

Strengthening Child Protection Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa

A working paper



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Strengthening Child Protection Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa

A Working Paper

Prepared by: Training Resources Group and Play Therapy Africa

For the: Inter-agency Group on Child Protection Systems in sub-Saharan Africa

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADB	African Development Bank
AIHA	American International Health Alliance
ARC	Action for the Rights of the Child
CAAFAG	Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups
CHIN	Children in Need Network
CPC	Child Protection Committee
CPIE	Child Protection in Emergencies
CPN	Child Protection Network
CPSS	Child Protection Systems Strengthening
CPWG	Child Protection Working Group
CRA	Child Rights Act
DCPT	District Child Protection Team
DFID	Department for International Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ESAR	Eastern and Southern Africa region
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
FSU	Family Support Unit
FTR	Family Tracing and Reunification
GBV	Gender-based violence
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus/Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
IBCR	International Bureau for Children's Rights
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMS	Information and Monitoring Systems
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISW	Institute of Social Work
KAP	Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices
LEAP	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
MVC	Most Vulnerable Children
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSCP	National Strategy for Child Protection
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OPPEI	OVC Policy and Planning Effort Index
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
REPSSI	Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative

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RIATT	Regional Inter Agency Task Team on Children and Aids
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAS	Social Action Services
SWW	Social Welfare Workforce
TPO	Transcultural Psychosocial Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VCPT	Village Child Protection Team
WCAR	West and Central Africa Region
WCPT	Ward Child Protection Team
WISE	World Innovation Summit for Education
ZUTA	Zonal, Urban, Town and Area

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Executive Summary

Introduction

There is a growing interest in applying the systems approach to strengthening child protection efforts. Guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the systems approach shifts attention to a larger systemic framework that includes legal and policy contexts, institutional capacity, community contexts, planning, budgeting and monitoring and evaluation subsystems. This approach differs from child protection efforts that focus on single thematic issues, such as HIV/AIDS, disability, child trafficking, street children, child labour, emergencies and institutionalization. These single-issue approaches often result in a fragmented and unsustainable child protection response.

A number of national governments and advocates are working together with a coalition of organizations (e.g., the African Child Policy Forum, Plan International, REPSSI, RIATT, Save the Children International, Terre des Hommes, UNICEF, World Vision International and others) to help move this agenda forward. This paper is a response to the increasing need for agreement on approaches and documented evidence of good practices consistent with system strengthening work.

Purpose

The purpose of the Inter-Agency Working Paper is to consolidate current thinking, examples and lessons learned about child protection system strengthening in sub-Saharan Africa and suggest a way forward. The focus is on concrete actions that reflect country narratives and is followed by recommendations for continuing and sustaining the work. The target audience includes a range of government leaders and staff, from national policymakers to local government authorities, traditional authorities, UN agencies and other multilaterals, regional organizations within sub-Saharan Africa, bilateral and private donors, educators, researchers, international and local NGOs, community representatives and civil society, including children's groups.

Methodology

The working paper was developed using a mixed methodology that included a desk review of relevant documents and literature, interviews using telephone and Internet-based communications (Skype and e-mail), and face-to-face interviews. Documents reviewed included program descriptions and evaluations, government policies, laws and strategic plans and statistical data. The working paper relies heavily on practitioners' self-reported field experiences and observations.

Data collection, writing and draft reviews were carried out between September 2011 and June 2012. A series of draft reviews were done, beginning with the outline, in November 2011 and subsequent reviews in January and May/June 2012. Individual face-to-face interviews and group discussions were conducted at a [three-day consultation meeting with a reference group](#) in Nairobi, Kenya in September, 2011. Presentations of the draft paper and individual and group interviews and discussions were then held at the [Second International Conference on Sexual Abuse in Africa](#) in Accra, Ghana in March 2012. Further development was done at the [Child Protection System Strengthening Conference in Sub-Saharan Africa in Dakar, Senegal](#) in May 2012.

Child Protection System Strengthening Defined

At its most fundamental, child protection systems strengthening work means that leaders and practitioners take a holistic view of interventions, and discern how an intervention aimed at one element of the system requires aligned interventions in other areas. This approach supports success with the target intervention and strengthens other elements of the system at the same time. It requires relationships between and among different elements to be accounted for as key factors in

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the change process. Done with this approach in mind, the interventions are likely to be more effective, leverage scarce resources, and be more sustainable in the long run.

It differs from a single-issue effort such as child sexual abuse, HIV/AIDS, institutionalization, and child labour. Rather, common policies and practices demonstrate good outcomes for all children and families across all categories of vulnerability. This requires key stakeholders to simultaneously attend to the complex economic, social, demographic, political, environmental, and community contexts.

A number of global frameworks and tools have been developed to guide countries in building, reforming and strengthening national child protection systems. These global definitions, concepts and principles aim to support and strengthen families and engage communities. The frameworks and tools are designed to provide guidance for national governments and international organizations by highlighting components that would be found in any child protection system. Ultimately, however, the application of any global framework needs to reflect the national and local context, including cultural diversity, resources and level of stability.

Mapping and assessment has been demonstrated as a common first step for stakeholders to develop and address priorities for the protection of children. This also provides good information on the link (or lack of) between the “formal” national or government-led elements of the system (e.g., laws, policies, finance, and workforce) and the “informal” elements, sometimes referred to as “endogenous” family and community practices.

System Strengthening in Sub-Saharan Africa

It is recognized that the path that system strengthening takes is country specific and depends on a range of social, cultural, economic and political factors. This section of the full paper is organized into nine elements common to child protection system strengthening, and provides many examples from different countries as well as key considerations for application. It is meant to highlight the good work being done and demonstrate the country-specific nature of system strengthening within a common framework. The categories and observations include:

- 1. The Role of Mapping and Assessment:** A wide range of introductory mapping and assessment approaches have been utilized to understand the current child protection systems, from comprehensive “snapshot” mapping to specific component analyses (workforce, service delivery and community protection mechanisms). The methodologies used in the sub-Saharan context are described with detailed country examples and key considerations of design and process.
- 2. Creating Political Space:** Creating political space for system building is a process linked to some form of “democratization” of decision-making processes and recognizes the importance of strengthening empowering processes. A significant outcome of system strengthening should be a process that creates inclusiveness, cross sector discussions and political will for strengthening a national child protection system within a respective government. A discussion on the processes and key considerations for creating political space and country examples is provided (e.g., Côte d’Ivoire’s mapping exercise; Tanzania’s use of research data; and Senegal’s strategy development with local groups).
- 3. Strategy, Policy Development and Law Reform:** Practice has shown that developing, reviewing or updating strategies, legislation and policies are important avenues for the promotion of overall systems strengthening. Although in a nascent phase in most Sub-Saharan countries, several strategy development tools currently being utilized are illustrated, such as Kenya, Mauritania and Senegal. Additional examples include strategic approaches to piloting service models (e.g., Tanzania).

- 4. Community Protection Mechanisms:** System strengthening in Sub-Saharan Africa has consistently highlighted the importance of building sustainable community-based mechanisms that are coordinated with the wider system. Key determinants to consider are community ownership, support of traditional leaders and the use of existing resources coordinated and linked with the formal and non-formal structures. These approaches serve to address and manage issues of power and diversity through participation and inclusiveness. Descriptive examples provide evidence that in the face of scarce resources, incorporating protective endogenous practices can strengthen the national system and provide a more equitable distribution of resources.
- 5. Strengthening Service Models:** Service models refer to a range of responses including prevention, protection, reintegration, promotion and participation. An integrated service delivery system has served as the starting point for system strengthening in a number of countries. These responses use different language and structures depending on the country context inclusive of formal and informal laws, policies and local practices. Three specific approaches are discussed including *Protected communities (Democratic Republic of Congo)*; *Continuum of care (Zambia, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, Ethiopia, Malawi, Swaziland and Ghana)*; and the *Minimum package of services (Southern African Development Community [SADC] and Rwanda)*. Included are country examples of service models specific to vulnerable groups, e.g., institutionalized children (Liberia) and children in difficulty with the law (Cameroon).
- 6. Social Service Workforce:** The child protection social service workforce is an inclusive term that includes all categories of people who work on behalf of vulnerable children and families. This includes a range of providers and actors, paid and unpaid, both informal and traditional such as family and kinship networks, community volunteers as well as formal, employed professional and paraprofessional workers. Examples of workforce strengthening include a wide range of approaches such as training and education of the formal and informal frontline workforce and capacity building of educational institutions such as curriculum development and teacher training.
- 7. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** M&E work is essential for a country's or region's overall efforts to better protect its children. The overall perception of field leaders and practitioners is that M&E stands out as an area where great improvements are needed, and where increased sharing of information and larger investments are critical. This section explores some of the existing efforts in strengthening M&E work as a component of child protection systems and principles that are emerging from the experiences at the national and regional levels including information and national surveillance systems, routine assessments, surveys, ad hoc initiatives and tracking systems.
- 8. Budget and Financing:** A systems approach has direct implications on the way resources (both human and financial) are considered within the new paradigm. It opens new challenges and opportunities for improved resource mobilization with realistic, strategic planning. The question of affordability is discussed, and some promising examples of costing out plans of action and strategic planning within the framework of donor and national priorities are presented.
- 9. Emergency-Sensitive Child Protection Systems:** This section considers two core issues related to work on systems strengthening in and for emergencies: (1) Current work in non-emergency situations to build and strengthen "emergency-sensitive" child protection systems; and (2) Efforts underway in conflict situation and natural disasters to strengthen or "build back better" national child protection systems. The report presents examples of current practices that highlight challenges and opportunities including emergency preparedness, system mapping and system strengthening.

Lessons Learned

Experiences from the field about the good work being done to improve the lives of children, families and communities within Sub-Saharan Africa reveal some common trends and lessons learned:

- The paths taken are different, reflecting national and local realities, with greater attention being paid to engagement of communities, families and children.
- Linking the formal and informal structures and building on the strength and resilience of local communities, families and children are key challenges ahead.
- The link has been established between mapping and gap analyses in “triggering” system strengthening processes and building political space.
- Realistic implementation strategies that show promise link the good work of secular and faith-based NGOs, community leaders, volunteers and advocacy groups with the broader political agendas.
- With a more inclusive and holistic approach to “service” that includes an expanded vision of the “workforce” linked with endogenous child protection, child outcomes can be improved on an expanded scale within the Sub-Saharan context.
- Analytical thinking and alliance with the research and academic world around M&E system work, paired with coordinated, transparent and realistic budget and finance mechanisms by donors and governments will further sustain the good work being done.

Core Challenges

Key gaps and core challenges identified include:

- **Proposing strategies that are realistic with regard to available resources.** Strategies and policies are sometimes promoted that are outside the range of available resources. Strategic approaches might utilize a more rigorous approach to prioritizing possible interventions, and plan multiple phases where ambitious end results are reached through the attainment of sequential milestones.
- **Employing common concepts and terms in child protection systems.** Children and their caregivers including community actors have a lot to contribute toward understanding the meaning of words and actions. Participatory research methodologies on children’s and parents’ views can serve as a link between individual and family resilience, community resources, service structure and provision and child outcomes.
- **Coordinating efforts at all levels of the formal and informal child protection systems.** There are gaps in communication and coordination among relevant national Ministries as well as between the different levels of government. In addition, and of equal importance, linking representatives of the community and families with the formal systems remains a critical challenge and can provide excellent learning and resource opportunities.
- **Strengthening the social service workforce.** Systematic and comprehensive assessments of the workforce that pay attention to all levels of “service” providers from the Ministry to community actors are necessary. Incorporating resilience and strengths-based approaches will further support and empower families and communities.

Conclusions

- Most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have initiated some degree of child protection system strengthening work that reflects the local realities and complexities of the formal and informal actors.

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- Systems strengthening work means that leaders and practitioners take a holistic view of interventions, meaning an intervention aimed at one element of the system needs to have aligned interventions in other areas. This approach is likely to be more effective, leverage scarce resources more carefully, and be more sustainable in the long run.
- Awareness of the need to address the “formal” and “informal” systems is rapidly increasing, as well as the parallel disconnect in many countries and communities. This is key for respectful communication, power sharing, and shared decision-making by all actors.
- Given the increased level of activity and progress to date at the country, district and local levels, it is critical to document the implementation of child protection system strengthening strategies and interventions in concrete and practical ways. This requires that actors describe what is being done, effectively monitor inputs and outcomes and share these experiences with colleagues within and amongst countries.
- Child protection is political and cannot be understood outside the political context of governments and donors. New levers for supporting African governments need to be identified that can contribute to a better *understanding of the politics of child protection*, namely why governments and donors have particular preferences among policy options, and why there is more enthusiasm for certain child protection programs (e.g., OVC programs) than others.

Practical Steps

Based on the extensive documentation and the promising practices described in the paper, below are ten practical steps stakeholders can take to support child protection system strengthening:

- Use mapping and assessment processes to engage stakeholders and to advocate for systems change.
- Work cooperatively and collaboratively to set realistic priorities and investments with concise implementation plans that include short- and long-term goals as well as incremental steps.
- Set up processes that account for power differentials between government and community actors (which can skew interaction and decisions).
- Look for ways that an intervention can be supported by work going on in connected areas, or how work could be extended to other areas to support overall systems change.
- At the same time, avoid trying to undertake everything at once, or waiting until a whole plan can be approved or funded (the perfect is the enemy of the good).
- Avoid making huge investments in basket of interventions that do not have the potential to facilitate a shift in key elements of the overall system.
- In the beginning, focus on quality rather than scale. Scaling up becomes the longer-term goal once quality is achieved.
- Include simple and sound monitoring and evaluation approaches from the start of the process in order to track progress and inform changes to ensure effective implementation.
- Use documentation and M&E to take an active approach to knowledge management at country and regional levels and for dialogue within and across different levels and actors.
- Document the impact of innovative approaches that can be shared and scaled up. ***And don't forget to tell your story.***

1. Introduction

A broad array of child protection stakeholders at community, national, and global levels have called for a more holistic system strengthening approach in order to improve national responses to violence, abuse, and exploitation of children. Guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the systems approach shifts attention to a larger systemic framework that includes legal and policy contexts, institutional capacity, community contexts, planning, budgeting, and monitoring and information sub-systems.

This approach differs from earlier child protection efforts focused on single thematic issues, such as HIV/AIDS, disability, child trafficking, street children, child labour, emergencies, and institutionalization, which experience shows often results in a fragmented and unsustainable child protection response. Many international development agencies and donors have begun to move away from stand-alone projects to more programmatic and cross-cutting interventions focused on country systems (e.g., QDDR, World Bank Social Protection Strategy 2012-2022). Child protection is in fact far behind other sectors, such as health and education, in developing a systems approach. There is an urgent need to learn from current experiences and to document promising practices, in order to make the shift to an effective systems orientation successful.

To help move this system-strengthening agenda forward in Sub-Saharan Africa, a number of national governments and advocates are working together with a diverse coalition of regional organizations (e.g., the African Child Policy Forum, Plan International, REPSSI, RIATT, Save the Children International, Terre des Hommes, UNICEF, World Vision International and others) to build agreement on approaches and to capture evidence and better practices that are consistent with sound system strengthening work.

Over the past year, the regional partners commissioned a draft child protection system-strengthening paper, and convened a diverse group of stakeholders in Nairobi to gather the latest thinking and evidence about system-strengthening work as input to the paper. An additional conference in Dakar in was designed to “reinforce, support and sustain national efforts to improve child protection systems’ impact on children in Sub-Saharan Africa through cross-country exchange.”¹ Consultations at the Dakar conference also informed the final draft of this paper.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this working paper is to consolidate what we are learning about child protection systems strengthening in sub-Saharan Africa and to suggest a way forward. The working paper is designed to focus on concrete actions – not concepts – for systems strengthening. The target audiences of the paper include government leaders and staff, from national policymakers to local government authorities, traditional authorities, U.N. agencies and other multilaterals, regional organizations within Sub-Saharan Africa, bilateral and private donors, researchers, international and local NGOs, civil society – including children’s groups – and community representatives engaged in systems strengthening planning and implementation.

1.2 Methodology

Recognizing the meagre evidence base on system strengthening in Africa and the nascent nature of child protection systems strengthening work in general, this working paper relies heavily on practitioners’ field experience and attempts to capture and consolidate current thinking and promising approaches. A mixed methodology has been used, including a desk review, a three-day

¹ The conference web site is at <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/Welcome>.

consultation meeting with a reference group in Nairobi in September 2011, remote interviews with key informants, face-to-face interviews in Ghana, consultations during the Dakar conference in May 2012, and a series of draft reviews by various experts at different stages of the paper's development.²

It is also important to add that this working paper is intended to describe what is happening in the area of child protection system strengthening as seen by leaders and practitioners at all levels, and it is not meant to be an evaluation. Rather, the descriptions and results included are essentially based on self-reporting, drawn from program documents, interviews, the document review process or focus groups. As the field advances, it will be very important to undertake evaluations to assess actual progress in the field against intended programmatic outcomes.

1.3 Definition

What do we mean by child protection system strengthening, and how does it differ from what we have been doing?

There is no internationally accepted definition of child protection systems, but there are agency-specific definitions and they share common characteristics. UNICEF, for example, defines a child protection system as follows: "the set of laws, policies, regulations and services needed across all social sectors – especially social welfare, education, health, security and justice – to support prevention and protective responses inclusive of family strengthening".³ To take another example, World Vision defines child protection systems as "a set of coordinated formal and informal elements working together to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence against children".⁴ Whichever definition is being used, applying systems thinking to child protection system strengthening means relationships between and among these different system elements are critical. Although one component may be utilized strategically as a starting point, it is equally important to understand how changing one component changes – or is changed by – other components (what the Chapin Hall paper describes as "reverberations"⁵). At its best, a systems approach will have more integrated interventions designed to interconnect and create change on a scale that has wider benefits and is sustainable.

At its most fundamental, systems strengthening work means that leaders and practitioners take a holistic view of interventions, and discern how an intervention aimed at one element of the system needs to have aligned interventions in other areas which will support success with the target intervention and strengthen other elements of the system at the same time. Done with this approach in mind, the interventions are likely to be more effective, leverage scarce resources, and be more sustainable in the long run.

This more holistic systems approach is really quite different. For example, workforce strengthening interventions often take the form of additional training for current workers or the expansion of educational slots for new entrants to a school of social work. It is assumed that once the training or education interventions are completed, workers will go forth and contribute. Yet without adequate consideration of the kinds of changes required from other child protection system elements, including the less-formal child protection system context, newly trained workers can run into a range of bottlenecks that prevent them from contributing effectively.

The old issue-response approach, with some exceptions, has tended to focus on how a project can

² For more information, visit <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/CPS+Dakar+Conference>.

³ UNICEF Global Strategy, 2008.

⁴ Forbes, B. and D. Lau, E. Oswald, T. Tutnejevic (2011). *A systems approach to child protection: A World Vision discussion paper*. Monrovia, CA: World Vision International, p. 3.

⁵ Wulczyn, F. and D. Daro, J. Fluke, S. Feldman, C. Glodek, K. Lifanda (2010). *Adapting a systems approach to child protection: Key concepts and considerations*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. New York: UNICEF.

address a specific issue or need. Usually externally funded, the project would have a weak replication plan, if any, and a limited relationship to the complex context in which it operated. Policy efforts would too often focus on legislative reforms that were disconnected from local contexts or impossible to be enforced. In contrast, the systems approach requires key stakeholders to look at the world in a different way, and to identify and assess a broad array of the interconnected issues related to the economic, social, demographic, political, environmental and community contexts. It then asks those stakeholders to set and address priorities that *specifically address* the protection of children. This is why mapping and assessment, as outlined below, has become such a common tool as a first step towards moving towards a systemic framework.

In terms of understanding child protection system strengthening work, it is important to acknowledge two complexities. First, nested within an integrated approach are so-called “formal and informal” sub-systems or components. At present, there appears to be in some countries a disconnect between the more “formal” national or government-led elements of the system (e.g., laws, policies, finance, workforce and so on) and the more “informal” or what have been called “endogenous family and community practices.” This disconnect is not functional or geographical in nature, but rather reflects a difference in values, beliefs and expectations between the formal system and community knowledge and practices. In fact, different vocabularies are often used in describing how the formal and informal aspects of the system benefit children. Within the formal system, the emphasis is often on providing “services,” whereas communities often provide “supports” to children and tend to view services as an idiom of Western social service systems. To avoid privileging either the formal or the informal aspects, it may be useful to speak of systems as offering a mixture of services and supports. This formal and informal issue will re-appear in various parts of the paper.

The second complexity involves the ambiguous way in which the term child protection strengthening has been used. Alexander Krueger, director of Child Frontiers, offers the following as a way to clarify the different aspects of child protection system strengthening:

We believe that a system approach is the more theoretical framework that would inform the strategies to promote child protection systems. Those strategies in relation to the local context might take different directions, and could include some different paths:

- System building (where national systems are virtually non-existent, and/or the State is very fragile); where this situation exists, it offers the opportunity to design something that builds upon and integrates positive endogenous community practices and their principles and values. It begins with designing and building a system which creates a virtuous link between the state and citizens (recognized and understood by everyone).
- System reform (in contexts where the existing national system appears to be not fully relevant, appropriate, or where there is incongruency between the formal system and endogenous community practices).
- System strengthening is basically a work of improving what is there, as long as there is some sort of national system, a foundation that is relevant and more or less realistic for the context, as well as some recognition of both formal and informal elements of the system.

1.4 Global Thinking about System Strengthening

Increasingly, governments and international organizations are utilizing a systems approach in the establishment and strengthening of child protection systems. At the country level, it is important to acknowledge that a certain level of system strengthening work has been going on for some time, although it is not always been well documented. However, on a practical level as partners work

together, it has been informing international players as they develop system strengthening frameworks and approaches. Globally the systems approach is reflected in UNICEF's 2005 [Protective Environment Framework](#) as well as the main conclusions of the 2008 UN Secretary-General's [Study on Violence Against Children](#) which call for expanding protective mechanisms to more holistic, comprehensive and long-term responses, increasing attention to prevention through strengthening children and the nature of the social environment. It is also consistent with a child welfare orientation that promotes child protection within the context of family service in the home and community. This, in turn, requires planned collaboration between the child protection, health, education and justice sectors.

[UNICEF's Global Child Protection Strategy](#), adopted in 2008, provides guidance on building contextualized community-based mechanisms within a national framework that protects children across the range of thematic areas. The strategy suggested two priority actions: (1) to identify the *minimum package of services* ranging from prevention to response that are shared across sectors (social welfare, education, health justice and security), includes the private sector and community NGOs, and can be modified for emergency situations; and (2) to develop and apply an analytic tool for assessing existing system components and processes.⁶ The UNICEF strategy has catalyzed an enormous amount of work on child protection systems, much of it in the early implementation stage. At the country level, stakeholders are grappling with many new concepts, from basic definitions of child protection to determining what it really means to establish a child-focused, community-based, and nationally owned system.

