. The few programs that were successful, did so through consistent capacity building efforts, and investment of significant amounts of time and energy.

- **Were NGO facilitated CPCs able to garner the appropriate resources and receive appropriate training and capacity building to conduct their work?**

Resources that were typically mobilized came from external agencies rather than from the local government or local leaders, with a few exceptions, where some CPCs got land related grants from the local chief. Resources included e.g. bicycles, allowing volunteers to go long distances to reach affected areas, or stipends to support volunteers. Trainings were also provided, but they were often lacked appropriate depth and quality. Stipends were also highly sensitive to context, and in some instances giving large stipends, and that too early in the process actually undermined volunteerism, and the sense of community ownership.

This was also supported by ethnographic evidence from another study ([Horn et al., 2013](#)), that identified financial barriers faced by volunteers leading CPCs. Firstly, volunteers were unable to allot sufficient time for this work, due to having to earn an income in addition to the work of the committee. Also, the cost of transportation, and other expenditures related to this role, were impacting community members’ abilities to commit to the work. In addition, to the financial burden on the

volunteers, it was also reported that the communities did not understand the nature of the work, and often resented volunteers, by making wrong assumptions that they were receiving monetary compensation, or by expecting material assistance from the CPCs.

CPC members reported feeling impeded by what they described as a lack of experience and capacity, lack of agency in addressing underlying causes of the problems that children in their communities are exposed to, and feeling powerless when parents challenged the role of CPC members in their children's lives ([Horn et al., 2013](#)). These concerns may be lessened, if program designs also include training opportunities for CPC volunteers as part of the intervention.

- **Were NGO facilitated CPCs able to establish linkages with formal/informal child protection systems?**

The effectiveness of CPCs was also influenced by how well they were linked with district-level child protection networks, who helped them to mobilize resources, and also by their ability to connect with the police, and justice system, or with traditional justice systems, and religious groups.

Does the intervention help to achieve gender-equality sub-outcomes in the relevant IRC theories of change?

The available literature does not offer information on impacts on gender-equality sub-outcomes.

If cost analyses are available, what is the cost per beneficiary, output or outcome?

The available literature does not offer information on cost-efficiency or effectiveness.

How long does the impact of the intervention usually last (are there any long-term impacts reported)?

The available literature does not offer information on any long-term and/or sustainable impacts.

Are there reported unintended consequences or other known limitations of the interventions when implemented by IRC or by others?

As per the available evidence, key unintended consequences that can negatively impact protection outcomes are:

1. Where CPCs excessively target particular categories of vulnerable children, such as orphans or formerly recruited children, this can lead to groups overlooking other protection threats, particularly those which might be interlinked e.g., a child who lived on the street one day might become a child soldier the next.
2. Inadequately trained or appointed CPCs, can actually hamper protection efforts, particularly when members overstep boundaries e.g., housing children within CPC members' homes, which can replace or break down parental responsibility, or when there are no child protection policies or codes of conduct for CPC members, or when CPC members lack agency and authority within the community towards addressing child protection issues.
3. Didactic, top-down approaches often trigger a backlash, and make communities feel that their own beliefs, practices, efforts, and resources have been disrespected, and/or marginalized.

Additionally, there are no consistent indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of CPCs ([Landis, 2012](#)). This methodological issue, makes it difficult to evaluate for impact, and it must be considered at the beginning; during the program design phase.

Is there ongoing or planned research around this intervention (by the IRC or others)?

There is an ongoing study, using a before-and-after design (with a control group), that is seeking to understand the impact of linking community-based child protection groups with a formal child protection agency; the District Ministry of Health in Sierra Leone. The outcome they want to address is a reduction in teenage pregnancies. Mid-term results from this study, have found a reduction in teenage risk-taking behaviors, an increase in intention and efficacy to use condoms, and avoid unwanted sex ([Stark, L et.al. 2014](#)).

What evidence do we have for the IRC identified alternative interventions that achieve the same outcomes, but through a different set of activities and/or impact pathways? a) do we have evidence for a direct comparison between the effectiveness of the intervention versus the comparison and who does the evidence support? b) if there is no direct comparison available what is the standalone impact of the alternatives on the outcomes and what impact pathways appear to be playing a role?

No evidence was found for broader community-based protection approaches, or for the appointment of focal points for child protection within other existing community committees. There was also no evidence for other additional ways of working with CPCs, other than what has already been identified in the previous section, around the factors associated with effective CPCs.