In order to provide guidance to national governments on initiatives to build and strengthen child protection systems, further work has been done to define and identify the key elements and processes. Supported by UNICEF and the international NGOs identified earlier in this paper, the various child protection system frameworks utilize similar structural components and processes with varying levels of complexity. For example, [Chapin Hall](#)'s normative framework is embedded in social values and laws that emanate from culture, religion and government.⁷ Child protection systems are organized around a purpose and goal with structures, functions, capacities, a continuum of care, process of care and accountability. They also operate within the broader system inclusive of justice, health, mental health and education. [World Vision](#)'s approach is similar, linking laws, services and capacities with a circle of care concept and utilizing a child-focused resilience and participatory approach. The model also stresses coordination, cooperation and collaborative mechanisms.⁸

[UNHCR](#) describes a national child protection system as including a "coordinated series of functions and actions undertaken by a range of duty bearers at all levels, family, community, provincial, national and international that combine to prevent, respond to and mitigate, the multiple child protection risks children face".⁹ A functioning child protection system is informed by children's views and experiences and strengthens families in the care and protection of their children. The [Save the Children](#) approach outlines the critical components of national child protection systems and emphasizes the importance of community-based mechanisms at the grassroots level that allow for immediate action (which is especially helpful in emergency situations). It connects child and family support mechanisms in the community with child-friendly services at all levels, regulated by quality standards and delivered by the government or accredited social agencies.¹⁰ Mobilizing and supporting a network of community-based mechanisms helps in scaling up and providing wider

⁶ UNICEF (2008). Summary of Highlights: UNICEF Global child protection systems mapping workshop. Bucharest, Romania.

⁷ Wulczyn, F., et al. (2010).

⁸ World Vision. (2011). *A Systems Approach to Child Protection: A World Vision discussion paper*.

⁹ UNHCR (2010). *Protecting children of concern through a system approach: guidance for field offices*. Draft paper. Geneva, Switzerland, p. 10.

¹⁰ Save the Children (2010). *Building rights-based national child protection systems: a concept paper to support Save the Children's work*. Save the Children Child Protection Initiative, p. 4.

coverage in the short term. Also, in resource-poor settings and places where governments have limited capacity to fulfil certain responsibilities, community mechanisms may play an even more important role in supplementing or replacing government capacity.

Ultimately, the application of any framework must reflect the national and local context, including cultural diversity, resources and level of stability.¹¹ The frameworks are designed to provide guidance for national governments and international organizations by highlighting components that would be found in any child protection systems and, hopefully, stimulate stakeholder discussions on the implementation of system-strengthening initiatives within their own contexts.

In fact, countries are developing their own definitions and frameworks, either independently or drawing on global guidance as appropriate. For example, Kenya defines a child protection system as “A set of laws, policies, regulations, services and capacities (wherein)...monitoring and oversight is needed across all social sectors to prevent and respond to protection-related risks.” Malawi uses the following definition: “A coordinated, harmonized and systematic approach to protecting children from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect, with a special emphasis on HIV.” They also go on to describe the system as “the foundation of social welfare and transformative social protection.” Tanzania uses the following definition at the district level: “the formal and informal interrelated functioning mechanisms which prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse committed against children.”¹²

In addition to the work being done on child protection system strengthening frameworks, Maestral¹³ and Child Frontiers developed extensive toolkits to aid country-level practitioners to undertake mapping and assessment initiatives to gather qualitative and quantitative data on the current child protection system status.¹⁴ The results of the mapping and assessment work would then be used to provide the foundation for a context-specific strengthening strategy based on these nascent system frameworks and approaches.

Overall, it is clear there is increased attention being paid to child protection system strengthening. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that this work is being done in some countries where poverty has a compelling impact on child well-being and where child protection systems are woefully weak and underfunded. Given that context, the challenge is to utilize the frameworks and tools to establish a process for defining a child-focused, community-based and nationally owned system with a realistic or reasonable level of priority and resources. These issues are being tackled in many sub-Saharan contexts, and a number of examples will be described in the rest of the paper.

¹¹ Wulczyn, F., et al. (2010)

¹² Mhamba and Mtembei (2010)

¹³ *Child Protection Systems: Mapping and Assessment Toolkit*, Maestral International, May 2010.

¹⁴ *Research Manual: Child Protection Systems Mapping and Analysis in West and Central Africa Phase II*, Child Frontiers, August 2010.

2. System Strengthening in Sub-Saharan Africa

The path that systems strengthening takes is country specific. It is an outgrowth of a full range of social, cultural, economic and political factors. As such, it is important to consider some overall trends that are affecting the continent:

- Africa is going through its most dynamic growth period in recent times. The continent has achieved growth rates above 6% for most of the past decade, making Africa one of the fastest-growing regions in the world today
- Uprisings in North Africa revealed that growth is not enough if its benefits are concentrated in only a few hands or geographical regions. In fact, when combined with a lack of political voice and persistently poor governance standards, growth itself may become a source of instability, particularly for young people.
- Education and health are making steady progress and the number of fragile states has declined. However, a third of African states – home to over 200 million people – are still classed as fragile. With 50% higher rates of malnutrition, 20% higher child mortality rates and 18% lower primary completion rates, these states lag behind on almost all development indicators.
- While economic growth has lifted many households out of poverty and the number of middle-income households is increasing, inequality in Africa is still high and growing.
- The “youth bulge” is already generating increasing demands for economic opportunities and political voice. If these demands cannot be met, they could become a source of social and political instability.
- Environmental degradation in Africa is a serious and growing problem. Environmental degradation mostly affects the poor, who are also at the greatest risk from extreme weather events.¹⁵

From the above we can predict that the environment for young people (especially the most vulnerable) growing will expose them to violence, abuse and exploitation and provide justification for investment in child protection system strengthening work.

Overall, there is a certain level of dynamism in the context, and a need for urgent action to address changing child protection needs. Yet, system strengthening is evolutionary, and requires strategic attention to successes and good practices established at all levels in order to capitalize on them for moving the system strengthening agenda forward. This section of the paper provides a broad range of country specific examples in several different categories. These examples are meant to be illustrative but are in no way an exhaustive list of all of the good work in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is meant to demonstrate the country-specific nature of system strengthening within a common framework. (In matrices developed for the Dakar child protection systems strengthening conference, upward 20 countries provided information concerning the overall status of child protection system strengthening work at the national level: <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/Matrices>.)

¹⁵ The economic data in the bulleted items are from the Regional Economic Outlook, IMF (Africa 2012), African Development Report, ADB 2011 and the World Bank.

2.1 The Role of Mapping and Assessment

With the shift towards systems strengthening, new evidence is required to support system-related policy formulation and programme design. This requires documenting and analyzing the effectiveness and efficiency of specific system components – linkages and relationships between protection interventions, actors and levels of government – and interactions between core¹⁶ and allied sectors. Countries and local level actors have adopted a wide range of introductory mapping and assessment approaches to support systems strengthening on the continent. This includes the comprehensive “snapshot” methodologies, specific-component assessments, hybrid approaches and country-specific mapping and assessment methodologies and tools. Some methodologies include a planning step resulting in direct systems change, others require additional follow-up to translate evidence to action. In Sub-Saharan Africa, three standard mapping and assessment methodologies are currently being used to inform new policy and programming decisions. In the Eastern and Southern Africa region (ESAR), the interagency global mapping tool kit has been adapted to the country contexts, and this is currently being rolled out in 13 countries.¹⁷ This methodology supports country teams to frame and cost a strategy to develop the child protection system drawing on the results of the mapping and assessment process.¹⁸

UNICEF and NGO partners in West and Central Africa supported the development of a region-specific mapping methodology that has been completed in six countries.¹⁹ It combines a comprehensive mapping of the existing formal child protection system with a review of the informal systems, and an analysis of the how and why the systems interact in the way they do. Community perspectives about the formal system and an analysis of congruence between formal and informal protection responses are a central component of the analysis framework.

System Mapping and Assessment

Scope: Comprehensive, “snapshot” mapping exercises versus specific component analysis (HR, services, community protection).

Common Methodologies: Desk reviews; key informant interviews; participatory research with children, community and civil society actors; focus-group discussions; surveys, physical mapping of services. Current mapping and assessment methodologies are often led by national stakeholders with support from both international and local consulting firms and individuals and range from a basic review to more in-depth analysis.

Common Ways Evidence is Being Used: Strategy and policy development; strengthened data and information for decision making, budget and costing exercises development/piloting of new service models; investments to improve coordination (i.e. clarification and reassignment of mandates, agreements between traditional leaders and state actors, development of referral networks and protocols); investments in human resources; and follow-up decisions to conduct more in-depth assessments in gap areas.

Related Cost: Costs for mapping exercises can range from \$30,000 to \$250,000 depending on the choice of methodology, nature and duration of expertise required, and the scope and depth of information collected and analyzed.

Process Benefit: The process can assist in building agreement and enhancing coordination among broad range of key stakeholders; scattered analyses and assessments can be pulled together into one system-strengthening plan.

¹⁶ Examples of “core” sectors include social and justice sectors, while education and health sectors are examples of “allied” sectors that, if engaged, could highly contribute to child protection outcomes.

¹⁷ The countries include Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda, Somaliland, South Africa, South Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

¹⁸ Based on experiences from the first wave of countries, the Global Toolkit is currently being adjusted before second wave countries start the mapping process.

¹⁹ The countries include Benin, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Niger, Senegal and, Sierra Leone.

Finally, the United States government and UNICEF have supported governments with Human Resource Gap Analyses²⁰ as a critical step to improve the national response to children affected by HIV/AIDS in high-prevalence countries in ESAR. Focused on the capacity to coordinate the implementation of the National Plans of Action for OVC, these analyses often include a functional review of the structure and staffing of the relevant ministry; resource planning and allocation for the ministry at national and sub-national levels; human resource management; communication and coordination amongst a broad range of stakeholders including non-state actors, and capacity development of the focal ministry. Human Resource Analyses are beginning to migrate into the West and Central African region, with Nigeria planning to undertake a review in a number of states in 2012.

In addition to global and regionally developed methodologies, many countries have designed their own systems mapping methodologies. Like the HR Gap Analysis, some countries are choosing to take up the component-specific analysis versus a snapshot review. Decentralized social welfare service structures and delivery appear to be emerging as a common starting point for analysis in many of these countries. **Namibia** provides an excellent example where UNICEF and UNFPA partnered to support the government to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the child protection services in five regions to develop strategies to provide integrated prevention and protection services for abused women and children. Similarly, **Mauritania** conducted an action-oriented, service-delivery mapping and assessment that resulted in the government rolling out a set of interventions to address bottlenecks in service delivery for child protection outcomes. This more weighted analysis requires child protection actors to pre-determine the most effective entry point for system strengthening in their country context and to tailor their review accordingly.

Finally, in a number of countries, system planning is being influenced by action-oriented ethnographic studies of traditional community protection mechanisms as well as by new mapping methodologies to document and strengthen such mechanisms. In Sierra Leone, for instance, a function-oriented ethnographic study helped to provide policymakers with extensive understanding of which child protection mechanisms people actually use and how to enable community use of formal mechanisms where appropriate. World Vision has developed a participatory child protection systems mapping tool that is being tested in a number of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This tool measures the effectiveness of the child protection systems in communities, and is the initial action to mobilize formal and informal actors toward local child protection system strengthening. It also acts as the foundation to generate data for national-level advocacy. Finally, Child Protection in Crisis is working with national and international NGOs in Uganda and Liberia to map community-based protection mechanisms, including their linkages to formal service providers.

Community protection evidence – whether separate or integral to mapping methodologies – is crucial to building more responsive systems, as community protection actors constitute the front-line response in the majority of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Gathering such evidence should facilitate participatory processes aimed at strengthening communities' ownership in scaling out child-centred protection supports and services, and in making a stronger, more viable link between these kinds of mechanisms and government-provided services.

2.1.1 Key Considerations

Conducting system mapping and assessment exercises is a fairly new phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa. To date, no comprehensive evaluation of methodologies and tools has been completed to inform the development of recommendations or guidance on the best approaches for different

²⁰ These analyses look at the degree of specialization, training and competencies available within specific government and non-governmental agencies in order to fulfill institutional mandates and address gaps in the successful delivery of positive outcomes for children.

country contexts. With a second generation of countries beginning to take on such work, however, it is useful to capture lessons learned²¹ as well as emerging thinking gleaned from current experiences on how best to carry out such exercises in the future and to sustain system strengthening as an ongoing process.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- ✓ **Understand assessment and mapping exercises as only one part of an ongoing, long-term process of system strengthening.**

One mapping and assessment exercise would rarely be sufficient to support meaningful and effective systems change. In the case of “snapshot” mapping exercises, additional assessments may be needed to support operationalising strategies into action and evidence-based programming. (An example is Côte d’Ivoire’s review of decentralized service assessments as part of its post-mapping plan of action). In many countries, prior, simultaneous or even parallel assessments are sometimes supported. Many of these exercises, such as in Zimbabwe, build on previous work, or consolidate prior learning to provide a rich new set of data for policy and programming decision-making. In Tanzania, the results of the mapping of child protection structures, systems and services were reinforced through the results of the National Study on Violence against Children. This led to a Multi-Sectoral Plan for Prevention and Response Plan 2011-15 driven by government ministries in the public health, social welfare, education and justice sectors, as well as civil society organizations and the UN. Likewise, in Burundi, the mapping process led to the development of a [draft National Policy on Child Protection](#), along with a costed plan of action (not yet finalized) for 2012-2016. Periodic assessment and updating of mapping information is required to support continual learning and reform.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- ✓ **Be clear about how the evidence and the collaborative processes used to get system strengthening on the agenda will strengthen systems at national and sub-national levels.**

Mapping and assessment exercises should be action-oriented in their design or clearly linked to pre-determined decision-making processes to ensure new evidence is fully exploited. The processes used should be an opportunity for promoting buy-in among different actors and an agreement to move forward using the mapping as one of the initial common steps. The Interagency global mapping toolkit methodology has a built-in planning step designed to support country actors to frame and cost a programme as well as strategy decisions to develop the child protection system drawing on the results of the mapping and assessment process. In Kenya, under the auspices of the Department of Children’s Services, the findings from the mapping were used to develop a costed program strategy that guided the ministry’s successful submission to the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (2011-14). Other mapping exercises, as in Cameroon, are positioned to provide critical information to country-specific high-level decision-making processes or support direct programming decisions.

As a cautionary note, it is important to recognize that mapping and assessment processes and results do not always translate into national strategies in a timely and effective manner. For example, in Kenya, work to design a child protection system under the auspices of the Coalition on Child Rights and Child Protection started in 2001 and was followed by other studies. In 2010, a year after two mapping and assessment processes were completed, a costed strategy was developed. It has been revised and is planned for later in 2012. A challenge in the child protection sector is managing multiple partners and interests, which, though essential, can sometimes make it hard to reach the agreement required to put plans and actions into operation.

²¹ The Inter-Agency Global Toolkit and User’s Guide is currently being revised based on country experiences in its application.

✓ **Consider the balance of information and cost within available resources.**

Mapping and assessment exercises are always a trade-off between degree of accuracy of information collected, the depth of information required for “good enough” decision making, funding available, and the time to undertake the exercise. The concept of “appropriate imprecision” could be used to describe a certain degree of pondered imprecision in the data gathered that remains acceptable for the ultimate goal of the mapping, and whose elimination would cost more than the benefits it would bring. In this regard, the parameters to be used to guide the choice on finding the right balance between costs of research and accuracy and depth of information remain specific to the context of the country. Two questions could help in making the “right” decision: what degree of accuracy and detail in the data is it needed to trigger political commitment? And what degree of accuracy and detail in the data is it needed to guide a technical response to identified child protection constraints? In the end, the data and analyses produced should be calibrated to align with the intended use of the mapping outputs. In some cases, the priority problems or gaps will be very clear with a modest level of effort. Often, in these cases, more intensive investment in further or more in depth assessment can lead to data overload that in turn delays or muddies decision-making processes.

✓ **Consider national context, national priorities, national resources and capacity, and donor interest to focus the exercise.**

System strengthening is taking place across different contexts throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The scope and processes applied are therefore different. Of interest due to limited documentation is the use of mapping exercises for systems development in fragile states. Somaliland has been pursuing the development of structures capable of addressing its extremely high poverty levels and regional instability, while supporting its ambitions to mobilize formal and informal mechanisms to protect its children. Focusing on community-based mechanisms is a key line of response in all countries, but is especially important in fragile states. There is also a need for enhanced coordination at national level, where most formal system actors preside, and the need to identify a very small number of priority indicators that might be realistically collected in this challenging environment. In another fragile state, the Central African Republic, a thematic assessment of the case management of children coming in contact with the justice system is providing evidence on the minimum set of short-term structural changes, legal reforms and training that would be required to enhance current (basic) interventions in child protection.

PROCESS CONSIDERATIONS:

✓ **Use the exercise to support the needed paradigm shift from issue-based policy and programming towards a systems-strengthening agenda.**

Mapping can also be instrumental in supporting the paradigm shift away from issue-based child protection work in a number of countries. Organizing, planning and implementing the exercise and reviewing the findings creates an ongoing dialogue among new and diverse partners that allows key stakeholders to consider new ways to approach protection work. In Sierra Leone, government and NGO workers were seconded to the mapping team as researchers, allowing for direct learning within the government and different agencies. In Kenya, a series of workshops supported a wide range of stakeholders, with participants from line ministries (such as health, education, judiciary, police, and others), NGOs and civil society, and including consultations with children. It was managed by a task force convened by the National Council of Children’s Services and chaired by the African Network for Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect. This type of shared learning experience is a powerful way to facilitate a needed shift towards system strengthening. It can lay a strong foundation for future partnerships and collaboration across organizations and sectors. By making

mapping a common effort among different actors – and agreeing on the situation analysis coming out of the mapping – can promote a convergence of interests and forward momentum.

✓ **Use the process to develop new partnerships across sectors, agencies and tiers of government.**

Evidence from the field shows that system development has provided an opportunity for broad and new partnerships. In Ghana, for example, mapping resulted in a new functional partnership between the Ministry of Social Welfare and the justice sector. In Ivory Coast, a new coordination structure was created to minimize duplication between OVC work and other child protection work. In South Sudan, the initiation of the mapping process has been key at bringing stakeholders together especially in a context where government ministries and policies are at the very early stages of establishment. Confronted with decreasing resources globally, these partnerships in both the formal and the informal sector will be key in ensuring positive outcomes for children.

✓ **Use the process to engage the ministry of finance and donors at the very start of the process to ensure follow-up and resources for action.**

In Kenya the costed program strategy (emanating from the mapping process) provided the Department of Children's Services with a tool to influence the Ministry of Finance Medium Term Expenditure Framework (2011-14) and for donor engagement. The result of this engagement was the establishment of District Children's Offices and the hiring of 50 children's officers at sub-national levels.

✓ **Understand the political environment and how to best position mapping to maximize joint ownership and build collaboration and new partnerships.**

Political will has emerged as a major consideration for the success of mapping and systems strengthening for child protection. When governments, UNICEF and other agencies introduce, promote and support such exercises, careful consideration should be given to how to position the mapping and who should be involved. Although designed to build consensus, experience has demonstrated that insufficient knowledge of the child protection framework and poor understanding of underlying politics and vested interests in existing structures can undermine the process and fuel existing tensions. Pre-mapping planning steps, such as a thorough stakeholder analysis, may be required to inform how best to navigate the process.

2.2 Creating political space: inclusive partnerships and evidence-based advocacy

The degree of involvement of governments, civil society organizations, donors, and implementing agencies in child protection system strengthening can vary greatly and it is subject to a number of factors: the degree of alignment of the proposed child protection system work with national priorities; funding opportunities for child protection system strengthening; availability of skilled social service workforce or dedicated child protection professionals; availability of data, assessments, mapping, and analysis; and common understanding of issues to be tackled. Each factor has a possible influence on the degree of political will towards child protection system strengthening in a given country. In this section of the paper, we will focus on the processes that lead towards the creation of political space for child protection system strengthening, including the role of extended alliances, lobbying and advocacy, as well as other participation issues.

The concept of "political space" for is defined as the types and ranges of possibilities available for pursuing system work by populations, including children, and by national or local organizations and governments on their behalf. This might include institutional channels through which policy formulation and implementation can be accessed, controlled, or contested; political discourse,

declarations or public commitments; national child-focused campaigns or movements; and social and political practices of right holders and duty bearers.²²

As child protection system strengthening is not a priority imposed on countries but rather a demand-driven process, the degree of political will is an indicator of the availability of a political space for a paradigm shift in child protection programming. While virtually all countries of the region have embarked in some sort of child protection systems work, it would be important to distinguish socio-political environments where the proposed processes of change reflect genuine political will and an available political space, as opposed to contexts where the rhetoric of the new jargon has not yet been matched by a real political commitment and remains a process in the hands of a few actors.

Political space cannot be created only through government intervention, but critically depends on organizational practices and political experiences of the different social groups and actors. It includes discourse and ideas around rights, responsibilities and accountability. A favourable policy environment and committed government might achieve very little in child protection system strengthening if vulnerable groups are not included in the process, if local civil society is ostracized, or if advocacy and lobbying groups are not organized. The creation of a political space for child protection system strengthening also implies the development of political agency by vulnerable groups (including children). In fact, opportunities for participation in political space are meaningless if these populations do not have the required access to take advantage of those opportunities.²³

A common challenge faced by all of the frameworks and system-strengthening approaches is the successful linkage of formal and community actors, and determining their respective roles within the political space. In the past, there has been a large-scale imposition of terms, concepts, and practices around child rights that (as documented in the 2009 inter-agency review) has been unproductive and has evoked a backlash. Governments and their workers hold enormous power formally and in terms of education and prestige. At the same time, communities have supports and mechanisms that should be built upon in systems strengthening. Yet in many places where strengthening work is under way, there has been no documentation of what is already there and little thought given to how to engage with it.

It could be argued that creating political space for system building is a process linked to some form of “democratization” of decision-making processes, and therefore a process towards better recognizing the engagement of populations and strengthening empowering processes. At the local level this could imply the active participation of populations into local development and planning to make sure that what is perceived as important by local groups is not perceived as insignificant by policymakers. At the national level, this could be linked to the exercising of citizenship rights, freedom of expression, respect of opinions, or right to information.²⁴

Motivated leadership and positive governance (or champions of change) can enable action on system work. A conducive political space is the key point for any sustainability in system work.²⁵ Since creating a political space for system building depends on the participation of different populations in development processes, it is legitimate to ask whether a non-democratic country embark in a genuine process of system strengthening. Experience in sub-Saharan African countries seems to suggest that even in authoritarian and non-democratic countries, political space can be established for child protection system strengthening. However, if not grounded in a broader democratic context, it will result in a more fragile process.

²² Webster, N. and L. Engberg-Pedersen (2002). *In the Name of the Poor: Contesting Political Space for Poverty Reduction*. Zed Books: London.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Nkrumah-Ababio, Stella (2012). Regional Advisor on Child Protection and Child Focus, West Africa, World Vision International. Personal Communication.

To conclude, creating political space for child protection programming is about creating meaningful alliances and looking at how the different elements of the system must be considered together. For example, a typical workforce-strengthening intervention targets social-work education curriculum change or invests in training for a cadre of community-based caregivers. These kinds of interventions are often done in isolation, without a substantive consideration of other system elements. To be truly holistic and effective, several other elements need to be considered: attention may need to be paid to reallocating resources to support curriculum change efforts, or to compensate graduates once they are finished with a training or educational intervention. To take a strategic look at the workforce picture and build the political will necessary to support change might involve the need to form a new alliance that includes stakeholders from both the informal system (e.g., family and community members, traditional leaders and other local actors who apply or have knowledge of endogenous practices) as well as the more formal workforce organizations (e.g., government, large NGOs). As one aspect of its work, this alliance could enable close communication with children, families and the community to determine what services could be provided by workers hired by government or civil society organizations that might complement community or family mechanisms. Such an alliance might also be a pathway for effective input and power sharing amongst formal and informal actors in making decisions about “supports and services” for child protection, a way to initiate and sustain “bottom-up and top-down” change at the same time. To add another system element, whenever substantial changes occur, they often involve the need for a new or updated law or regulation to legitimize a new scope of practice, or to provide a legitimization of a key local practice.

The remaining part of this section will look at some concrete examples of countries that have succeeded in creating or enlarging political space for child protection system strengthening.

2.2.1 Promising Strategies

Usually, at the institutional level, various ministries, departments and agencies within a respective country context share responsibilities for children’s development and the overall well-being of children and families. As a consequence, creating political space for child protection system strengthening may be initiated by leaders in all sectors involved. For example, in **Ghana**, the national policy directives for children include the departments and agencies of the ministries of health, education, and social welfare and community development.²⁶ The process served as a foundation for establishing cross-sector political will, leadership and governance for partnership and coordination efforts.

In **Côte d’Ivoire**, the government used the publication of the national mapping and analysis of child protection as a way to engage the health, education, and labour sectors in discussions of the findings and ways in which collective and systematic action could be carried out. Sierra Leone has initiated similar processes of cross-sector discussions on system strengthening strategies. The Government of **Niger** and UNICEF have initiated sector-wide consultations in the development of a shared vision for child protection.²⁷

In **Tanzania**, research data on the very high prevalence of school-based violence helped put the issue of violence as a national priority for action. This is a good example of how a single issue that was substantiated by solid data was used to facilitate the creation of political space and political will for systems strengthening. An extensive nationwide study commissioned by the government-led multi-sector task force on Violence Against Children revealed that sexual, physical and emotional violence

²⁶ Republic of Ghana, Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs, undated document.

²⁷ Niger, Ministère de la Population, Promotion de la Femme et Protection de l’Enfant (Octobre 2011), *Document Cadre de la protection de l’enfant*

are common features for children growing up in Tanzania, and that the perpetrators are often close or well known to the victims. Paradoxically, education advocates learned that the very goal of increasing school attendance was also putting children at increased risk. The government and its partners used this as the entry point for advocating for key changes in current practices. This led to establishment of partnerships and coordination mechanisms across sectors at national, regional, district and lower levels to develop social equity measures to end impunity. The government has highlighted the need to invest in ending violence against children as it poses a major threat to national development and to achieving the *Mkukuta* vision²⁸ and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Each relevant ministry²⁹ has inserted coherent and coordinated violence continuum of care service structures and responses within their annual plans and budget, in line with a 5-year National Plan of Action to prevent and respond to violence against children. This example shows the importance of strong leadership and governance, especially in advocacy, and how partnerships and coordination mechanisms can respond well to a very sensitive entry point issue. It also demonstrates how one achieved outcome, in this case data generation and evidence-based advocacy, can be used strategically to strengthen several other areas of the system.

Establishing effective partnerships and coordination mechanisms can then serve as an entry point for system strengthening. The specific allocation of resources for developing partnerships and coordination mechanisms has shown considerable results when coordination mechanisms are implemented with clear goals and time frames. Examples include the use of coordinating groups to create the national protocols for gender-based violence in **Sierra Leone**, for domestic violence in **Ghana** and for overseeing the development of social protection situation analysis and framework in **Niger**.³⁰

In **Malawi**, the creation of a strong political space started with child protection actors reviewing together the literature around child protection system strengthening and then devising a working definition and strategy reflecting the local situation in the country. Through a series of meetings, they actively engaged in the development process for the design of the new Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (2011-2016). This was done by preparing short briefing notes and participating in key meetings that helped in expanding the political space for child protection system strengthening. A participatory mapping exercise was undertaken, involving partners from more than 50 agencies, to identify the various child protection activities, partners, capacities, and interventions. Advocacy in the broader UN helped create a consensus that child protection systems building was a national priority. The linkages between child protection, social welfare and social protection were explored. This provided valuable information on how the establishment of a national child protection system would provide the mechanism for the capacity building of the social welfare workforce and improvement in the quality and reach of welfare services while also contributing to the achievement of a number of social protection goals. These goals include the development of rights based legislation, social welfare services and case management. Child protection system work is nowadays also reflected in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2012-2016), whereas the previous Framework was silent on child protection (although issues such as justice for children and children affected by HIV were covered). The lead ministry has established a Division of Child Protection to coordinate systems building and to support partners to harmonise efforts. Child protection partners are also better equipped to design meaningful programs as a result of participatory processes in system assessments. Overall, systems work has enabled the government and partners to identify how to bring together the various responses to child protection and orphans and vulnerable children into a coherent programme response.³¹

²⁸ Tanzania's National Development Strategy.

²⁹ This mainly includes the social welfare, the education and health sectors and the justice sector.

³⁰ Plan, Save the Children and UNICEF (2011).

³¹ UNICEF (2012). *Lessons Learned: Child Protection System Building*. Malawi.

In **Senegal**, a National Child Protection Strategy that reflects a focus on systems strengthening was developed in 2011 with key contributions from civil society organizations and children themselves. Extended national consultations with local public servants, religious leaders, child protection coordination groups, civil society organizations and children were organized to collect initial child protection priority topics to be inserted within the national strategy, and then to review the initial draft of the proposed National child protection Strategy. Stimulated by evidence-based advocacy, the result has been strong political commitment and leadership by national actors leading to the development and validation of the Strategy (although implementation has not yet begun).

In **Ethiopia**, the participation of children and populations to local processes of creating a political space for child protection system strengthening is an encompassing approach. The government has, in fact, made clear that importing ready-made solutions from other countries is not acceptable to them and that the participation of local populations and the testing of local solutions are the main elements for creating national leadership and buy-in. Children's views are unique in each given context, and therefore unique must be the policies developed to address those views.

2.2.2 Key Considerations

✓ **Mind the process for child protection system work.**

The examples show that the political space for child protection system strengthening is not a given, but rather the outcome of a process to create inclusiveness, political will, and informed and evidence-based advocacy. While political space can be influenced by several factors and country contexts, a process of creating broad partnerships, coalitions and participation is critical to national ownership and sustainability. Externally imposed solutions or forcing the national agenda through isolated initiatives are not effective approaches and are often criticized.

✓ **Recognize that political space includes both national and local actors.**

While much focus is given to establishing a prominent role for child protection system work within the national political agenda, creating a meaningful political space for child protection system strengthening should include providing certain population segments with opportunities to participate and contribute to the process, and not only to express their views but have them taken into account by local organizations and governments. There should be institutional channels through which policy formulation and implementation can be accessed, controlled, or contested; political discourse, declarations or public commitments; national child-focused campaigns or movements; and social and political practices of right holders and duty bearers.

✓ **Forge broad and inclusive alliances**

For child protection strengthening work to happen, experience has shown that it is necessary to look at establishing or consolidating broad alliances that range from multi-sectors to multi-layers of actors (donors, government representatives, civil society representatives, children and youth representatives, opinion and religious leaders, advocates, and alike). Political space can be enlarged through the coordinated effort of a number of actors and institutions all advocating for the same objectives, but using the channels of communication and the language more appropriate to each sector or actor.

2.3 Strategy, Policy Development and Law Reform

Strategy development in child protection systems building remains in a nascent phase in most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, and many countries that have invested in mapping are now challenged to move towards effective systems strengthening programmes. Practice has shown that developing, reviewing or updating strategies, legislation and policies are important avenues to the

promotion of overall systems strengthening because these documents demonstrate consensus on the need for systems building, and outline the steps necessary to move in that direction. Some countries have taken a less formal approach to defining their plans for systems strengthening by using visioning statements or cooperation agreements as “road map” tools. This section outlines the current approaches to development of systems strengthening strategies in Sub-Saharan Africa. It then highlights how national strategies are developed and managed at the country level, touches on core content of strategies, and identifies challenges and opportunities. Finally, the section suggests key considerations related to putting in place strategies, policy and legal frameworks for strengthening child protection systems.

2.3.1 Current tools

Tools to define and guide child protection systems strategy development that are being utilized in Sub-Saharan Africa range from formal national strategies to informal strategy documents. Three types of strategy approaches are detailed below.

National development plans

Some countries have embedded child protection system strengthening strategies within broader national strategy and planning documents, for example within the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Child protection advocates in **Malawi** succeeded in integrating child protection system strengthening objectives into the Growth and Development Strategy (2011-2016) Poverty Reduction Strategy, the UN Development Assistance Framework, and the UNICEF Country Programme Document. This strategic move consequently triggered significant national resources. The Malawian government recently received a \$9.2 million grant from DFID specifically to strengthen the child protection system, which is the largest grant to date on child protection systems development in the region.

In **Somaliland**, the establishment of national child protection systems is identified as a priority area within the National Development Plan (2012-2016). Though lacking detail, child protection systems are included in the social affairs sector budget under social protection activities, and Somaliland now plans to integrate child protection issues into the district and regional coordination forums.

In cases like these, it is important to include not just systems language in the text of a national development plan, but also include key indicators in the results matrix. This will help ensure that the strategy remains prioritised, and is not lost when moving to implementation. For example, in the context of systems building, birth registration can be mentioned in the text of a national development plan, but it needs also to be in the results matrix and budgeted for it to have the positive system effect.

Formal strategies, policies and plans of actions

A second approach is to develop formal strategy, policy and planning documents. Countries using the Maestral mapping methodology do this as standard practice, but other mapping methods require national stakeholders to organize a strategy development step separately. **Niger** took recommendations from the mapping process into account when developing a child protection framework document that reflects the vision of the government, national and international partners. The framework document includes a shared vision, fundamental principles, strategic areas of intervention (specifically prevention, care, and system reinforcement), and defines the institutional framework as well as coordination and roles of different actors. Niger is now finalizing an action plan based on the framework. After the mapping process, Senegal and Mauritania also developed a formal child protection strategy, the details of which are described in the process discussion later in this section.

Other programmatic and policy tools

Finally, some countries use UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation Agreements³² and other agency-specific agreements as interim tools for stating a commitment to systems strengthening. In **Ghana**, for example, the mapping results informed the development of the new country programme between UNICEF and the government, acting as a placeholder until a national child protection policy could be drafted. Similarly, **Mozambique** articulated its child protection systems strategy in a [joint UNICEF/Government visioning statement](#). While such agreements are bilateral in nature and are only accountable among the signed parties, they provide a manner of documenting an interim commitment to systems strengthening and triggering action while more political and lengthy processes are underway.

2.3.2 Strategy Development and Management

The process of developing a systems strategy can determine whether the strategy will have an effective impact. The process requires a wide consultation of stakeholders, including meaningful consultation of children. As is seen in the examples below from Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Kenya, a well-managed mapping and assessment process often increases the likelihood that key stakeholders will agree on – and support – a future systems strengthening strategy. As noted above, the Maestral International mapping toolkit, utilized by many countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, includes a strategy output as an integral part of the mapping process. Section 5.b of the [Child Protection System Mapping and Assessment Toolkit](#) enables countries which undergo a mapping to finish the process with short and long term strategy statements on components of system building such as “laws, policies, standards, and regulations” and “cooperation, coordination, and collaboration.”

In **Kenya**, Following the completion of the Maestral mapping and assessment of the child protection system in Kenya, key country-level stakeholders drafted a costed strategy under the auspices of the Department for Children’s Services. Initiated through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development’s sub-sector submission to the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (2011-2014, MTEF), the strategy process included costing, securing donor contributions to the child protection program, and drafting proposed activities on the mapping and assessment. Representatives of the mapping stakeholder groups went through a prioritization process to specify activities to be conducted over the next three-year MTEF period. Once the stakeholder activities were defined,³³ spreadsheet templates were prepared that highlighted the requested MTEF contribution to child protection, the gap between the request and the amount needed from the budget, and the proposed donor contribution. This was structured to show how the donor contributions would leverage directly the resources being provided by the public sector.

In **Niger**, a key recommendation from the mapping exercise was the development of a national vision around child protection.³⁴ This process was led by the ministry in charge of child protection with the financial and technical support of UNICEF. An international consultant facilitated a participatory approach involving all sectors, through consultative workshops: social affairs, justice, education, health, civil society, communication (media), traditional and religious leaders, children and youth, but also inter-sectoral workshops at the regional level. The consultative process involved

³² The UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation agreement is part of a government’s development strategy and is developed within the context of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. UNICEF is accountable to the government and to the UNICEF Executive Board for the results achieved in the Country Programme of Cooperation.

³³ The sub-sector MTEF submission showed partial consistency with the work of the Task Force, particularly in the sections concerning the establishment of District Children’s Offices and the hiring of more children’s officers, who would play a key role in the emerging child protection structure in Kenya. Stakeholders from other sectors besides MGCSO provided assumptions that were used to cost child protection activities under the proposed program.

³⁴ The document is entitled [Orientations nationales pour la prise en charge des enfants en situation de vulnérabilité](#).

more than 1,200 people. The objective of the workshops was to develop a common understanding and vision of child protection and also to clearly define roles and responsibilities of all actors. The framework took six months to develop, was validated by all actors at the national level, and included an action plan. Organizers noted the importance of including a wide variety of sectors in the process, and of securing political buy-in. The inter-sectoral group that was first established to guide the mapping also guided the development of the child protection framework under the leadership of the ministry.

In **Mauritania**, mapping of social institutions and services led to the development of the National Strategy for Child Protection (NSCP) in 2009.

Developed in partnership between the Ministry of Social Affairs with UNICEF support and facilitated by an international consultant, the NSCP is implemented through cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms at the provincial and municipal level.³⁵ The Ministry of Social Affairs led the one-month process, which included two steps. First, the steering committee (made up of different entities from the Ministry of Social Affairs and UNICEF) drafted the strategy with the support of an international consultant. Second, validation of the draft was completed through two workshops with national actors from different sectors and provincial actors (primarily from the Ministry of Social Affairs) and consultation with high-level national decision-makers at the policy and budgeting level. The National Strategy is now the common framework for international agencies (UNICEF, OHCHR, UNHCR) and NGOs supporting child protection work and related sectors.³⁶

Mauritania identified three challenges in strategy development: (1) the delay in final adoption of the NSCP by the Council of Ministers, (2) the need for increased resources and qualified human resources to make child protection systems fully operational at regional level, and (3) limited availability of institutional experts to support the child protection process building at some critical steps.

Senegal's Strategy Development Process

Before its 2009 mapping, Senegal's strategic thinking around child protection was divided across three ministries (Family, Social Affairs, and Justice). However, the mapping process brought ministries together in a more organized way to talk about strengthening systems. With the technical and financial support of UNICEF and facilitated by an international consultant, the strategy development was a participatory and consultative process that took place over the course of a year. The draft strategy was first vetted by a steering committee of the three key ministries and the unit under the Presidency, then by the Ministries of Education, Health, Decentralisation and Police as well as civil society, media, and religious leaders. At regional consultations, stakeholders including representatives of local government, decentralized services, traditional leaders and religious leaders discussed how to better define each actor's role. Children were also consulted to get a sense of how their rights were being protected in the current framework and where they experienced gaps and violations. Coordination between the different ministries remains a challenge, however. The strategy is a policy document that provides a framework for cross-sectoral interventions as well as provides space for each specialized sector (such as justice or welfare) to further develop and redefine their roles of service delivery. While the strategy was technically validated by the government, the 2012 elections brought new leadership to all ministries and political adoption of the strategy remains. The new leadership recognized the need to better incorporate community-based mechanisms into Senegal's strategy and the government is now reviewing and revising the strategy to reflect this priority prior to its political validation.

³⁵ Efforts to extend of the system at the provincial level in Mauritania started with progressive mapping of institutional and community based mechanisms before their incorporation into the provincial and municipal child protection coordination mechanisms. The provincial child protection system operates under the leadership of the *Wali* (religious leaders), which has helped ensure the cooperation and collaboration of other sectors.

³⁶ Examples include Medicos del Mundo and the World Lutheran Federation, which do not directly work on issues but support the implementation of the NSCP in its service delivery components related to health and education.

In some cases, thematic issues serve as a strategic entry point for developing systems strategies. In **Tanzania**, the 2009 report on violence against children³⁷ galvanized the child protection community, and led to a strong commitment to a systems building approach. In **Senegal**, the thematic issue of *Talibé*³⁸ children has gradually become a topic of high priority on the political agenda, and has been effectively used to mobilize the government, civil society and communities around the need to develop and promote a broad national strategy of child protection. (See text box for more information on Senegal's Strategy Development Process.) The National Child Protection Strategy promotes systemic and institutional changes that take stock of the specific dangers faced by *Talibé* children while aiming at restructuring the entire child protection sector.

2.3.3 Common Systems Strengthening Priorities

Piloting Decentralized Service Models

Too few countries have engaged in a formal (or informal) strategy development to make a systematic comparison across countries of common strategic themes or priorities.³⁹ That said, this section discusses how some countries have moved towards piloting decentralized integrated service delivery models, and notes the investments in the social welfare workforce strengthening in the Eastern and Southern African region.

Post-mapping, several countries have opted for piloting integrated service delivery models at the local (or departmental) level. **Senegal** has piloted a new network of government and non-governmental services that has adopted a set of common standards on the identification, protection and reintegration process of vulnerable children and the use of technology to improve interagency coordination and case management. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, a pilot project in the Bas Sassandra cocoa-producing area supports community child protection strengthening through participatory community mapping (*diagnostic communautaire*) of child protection related knowledge, beliefs,

Tanzania's Region-Level Service Models

In 2009, the Department of Social Welfare, in collaboration with UNICEF, undertook a mapping and assessment of Tanzania's child protection system, examining formal and informal approaches in seven districts. The assessment found that structures for preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and neglect were weak or missing at the national, district and/or community levels. Three key recommendations were presented: (1) to establish a coherent child protection system at all levels, with clear roles and responsibilities and a structured case management system; (2) to develop the system in coordination with social protection; and (3) to establish a guiding framework and supportive policy environment with clearly specified roles and responsibilities.

In response to the first recommendation, Tanzania has been developing comprehensive child protection systems in four districts: Hai, Kasulu, Magu and Temeke. The objective has been to establish an evidence base to build a national system that can effectively prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse of children. The systems aims to address the substantial numbers of children facing these risks, drawing in part from momentum generated by the Violence Against Children Study.

Lessons learned from the District models include: (1) responding to child protection violations stimulates community interest; (2) teamwork leads to increased speed and efficiency of response; (3) actors need time to understand the concept of child protection; (4) both prevention and response expertise are required; (5) the community role in mobilization and action is critical; (6) district level political support and leadership are essential; and 7) a systems approach has increased accountability.

³⁷ UNICEF, CDC, Muhimbili University (2009). *Violence Against Children in Tanzania: Findings from a National Survey*.

³⁸ Students at Qur'anic schools.

³⁹ It is worth noting what Kenya identified as priority four work areas to strengthen the system: 1) Strengthen the Legal and Policy Framework for Child Protection, (2) Improve the Organization, Management and Administration of Child Protection, (3) Enhance the Quality and Access of Child Protection Services and Benefits, (4) Strengthen the Capacity of the Justice System to Respond to Children's Needs.

practices and community mobilization. The project seeks to use local resources to build a child protection mechanism and undertake an integrated reform of the existing social service structure to include permanent community work and case management. Niger has also piloted an integrated service delivery model at the local level.

Social Welfare Workforce Systems Strengthening

Several countries have begun to engage in social welfare workforce (SWW) strengthening efforts, sometimes in alignment with comprehensive child protection systems strategy development. In the Eastern and Southern African Region, there have been initial strategic investments in social welfare system strengthening and particularly workforce strengthening. This includes: (1) Workforce Capacity Gap Analyses that have taken place in Namibia, Malawi, Tanzania, Lesotho; (2) Social work workforce assessments that are taking place in Kenya, Malawi and Nigeria; and (3) Social work curricula are being reviewed in Malawi, Nigeria and Rwanda. The initial results of these capacity assessments have identified significant gaps in the workforce and in data about the workforce. One standard outcome of SWW gap analyses is a report including recommended strategic next steps to build the SWW. In Uganda, efforts are already underway to strengthen the SWW in relation to child protection. A child protection course unit has been developed and integrated into existing undergraduate and post-graduate degree programs. Further, a diploma course and practice-oriented certificate course in child protection have been developed, the latter targeting government and NGO social workers.

While the SW workforce gap analyses are in a formative stage, the untested assumption remains that once the gap analyses are complete, funding will follow from domestic and international sources to address the identified gaps. SWW strengthening has been prioritized by the U.S. government, a major bilateral donor, and has gained traction in some countries. This kind of SWW strengthening work also often involves the same lead ministry as child protection systems. On a small scale, follow-up investments are being made in Malawi with UNICEF, USAID and *CapacityPlus* cooperating on strengthening the school of social work at Magamoro, and *CapacityPlus* in developing an HR information system. Because SWW strengthening has in the past taken sometimes taken place largely outside the broader child protection systems strengthening work, there is a risk that these two areas could continue to work in parallel in the near future. However, efforts are now underway amongst the key players (e.g., relevant country level ministries plus UNICEF, USAID, *CapacityPlus*, *Maestral*, *Child Frontiers*) to align SWW gap analysis and planning with child protection systems strengthening efforts.

2.3.4 Implementation Challenges and Opportunities

This section examines the challenges and opportunities that have arisen when developing and implementing strategic documents or otherwise making national policy statements.

Challenges

While countries have made significant progress to strengthen and build child protection systems, there remain a number of challenges in the process of developing formal national strategies. First, although significant effort has been made to support systems mapping and assessments, less support and guidance has been developed to date to support post-mapping work. There is currently no commonly accepted framework or set of operational steps for child protection systems strengthening as a follow-up to mapping. There is limited guidance to support strategy development and little experience around actual implementation.

Second, on a fundamental level, there still is limited consensus on what systems strengthening is despite attempts by countries to develop definitions. Many still view the systems agenda as being

driven by external actors, and not driven by African champions. (After wide consultation with child protection advocates in more than 25 countries, this paper posits a working definition and characteristics of system strengthening.) The indigenization of the concept assists in strategic dialogue, and is necessary to effect sustainability and ownership.

Third, limited resources and capacity within the social welfare sector affects the capacity to plan, implement and coordinate institutional arrangements, human resource development, legislation and finance and budget for an effective child protection system. As such, it is important that strategy documents reflect the capacity and resource limitations, and not be written merely as aspirational exercises.

Fourth, some countries engaging in child protection system strategy development have not integrated monitoring and evaluation frameworks into strategy documents. As such, it remains difficult to measure whether these countries are achieving strategy benchmarks.

Finally, the challenges identified in mapping—such as lack of leadership, lack of coordination, weak capacities for strategic planning—can significantly affect strategy development. Some countries face the challenge of multiple partner or donor driven follow-up strategies that lack of cohesion and coordination.