Search Strategy

A rapid scoping of literature was conducted using phrases such as; “child protection committee*”; “community-based child protection”; “child welfare committee*”; “association of concerned carers”, as well as keyword combinations such as; (“child protection” OR “child welfare”) AND (committee OR group OR “community based” OR “local level” OR “beneficiary led” OR “children club”); (community AND “child protection”); (“beneficiary-led” AND “child protection”); (“refugee community organization*” AND “child protection”); (“vigilance committee*” AND “child protection”); (“local demobilization and reintegration committee*” AND “child protection”); (“children’s club*” AND “child protection”). We also combined these with terms (evaluation OR review).

Resources searched were: Google Scholar; STC Resource Center/Child Protection Working Group; CPC Learning Network; 3ie IER, 3ie SR database, Campbell Database, Cochrane Database, EPPI center Database; IRC Research Project List; Feinstein International Center; Plan International; UNICEF Innocenti; ALNAP; Science Direct.

Search Findings

Systematic reviews

Not available

Impact evaluations

Not available

Literature Reviews

1. [Eynon, Alyson., & Lilley, Sarah \(2010\) ‘Strengthening National Child Protection Systems in Emergencies through Community-Based Mechanisms: A Discussion Paper’.](#) Save the Children, UK.
2. [Landis, D. \(2012\) ‘Examining Promising Practice for Young Survivors: An Integrated Review of Sexual and Gender Based Violence Programming in Liberia’.](#) Report. Child Protection in Crisis Learning Network.
3. [Wessells, M.G. \(2009\) ‘What Are We Learning About Protecting Children in the Community? An inter-agency review of the evidence on community-based child protection mechanisms in humanitarian and development settings’.](#) Report. Save the Children, UK.

Case Studies & Ethnographic Studies

1. [Kostelny, K., Wessells, M., Chabeda-Barthe, J., & Ondoro, K. \(2013\) ‘Learning about children in urban slums: A rapid ethnographic study in two urban slums in Mombasa of community-based child protection mechanisms and their linkage with the Kenyan national child protection system’.](#) London: Interagency Learning Initiative on Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms and Child Protection Systems.
2. [Wessells, M.G., Lamin, D.F.M., King, D., Kostelny, K., Lindsay, S., & Lilley, S. \(2012\) ‘The disconnect between community-based child protection mechanisms and the formal child protection system in rural Sierra Leone: Challenges to building an effective national child protection system’.](#) *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 7:3, 211-227.
3. [Plan International \(2017\) ‘Community-based child protection as a strategy for protecting South Sudanese refugee children: a case study from Gambella, Ethiopia.’](#) United Kingdom: Plan International.
4. [Wessells, M.G. \(2011\) ‘An ethnographic study of community-based child protection mechanisms and their linkage with the national child protection system of Sierra Leone’.](#) Report. The Columbia Group for Children in Adversity.
5. [Rampazzo, E., & Twahirwa, A. \(2010\) ‘Baseline Study: Children’s Perceptions of Child Protection Measures Existing at Community Level in Rwanda: Final Report’.](#) Save the Children.
6. [Sheahan, F. \(2009\) ‘The First Line of Protection: Community-Based Approaches to Promote Children’s Rights in Emergencies in Africa’.](#) Save the Children, Sweden.
7. [War Child UK \(2010\) ‘Study of community-based child protection mechanisms in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo’.](#) War Child UK.
8. [Prickett, I., Moya, I., Muhorakeye, L., Canavera, M., & Stark, L. \(2013\) ‘Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms in Refugee Camps in Rwanda: An Ethnographic Study’.](#) Child Protection in Crisis Learning Network.
9. [Horn, R., Bizimana, D., Scholastica Nasinyama, L. A., Kironde, E., Canavera, M., & Stark, L. \(2013\) ‘Community based child protection mechanisms amongst urban refugees in Kampala, Uganda: An ethnographic study’.](#) Child Protection in Crisis Learning Network.

Ongoing Studies

1. [Lindsay Stark, L., MacFarlane, M., King, D., Lamin, D., Lilley, S., & Wessells, M.G. \(2014\) 'A Community-Driven Approach to Reducing Teenage Pregnancy in Sierra Leone: Midline Evaluation Brief'. London: Save the Children.](#)