Opportunities

Several countries have developed strategy documents, or other, less formal ways of documenting next steps in system strengthening. One opportunity to highlight is the recognition of costing strategies as a way to accelerate system-strengthening efforts. In 2010, **Kenya** developed a [draft costed child protection systems strategy](#).⁴⁰ The report provides the mapping's key findings, and provided a detailed costing of resources needed to implement Kenya's strategic vision. Based on data that children's officers from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development handle, an average of 250 cases at any given time, the report recommended hiring 450 new officers to increase its reach from 95,000 at present to over 400,000 children.

Kenya's costing experience led to concrete, affordable recommendations in terms of the social welfare workforce expansion, and helped ensure a realistic approach. It also provided stakeholders the chance to prioritize areas of action using the estimated costs calculated over a three-year period to guide and decision making, as well as serve as a powerful advocacy tool for resource mobilization.

2.3.5 Key considerations

- ✓ **Strategy development requires consolidating, rationalizing and developing local concepts at the national level to create a clear vision to guide future work.**

While this process is made more difficult because of a lack of international and regional clarity to support national work, it also provides an opportunity to develop more contextualized and indigenized definitions of child protection system concepts.

- ✓ **Systems mapping that is well coordinated and participatory fosters more political buy-in and cohesive strategies.**

A cohesive, well-coordinated and participatory systems mapping and assessment that promoted joint learning and consensus building from the beginning can lay the ground work from better

⁴⁰ Entitled [Strengthening Child Protection in Kenya, Program Strategy: 2011-2014](#).

strategy development. Strategy development requires input from a wide range of government and civil society leaders, and children and youth.

- ✓ **Policy frameworks should reflect a country's real capacities and budgets, instead of promoting unrealistic, ambitious outcomes.**

Strategies, policy and legal development and reform are sensitive issues that should carefully be considered together with the actual "real" potential capacities of a country to implement required changes. In the past, strategy and policy development for child protection has arguably been very ambitious, resulting in aspirational plans with low implementation rates. By contrast, Kenya's costing exercise produced a realistic, affordable plan based on the actual available budget.

- ✓ **Strategic value exists in pegging strategy, policy development and law reforms to broader national plans, poverty reduction and other processes.**

child protection system strengthening work could gain in speed, momentum, recognition and prestige if embedded within broader national development and law reform processes, including poverty reduction strategies. Such a strategy solidly places child protection on the table for political negotiations. Incorporating child protection elements into broader development plans can also bring tap sources of funding, as seen by Malawi's successful resource mobilization for systems strengthening.

- ✓ **Child protection systems strategies remain subject to domestic political context.**

National political context and electoral cycles matter greatly in strategy development. The reality of an electoral crisis, as well as a need to review of roles and responsibilities across ministries, kept the Kenya strategy in draft form for at least 18 months. Similarly, in Senegal, a change in government led to the delay of the political validation of the National Strategy on child protection, already technically validated by the previous government.

- ✓ **There is value in linking strategy, policy development and law reform with direct implications for service delivery.**

There are many examples of lengthy, expensive and cumbersome policy development or law reform programs that had virtually no impact on the well being of children. This tends to happen when there is a disconnect between the policy environment and the focus on service delivery. Strategy development, policy revision and law reform is better undertaken when keeping the implications for service delivery well in mind. In some countries, policy revision is often followed by the development of guidelines for implementation or procedural reviews, which helps translate new legislation into new services.

- ✓ **There is a need to align social welfare workforce strengthening efforts with child protection systems strengthening.**

In some countries, USAID and UNICEF are conducting social welfare workforce gap analyses involving the same key ministries and leaders that have lead responsibility for child protection issues, and concerning the same workforce that is responsible for child protection. This challenge has become apparent and coordination efforts are already underway, but the link between SWW and child protection systems can be strengthened to support the idea that this is one system.

- ✓ **Strategy documents should incorporate M&E frameworks to assist in efforts to measure progress in system strengthening.**

Having a monitoring and evaluation plan is vital in ensuring effectiveness of the programmes, identifying areas for programme improvement and ensuring accountability to vulnerable children, as well as to those providing resources. At a time of decreasing global resources, M&E frameworks help ensure we maximize the impact of investments by consistently checking in on the impact of projects.

- ✓ **While the development of child protection strategy is important, it is not a sufficient means of strengthening child protection systems.**

Strengthening only occurs when the strategy, or some part of it, is actually implemented. While most countries do not yet have fully formed strategies, let alone clearly costed and evidence based strategies, a risk is that the strategy will remain largely or wholly unimplemented. System strengthening not only requires developing a strategy, but getting approval and some level of resources and then moving to implementation. The implementation phase needs the same level of attention, measurement and resource allocation as the mapping and strategy development stages.

2.4 Community Protection Mechanisms

System strengthening in Sub-Saharan Africa has consistently highlighted the importance of building sustainable *community-based mechanisms*. In practice, community protection mechanisms and responses serve as the front line of protection for children. They are essential components for addressing the gap between broader principles and policies and the specific practices on the ground. As more formalized mechanisms are developed, it is especially critical to build on existing mechanisms and practices inclusive of community and kin networks and customary and traditional practices. This is based on the hypothesis that greater levels of *coordination between community mechanisms and the wider system* potentially lead to greater effectiveness in achieving positive outcomes for children and families.⁴¹

Community concepts of childhood, child rearing, safety and protection concerns are very different from global child protection standards that promote individual rights and children and children's best interest. A research study in **Sierra Leone** showed that children are not usually defined by age, but rather by the individual's level of dependency, role and activities. There is an interdependent relationship between parents and children in that children are needed to do family work and carry on the family name. Finally, family mechanisms of protective care include parental care and support from extended family such as grandmothers and elders (who were found to greatly value education).⁴²

Incorporating community concepts of child safety and protection reflective of the local context that emphasizes community harmony and the protection of children from problems such as teenage pregnancy out of wedlock⁴³ remain a significant challenge for translating broad principles and policies into *local action within the local context*. This provides the basis for the types of responses needed (programs and services) and guides the specific job functions for those responding (e.g., workforce inclusive of all community actors, paraprofessionals and professionals). This provides ways to incorporate community endogenous practices which are critical elements in system-building and system-strengthening.⁴⁴ Community mechanisms give voice to duty-bearers and rights-holders. They reflect local norms, beliefs and attitudes. They contextualize standards and principles by building on existing mechanisms and practices by engaging all stakeholders.

Key determinants to consider are community ownership and support of traditional leaders, the use of existing resources that are coordinated and linked with the formal and non-formal structures. These approaches serve to address and manage issues of power and diversity through participation and inclusiveness.⁴⁵ And where resources are scarce, it is even more critical to incorporate

⁴¹ UNICEF (2010). *Strengthening national child protection systems in emergencies through community based mechanisms: A discussion paper*. Published on behalf of the Child Protection Working Group of the UN Protection Cluster. London, UK: Save the Children UK.

⁴² The Columbia Group for Children in Adversity (2011). *An ethnographic study of community-based child protection mechanisms and their linkage with the National Child Protection System in Sierra Leone*.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Plan, Save the Children and UNICEF (2011).

⁴⁵ Wessels, M. (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*. Save the Children Fund.

protective endogenous practices that can strengthen the national system and a more realistic distribution of resources. Also, where governments are limited in their ability to fulfil its duties, community mechanisms may support and supplement government capacity.⁴⁶

The ethnographic study in Sierra Leone by The Columbia Group provides a lot of good examples of how the links can be made between the traditional and formal systems. The Family Support Unit (FSU) is where there is the potential link between the formal and non-formal system. Given that the FSUs expressed a strong desire and motivation to protect children, it has been proposed that strengthening the FSU's and formalizing their linkage with the Chieftdom increase awareness of children's issues and access to the FSUs.⁴⁷ There is also discussion about the potential link between the non-formal system and the health units. Need update on this as this statement was in some of the feedback.

Child welfare committees and networks are other mechanisms that a number of countries are using to better achieve a link between the formal and informal systems and address equity and access. In Rwanda, 12 civil society "umbrella" organizations were established to identify the needs and mobilize resources. Developed in 2000, they were charged with the responsibility for ensuring an equitable distribution of preventive and protective services. In 2007, The Child Rights Act (CRA) in Sierra Leone established Child Welfare Committees as officially authorized, state-empowered structures for the protection of children assigning roles, responsibilities and coordination functions.⁴⁸

The local community structures are critical for implementation of models and frameworks, yet there is little information on how they are working across respective countries. Anecdotal information suggests that some function quite well while others may exist only on paper. A 2011 World Vision Assessment conducted in a community in Sierra Leone revealed that children's clubs and mothers' child welfare committees are all local structures that are state-approved and could have the potential to greatly bridge the gap between informal and formal Child Protection systems. World Vision has programmed to work with these local structures, so they become a key components of the local child protection mechanism able to protect themselves and others by identifying, reporting and referring cases of abuse to agreed partners. (In matrices developed prior to the Dakar child protection systems strengthening conference, an upward of 20 countries in the region has provided information concerning their community protection mechanisms: see <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/Matrixes#Community>.)

In **Angola**, child protection committees consisting of community members including parents, teachers, local government workers and children are beginning to appear to make a difference.⁴⁹ Considered one of the most effective child protection network models in Angola, Save the Children's approach combines training and empowerment of communities, awareness raising, child participation and strong partnership with government. Angola's Zaire province, which borders DRC to the north, is primarily made up of people from the Bakongo ethnic group. It is composed of six municipalities, with community child protection committees present in M'Banza Congo (the provincial capital), Cuimba and Noqui. Each committee is composed of 20 to 30 people and made up of sobas, teachers, parents, traditional healers and sometimes children. Members meet on a schedule from every few weeks to every few months and when there is an urgent situation. They are tasked with developing partnerships between the government and community for child protection, training communities, and engaging children in their own protection and data collection and research.

⁴⁶ UNICEF (2010).

⁴⁷ The Columbia Group for Children in Adversity (2011).

⁴⁸ Save the Children (2010).

⁴⁹ Doyle, J. (2011). *Protecting children in Angola: The story of the Child Protection Networks in Angola*. Save the Children.

In **Uganda**, Child Protection Committees (CPCs) have been established in at least 20 districts. The members of the CPC have been trained in basic child protection and community dialogues are organized around child protection issues and on how communities could protect their children. CPC members identify cases of child abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation and refer them to the local authorities such as police or local councilors who are mandated to take action.⁵⁰

In the Sourou province of **Burkina Faso**, with the support of Terre des Hommes, provincial-level and multiple community-level child protection networks have been instituted to address child exploitation trafficking, and abuse. The provincial network includes representatives from health, justice, social action, social services, education and civil society, while the community networks include village development counsellors, chiefs, religious leaders, and children. The networks provide an opportunity to validate positive endogenous practices.⁵¹

Community Based Mechanisms Improve Coordination and Service

Mauritania's limited mapping of social institutions and services to vulnerable children led to the development of community coordination mechanisms for the development of appropriate protection and prevention responses. One such mechanism, called the *Forum d'appui aux systems de protection d'enfant*, has led to the initiation of a school integration program targeted at vulnerable children in Nouakchott. In addition, stakeholders from all levels came together (family, community, provincial, UN and international agencies) to jointly advocate to the highest authorities the need to address birth registration and the worst forms of child labour, including child slavery and begging.⁵²

In **Ghana** at the sub-national level, multi-sectoral Regional Child Protection Networks existed prior to the mapping exercise but were basically inactive. The mapping process provided an opportunity for all of the partners to come together to revive and revamp the inactive coordination network that existed in Eastern Ghana in the past. Presently, there are four networks, with six planned for development by 2013 for a total of ten.⁵³ According to the plan, the district sub-structure level (Zonal, Urban, Town and Area [ZUTA] Committees) membership is made up of government officials, representatives of NGOs and Traditional Authorities of the area. At the community/unit level, communities are responsible for forming early childhood care development committees composed of representatives such as the unit committee member, assembly member, chairman of own/village development committees, members of religious groups, teachers, and community health staff.⁵⁴

2.4.1 Key considerations

✓ Fully assess endogenous child protection practices within families and communities.

It has been clearly demonstrated that the community protection responses are the first line of protection for children. Research and anecdotal information has clearly indicated that many of the problems with children can be, and often times are, resolved between families within communities. Although this may not always have the best outcome for children, there are endogenous practices that have positive outcomes for children and families. And in cases where they may be harmful or norms may be exclusive, they can more realistically be shaped when there is full engagement and mutual respect at the ground level. Understanding how and when endogenous practices that are inclusive as well as exclusive is as important as knowing when they are not. Building on the natural strengths and resources is critical in making policies work in practice.

⁵⁰ This example is drawn from: <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/file/view/9c+Dakar+Systems+Conference+-+Uganda+delegation+presentation+May+2012.pdf>.

⁵¹ For more information, see <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/file/view/13h+NEW+Herman+-+Pr%C3%A9sentation+Systeme+de+protection-Burkina+Faso.ppt.pdf>.

⁵² Personal communication, UNICEF Mauritania, March 2012.

⁵³ Personal communication, UNICEF Ghana, March 2012.

⁵⁴ Republic of Ghana, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs. *Early Childhood Care and Development Policy*. No date.

✓ **Understand community concepts of child safety and protection as it fits with a child rights framework.**

The definition of children, childhood and adulthood is culture-bound. Developing a normative framework that will be reflective of the local culture and the universal child rights approach takes a fully participatory approach inclusive of children and adults in order to negotiate what it is children need and want within the context of the family and community needs. Children may want to be in school but not be able to attend because their family needs them to work or care for children for the family to survive. Or the child may feel unsafe at school due to threat of sexual assault or exploitation. Safety and protection within the home, school and community needs to be fully contextualized through participation, both the real and desired, in order to move closer to the desired.

✓ **Build on existing traditional and informal protection mechanisms.**

There are many traditional and informal structures to protect and support and their families. Angola's Zaire province is an example of the use of traditional protection responses and mechanisms. Coordination between the formal and non-formal systems has been shown to strengthen both government and community protection responses. This was demonstrated in Mauritania where the community coordination mechanism advocated for more collaboration with NGOs and also was influential in addressing specific needs such as birth registration and child labour. In addition, there is evidence that informal systems are more accessible. There is less stigma associated with going to the local religious or tribal leader. There is evidence that children and families are reluctant to report acts of violence against children to the formal authorities because the cost to travel to a city to go to court would be too much in terms of time, transportation, accommodation and food. Another concern is caring for the children if one or both parents or caretakers were to be gone for several days.

✓ **Strategically plan, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the formal and informal community processes and systems at the response level.**

There are many good practice models that have been shown to be effective in addressing children's needs and rights within the local community context. Child welfare committees that include the full range of government, NGOs and traditional representatives and authorities within the community have been established in many countries including Rwanda and Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone, they were unofficially established as more informal entities but later formalized by the Child Rights Act in 2007. In Ghana, they basically revived multi-sectoral Regional Child Protection Networks that had become inactive. With strategic planning, training and follow-up, the committees can more consistently function across the different governmental levels (national, district, and village).

2.5 Strengthening service models

Community Response and Protection refers to a range of responses including prevention, protection, reintegration, promotion and participation. These responses may be called different things and have different structures. The responses may include a range of integrated case management practices such as systematic assessment strategies, case planning, treatment, and follow up. Specific processes are shaped by formal and informal laws, policies and practices. Included are measures that ensure equal access, protection and participation of all children. This includes formal and informal community mechanisms that serve as the front line of protection and allow for adaptation of practice guidelines to the local context.

A key entry point to system strengthening can be at the level of response to address a specific thematic issue. And then over time, the response model can be applied to all vulnerable children as a more integrated child protection approach. An integrated service delivery system has served as the

starting point for system strengthening in a number of countries. Three specific approaches are discussed here:

- Protected communities most often applied to emergencies and post-conflict situations,
- Continuum of care that provides for a range of services from prevention to promotion to protection
- Minimum package of services that is inclusive of health, child protection and social protection

2.5.1 The Protected Community Approach

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, the Social Protection Thematic Group has adopted the Protected Communities approach to “promote a protective environment for children in adverse circumstances.” A Protected Community, although applied differently in stable and post-conflict zones, has a common goal – to prevent violence, abuse, exploitation and social exclusion. A community is “protected” with tools and mechanisms adapted to the local reality to prevent abuse and social exclusion and promote children’s rights as well as mitigate existing risk. It is closely linked to community and family vulnerability. Service delivery begins with the community-based child protection committees that include a corps of volunteers that refer and accompany children to services, monitor and follow-up their cases. Part of their training includes how to identify problems and situations that surpass their capacity and knowledge of how to and where to refer. This includes referral and coordination with the broader array of governmental and private services.⁵⁵

2.5.2 Continuum of Care

Zambia has identified a continuum of community-based social services for children and women in need of social protection that integrates a method of case management, social work and counselling.⁵⁶ At greatest risk are children and families in rural areas often without access. The continuum of care model includes three categories of services:

- Primary and universal services including education, information and awareness raising at the local community level regarding the needs of children and families in vulnerable situation.
- Secondary targeted services aimed to mitigate risk of children in vulnerable situations. This includes early intervention and family support including psychosocial counselling, economic support, housing support, day care centres, etc.
- Tertiary individual services for highly vulnerable children and families that include intensive family support, protective services including alternative care that include foster care and reunification; crisis centres; rehabilitation and adaptation centres, etc.

The *Mapping and Assessment Report* details the specific social services, supervised by the District Social Welfare Department, and provided cooperatively between the Government of Zambia and NGOs. Specific secondary and tertiary services include family support.

Guinea Bissau’s model utilizes an integrated case management approach that functions within a continuum of care services model at the decentralized level. This approach aims to better coordinate an inter-sectoral approach to assessment, case planning, intervention and follow-up. Cross sector mechanisms were developed to target vulnerable children and specifically address harmful cultural

⁵⁵ UNICEF DRC. (2011). *Protected communities: Child protection in transition*. Child Protection Section, UNICEF DRC.

⁵⁶ Munga, A. T. & Gibson, K. Z. (2011). *Child protection system mapping and assessment report*. Republic of Zambia and the Children in Need Network (CHIN).

practices. The Ministries of Women and Family, Justice and Health jointly focused on access to judicial assistance and response to FGM/C, early marriages and domestic violence.⁵⁷

Senegal's continuum of care model outlines services under three categories: prevention, protection and promotion.⁵⁸ Minimum standards for the different steps of the reintegration process of vulnerable children (including identification, child and family assessment, reintegration and monitoring) have been developed through a participatory process. The leadership focused on defining vulnerability, service provision and case management; clarifying the process of care and case management was done through dialogue and vision sharing among key ministries (Family, Justice and Social Affairs) as well as decentralized services and community-based actors. Initially developed to address the issue of street children, Senegal has designed service delivery system that is integrated and includes eight steps of service delivery provided by a range of actors: identification of vulnerable children and families; social inquiry (study of the child); listening to the child; family evaluation; social reintegration; follow-up and alternative placement, if necessary inclusive of case management services.

In **Ethiopia**, the thematic issue of children in street situations has been used to create continuum of care service structures that include integrated case management approach and inter-sectoral child protection coordination. In one of the regional capitals⁵⁹ of the country, civil society and the local government came together around the assessment that the different sectors dealing with street children often worked in parallel with no exchange of information, sharing of practices, common vision, and coordination. The local government, the communities, the police, the court, the prosecution office, the health and education service providers, and the NGOs were all working in a vacuum of mutual knowledge, synergy and collaboration. This initial assessment helped in initiating a local multi-sectoral response through partnerships and coordination mechanisms that gradually extended its scope to preventing child abuse and exploitation, with good referral mechanisms, defined case management procedures, and sharing of responsibilities among actors. This local initiative has gradually been inserted into national discussions around promoting a government led (leadership and governance) inter-sectoral response to abuse and exploitation, with the establishment of an inter-ministerial management team for the prevention, the support and the response to child abuse. Sectors sharing responsibility in this task are the health, education, justice, youth and social actors.

In **Malawi**, the progressive and strategic use funding for the HIV/AIDS epidemic, one of the worst in the Region, provide an opportunity for the government to significantly expand the range and reach of basic child protection. Continuum of care service structures were established in the form of Police Victim Support Units, One Stop Centres for women and children survivors of rape, family violence and child maltreatment and Community Victims Support Units. Mechanisms for supporting children, families and communities were established through the creation of district child protection committees that utilizes and supports community based care practices. The Malawi experience demonstrates how good practices in service delivery aimed at a particular vulnerable population can then be expanded to strengthen the overall system to protect all children through a full continuum of responses.

In **Swaziland**, a continuum of care service model is provided at Neighbourhood Care Points of Care Centres where children access basic services including child protection services.⁶⁰ These centres were built on existing structures that had been developed to address HIV/AIDS within communities. Over time collaboration and convergence with UNICEF, education and faith-based organization has

⁵⁷ B. Kameni (2011). Chief, Child protection, UNICEF Guinea Bissau, personal communication

⁵⁸ Personal communication with UNICEF Senegal.

⁵⁹ Nazareth, Regional capital of Oromia Region.

⁶⁰ This information was provided by UNICEF representatives from Swaziland at a group meeting on March 14, 2012.

developed with continued attention to partnership coordination. The Centres include a waiting area and includes preschool education and some health services. Staff training is done using South Africa's training manual. Since the training has to be done by different partners, efforts are underway to systematize the training with one manual to be utilized for all Centres. A system for documentation and monitoring needs to be developed. Given the high rate of sexual violence and the relationship to HIV-infection, the development of a curriculum and outreach to high schools is planned.

In **Ghana**, The Care Reforms were initiated at the policy level where a Policy Development Advisory Committee took the leadership in defining the issue. In order to ensure government ownership, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs took the lead. Committee membership included 16 to 18 representatives from the public sector and NGOs. The Government and UNICEF initiated technical support through a specialized technical support committee. Some of the issues were defined at the level of finalizing the Terms of Reference (TOR) and final recommendations of the system mapping and assessment exercise. One of the primary recommendations was a national-level coordination mechanism.

Ghana's Care Reform Initiative⁶¹ provides for Integrated Care Services for OVC:

- **Prevention:** To prevent the disintegration of families through linkages with strategies that strengthen families such as the social grant programme (LEAP), scholarships, food packages, access to National Health Insurance and other support programmes.
- **Reintegration with the extended family (Kinship Care):** In cases where children are separated from their parents, to find loving relatives who are able to create a caring and stable environment for the child.
- **Fostering:** When kinship care cannot be provided, temporary or permanent care with foster families can still provide a good home for children.
- **Adoption:** When the possibility of a family reunion is exhausted, to find the child a loving adoptive home, preferably with a Ghanaian family.

Community-based child protection teams were developed in three Northern regions beginning in 2002. Training was gender balanced with emphasis on systems mapping. More recently standards for community protection are being developed through a collaborative process of all of the stakeholders. Standard operating procedures for response and referral are being done through a multi-partner approach with PLAN, UNICEF and WISE that bring together expertise in referral mechanisms.

2.5.3 Minimum Package of Service

UNICEF's Child Protection System Strategy adopted in June 2008 supports the identification of a minimum package of child protection services as a framework for social protection strategies development and national and sectoral planning. The minimum package refers to a range of services on a continuum from prevention to response, shared across sectors (social welfare, education, health justice and security and the private sector including community NGOs.) and modified for emergency situations.⁶² The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has adopted the Minimum Package of Services to guide the harmonization of service delivery for OVC & Y across the region. It includes a comprehensive range of services: educational and vocational skills; health care, clean water and sanitation; food security and nutrition; protection of children & youth; psychosocial well-being and support and social protection. Key components in supporting and delivering the

⁶¹ Child Frontiers Ltd. (2011). *Report of the mapping and analysis of Ghana's child protection system*; National Council for Children's Services and Government of Kenya. (2012). *The framework for the National Child Protection System for Kenya*.

⁶² UNICEF. (2008). *Summary of Highlights: UNICEF Global child protection systems mapping workshop*. Bucharest, Romania.

Minimum Package include active participation and empowerment of youth, families and communities.⁶³

The Government of **Rwanda** and stakeholders use the Minimum Package of Services for OVC's for defining the essential services for their most vulnerable children. The fundamental elements include basic health care, nutrition, formal and non-formal education and training, child protection psychosocial services and socioeconomic services. It is an integrated community service delivery approach that is targeted to children zero to 18 years of age and meet the criteria for being identified as "vulnerable." A secondary target group includes those who support OVC, such as caregivers, volunteers and local workers.⁶⁴

2.5.4 Service Models as a Response to Specific Vulnerable Groups and Sectors

In **Cameroon**, specialized social services and child protection mechanisms have been developed to provide services to support juveniles in conflict with the law. The Ministry of Social Affairs' Juvenile Justice Division established Social Action Services (SAS) in police stations, Gendarmerie Brigades, courts and prisons to provide care and at the various steps of the penal procedure (investigation, prosecution and sentencing). Social Action Services specifically target minority and marginalized ethnic groups like Baka, Bakola and Kirdis. Alternative care models have been established through units of partner Ministries (Education Vocational Training, Youths and Sports) that includes re-education centres. These are to substantiate and reinforce the re-education of juveniles in conflict with the law. SAS's are also attached to health facilities and educational institutions (primary, secondary and university) with mandates to facilitate access to health and education services for the highly vulnerable. Community outreach approaches are used to target groups in remote areas for birth registration, life skills education and parenting education.⁶⁵

In **Liberia**, the development of alternative care for children targets the more than 5,000 children living in institutions and orphanages. An assessment revealed that 90 % of the orphanages had inadequate care services, poor quality of education, over-crowded sleeping quarters and lack of recreational facilities. Many children were subjected to child labour and there were instances of sexual harassment and molestation of girls by staff members. Furthermore, a link was found between institutional care, child trafficking and international adoption in Liberia. Given that more than fifty percent children in institutions of the children have living family members or relatives, deinstitutionalization has been the entry point for reforming the service delivery system. The guiding document, the Government of Liberia's Regulations for the Appropriate Use and Conditions of Alternative Care for Children, requires all alternative care institutions in Liberia to register with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. An independent team comprising representatives from the government, UNICEF and civil society organizations will carry out a detailed assessment of each institution before recommending it to the Ministry for accreditation.

The regulations and the tools will facilitate deinstitutionalization of children and set a standard of care for children living in alternative care. The new regulations clearly stipulates the minimum standards of care and functions of alternative care institutions in the country as described in the National Health Standards and the principles of the UN Convention on the rights of the Child and other related international instruments on care for children in alternative care institutions. The maximum caseload is set at 50 children for one institution. These regulations aim to facilitate

⁶³ Southern African Development Community. (2010). Development of a SADC minimum package of services for orphans and vulnerable children and youth. Regional Situation Analysis Report Draft 4.

⁶⁴ Binagowaho, A., Noguchi, J., Senyana-Mottier, M. & Fawzi, M. C. S. (2008). *Community-centered integrated services for orphans and vulnerable children in Rwanda*. Joint Learning Initiative of Children with HIV/AIDS Learning Group 3: Expanding Access to Services and Protecting Human Rights.

⁶⁵ Personal communication, UNICEF Cameroon, 2012.

reunification of children in institutions with their families whenever possible, and put measures to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation. In order to achieve this, a range of protection and participation services will be put into place within each institution.⁶⁶

2.5.6 Child Participation in Research

A Liberian research study conducted by Save the Children (2011) on Child Protection Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) Study provides an excellent example of how to include children and caregivers in a process of decision-making through research. The study was a part of the project “Educating and Protecting Vulnerable Children in Family Settings in Liberia” (2010-2014) and focused on 12 districts from 6 counties in Central and Western Liberia, including Greater Monrovia (i.e., Grand Cape Mount, Bomi, Margibi, Gbarpolu, Bong, and parts of Montserrado). The results of the study provided some important insight into the link between positive outcomes for children and services. The majority of caregivers (98 percent) and children (96 percent) think that it is possible to bring children who are living in the streets back with their families. All caregivers in Greater Monrovia and 90% in rural areas agree that this can happen if provided services. In order to facilitate the reunification, caregivers identified the types of services that would help to return children to their families: counselling and psycho-social support for children and/or parents (84 percent), schooling (75 percent), material assistance (39 percent), vocational/skills training and opportunity for income generation (33 percent). Children identified the same resources but added recreation/safe playgrounds or football field (10 percent).⁶⁷

2.5.7 Key considerations

- ✓ **A framework for community supports and service for the identified population should be clearly articulated with agreed upon terms through participatory means.**

Although there is a common goal for child protection in terms of preventing, mitigating and protecting against neglect, abuse and exploitation, what the supports and services are called and look like may differ from country to country as well as community to communities within countries. The primary work is to have a participatory process inclusive of child, family and community participation on what they should look like on the ground and what they should be called. The dialogue and vision-sharing among key ministries in Senegal in defining vulnerability, service provision and case management is an example. Terms like service, case management and psychosocial counselling have different meanings in different contexts and are sometimes viewed as western, individualized and disempowering approaches not suited for collective societies. Therefore contextualizing language and meaning can have far-reaching benefits, especially when it comes to the articulation of specific job functions and workforce design. Participatory research, such as the study in Liberia and Senegal, are excellent examples of how language, needs and possible solutions can be assessed through researched that includes children, parents and other caregivers and community leaders.

- ✓ **Community mechanisms should be embedded within the support and response structures and processes.**

Within each of the models, access is facilitated by the community mechanisms that are the foundation of any service, not matter what it is called or what it looks like. It is those coordinating and facilitating functions of the child protection committees exemplified in the DRC and Malawi and

⁶⁶ Government of Liberia (2010). *Regulations for alternative care launched in Liberia*. Keynote Address by Deputy Minister Joseph W. Geebro of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Retrieved from http://www.unliberia.org/press.asp?pr_detail=122.

⁶⁷ Save the Children (2011). *Child Protection Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices in Central and Western Liberia*. Retrieved from <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/content/library/documents/child-protection-knowledge-attitudes-and-practices-central-and-western-lib>.

cross-sector coordinating groups such as those in Guinea Bissau that really makes it happen on the ground. Therefore, the response must include a participatory process in order to make it fit the reality of time, place and context.

- ✓ **Specific approaches and implementation strategies should respond to the community and political priorities given the resources available.**

The examples given and the model frameworks provide a range of options based on the local realities. The DRC's protected communities approach recognized the need to adapt the model differently in post-conflict zones. Implementation included a corps of volunteers that learn what to look for, what they can do or what someone else needs to do and how to protect and support them in getting the help they want and need. In Swaziland, Neighbourhood Points of Care Centres provide outreach approaches that were built on the existing structures that were developed to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic. They were just transformed to include a wider range of services with strong convergence with education, health and faith-based organizations. In Liberia, the initial focus on children in residential facilities meant that the service structure developed services for children separate from the family context, including family reunification. This is the backdrop for efforts to develop support and services for children living within communities.

2.6 Social Service Workforce

The Child Protection Workforce is an inclusive term and means all categories of people who work on behalf of vulnerable children and families. It includes a range of providers and actors, both informal and traditional, such as family and kinship networks and community volunteers as well as formal workers who are employed. They may be unpaid volunteers working in the informal system as well as paid employees working in governmental and non-governmental organizations, including hospitals, schools, prisons, community centres and other community programs. It includes people who work at the national, regional, district and local levels as well as trainers and teachers of workers.

Approaches to strengthening the child protection workforce can take many forms and approaches. The various approaches are guided by respective country's policies, strategies and customs. It may be a response to address a particular vulnerable group. Or it might be initiated to implement a selected system of services. It often includes the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values for frontline and supervisory child protection workers, managers and educators, inclusive of formal and informal actors. A range of activities could include curriculum development and teacher training for universities and tertiary educational institutions and conferences, workshops and on-the-job training for formal and informal community workers. Professional social work associations are a key part of child protection systems, as they support the professional development of individual workers, promote public understanding of social work, and help to advance sound social policies.⁶⁸ (In matrices developed prior to the Dakar CPSS conference, upward of 20 countries have provided information concerning their child protection workforce: <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/Matrices#child%20protection>.)

2.6.1 Linking Formal and Informal Systems

Social welfare workers and other child protection workers can be a link or bridge between the formal child protection system and local community. Well-trained and competent workers understand the logic and motivations of various community actors. They can demonstrate skills for adapting rights-based approaches to the realities of the communities in which they work. Social workers and other child protection workers express many challenges in adapting to local realities, but at the same time, some have developed innovative strategies for working with children, families

⁶⁸ For more information on social work associations, see <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/12g+Associations>.

and communities. Using the workforce as a system-strengthening entry point can involve collecting these stories and strategies and capitalizing on these experiences; it is the front-line workforce that will remain in close contact with the community realities.⁶⁹

With ingenuity and innovation, social workers can translate principles and practices from one context to fit another. For example, a study on indigenization of practice in India showed how social workers were able to take the models they had learned to translate them into culturally relevant practice.⁷⁰ Social workers' demonstrated abilities to incorporate endogenous community practices can serve as the bridge between the customary and formal system mechanisms. This supports the significant role social workers and other frontline child protection workers can play in linking informal and formal systems and building and strengthening mechanisms that support children, families and communities as co-participants in child protection. For example, **Niger's** Local Committees represent a promising approach that seeks to bring various social strands together into one coordinating mechanism for service delivery to children in dangerous situations and children in conflict with the law. Formally recognizing chiefs in **Sierra Leone's** child protection system also serve as an important step for closing the gap between the formal services and children and families.⁷¹

Local community practices are protective in nature and function as the first line of protection for the overwhelming majority of children Africa. It is critical that the capacity of frontline social workers and other child protection actors be strengthened so they understand how they function and how they can be supported and bolstered. This requires significant attention to strengthening the frontline social service workforce that include job functions and skill-building in community and family engagement and integrated case management practices.

2.6.2 Education and Training

In **Tanzania**,⁷² in order to implement the development of the structure of service provision, attention need to be paid to the workforce with the districts. The District Councils partnered with the Institute of Social Work (ISW) for addressing the workforce needs. A coordinator was based at ISW in Dar es Salaam with three technical support staff based in each of the three districts. ISW trained district teams made up of Social Welfare Officers (SWOs), representatives from the Gender and Children Desks in the police, magistrates, probation officers, prison services, residential care social workers, civil society representatives and others. The exact composition varies across districts depending on the local reality and the districts decided who should participate. The structure consists of the Council Management Team, District Child Protection Team (DCPT), Ward Child Protection Team (WCPT), and Village Child Protection Team (VCPT). Next was a capacity needs assessment of DCPT and sub-district CPT members. A framework for coaching and mentoring of district child protection teams was developed, with technical support persons placed in each district and with periodic technical support visits by the ISW and later through the partnership with Save the Children. It is expected that the training modules will eventually contribute to training of gender and children desk officers and at some point be integrated into new social worker training at the national level.

Tanzania faces a number of challenges as it attempts to scale up the good practice models and services developed so far. Of primary concern is the role of the 5,000 trained para-social workers and the fact that the role of community justice facilitators in prevention, response and support is not clearly spelled out. Most Vulnerable Children (MVC) volunteers, Community Justice Facilitators (CJF's) and para-social workers are critical for the full range of service delivery (prevention, referral,

⁶⁹ Plan, Save the Children and UNICEF (2011).

⁷⁰ Nimmagadda, J. and C.D. Cowger (1999). Cross-cultural practice: social worker ingenuity in the indigenization of practice knowledge. *International Social Work*, 42 (3), 261-276.

⁷¹ Plan, Save the Children & UNICEF (2011).

⁷² Long, S. (2011). *Tanzania: Linking community systems to national model for child protection*. Maestral International.

rehabilitation and reintegration) but an effective role that fits with their skill competencies will need to be determined.

Nigeria⁷³ also has a para-professional social work training through the American International Health Alliance (AIHA). They have a Training of Trainers Curriculum, Training of Supervisors and the Para Social Work I Training. It is 10 days of training which includes classroom and field work facilitated by the supervisors. Overall, this is a six-month training, followed by a re-inoculation training. The process of developing the curriculum was very thoughtful and comprehensive. The curriculum is based on family and community based principles with a practical approach to learning. A strength of the program is the emphasis on the para social workers to know when to refer and where to refer. Knowledge of community resources is provided through various mechanisms such as a resource fair. Representatives of community programs are brought together to educate the para social workers about their different programs and services. The teaching methodology is participatory, utilizing case studies and small group work. The content reflects generic social work theory, values and skills that are often taught at the BSW and first-year MSW levels in schools of social work. To date they have trained 190 para social workers. In general, the participants of the training are working in the voluntary sector although Social Welfare Officers are always invited to attend the trainings. One of the primary concerns is how integrate the para social work training into the public social development system in Nigeria. Also, given that the curriculum reflects a strong empowerment and community approach, it would be useful to integrate some of the modules and teaching methodologies into the university education curriculum although they have not direct links to that. A National Steering Committee on Strengthening the Social Development (Welfare) Workforce in Nigeria was launched in December 2011. It is hoped that this steering committee and begin to plan, develop and support the workforce as Nigeria moves forward with system strengthening efforts.

Child protection system strengthening requires significant attention to customary justice as well as child and family welfare. Contextualizing standards and principles link informal and formal system processes that incorporate social equity measures to ensure equal treatment of protection and accountability. This includes equal attention to the roles and rights of men and women within communities and families (the focus is often on women).⁷⁴ In **Swaziland**,⁷⁵ community caregivers from the local-level NGOs were provided a weeklong training with support from the Global Fund. Later, police officers and prosecution units received the training. There is a need to find a way to link this with the Department of Social Welfare and have social workers team up with REPSII. At the university level, the first cadre of 200 social workers has been trained utilizing a one-year program. It was a holistic “crash” course to try to quickly get persons trained and placed within the system. A follow-up assessment will be done to evaluate the real outcomes in terms of service delivery. Within the Justice Sector, there is a child protection worker in all police stations. There continues to be a need to link social welfare and justice by connecting the social workers across sectors. There are continued efforts to link the Departments of Social welfare and Police Units although the technical team doesn’t have any decision-making power.

⁷³ Davis, R. (2011 July). *Nigeria Social Development Workforce Strengthening Social Work Education Gap Analysis Scoping visit to Abuja, Nigeria*. A Trip Report to CapacityPlus.

⁷⁴ The Columbia Group for Children in Adversity. (2011). *An ethnographic study of community-based child protection mechanisms and their linkage with the National Child Protection System in Sierra Leone*.

⁷⁵ Personal communication, UNICEF Swaziland, March 2012.

2.6.3 Workforce Gap Analyses

A number of countries, implementation of the recommendations of the Gap Analysis has served to “jumpstart” workforce strengthening initiatives. In order to implement the recommendations from the gap analysis in **Malawi**,⁷⁶ it was recognized that improving internal communication and teamwork within the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development was a prerequisite. Investments were made in a *Customer Care Retreat* specifically designed to address teamwork, leadership and communication for senior staff from the various departments within the Ministry. Through this process the senior staff “started talking to each other” with energy, enthusiasm and ideas. This resulted in a climate conducive to the implementation of a change management process. This constitutes a very good example of establishing strong leadership and governance through internal partnerships and coordination mechanism.

Stronger leadership paved the way for the Ministry to strengthen the social service workforce, focusing at the top within the Ministry itself. The process began with a self-analysis of Human Resources (HR), placing responsibility with the Ministry’s Chief Human Resources Officer. This was a strategy to increase engagement and responsibility within the HR Department for workforce capacity building and management. Positions in the Ministry were upgraded and job descriptions were revised. Many of the Ministry staff were not qualified for the new job descriptions, thus efforts were implemented to increase the professional capacity of the management staff, including requirements that social welfare officers hold undergraduate degrees. A career path and training strategy were developed, including investments by the central government for upgrading the infrastructure and curriculum at Magomero Training College where most social workers were trained. After the two-year process of strengthening the ministry level workforce, the government, USAID and UNICEF shifted focus to the frontline staff at the district and local levels to strengthen implementation of the continuum of care services.

In some countries, a Workforce Gap Analysis has been used to strategically design workforce strengthening initiatives.

What Social Workers Do, in “Plain English”

A unique and grassroots approach to defining social workers’ responsibilities is included in a Liberian workbook that aims to explain a child-friendly approach to children who need to go to court with child survivors of sexual violence.* The work of the social worker or psychosocial counselor is an essential part of the healing process for a survivor of sexual assault. For some, the social worker is one of the few people that she/he can talk openly with, without fear or shame. The job is to lessen the feelings of fear and healing for the future. The job functions of social workers are outlined as:

- Take our time when reading the story in the book to survivors so he/she has time to ask questions
- Encourage member, when appropriate, to also sit and understand the story
- Take the survivor to the court room when it is not in use when she/he will testify so that it is a familiar place
- Make sure to provide information and contact numbers to the survivor that might be useful if in need of additional support
- Use the coloring book as a way for the survivor to use while waiting; it can be a way to keep the survivor engaged and doing something while the proceedings are going on.

* Johanson, Z. & Stone, A. (2011). *Musu Goes to Court*. A publication of the Norwegian Refugee Council in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice in Liberia.

⁷⁶ USAID & UNICEF. (2009). *Reforming social welfare: A new development approach in Malawi’s Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development*.

2.6.4 Key considerations

- ✓ **Data on workforce capacity is limited but is necessary to strategic planning and budget system strengthening efforts.**

There is a great deal of anecdotal information that does exist suggesting that there are unclear job descriptions, high caseloads, limited resources and low pay for paraprofessionals and professionals. These themes are repeated in many documents. Given that there has been limited qualitative data, a number of countries are not undertaking workforce gap analyses to quantitatively and qualitatively identify the specific needs to implement policies and laws.

- ✓ **Contextualize education and training curricula so that they match the support and service responses that are being implemented.**

Much of the training that is done is borrowed from western countries and therefore has limited application in local contexts, especially for integrating the formal and informal systems. There are some examples and efforts for incorporating more indigenous practices such as the Liberian workbook, *Musu Goes to Court*, that is used for social workers working with victims of violence who are going to court. Its use of pictures and language translates professional terms into specific behaviours for the social worker. Other manuals and educational materials could be adapted as well UNIFEM's publication on *Traditional Trauma Healing Mechanisms in Communities in Liberia* suggests that trauma is defined differently within families and communities, and therefore interventions need to be defined differently. A similar manual produced for Ethiopia, *A Better Way: Manual on Positive Child Discipline*, provides some excellent curriculum material that could be used for child development and parent discipline training adapted to all levels of educational instruction.

- ✓ **Paraprofessional training at the NGO level is an excellent resource for workforce development but there is a lack of a clear role for them.**

Paraprofessionals provide many of the services at the grassroots level and are critical for implementing the full range of services. In Tanzania, over 5,000 paraprofessionals have been trained but their role is not clearly defined in relationship to the continuum of care service structure. In Nigeria, there is a clear need and role for paraprofessionals, but the question remains how to utilize their knowledge and skills within the more formal system. Or, perhaps the question would be how to link the jobs they do with the formal protection mechanisms.

- ✓ **Institute creative education, training and supervisory approaches to address the quantity and quality of the workforce.**

In Tanzania, a process of coaching and mentoring of the child protection District Teams was developed as part of the training program. Doing supervision and support through teamwork can further solidify group work and build on shared knowledge and resources. The Regional Psychosocial Support initiative (REPSSI) has developed a distance-learning program that allows students to meet without leaving home. Incorporated into this are mentor groups of 15 to 20 students that meet for one day every three weeks. This has added great value to the training by building a community of practice that reinforces the learning experience.

2.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation work for child protection system strengthening is an essential part of a country's or a region's overall efforts to better protect its children. Although interpretations differ, whether within a country, across a region, or between different regions, as to the precise aims and most effective structure of a child protection system, there is no dispute as to the critical need for this component of systems strengthening work. If we are not tracking success and challenges,

progress and lack of progress, in creating, consolidating and strengthening a child protection system whatever its composition (monitoring), then we are not learning (evaluation). And if we are not learning, we are probably not questioning current decisions using informed new knowledge.

The overall perception of field practitioners is that M&E (monitoring and evaluation) stands out as an area where great improvements, sharing of information and investments are needed. As child protection investing becomes more and more a strategic option among competing sectors, government leaders (and donors) are increasingly asking what outcomes they will see out of invested resources and additional ones. Without some reasonably valid M&E data organized around key indicators, it is difficult to justify requests for expanded funding, or claims for shifts in strategies and approaches.

While there is a substantial agreement on the need for stronger M&E frameworks (even in developed countries), discussions with system experts have shown that fundamental questions as to how progress can and should be measured are still not finding consensus responses. As is the case with M&E in many spheres, not merely in child protection systems strengthening, the rhetoric about the importance of assessing performance is less often matched by the reality. Indeed, good practice examples thus far of effective M&E (let alone of accountability) for systems strengthening are relatively few and far between. (For a matrix on the status of M&E system building in more than a dozen countries in Sub-Saharan Africa see: <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/Matrices#monitoring>.)

The HIV sector is possibly a good example to learn from on the specific topic of M&E. In particular, national and multi-country work done around HIV/AIDS and OVC has proven effective in manage population based data collection systems and census, as well as using the M&E outcomes to enlarge political buy-in and further financing. The approach used by the Global Fund and several bilateral organizations of investing in solid surveillance and control systems at the national, sub-national, and more recently at the community level has allowed the development of an M&E culture strictly linked to policy planning and implementation. In addition, surveillance and control system efforts have also been used as a catalytic factor to constantly bring different actors around the same table, mainstreaming interventions within different sectors. Finally, M&E work within the HIV and AIDS sector has also been use as the fundament to create a common understanding and vision among actors, what it is still not the case within the protection sector.

This section will briefly explore some of the existing efforts in strengthening M&E work as a component of child protection systems and some of the principles that seem to emerge from the experiences at the national and regional level.

2.7.1 Current efforts to improve M&E

A recent review of information and monitoring systems (IMS) in West and Central Africa has highlighted the main efforts ongoing in the sub-region to increase accountability and the tracking of results.⁷⁷ Within this context, national M&E approaches have been categorized as belonging to one of the following four categories:

1. Information systems used within specific sub-sectors of child protection work. These are vertical provisions for routine data collection made available within a specific area (i.e., social work), or within specific sub-sectors (i.e., police, court and penitential administration).

⁷⁷ UNICEF (2009). *Regional Review of Child Protection Monitoring and Information Systems in West and Central Africa*. UNICEF Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa, Dakar.

2. Targeted monitoring systems (geographic or thematic). These are integrated monitoring systems encompassing different sectors focussing on a specific geographical location or on a specific child protection issue (i.e., child trafficking or sexual abuse and exploitation).
3. National surveillance systems on the prevalence of child protection issues and risks, routing national surveys, and child protection databases. These are integrated monitoring systems, managed by government or child protection coalitions, that encompass different sectors at the national level for routine data collection and management on a wide range of child protection indicators (this category includes for instance the widespread data including for instance child helplines).
4. Finally there are routine or prolonged assessments, surveys, and *ad hoc* initiatives, including those in emergency, post-emergency or fragile settings. These are, for instance, systematic collections of child protection indicators under the resolution 1612 and systematic collections of child protection events within the framework of peace and reconciliation commissions in post-emergency settings.

In this paper, we add four more categories:

5. Initiatives dealing with the tracking of the national components of child protection system strengthening, as well as the effectiveness of the system at the level of end users. These are initiatives that provide periodic updates on the number of social workers available and their deployment status, the number of child protection units, the number and typology of reference mechanisms established, and the typology of case management available.
6. At a national level, some countries have established M&E mechanisms that look not only at the aggregation of data and statistics, but also at the routine review of the effectiveness of specific policies and programs. These initiatives are particularly important because they provide an institutional space to move from the availability and analysis of data to the implications for the design and desirability of new policies.
7. Initiatives that view child protection issues at a multi-country level include coalitions that, while they focus on a range of issues, have an M&E mandate for routine multi-country follow-up on cross border child protection issues. These include the Mano River Union initiative, the Great Lakes initiative, and the Multilateral Cooperation Agreement against Child Trafficking in West Africa.
8. Moving from the macro to the micro, individual-level M&E tracking systems are initiatives linked to individual case management. UNHCR and institutions working with stateless or refugee children have developed particularly effective tools to follow-up on the individual child through the reinsertion process.

1. Information systems used in child protection sub-sectors

In several sub-Saharan countries there are excellent examples of vertical and compartmentalised data within specific child protection sectors or sub-sectors. Overall, the justice system is possibly the sector where more efforts of this kind have been made and where vertical data are periodically collected and aggregated. Routine data collection is usually mandatory for child protection police units as well as the personnel administering institutions for children deprived of their liberty. For instance, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Units in **Ghana** constitute a country-wide network of eleven police regional units and 75 police local units specialising in domestic abuse and victims support consists of a network of police units that respond to domestic violence and provide victim support. The units were set up to protect the rights of victims of abuse, investigate all domestic violence cases, investigate all child abuse cases, arrest and prosecute offenders or perpetrators of abuse, and extend support to victims of domestic violence. All activities of the unit

are coordinated by a national secretariat located at the national headquarters of the Ghana Police Service in Accra.⁷⁸ Cases of abuse are recorded using a multiplicity of methods, a patchwork of formats, and recording models with scarce uniformity and homogeneity among units, as well as the non-systematic character of the variables collected.⁷⁹ Along similar lines, the penitentiary administration in **Madagascar** has several different formats for collecting routine information on minors deprived of their liberty, with the collected information that are then periodically passed on at the national level. In **Cameroon**, the penitentiary administration for minors produces yearly statistics on the number of children in prison by gender and region, by their status (convicted, remand, or preventive incarceration), they look at the duration of the temporary incarceration, and alike.

2. Targeted monitoring systems

Togo is an example of country that has both geographical and thematic monitoring systems. The Central Statistics Office has established a child-monitoring observatory that relies on the regional divisions of the Statistics Office. Data on child protection is collected on a bi-annual basis by social development officials as well as by representatives from villages and communities. The observatory is attached to project zones and activities, and the data is consolidated locally according to a predefined form. The aim of the observatory is primarily one of making available data and statistics to predefined geographical locations where child protection programs and projects are operating.

At the same time, Togo's national commission for child victims of trafficking, established in 2002, is responsible for coordinating case management, family tracing, and social rehabilitation of victims of trafficking who have been rescued in border areas or repatriated from other countries (i.e., *Talibé* children). The commission centralises all information and coordinates all actions in the sector through six regional and 30 prefectural divisions, not all of them operational.⁸⁰ In 2009, the commission introduced a national database for which data is collected by local surveillance committees that are involved in child trafficking prevention at the community, village and district level. A consolidated national analysis was produced in 2008, looking at the trends in cross-border child trafficking for the period 2002-2007. Data was disaggregated by sex, age, regions, and by issues such as the reasons for trafficking, typology of family background, profile of the abuser and typology of work to be undertaken by the child. Although the national database on child trafficking was well planned and triggered the buy-in of several key actors, a lack of financial resources has greatly limited its potential work in the area of M&E. A number of child protection partners have suggested integrating this thematic data collection initiative within the national database on vulnerable children under the responsibility of the ministry responsible for child protection. Later in 2012, the ministry plans to publish a statistical book on child protection indicators to be used as baseline against which to measure future progresses.⁸¹

3. National surveillance systems

An interesting example of this M&E approach is the routine database Childline **Namibia** makes available to child protection partners. Childline Namibia has developed a comprehensive performance-monitoring plan designed to programme impacts in all its phases. The variables to be tracked measure the expected outcomes or changes. The monitoring plan describes key indicators to monitor the outcomes, the units of measurement, data sources, methodology of data collection, monitoring frequency, responsibility, baseline values and targets set within the planning horizon.

⁷⁸ Osman Alhassan (2007). *Documentation of Domestic Violence in Ghana 1998-2006*. University of Ghana.

⁷⁹ UNICEF (2009). *Regional Review of Child Protection Monitoring and Information Systems in West and Central Africa*. UNICEF Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa, Dakar.

⁸⁰ UNICEF (2009). *Regional Review of Child Protection Monitoring and Information Systems in West and Central Africa*. UNICEF Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa, Dakar.

⁸¹ Félicité Mukantambara Goundjo (2012). Personal Communication. UNICEF Togo, Lomé.

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The evidence collected through systematic review and case studies are used to influence understanding of a situation and to provide new ways of thinking as well as to provide insights into different policy options. Civil society organizations and relevant government authorities, partners in the initiative, use evidence and statistics to initiate a dialogue with high-level policymakers and donors to obtain appropriate buy-in. Child protection partners use statistics within working groups and protection taskforces.

Major improvements have been instituted as a result of this work. The data revealed weaknesses in the referral network for children who are victims of abuse and violence and in the number and quality of services to meet victims' legal, shelter, health and emotional needs. As a consequence, many children were not supported. Childline commissioned a mapping exercise of all child protection service providers and developed a resource directory based on the information collected. A database was installed to help with tracking and referral of cases and a case management system was introduced between project partners as well as external stakeholders like school counsellors, social workers, police and Child Protection Units. A policy for referral of cases was introduced and a network NGOs trained on the policy. An interagency working group that includes ministerial authorities was also established to develop a safety net model for children in need of protection. An important outcome was a national referral flow chart that describes the role and responsibilities of key service providers. The group is working on standard operating procedures that will assist the national government to finalise service agreements with providers. The same group of stakeholders also facilitated the drafting of the Child Protection Bill. Staff, adult and child volunteers were actively engaged in consultations, using the child line as a way for people to participate and influence the process and contents of future legislation.⁸²

Another example of national child protection databases is the work undergoing in **Benin**, the only country in West Africa that has succeeded in establishing a national information management system for general child protection (*tableau de bord social*).⁸³ This is an important achievement from which other countries will be able to learn. Funded by UNICEF, with additional support from Plan International and Danida, the system is under the control of the government and is gradually improving its functions in three areas. First, data is collected from different child protection actors who contribute their routine data regarding the children with whom they come in contact. About 80 percent of the data are on OVCs, and other child protection issues (such as forced marriage and incest) are not well reflected. Because the data is not yet representative, it cannot be used to analyse child vulnerability more generally. Ways must be found to more frequently update the data, which are generally a year late. The second area is data use. The Ministry of Family is the main user and data are only analysed at the central level. Childpro has created a system for data sharing and coordination at commune level. CPS uses raw data. No referral pathways exist, so the data system helps with referrals. For UNICEF, the IMS is a tool for advocacy at the commune level, to show that certain child protection phenomena exist. Ministry of Family uses the data for planning, including mapping actors and actions and identifying gaps in services. The third area of gradual improvement is the system's impact on child protection actors, which gets partners into the habit of improving record keeping and the use of data.

The government of Benin provides the personnel to operate the system. UNICEF's estimated costs in 2010 were \$43,000 for a consultant, training, travel, forms, and data collection from the justice and prison systems. Strengthening Benin's child protection IMS would be best accomplished by basing it on the results of child protection systems mapping. This would ensure that the data system is fully

⁸² Child Helpline International (2012). Personal communication. For more information on child helplines, see <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/13j+Child+Helplines>.

⁸³ Sarah Lilley (2010). Extract from unpublished trip report. Save the Children UK, London.

integrated with child protection services and is part of the routine system. There is also a need to avoid establishing parallel data systems for different but related issues. Efforts are underway to integrate a parallel database on women, family, and children, financed by Swiss cooperation and implemented by UNFPA.

4. Routine or prolonged assessments in fragile settings

Although several truth and reconciliation commissions were established in sub-Saharan African countries that experienced some form of civil war, or religious, tribal or ethnic clashes, **South Africa's** was the first successful experiment that helped the country to move to full democracy and respect of human rights after the abolition of the apartheid. The undertaking mobilised the entire population and laid the foundations of the current modern country and for the establishment, more recently, of a nationwide, pluri-disciplinary M&E system related to violence, sexual abuse and the exploitation of children and women. The Thuthuzela Care Centres are a network of one-stop, integrated and multidisciplinary centres for the case management of victims, under the overall supervision of the South African National Prosecuting Authority's Sexual Offence and Community Affairs. Besides the provision of integrated services to victims, an explicit objective has been to greatly improve prosecution, particularly in the areas of sexual offences, maintenance, child justice and domestic violence. To achieve this, routine assessments, collection, recording and use of data is a key instrumental strategy. Through the activities of monitoring and recording, the Office of Sexual Offence and Community Affairs has been able to track individual cases from the moment of reporting to the final sentencing. As a consequence, the government can see where the bottlenecks are in the instruction and prosecution process, which actors are responsible for those bottlenecks, and which remedies can be taken to eliminate cases that were not investigated or prosecuted. The programme has been highly effective in increasing the protection of victims, allowing for routine national assessment of actions taken on individual case management, and for bringing an increasing number of perpetrators to final verdict. The initiative is now being replicated in several other sub-Saharan African countries. Importantly, routine assessments in South Africa are also promoted by civil society, and children in particular have been regularly involved in nationwide studies, some of which included perpetrators as well as victims. Notably, in response to children's feedback that testifying in court felt as traumatic experience as the abuse itself, special child hearings and procedures were developed to prevent secondary victimization.

Other types of national-level research and prolonged assessments have the potential to trigger broad change by building the evidence base for an effective and accountable system that offers a continuum of services from prevention to protection. Examples include research into risk, well-being and protective factors as well as population-based measures and *ad hoc* studies. A national study of violence against children in **Tanzania** that measured the prevalence of certain risk factors helped improve the country's child protection system not just through better information but by raising the issue's profile.⁸⁴ An effective child protection system has to be able to deal with comprehensive needs and not just categories, and research can help countries meet this challenge. For example, ethnographic studies⁸⁵ for evaluating grassroots community mechanisms could better inform linkages between the "informal and formal" systems, and between micro (individual, family, and community) and macro (regional and national systemic) systems. Social anthropology can also offer insights into large, ethnically diverse nations such as many of those in sub-Saharan Africa.

⁸⁴ UNICEF (2011). *Violence Against Children in Tanzania, Findings from a National Survey 2009*. A report by UNICEF Tanzania, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, August 2011. As seen in Tanzania, the enhanced commitment of the government to a child protection system can also be a useful outcome of a study—in addition to its impact on monitoring and evaluation.

⁸⁵ Ethnography is the scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences.

5. Initiatives that track child protection components at national and end-user levels

Monitoring child protection issues is different than monitoring the status of a child protection system's components. The Government of **Malawi**, for instance, is certainly consistently investing in setting up effective platforms to review not just individual child protection indicators, but also the shifts needed in the different areas of the child protection system: looking at the political space, budgetary allocations, overall coordination needs, human resource development and capital investments and geographical coverage. Though it is too early to present effective good practices in this field, what was initiated in Malawi in the last few years is a promising strategy that could pave the way to future learning.

One way of asserting the effectiveness of the entire child protection system is to measure the degree of satisfaction expressed by end users, including at the community level. World Vision, for example, has been using ADAPT tools not just to record structures and services available to end users, but also to evaluate their effectiveness and related quality concerns.

The child protection system building movement can draw from the OVC field in terms of tools to track the status of a country's child protection system components. The OVC Policy and Planning Effort Index (OPPEI)⁸⁶ measures a country's OVC response. The Index is a core composite that assesses a country's progress on the implementation of "eight components that are required to create an enabling environment for an appropriate scaled up response at country level." The extensive questionnaire was developed and administered at tri-annual meetings of OVC stakeholders wherein respondents answered questions on the following eight components: situation analysis, the consultative nature of the field, coordination, national action plans, policy, legislation, M&E and resources. The Index provides both a current profile and trending data, and considers efforts by government, national and international NGOs, multilateral agencies, bilateral donors and other stakeholders. Using the OPPEI, it was clear that **Zimbabwe** showed market improvement over the time period of 2001 through 2008 in all eight component areas.

Once agreement is reached on systems strengthening issue areas and specific measures of progress, one can imagine such an index being developed for child protection systems to provide baseline snapshots and view of progress over time of the status of child protection systems programming. A child protection index could be integrated into the mapping process, or be a low-cost alternative to mapping.

6. Mechanisms that evaluate policies and programs

Under this category, the example from **Lesotho** is a success story. In Lesotho, Child and Gender Protection Units have been created within the police administration with branches in all 11 police districts countrywide since 2003.⁸⁷ Given the high prevalence of HIV and the very real risk of its transmission to children in cases of rape and sexual abuse, the Child and Gender Protection Units keep a solid record of reported cases also for strengthening the referral to medical services for timely and effective case management to prevent HIV infections. Yet, initially, the involvement and effectiveness of health services for victims was very limited, and cases were not followed and "lost" in the referral process. As a part of the overall effort to strengthen M&E and referral across sectors, a computerized database has been set up and rolled out after piloting in a single district. Importantly, this initiative was introduced with an in-depth orientation on child protection issues, as well as the pertinent legal and policy framework applicable, psychosocial care and support techniques, and stress management. The database provides details of cases as they are reported and

⁸⁶ UNICEF (2008). *Progress in the national response to Orphans and other Vulnerable Children in sub-Saharan Africa: The OVC Policy and Planning Effort index (OPPEI) 2007 Round*.

⁸⁷ UNICEF (2006). *Lesotho: Strengthening Child Protection Services for Survivors of Sexual Abuse*. Unpublished internal memo.

make data available at all times to service providers and senior policymakers to allow for evidence-based policy making and awareness raising on the magnitude of the problem. It also aims to improve referral links between the police and the social welfare, health and judicial systems, thus ensuring that survivors are treated sensitively and receive the quality services due to them. Finally, the authorities made a complementary effort in linking the sharing of the data with unified procedures for case management through the finalization of National Guidelines for the Management of Survivors of Sexual Abuse, adapted for Lesotho from the WHO Protocol for sexual abuse that complemented and made operational the Sexual Offence Act of 2003. Originally started as cross-sectoral M&E initiative, this work greatly raised awareness on the extent of sexual abuse and its devastating impact on victims, showing authorities the magnitude of the problem and the need for multi-sectoral and integrated responses backed by policies and political will. The process facilitated the development and voting of the Child Protection and Welfare Bill, a landmark result for the country.

2.7.2 Key considerations

From the examples presented above and from a broader literature review, a number of lessons can be drawn on the use of M&E to strengthen child protection systems.

✓ **Take a long-term perspective and link efforts to policymaking.**

There is a need for a long-term perspective⁸⁸ as well as measurement of short-term gains. A system is not strengthened overnight, although *ad hoc* or ongoing activities can be measured to see whether they met their limited, specific objectives. Some of the examples reviewed have shown that the strategic use of data is often linked to advocacy activities that might require consistency and time, as well as allowing more and more key stakeholders to “buy-in.” The most successful experiences in the establishment of M&E systems are also the ones that managed to link long-term evaluations and analysis to policymaking. As the ultimate scope of an M&E system is not just the one of providing updates on the situations of vulnerable children, but rather providing the basis to better inform policymakers in their future decisions.

✓ **Strengthen linkages between M&E and increased accountability.**

M&E efforts are rarely seen as a vehicle to enhance public accountability for fulfilling promises and commitments. There certainly is potential in explaining governments that properly tracking progress against specific child protection outcomes could be rewarded with larger political capital and public support for the policies and programs undertaken. M&E systems could be seen as a way to “measure” the outcomes of political commitment and will against specific child protection issues, and could provide for hard evidence in political debates (including pre-electoral debates) to justify proposed strategic decisions taken by the political elites (as it has happened for instance in Kenya and South Africa in recent years).

✓ **There is a need for greater convergence around child protection system visions.**

There is a need for greater convergence in the differing visions of a system in order for M&E to be undertaken successfully.⁸⁹ If we can't agree on what the system can reasonably be expected to do, we surely can't agree on how to measure whether it's successful or not. In tandem with this, agencies need to know why they are being asked to do certain work and how they fit into the overall system. At the same time, the examples presented above also highlight the possible different approaches and levels at which child protection measurements could be undertaken. A greater

⁸⁸ Some experts assert that it is simply “too soon” to measure systems impact.

⁸⁹ The many definitions of system, of its components and scope, as well as the differences in view of what child protection should cover as a sector limit the creation of a unified vision of what should be monitored at an aggregated level.

convergence of visions also implies that actors know and agree upon which approaches are better adapted to their specific needs and take informed strategic decisions that are motivated, justified, and broadly shared among key stakeholders.

✓ **Measuring the process of system strengthening is as important as monitoring final outcomes.**

Both process and outcomes should be measured. Activities and projects will focus on strengthening some of the key issues of a national child protection system and progress in their reinforcement certainly need to be monitored and evaluated together with final outcomes. Child protection national indicators are an important source of information, but monitoring the progresses made in the different areas of child protection system strengthening is certainly equally important. This also implies that M&E indicators are more effective when developed within a framework where strategies are agreed upon in advance, and stakeholders do not just agree on the “what,” but also on the “how.”

✓ **Plan M&E from the start.**

There is a need to insist on M&E being planned for and conducted “up front” and not as an add-on at the end of a project. If performance assessment is not built in to the systems strengthening work at the outset, as has been the case in a number of instances across the sub-Saharan region. It is harder to assert its importance and conduct it effectively later in the process. Questions remain to be addressed, however, as to how surveillance mechanisms can be successfully established at the national level. In this regard, mapping work, as described above, is critical and provides a baseline on which to strengthen the system. But how can this mapping be updated on an ongoing basis without the need for an expensive and time-consuming new process?

✓ **Assess the costs associated for a robust M&E framework.**

M&E is potentially an expensive component of child protection system strengthening, and most of its costs could potentially come at the beginning of the life cycle of a programme. Cost implications of the M&E system tend to be underestimated and there is a general fear that a too expensive M&E framework will be difficult to be justified or accepted by donors or governments. This assumption could be changed if proper arguments are presented in favour of a solid M&E established up front. The OVC cash grant scheme established in Kenya is a good example of a programme where the World Bank has accepted the idea of making a considerable investment in establishing a solid and broad M&E system while initially testing a fairly small pilot for cash grants to vulnerable children. The M&E component of the initial pilot project resulted more expensive in the first year than the others programme implementation components. Yet this provided solid and reliable information that was used to improve the second phase of the programme. As the investments in the cash grants component have massively increased in the following years, the M&E system established in the first year did not require much additional investments, and its cost on the overall spending of the programme dropped dramatically in subsequent years.

✓ **Consider ethics in gathering and using data.**

There are obvious and significant ethical and practical issues related to child protection data gathering, analysis, storage, dissemination, and use. These are not easy to address even for those who are determined to put the child’s best interest at the centre of their work. The multi-sectoral data challenge is also significant, as it will be desirable to align data for systems mapping and strengthening with other relevant sectors, in particular health and justice among others. Yet, to do so, protocols for the proper management of data are required, not just within specific sectors, but across disciplines. Countries have been much more concerned in creating databases and data collection tools than in supporting frameworks for the ethical use of those data, and this might have implied that some actors, such as the justice actors, have felt possibly threatened by giving access to

their data to external entities without the proper agreements on data management and confidentiality.

✓ **M&E outcomes should be better linked to scientific partnerships.**

One of the observed weaknesses of M&E systems available in child protection is that they often happen in a vacuum of partnerships or strategic agreements with the scientific and academic world. As such, there appears to be a disconnect between the data that are potentially available, and the capacities that could be mobilized to better interpret that data in light of new development theories.

2.8 Budget and Financing

System strengthening work is a long-term effort, but within the current development aid environment there is a question about how “affordable” this kind of work is. Good intentions can be consigned to paper without the means to achieve them. Thus, budget and finance issues have a fundamental part in the discussions around child protection system strengthening in order to make the best use of scarce resources. Yet a consolidated discourse around budgeting and financing child protection system strengthening has not been sufficiently developed. Positive experiences remain scattered, and institutional learning has not been systematically shared. Innovative initiatives such as the child protection basket funding in **Mozambique** or the government’s decentralized child protection spending in **Nigeria** show promise for leveraging funding for better services for children, although additional documentation is necessary to glean the lessons learned that can be disseminated for consideration in other countries.

This section starts by acknowledging that a system approach has very important implications for child protection budgeting and financing, and that the shift in the conceptual framework has direct implications on the ways resources—both human and financial—are considered within the new paradigm.

The system approach opens new opportunities, as well as challenges, for better resource mobilization. The new opportunities are a direct consequence of a more comprehensive and integrated approach that aims to use existing funding more effectively while leveraging more resources for expanded positive outcomes for children. A more effective rationalization of existing inputs and the enhancement of cross-sectoral synergies are two very strong elements that can build confidence for expanded investments to strengthen the child protection system. The same applies for costing exercises that are more comprehensive in nature, based on greater partnerships amongst actors, and grounded on more carefully assessed priority needs for the sector. Finally, the current development debate on how to strengthen accountability processes also has direct implications on the ways budgeting and financing are inserted within a larger process of planning and in setting realistic objectives for child protection.

Other challenges must be addressed, particularly the fact that some believe that the systemic approach to child protection has not yet fully proved itself, and that despite great progresses and promising practices, it is too early to advocate for a substantial increase of funding in the field. Some may require evidence on how the systemic approach contributes to the better use of already existing resources before considering an expansion of funding. Such an argument is not easy to make at a time when development spending and international aid has greatly suffered from recurrent market crises. In several sub-Saharan countries, donor support in social spending has been diminishing or is unpredictable, meaning that traditional and more consolidated sectors such as health and education are already straining to meet previous levels of investment, let alone mobilizing new resources for child protection system building.

Nonetheless, below there are some promising initiatives from the field that have helped leverage resources to strengthen child protection systems. These are briefly explored below.

2.8.1 Promising strategies

The first topic that seems important to address is how to better align child protection system strategies with governments' budget spending, donors' priorities and national opportunities. In addition to the information provided from many countries in a [matrix](#),⁹⁰ the example of the work done in Kenya is presented here to provide some insights.

In **Kenya**, the issue of costing and financing was not dealt as a separate issue, but rather as an integral part of the overall effort for system strengthening. This government took a strong stand on this from the start.⁹¹ Yet, it resulted in an even clearer strategy when the Government decided to use the Maestral's toolkit to map and assess child protection systems. One of the sections of the Toolkit explicitly includes *resource mobilization and fiscal accountability* to assess the human and financial needs of the system and the extent to which these needs are reflected during the budget process. Another part of the mapping tool deals with *moving forward on system development*, allowing users to frame and cost a program to develop the child protection system drawing on the results of the mapping and assessment process⁹². In this way, budgeting, finance accountability and resource mobilization are all considered within the same integrated process, leading to the development of systems better able to finance adequate responses to the variables and cross-cutting risks experienced by children.

While several countries are undertaking the same process, Kenya is presently the only country that completed the production of a fully costed strategy for child protection systems strengthening. One of the lessons already learned is that the process is longer and more time consuming than what was initially envisaged, and that the participatory process itself is as important as the final outcome.

The costing on identified child protection system priority areas started in March 2011, under the leadership of the Department for Children Services, and involved a wealth of key child protection partners and representatives of the Kenyan child protection Working Group, as well as complementary actors including representatives from the Kenyan Treasury. In the Framework for the National Child Protection System for Kenya (2011) developed by the National Council for Children's Services with the support of the child protection Technical Working Group, the role of the Ministry of Finance has been presented as follows (p.17):

- Ensure the state allocates adequate financial resources to child protection.
- Ensure through audits that allocated resources are prudently used for the intended purposes.
- Control inflation so as to not hinder realization of children's rights through high cost of living.
- Ensure the long-term protection of children from unreasonable national debt burden.

The work done by the Working Group was subsequently reviewed by other relevant Ministries within the government. Since the outset, the target was to align child protection costed priorities with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development's Mid Terms Expenditures Framework

⁹⁰ See <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/Matrices#budget> for more information

⁹¹ Professor Jacqueline Oduol (2011). Secretary for Children Affairs, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development, Kenya. *Personal Communication*.

⁹² Available at http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_54229.html.

for 2011-2014, make a case for the needed investments, review donors' current contributions to the sector, identify which actors would be accountable for what, and justify investments in the identified priority areas (including the establishment of Children's Officers and the scaling out of decentralized service providers and officers). The costed plan has been based on activities to be undertaken in each priority area for the coming three-year MTEF period, with an effort made to eliminate duplication of activities, finding synergies among interventions, and specifying intervention modalities. The justice sector was subjected to "special treatment," as interventions in this sector were covered under a separate MTEF and budgeting process. Therefore, it was agreed that it would be easier for the government to outline justice budget requirements in a separate component.⁹³

Once the activities were finalized and costed, the actors engaged in the exercise of reviewing current investments, available resources (including donors' contributions), recurrent costs and spending, and determining the funding gap in each of the priority areas. It was agreed that donor contributions would leverage directly the resources being provided by the public sector. The stakeholders finally met to review the final outcome of the exercise and to discuss about the underlying unit cost assumptions that were considered. While some estimate might be imprecise, the overall perception of participants to the process was that the costs provided are a reasonable estimation of the real financial needs, and they will be tested once the government will begin the actual spending on its child protection new strategy.⁹⁴

The second important topic that needs to be addressed is the possibility of enhancing financial commitment and child protection investments through aligning system priorities with broader budget opportunities, for example the resources available in the HIV/AIDS sector, or those available to the broader justice sector reform among others.

In recent years, **South Africa** is a good example of a country that has consistently invested, under the leadership of the South African Minister of Social Development, in a new and comprehensive approach to services, family counselling, ECD and child and youth care centres as foreseen in the new Children's Act, using a variety of resources to complement the overall social spending, and managing to bridge vertically conceived budget lines. In particular, the resources available to the HIV and OVC sector⁹⁵ were also pivotal to expand financing for better child protection services. Social development for children is the single largest area of government welfare funding and the government funds services in four complementary ways: by employing a wide range of social sector public officers; by providing grants and funding to NGOs; by contributing to the funding of commercial enterprises; and by providing education facilities to social sector students.⁹⁶

The South African government has also recognized that the quality of child protection services critically depends on the motivation and competencies of skilled professionals and investments in these areas are a key strategy to prevent poor staff retention. The government noted that inadequate funding in the social sector had implications on poor career plans, poor implementation strategies, unattractive salaries and incentives, an overload of case management, and stigma associated to social work. To highlight the link between quality of services, further investments needed, and strategies adopted, the Social Services Protection Act was amended accordingly. A full budgeting exercise of new priorities was also undertaken resulting in a greater commitment by the Minister of Finance for providing more resources for the social sector, as previous estimates were

⁹³ Maestral International (2011). *Child Protection Systems: Mapping and Assessing Eastern and Southern Africa*.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ For instance PEPFAR invested in 2009 an accumulated 50 USD million in South Africa to support better services for children affected or infected by HIV/AIDS and vulnerable children in general, and 300 USD million worldwide.

⁹⁶ PEPFAR (2011). *Investing in those Who Care for Children: Social Welfare Workforce Strengthening Conference*. South Africa, Cape Town Conference Report.

anecdotal and not based on reliable assumptions⁹⁷. Increased donor contributions through direct budget support was a strategy adopted to enhance and encourage local ownership, better aligning national plans with existing strategies, and increase public perception around government direct commitment for social spending. This strategy also increased the accountability of the government, and its role in articulating and justifying a call for more domestic and foreign resources to be mobilized in the sector.

As a final example, **Mozambique** has designed a social protection basket fund (or common fund) to invest on the child protection system building. Mozambique's is the first basket fund on the continent to be managed by a ministry responsible for social welfare, and builds on Mozambique's experience with basket funds in the health and education sectors. While Mozambique has not completed the child protection systems mapping process, it has leveraged social protection funds for child protection systems strengthening. Mozambique's strategic incorporation of systems building into the national policy agenda also shows the flexibility of the basket-funding approach to respond quickly to the emerging regional consensus on systems.⁹⁸

2.8.2 Key considerations

- ✓ **To increase probability of budgetary commitment, involve the right actors at the start of the child protection strengthening process.**

In both cases presented, the child protection community made an informed and explicit effort in creating a broad and solid partnership with concerned actors from the outset of child protection system strengthening efforts, creating strong buy-in not just from traditional actors, but also from line ministries or other agencies traditionally less involved in child protection planning and implementation. The involvement of the Ministry of Finance, or of actors such as PEPFAR, DFID or the World Bank is not a given but the result of an intelligent strategy that brings out ideas and concerns from the beginning of the participatory process, and this allowed differences in views and expectations to be clarified as part of the process. To be more effective in engaging different ministries like Finance, it is crucial to have high-profile allies who are able to speak a language understood by that Minister, as well as to assess the existence of fiscal space for what is proposed. While it is too early to say if the process followed in Kenya will lead to expanded donor commitment, there is hope that this will be the case.

- ✓ **Align child protection system strengthening strategies with broader development agendas and budget allocation procedures.**

The use of Mid Term Expenditure Frameworks opportunities (or similar options available at the country level) is an important strategy to facilitate and justify budgetary allocations to new child protection priority areas. The *ad hoc* financing of child protection system components outside a multi-year investment framework is a weak option, less desirable than planned spending within existing and costed action plans. The use of MTEF opportunities also increases government's accountability, and clarifies responsibilities for financing specific system components. The knowledge of the periodic financial cycle of a country is a must to submit timely costed analysis and plans. The design of the costing exercise in Kenya and South Africa sought to leverage both public and external financial resources, through also maximizing the efficiency of existing spending.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ For more information on Mozambique's social protection common fund, see http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/file/view/12j+Sales+SP+Common+Fund+Dakar+May+2012_Presentation1.ppt.pdf.

✓ **Use country specific resource opportunities to address child protection system strengthening needs.**

Some countries enjoy specific, but often narrow, funding opportunities. Funding opportunities in the area of OVC, justice sector reform, social protection and cash grants schemes, emergency sector, security sector reform, are only few among many examples of targeted funding available to some countries and that could be effectively linked to broader child protection outcomes. Most of the donors behind these different budgetary opportunities would need to be convinced that part of these resources could be better used for child protection system strengthening. Thus advocacy and investment case scenarios will be key to generate interest for a better use of resources available.

✓ **Review the long term financial viability of interventions proposed, and push for participatory processes of budget management**

Workforce, services or institutional restructuring required as part of system strengthening work will be inherently recurrent and will require predictable and sustainable financing. Abandoning the work a few years after the restructuring has started risks wasting an opportunity as well as the resources already spent. Financial viability in the mid and long term is a key success factor. Therefore, exploring fiscal space for proposed interventions, to undertake public expenditure reviews, analysis of financial sustainability and exit strategies, investment case scenarios, etc. will need to complement the system mapping. In Nigeria, for instance, the government has done an Analysis of Fiscal Space for Social Protection in 2011 and now will be planning for a Social Welfare Sector Public Expenditure review in selected states with the Social Policy Section.⁹⁹

At the same time, drawing on the experiences of the HIV/AIDS sector, concerned child protection actors might insist on establishing a system for periodic participatory reviews of budgetary allocations, management of funding and spending, as well as establishing permanent platforms of dialogue and negotiations on child protection budgeting.

✓ **Assessing the costs of missed opportunities**

The health sector has been moderately successful in arguing for additional investments in the sector through presenting the higher costs associated with the treatment of patients as opposed to the costs associated with prevention interventions. The child protection community tried a similar strategy mainly at the level of presenting a negative economic growth's impact and the higher costs associated with consequences of violence against children, as well as child labour. Yet, a compelling unified strategy and approach on these methodologies has not yet been formulated, but it could greatly contribute to make a case for strengthening preventive interventions as opposed to services that are curative. There seems to be the need to compare the immediate costs of additional investments needed for child protection system strengthening, with the mid or long term costs associated with not making those requested additional investments. While the above is a reminder of the importance of properly funding child protection system priorities, Mauritania is a good example of a country where much child protection system work has been done in a context of nearly total absence of resources. This stands as a reminder that proper funding is important, but a lack of funding is not an excuse for inaction in the short term.

✓ **Recognize some of the gaps in the costing area, and adjust accordingly.**

There are concerns about how costing for National Plans of Action for OVC is often developed in a top-down fashion based on unrealistic assumptions rather than being developed from the bottom up using real programmatic costing information. This lack of credible costing could be a factor in their inability to attract adequate financing. Resource allocation by national governments to

⁹⁹ Noriko Izumi (2012). Chief, Child Protection, UNICEF Nigeria. Personal communication.

implement NPAs for OVC has been very limited, with only 4% of countries noting that the resources allocated are sufficient. While over 92% of national action plans include cost estimates, a majority are unrealistically costed (on the high side), limiting their utility as tools for resource mobilization and government budget allocation (OPPEI 2007). Also, OVC costing is more complicated than HIV treatment costing, for example, due to broad and multi-dimensional outcomes with multiple inputs and contributing factors. It can be challenging to apportion costs to particular outcomes and it is difficult to identify a standard package of services for OVC as there are multiple ways to achieve a programme output (e.g., keeping a child in school or supporting economic strengthening) and interventions are very context dependent. In addition, unit cost data does not tell us about cost-effectiveness and should be analyzed cautiously and there is a need to be cautious of only using a cost-benefit argument, as more effective interventions may be more expensive and essential (e.g., child protection and reunification).

2.9 Emergency-Sensitive Child Protection Systems

More reflection and analysis on systems strengthening in emergencies is needed to advance child protection work in Sub-Saharan Africa. The continent remains plagued by high levels of armed conflict, natural disaster and mass displacement. In 2010-12 alone, Sub-Saharan Africa experienced major conflicts in Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and between the Sudans; heavy flooding across the continent; and, devastating famine in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. DRC, Chad and other geographic hot spots remain stained by decades of chronic violence and fragility. Child protection advocates must consider how best to build resilient, emergency-sensitive child protection systems capable of withstanding and responding to such shocks, as well as how best to organize emergency interventions to promote, strengthen and support functional systems post crisis.

Although limited in scope, this section of the paper briefly considers two core questions related to work on systems strengthening in and for emergencies:

- What is currently being done in non-emergency situations to build and strengthen “emergency-sensitive” child protection systems?
- What efforts are underway in conflict and natural disaster situations to strengthen or build back better national child protection systems?

This section also offers examples of current practices from the continent, and highlights some select challenges and opportunities around systems strengthening in emergencies. Reference to two major research initiatives currently underway is provided at the end of the section to allow readers to track the new and growing evidence base on this important topic.

2.9.1 Existing strategies

Emergency preparedness

Emergency preparedness is a standard component of the emergency machinery, yet systems strengthening objectives are only beginning to be considered within national, regional and international frameworks that guide this work. Some challenges related to fully integrating system-related objectives into preparedness exercises include who leads and manages the process (national versus international actors) and the agency-specific nature of many exercises. These issues persist despite large-scale efforts to promote more coordinated emergency responses under the umbrella of 2005 humanitarian reform. The cross-border nature of some emergency work is also extremely underdeveloped and the implementation of plans sometimes suffers when crises hit.

Some promising initiatives are underway to improve overall preparedness planning, but more needs to be done to bring systems and child protection in emergencies (CPiE) preparedness work in line,

beginning with breaking down a culture of agency-specific preparedness planning and supporting more interagency, country-led exercises.

Integrating child protection into emergency planning

Inclusion of traditional CPIE issues into formal systems strengthening strategies and plans appears to be limited. Although major systems mapping exercises include key questions about emergency preparedness and response, this information is limited and seems to get lost in the post-mapping analysis and decision-making phase. This may be explained by the vast amount of information collected during mapping exercises and the challenge of prioritizing competing child protection concerns when faced with limited resources. Where governments play a lead role in mapping, there may also be political or capacity reasons behind limited investments in preparing for an emergency situation.

There are exceptions to this apparent trend. **Mozambique**, for example, has developed a systems strengthening vision that includes a “commitment to mitigate the impact of natural disasters on vulnerable children by strengthening child protection systems in risk prone areas, with particular emphasis on further supporting Community Child Protection Committees as the first line of response to vulnerable children; and advocate for stronger linkages between disaster risk reduction and management and social protection programmes.”¹⁰⁰ **Ghana** has also included capacity building for emergencies as part of their systems strengthening plan. This will begin with CPIE training of national and regional Child Protection Networks who in turn will work to establish and train district-level child protection stakeholders as first-line responders in disaster-prone areas. In **Nigeria**, similarly, government disaster management structures have worked with international humanitarian agencies to strengthen measures in place to protect children at the district and community level in the event of an emergency.

On a related point, many emergency-affected countries hesitate to organize and conduct broader “snapshot” systems mapping exercises because they are costly, require time and are not sufficiently focused on core emergency issues (i.e., unaccompanied children, CAAFAG). This limits countries’ ability to understand emergency response within the broader child protection framework. Much can be learned about how to organize such exercises from Somaliland and Puntland. After noting gaps in the Somaliland experience,¹⁰¹ Puntland decided to revise the methodology to ensure a stronger focus on emergency preparedness and community resilience. As resilience in fragile states is anchored in the communities, the Puntland mapping will prioritize assessment and mapping of how communities respond to child protection issues. For more information, see:

<http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/6j+Somalia%2C+Somaliland%2C+%26+Puntland>.

Efforts to build strong national child systems during emergencies

Emergencies frequently bring in new resources and capacities, providing significant opportunities for systems

Building Back Better

“...following a new crisis, new opportunities often emerge for change or reform of pre-existing policies, infrastructure and service. These opportunities can bring about accelerated developmental gains. Building back better placed a premium on rehabilitation of services, systems and institutions through application of improved standards, methods for rehabilitation, and policies...”

Excerpts from UNICEF Post-Crisis Transition Strategy in Support of the Medium-Term Strategic Plan, UNICEF Executive Board Annual Session 2006

¹⁰⁰ Vision for Child Protection Section 2011-2015, UNICEF Mozambique.

¹⁰¹ Somaliland adapted the Maestral methodology to compare conflict-prone regions with more settled areas of the country. The mapping also covered urban communities – made up of urban poor and internally displaced people – and drought-prone rural communities. The outcomes of the mapping, however, did not highlight child protection issues in emergencies because by design the tool did not take into account emergency preparedness or the actual management of child protection issues in emergencies.

strengthening. When carefully planned, managed and sustained, investments in system components during an emergency can act as a foundation for building stronger national systems in the post-emergency phase.

Systems strengthening in emergencies requires more than adopting a systems approach to emergencies or focusing on improved coordination. It requires understanding the pre-emergency child protection context and capitalizing on existing protection structures at the onset of and during an emergency when possible. It also requires undertaking purposeful planning that considers post-crisis realities and issues of sustainability. Finally, serious transition planning is needed to adapt and expand services to non-emergency settings. This often requires redesigning emergency specific services and structures (i.e. service and structures supporting family tracing, reintegration of children involved in armed forces and groups) to address new types of vulnerabilities that may not be *directly* related to the crisis. Bridge and post emergency funding is also needed ensure continuity.¹⁰²

2.9.2 Common systems-related investments

Although far from complete, five common systems-related investments in emergency situations are outlined below. These limited examples highlight both the potential to strengthen future systems work as well as risks of unintended consequences that can undermine the work.

Building and strengthening community based child protection mechanisms

Over the past decade, establishing and supporting community protection mechanisms in crisis situations has become a major component of the emergency landscape. The role of communities is central to systems strengthening work in all contexts, but even more so in emergency situations when formal national systems may break down.

Emergencies provide needed resources and impetus to support the creation of new and effective networks of volunteers that can extend the reach and coverage of national protection interventions in the crisis and beyond. Such groups take on many tasks, including: identifying at-risk children; supporting and advocating on behalf of marginalized children; linking children and families with government and NGO service providers; and, monitoring child protection cases and trends. When support to community groups is coordinated and planned appropriately, new, effective and durable networks may result. This requires NGOs and others to build on existing structures, provide ongoing support to volunteers that can be sustained by future national resources (i.e. stipends, support packages, training) and work with government service providers—when appropriate—to

Working with the existing community structure: the case of Uganda

Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), a local NGO in Uganda dedicated to providing psychosocial and mental health support in emergencies, partners with communities by first mapping existing community structures, assessing existing groups' capacity and then providing tailored support to allow recognized community groups to more effectively support children and families. Initial evaluations suggest that such work leads to more sustainable results and is contributing to stronger national child protection systems.

For more information on the project, see:
<http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/6f+Uganda>

¹⁰² In South Africa, for example, Save the Children worked closely the government to design and manage a family tracing programme for Zimbabwean unaccompanied migrant and refugee children and later expanded the programme to take on new protection concerns not directly related to the original target group. Despite concerted efforts to transition the programme into the non-emergency context, funding gaps created serious difficulties (Save the Children UK's Musina programme supporting unaccompanied refugee and migrant children).

establish and maintain referral pathways and procedures.

When community protection mechanisms are initiated and supported outside of existing structures, negative consequences result and future systems work may be undermined. For example, following post elections violence in Kenya in 2008, some agencies set up new, parallel protection structures that actually competed with existing community structures—creating confusion and resentment among different protection actors. Similarly, in DRC, some NGOs established committees outside of government structures, leading to tension and distrust between the externally supported community groups and local authorities. This approach contrasts with the well-documented “protected community approach” also supported in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, which focuses on two elements: “(1) assess, and then create or strengthen, the mechanisms that protect children and women in emergencies, in partnership with government and civil society, during post-crisis transition; (2) raise awareness and strengthen advocacy to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation of children and women, and prevent recruitment, facilitate release and advance the reintegration of children associated with armed groups. The implementation relies on community based mechanisms, their links with relevant authorities and children’s participation.”¹⁰³

In **Nigeria**, the state Child Protection Network (CPN) emergency preparedness/response approach relies heavily on community structures. CPN’s approach is as follows: work with community gate-keepers, strengthen the existing communication channels so that they will function during crisis moments, identify federal and state resources as well as local mutual support networks, and involve official emergency/relief actors as well as child protection actors in all steps (planning, training, and action). For more information, see http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/file/view/9f+lzumi+Reflection+for+CPiE+2012_Fin.pptx.pdf.

NGOs and others sometimes attributed their inability to work with existing groups and with governments to tight deadlines for project proposals, lack of information on existing groups and structures, and/or ethical issues of working with governments when seen as a potential perpetrator¹⁰⁴—but the consequences of setting up parallel or substitute community structures clearly runs against systems strengthening objectives. In many cases, it also goes against the “do no harm” principles embraced by emergency responders.

Improving coordination capacity

The 2005 humanitarian reform agenda called for improved coordination among emergency actors as one of the main pillars of change. Although emergency coordination mechanisms do not always transition to post-emergency situations, the renewed focus on coordination—and complementary training packages to improve related skills and leadership—can support systems strengthening in the future. In **Uganda**, for example, as part of the humanitarian reform cluster approach, district level coordination mechanisms were established in the North. Each district committee was made up of government, a lead international NGO, civil society and community members and actively supported case management, monitoring and reporting of protection trends in their area and capacity building initiatives. A national curriculum tailored to support community protection committee members was adopted and standard reporting forms developed to support more predictable, quality work. In the **DRC**, the Protected Community approach also prioritizes actions to improve coordination between the state, civil society and communities. Finally, new coordination platforms in **the Sahel** bring together diverse protection actors for the first time, including child labour actors.

¹⁰³ UNICEF, DRC (2011). *Protected Communities: Child Protection in Transition*, Child Protection Section, UNICEF DRC, August 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Save the Children (2010). *Strengthening National Child Protection Systems in Emergencies through Community-Based Mechanism: A Discussion Paper*.

Piloting new service models

The influx of cash and resources that also accrues in most emergency situations can allow governments and NGOs to pilot new approaches to child protection. One example is the cash transfer and voucher programme supported in **Kenya** and the **DRC**. Piloting standardized case management systems in some countries has also introduced new practices, as was the case in **Chad** and the **Central African Republic (CAR)**. Another example is testing more appropriate forms of care for children without adequate parental care – such as the foster care networks in Rwanda established in the wake of the genocide. New inter-sectoral service models can also be tested. During the 2012 nutritional crisis in the Sahel, the government of **Niger** formalized partnerships between the health and the child protection systems, using the provision of psychosocial support and emotional stimulation to malnourished children and their caregivers in therapeutic centres and at community levels.

Design of new service models that can support system strengthening requires careful consideration of their post-crisis relevance, sustainability factors and funding. It also requires transition planning aimed at adapting “emergency-oriented” services so that they can effectively reach vulnerable populations outside of an emergency context, as well as consideration of other important post-emergency realities. As with many innovations developed as part of the emergency response, much needed services often fall off the map once they are considered irrelevant outside of an emergency context or emergency funding dries up.

Workforce strengthening for emergencies

For the most part, capacity-building efforts around child protection for emergency situations are short-term, one-off and managed by external agencies. Of the 25 training resources listed in the Interagency Training Menu for Child Protection in Emergencies no training programme lasted more than 8 days, with most ranging from 3-4 days.¹⁰⁵ Common training programmes such as ARC¹⁰⁶ and others introduce basic knowledge and skills required to carry out a minimum child protection response in an emergency, but do not offer opportunities for more advanced training. This has resulted in a capacity gap of mid and senior level emergency child protection professionals in Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. A new Child Protection for emergency situations diploma is being now developed by University of KwaZulu-Natal, **South Africa** to address this gap. A distance learning course, it is designed to target national protection and covers eight learning modules (including a face to face

Untapped potential? Interagency Child Protection Information Management System

There is increasing interest in the IMS being used for other caseloads of vulnerable children, in emergency and non-emergency settings. These may range from responding to the needs of vulnerable children in long-term camp settings, children engaged in hazardous labour, children affected by trafficking, and GBV (gender-based violence) programmes. Many of the concerns addressed in these types of programmes are issues that children affected by conflict and separation are also likely to face. Indeed, in a few country programmes agencies have continued to use the IMS in post-emergency/transitional phases in programmes that address pre-existing child protection issues. This is the case in Myanmar, where following the introduction of the IMS to assist in FTR activity after Cyclone Nargis, UNICEF now uses the database to cover all data on vulnerable children, as a result of advocacy achieved with the government. Use of the IMS in such programmes would increase the global reach of the tool, which would also enable it to be pre-positioned as a preparedness tool in case of emergencies in many countries.

Excerpt from the *Evaluation of the Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System Save the Children, IRC, UNICEF, 2010.*

¹⁰⁵ Interagency Training Menu for Child Protection in Emergencies, CPWG, Feb 2012 (posted on <http://cpwg.net/>).

¹⁰⁶ Action for the Rights of the Child (<http://www.arc-online.org/using/index.html>).

component and a practical placement) over an 18-month period. (For more on this programme, see: <http://wiki.childprotectionforum.org/file/view/12h+Advanced+Diploma+in+Child+Protection+in+Emergencies.ppt.pdf>.)

In addition to global and regional emergency training programmes on child protection, experience has shown that emergencies also provide significant opportunities to strengthen the security and justice workforce. UN Peace Keeping Funds often prioritize justice and security, providing new resources for security sector reform. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, UNICEF, IBCR and others have partnered with the national police academy to introduce new training modules on child friendly policing as part of the standard curriculum (for more on the project in French see: <http://www.ibcr.org/editor/assets/Rapport%20Atelier%20Niamey.pdf>.)

Evidence and data for programming and policy planning

Common child protection in emergency assessments conducted at different phases of a crisis can be designed to capture information about pre-crisis and existing infrastructure and practices, as well as identify new opportunities for systems strengthening. However, more can be done in this area. A recent review of community-based mechanisms and systems strengthening indicates that common CPIE assessment tools fall short in terms of capturing basic systems-related information. The 2012 discussion paper suggests that assessments of existing community mechanisms is limited, and calls for more attention to quality assessment of what exists in communities to protect children following an emergency.¹⁰⁷ Lack of critical evidence about the national system frameworks and structures pre-crisis and in the early stages of an emergency limits child protection actors' ability to reinforce, build or revive existing structures and hinders their ability to strengthening systems in the future.

In recent years, the child protection community has made major advances in supporting establishing data systems during emergencies—both for individual case management, as well as trend analysis. The Interagency Child Protection Information Management Systems (IMS), initiated in 2004, aims to improve the co-ordination and collaboration of the different agencies so as to improve the quality of emergency child protection programmes, and quicken agencies' responses to children's needs. To date, it has been used in over eight countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including **Chad, Uganda and South Africa**. Although primarily initiated and managed by external agencies, some integration into nationally owned work has been documented, including the use and adoption of standard family tracing forms and data protection protocols by government officials in **Uganda and South Sudan**.¹⁰⁸ Although not African-specific, Myanmar provides one example of how the database transitioned into a post-crisis context (see text box above). The child protection information management system has also inspired the development a new national case management system piloted in Senegal in 2010. The **Senegal** and Myanmar experience suggests that there is tremendous potential for the IMS, traditionally associated with emergencies, to be transitioned/adapted to post emergency settings – and it can even serve as a valued tool for supporting the development of new case management systems in non-emergency contexts.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Save the Children (2010). *Strengthening National Child Protection Systems in Emergencies through Community-Based Mechanism: A Discussion Paper*.

¹⁰⁸ Save the Children, IRC, UNICEF (2010). *Evaluation of the Inter-agency Child Protection Information Management System*.

¹⁰⁹ A new version of the IMS was released in 2010. This new version enables agencies to adapt the forms and database to the specific needs of individual programmes in any particular country and context. It is designed to service a much wider caseload of vulnerable children—both affected and not affected by emergencies (e.g., children involved in hazardous labour and children affected by trafficking). For more information see: <http://childprotectionims.org/service.php>.

2.9.3 Key Considerations

- ✓ **International emergency frameworks are beginning to incorporate systems-related language,¹¹⁰ but there is still a gap in implementation.**

The implementation gap may be partially explained by fundamental differences between the way emergency and development work is organized and managed—particularly in conflict situations. Emergencies focus on saving lives as a first priority and often result in an influx of new actors (including external actors), resources, and tight timelines to respond. Development work is driven primarily by national actors, focuses on building long-term national capacities and generally lacks a sense of urgency. Working directly with a government in conflict situations can also be contrary to humanitarian principles. Regardless of the shared goals of preventing and responding to violence, abuse and exploitation of children across the development and emergency communities, the context, mindset and modalities of work in these different situations can result in different understandings of what systems strengthening is and how best to go about it.

- ✓ **Outside of active emergency situations, building stronger national capacity for emergencies in Sub-Saharan Africa remains marginalized within the broader child protection systems strengthening agenda.**

This raises questions about how to better engage the emergency sector in mapping exercises and post-mapping decision-making processes.

- ✓ **Systems strengthening in emergencies requires a wide view that encompasses pre- and post-crisis systems as well as immediate protection concerns.**

Adopting a systems approach *alone* in an emergency does not necessarily lead to a stronger child protection system. Systems strengthening in emergencies requires a long-term view that looks beyond immediate protection concerns and the emergency. It also requires basic understanding of pre-crisis systems and protection mechanisms, as well as consideration on how the emergency response can contribute to systems strengthening during and post-crisis. This has implications for how programmes are designed, who should be involved in managing interventions, and funding. Most important, child protection actors should work within existing mechanisms and avoid setting up parallel structures when possible.

- ✓ **Transition planning and funding is critical to systems strengthening in emergencies.**

To capitalize on investments, child protection actors working emergencies must plan with governments and others involved in national work over the long term to identify ways to transition and sustain the work into a non-emergency context. A handover approach is often not sufficient, as many emergency interventions are designed to target groups of vulnerable children affected by emergencies (separated children, CAAFAG) and need to be adapted to take on a wide range of vulnerabilities. Donors must also be educated about the importance of bridge funding to support the adaptation and transition of emergency services. Small investments to support this process allow child protection actors to maximize their gains both in the short and long term.

UNICEF and the Child Protection Working Group (CPWG) (with the support of Child Protection in Crisis Network housed at Columbia University) are currently leading two major research projects to improve the slim evidence base on systems strengthening and emergencies. For more information on the CPWG research, please contact Mark Canavera (mark.canavera@gmail.com) or Katy Barnett (cbarnett@unicef.org). For more information on UNICEF CPIE and systems research, please contact Kendra Gregson (kgregson@unicef.org).

¹¹⁰ Examples include the minimum standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Settings and the UNICEF CCCs.

3. Lessons Learned and Practical Steps

Virtually all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have initiated some degree of work to strengthen child protection systems. Indeed, the many country examples reveal a tremendous amount of good work being done to improve the lives of children, families and communities. The paths taken are country-specific and reflect the complexity of child protection systems that cut across sectors and involve a range of formal and informal actors, including those at the household level. Greater attention is being paid to engagement with communities and children, and strengthening these linkages between the formal and informal structures will be critical as we move forward.

This section summarizes some of the lessons learned from experiences in many countries and challenges that lie ahead. It also offers up nine key elements that comprise effective system strengthening in hopes of promoting a shared understanding among stakeholders as well as ten practical steps stakeholders can take that will help the field more effectively address the very serious levels of abuse, neglect and exploitation of children.

3.1 Lessons Learned

Mapping assessments are a good way to begin the system-strengthening process.

For many countries, an assessment such as mapping or a gap analysis was the starting point for moving systems strengthening forward. For some countries the mapping is broad based and is done at the national level (Malawi) and for others, it is done on a smaller scale, such as Mauritania's limited mapping focusing more on community response and coordination. This has been shown to what might be considered an "evolution of actions." Malawi's gap analysis "triggered" a process for improving the work at the level of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Community Development. This, in turn, led to workforce strengthening initiatives at the district and local levels. Mauritania's mapping of community response set the strategic planning process in motion for developing the National Strategy. So, whether it is top-down or bottom-up (or some collaborative mixture) depends on the particular context in terms of resources including budget, time and expertise. And it is also directly related to the political agendas at all levels including national, district and local village levels.

In creating the necessary political space, the process can be as important as the end result.

Mapping and gap analysis exercises and creating the political space go hand in hand. In many countries, the assessment process brought together a wide range of key stakeholders to plan and participate in information exchange and decision-making processes that put into place coordinating mechanisms and tools. This kind of activity seemed to be where many ideas were shared and vetted, and common visions were created. For some, the assessments and gap analysis process was especially useful in more concretely identifying the gaps between policy and what is being practiced on the ground. This information was often used to bring attention to the gaps and lobby for some kind investment and action specific to the country. The practices of the organizations and the political experiences of the different social groups are a key determinant for the creation of political space for child protection system strengthening. This cannot be straightforwardly created through government intervention, and will also depend on the degree of empowerment of local groups and children, as well as the strength and dynamisms of the civil society available within a country. For these reasons, the very process and modalities of engaging actors towards the strengthening of child protection systems is as important as the end result.

Bridging the gap between policy and practice will require realistic implementation strategies and better linkages between formal and informal systems.

Law reform in child protection has been very ambitious in the region. Yet, there is considerable evidence that there is a divide between the development of some very progressive legislation at the national level in line with international standards and the persistence of exploitative and abusive

practices on the ground. Unrealistic laws and policies impede the development of realistic strategies. Severe resource limitations hinder action on the ground. And the prevailing social norms and a lack of enforcement and accountability also can be a limiting factor. Moving child protection strengthening forward will gain legitimacy and momentum if more realistic implementation strategies are linked with the child-focused, project-oriented work on the ground. Finding creative ways to link the very good work of NGOs, including secular and faith-based groups, and community leaders and volunteer and advocacy groups with the broader political agendas of governments can help move system strengthening toward more realistically defined goals. Bridging the gap between the formal and informal processes and structures—the two ends of this broad spectrum of child protection actors—will increase the likelihood that attitudes and behaviours will change.

System strengthening is enhanced when common definitions and terms are developed in collaboration with community-based actors.

A major risk in the development of responses on the ground is language and meaning. There is plenty of research that suggests that labels are powerful and they can stigmatize. Thus, they can be disempowering and disenfranchising. Shared meaning and common definitions need to be developed for concepts and terms such as childhood, service, safety and protection, case management and psychosocial support and counselling. Community leaders and contributors need to be involved in creating this shared meaning in ways that are not imposed. These terms need to be stated and defined in ways that reflect the context in which they are to be implemented and practiced. This means that assessments need not only to include “the formal system” but also endogenous child protection practices within families and communities. Also, it is important to have collaborative approaches wherein different kinds of actors can work together to understand how a family views and provides support to a “child,” child protection, etc. Innovative approaches and participatory approaches such as World Vision’s Social Mapping Tool could be adapted in order to develop terms and contextualized definitions for labelling the work of child protection.

System strengthening can be initiated by moving towards a holistic approach to “service.”

In a number of countries, the initiation of reforms began when special attention was paid to a particularly vulnerable group such as violence against children in Senegal, OVC in Rwanda or children in street situations in Ethiopia. Once the vulnerable group was identified and studied, a range of responses was developed such as a continuum of services inclusive of prevention and protection (Ethiopia and Senegal) or Minimum Package of Services (Rwanda). In Liberia, the identified starting point was children in alternative care, more specifically called “orphanages.” Although they have different names and different starting points, the common theme is the provision of a range of services or support delivered within the family if possible with increasing attention to prevention and mitigation of risk for the priority group. Over time as capacity is built and experience is developed, system strengthening can fully be initiated by moving towards a more inclusive and holistic approach to “service.”

Effective workforce training requires an expanded vision that includes community actors and their perspectives.

A common theme through all of the frameworks and system-strengthening approaches is the suggestion that translating the broader national policies and laws into local actions requires attention to the capacity of the workforce (inclusive of professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteers), effective community engagement, and accountability at all levels. A typical workforce strengthening intervention targets social work education curriculum change or investing in training for a cadre of community-based caregivers. These kinds of interventions are often done in isolation, without a substantive consideration of other system elements. Workforce strengthening does necessitate education and training, but it goes beyond that. It requires a special sensitivity to past practices in which there has been large-scale imposition of terms, concepts, and practices around

child rights. For example, communities have existing supports and mechanisms that should be built upon in systems strengthening. Yet in many contexts where strengthening work is under way, there has been no documentation of what is already there and limited thinking about how to engage with it. Workforce studies that utilize participatory data-gathering approaches that look at the specific behaviours of the range of community actors and the gaps in what is needed are critical. This is labour intensive yet, like country mapping and assessment exercises, this can also be used as a mechanism to bring the disparate groups together and help create a common language and understanding for implementation. Community engagement and buy-in are as critical for making sure the work that is needed gets done.

Effective M&E is not only able to influence policy and laws but to enhance national accountability.

A common feature in successful M&E initiatives is the attempt, up-front, to link different forms of measurements with greater national accountability processes as well as to influence policies, laws and legislation through the use of evidence. While a range of M&E approaches are being implemented, there is growing agreement on the need to better test national M&E solutions that can assess the performance of the many components of the child protection system. Clarity of vision and shared objectives among actors are elements that facilitate agreement on what to measure and how to do so. In general, M&E work around system strengthening is broadly recognised as an area where more analytical thinking is needed to support practice on the ground, where a greater alliance with the research and academic world is potentially important, and where financial investments are desperately needed to document the level of effectiveness of new approaches proposed.

Aligning child protection system work with broader development processes and involving donors and line ministries can help ensure adequate funding.

The country examples show that it is important to align child protection system work with broad processes of poverty reduction, existing budget opportunities, and reforms in the area of resource management. These efforts, together with providing an enabling environment for donors and line ministries (including the ministry of finance) to actively participate into the debate for child protection system strengthening, present a compelling argument for scaling up the financial resources available to the sector. Making that case also depends on proving how the new approach will better use the resources already available, increase financial accountability and transparency, and enable better processes for participatory expenditure reviews. In an environment of decreasing foreign aid and increased competition between social sector spending and other sectors, making a robust case on the mid and long term impact of child protection programming results can be an important discussion point in negotiating budget allocations. Examples from a few countries nevertheless show that system work can still be initiated with a minimum budget if action is taken to focus on creating better synergies among actors and existing interventions.

3.2 Core Challenges

The following challenges reflect pitfalls to be avoided or gaps to be addressed in future system-strengthening efforts. This report offers many positive examples that can guide stakeholders as they take on these challenges.

Proposing strategies that are realistic with regard to available resources.

To some extent, there is a tendency to promote strategies and policies that are disconnected from budget realities. If the necessary financial and human resources are not available, even the best strategies will sit on the shelf, with no change in children's well-being. Strategic approaches might consider multiple phases where ambitious end results are reached through the attainment of sequential milestones. Proposing unrealistic strategies could generate frustration in partners and even thwart future system-strengthening efforts.

Employing common concepts and terms in child protection systems.

As noted above, community actors, including children and their caregivers, have a lot to contribute to the meaning of words and actions in the field. Efforts should be made to adapt participatory research models such as the Liberian research study, in which children and parents held hopeful views of street children's prospects if they are provided with appropriate services.

Coordinating efforts at all levels of the formal and informal child protection systems.

In most countries, a lack of effective communication and coordination can hinder child protection system strengthening. This has been seen at the ministry level, between different levels of government and in relations with communities and civil society. While a number of countries have coordination groups that focus on a particular issue, such as the Steering Committee in Nigeria that focuses on the Social Development Workforce, a full-time secretariat is the best way to manage the range of administrative and communication tasks required in child protection system strengthening. Creating collaborative approaches in which community and family representatives are partners with governments is a critical challenge—and also a learning opportunity.

Strengthening the social service workforce.

Putting plans into action and policy into operation depends on people, and whether what they know and do matches what is required. This paper describes promising ways to strengthen the workforce, but it will be a challenge to institute systematic and comprehensive workforce assessments at all levels, from the ministry level to community actors—and to provide appropriate ongoing training and support.

Making system work affordable.

A major question has yet to be adequately answered: how can we afford the significant investments that seem to be needed to bring about a systemic change in the sector? Whereas some countries have proven that initial work can be done on a low budget, it is too early to say if the momentum created will help mobilize adequate budgetary allocations. Malawi is the only country where the process has succeeded in generating substantial additional donor aid.

3.3 Key Elements of a Strong System

There is a growing evidence base of successful or promising strategies for strengthening child protection systems in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although more knowledge is needed, it is not too early to propose some key elements to guide stakeholders in taking a holistic approach. The aim here is to provide a foundation for a shared understanding of the structures and functions of an effective child protection system.

- 1. Up-to-date laws, policies and regulations** target and support vulnerable children and are consistent with overarching child-centred values, principles and international conventions. This element includes both civil and customary law (recognizing that legal frameworks are changing as new laws are being written in some countries that integrate both).
- 2. Leadership and governance** is manifested at all levels, and is critical for child protection system strengthening. At the national level and regional level, it involves ensuring that strategic policy frameworks exist and are implemented, and that this is combined with effective oversight, coalition-building and advocacy to build political will and legitimize child protection systems and work. At the local level, this means that family and community leaders participate fully and contribute in ongoing ways to community based child protection mechanisms. Overall, a strong system will be built on effective linkages between local and national level leadership and governance, and will pay attention to system design and accountability.

- 3. Finance and budget** issues play a fundamental role in child protection system strengthening. The systems approach promotes better resource mobilization by using existing funds more effectively and leveraging more resources for expanded positive outcomes for children. Cross-sectoral synergies build confidence for expanded investments to strengthen the child protection system. The same applies for costing exercises that are more comprehensive in nature, based on greater partnerships amongst actors, and grounded in more carefully assessed priority needs for the sector. The results of effective finance planning, budgeting and costing contribute to all the other elements described here, but are especially important for collaboration and advocacy for increased funding.
- 4. Effective partnerships and coordination mechanisms** ensure inclusion and participation of all the relevant actors that have responsibility for the care, protection and overall well-being of children and their families. This includes a range of ministries (and can be national and district level) such as social welfare, gender, health, education and justice. It includes potential partnerships and coordination with a broad range of civil society organizations (CBOs, NGOs) as well as donors that address issues like funding, roles and sustainability.
- 5. Continuum-of-care service structures** provide a range of services from prevention to protection to reintegration to promotion. These service structures include integrated case management practices such as systematic assessment strategies, case planning, treatment, and follow up. Specific processes are shaped by whether the underlying services are promotion, prevention or response. In addition, practice standards and guidelines adapted to the local context are included as part of a sound approach to contextualization and implementation of the service structures.
- 6. An effective social service workforce** provides critical child protection services in a reasonably equitable and qualitative manner given the limitations of resources and circumstances. This includes both the formal and informal workforce, and requires sound connections between the different sectors' professionals and various kinds of workers. It is inclusive of informal or traditional community-based providers such as family and kinship networks and volunteers; formal reporting and monitoring mechanisms for child's rights abuses; information sharing and public education; child participation; training and education for parents, community volunteers; transportation for clients and staff to increase access to workers as needed; vertical and horizontal communication.
- 7. Social equity measures** identify and address inequalities reflected in traditional social norms within families and communities. Such measures include justice and security structures and procedures that address violence, abuse and exploitation of children such as child labour, corporal punishment, and harmful traditional practices such as FGM that often reflect traditional gender roles and status. These structures and procedures cut across health, education, child protection and justice and incorporate coexisting customary and formal legal structures and mechanisms.
- 8. Decentralized mechanisms for supporting children, families and communities** are the front line of protection and co-participants in all of the above. As a result, there is ongoing recognition by all actors that it is not just the supply or provision of services but the demand for and participation in the development of solutions, supports and services that will ultimately lead to strengthened child protection systems effective in practice at the community level.
- 9. Data gathering and information systems** provide quantitative and qualitative information that can be used to advocate for investments on a particular thematic issue such as violence against children, child labour, or disability. Data can also be used to support investments in

specific elements of the system such as workforce strengthening or expanding the structure of services so that children and families have options other than residential care.

3.4 Practical Steps

Based on the extensive documentation and the promising practices described in the paper, below are ten practical steps stakeholders can take to support child protection system strengthening in Sub-Saharan Africa:

- Use mapping and assessment processes to engage stakeholders and to advocate for systems change.
- Work cooperatively and collaboratively to set realistic priorities and investments with concise implementation plans that include short- and long-term goals as well as incremental steps.
- Set up processes that account for power differentials between government and community actors (which can skew interaction and decisions).
- Look for ways that an intervention can be supported by work going on in connected areas, or how work could be extended to other areas to support overall systems change.
- At the same time, avoid trying to undertake everything at once, or waiting until a whole plan can be approved or funded (the perfect is the enemy of the good).
- Avoid making huge investments in basket of interventions that do not have the potential to facilitate a shift in key elements of the overall system.
- In the beginning, focus on quality rather than scale. Scaling up becomes the longer-term goal once quality is achieved.
- Include simple and sound monitoring and evaluation approaches from the start of the process in order to track progress and inform changes to ensure effective implementation.
- Use documentation and M&E to take an active approach to knowledge management at country and regional levels and for dialogue within and across different levels and actors.
- Document the impact of innovative approaches that can be shared and scaled up. ***And don't forget to tell your story.***

Research and learning opportunities

- Develop a more sophisticated understanding of the politics of child protection—how politics affects decisions of governments as well as donors. Do governments and donors have particular preferences among policy options and programs? What are the political drivers of policy processes and the opportunities for future engagement?
- Evaluate and document the use of thematic issues as an entry point to leverage system strengthening. For example, if children affected by AIDS are the focus, do issues of violence against children receive less attention? Would a focus on *talibé* children, most of whom are boys, lead to a neglect of the child protection concerns of girls?
- Consider developing country typologies that could offer insights into system-strengthening work in countries with similar contexts. Research might examine the role of legal or social welfare traditions, the context of fragile and post-conflict states, or states that become more integrated into the global economy.

In conclusion

We hope that this paper—and the processes involved in its development—has helped to establish a shared definition of child protection system strengthening, as well as identify commonalities in the various approaches.

Fundamentally, systems strengthening work means that leaders and practitioners take a holistic view of interventions. They are able to discern that an intervention aimed at one element of the system requires aligned interventions in other areas, increasing the likelihood of long-term success while strengthening the system and leveraging scarce resources more carefully.

The exact nature of a particular intervention will vary from country to country and context to context; but it should now be clear that effective child protection system strengthening requires addressing the interconnectedness at some level.

The many country examples in this paper indicate that a tremendous amount of good work is being done to improve the lives of children, families and communities in Sub-Saharan Africa. We hope that documenting this level of activity—and continuing to do so—will increase the knowledge and practice base that can guide systems improvement in the future.

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