Enhancing community engagement in child protection

Kampala and Arusha Workshops
30 Jan-01 Feb and 06 Feb-08 Feb, 2018

Highlights from the workshops
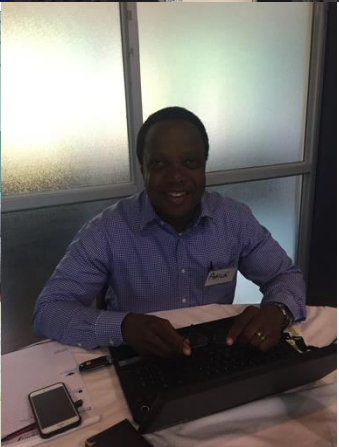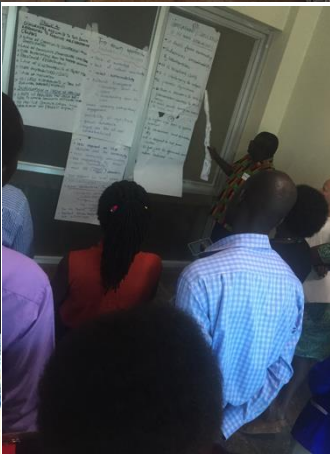

Kampala

Arusha

Contact: lucy@childprotectionforum.org
www.childprotectionforum.org

Why these workshops?

Emerging evidence has identified certain approaches which may be crucial in effectively addressing the challenges often faced by practitioners planning or implementing community-based child protection work. Challenges for practitioners often include a lack of community ownership or sustainability of the project, and a resistance to child rights and protection concepts.

These workshops were designed to create the time and space for practitioners in Uganda and Tanzania to reflect deeply on aspects of their own organisation's community-based child protection work, learn about each others' work and other evidence and learning, and to think about how they might employ some different approaches moving forward.

The workshops were each three days long. The first two days focused on exploring and discussing key concepts, and the final day was dedicated to thinking about how we might change some of our practices in current and future projects.

The workshops were facilitated by an international, regional and national team:
- Eric Guga (Tanzania)
- Lucy Hillier (South Africa)
- Njeri Omesa (Tanzania)
- Ken Ondoro (Kenya)
- Patrick Onyango (Uganda)
- Mike Wessells (USA)

Thanks to Shermin Moledina and Eric Guga for impromptu KiSwahili interpretation in Arusha.

Highlights – key issues discussed during the workshops

> "*Don't make the top-down approach the only approach in your tool kit*" Mike W.

"*The limitations of top-down approaches*" We spent time looking at common models of community-based child protection programming (such as Community Child Protection Committees) and considering some of their limitations. These included: an imbalance of power, a focus on our agency defined issues and interventions, a lack of participation by some groups, a lack of understanding of priorities and needs, and a resulting lack of ownership. We also looked at why agencies continue to use top down approaches even when we know they have many limitations. Reasons included: "a fear of the unknown", donor pressure to deliver or not enough time or resources.

In particular, we noted that an understanding of "power" is central to any approach - a top-down approach places the power with the external agency, and some dominant community groups.

We also discussed how it is also possible that a number of different power structures can exist together. For example, if it is the local leader who decides what everyone will do, this might also be considered top-down within the community. A bottom-up approach allows groups which may normally stay quiet to be heard, and reduces the influence which an external agency might have on a community project.

"*When can a top-down approach be appropriate?*" We also acknowledged that in some contexts it might be more appropriate to use a top-down approach. For instance, when immediate action is required during an emergency or when the "community" is in crisis, such as during a war or displacement. It might even be dangerous to try and implement participatory processes in an environment where there is little trust, perhaps where there may be refugees and others living together from different sides of a war.

> "*It is not always appropriate to do a slow participatory process when people have urgent humanitarian needs*" Mike W.

"*The goal is not to promote a new orthodoxy, but to link bottom-up and top-down more effectively*" It was also noted during the workshops that both approaches are needed for effective child protection. For instance, national

> "*The only barrier to an efficient, effective and sustainable community-based child protection work is our own attitude*" Eric G., Tanzania

policy and services are top-down in nature, but community efforts to link with services might be stimulated by a bottom-up approach. Ideally both approaches should work to strengthen each other. In India, the government has mandated a Child Protection Committee in every community, so the goal is not to try and replace this but to link it to community actions and vice versa. A logical next step in learning should focus on how we can interconnect top-down/bottom-up supports and services.

"*Who holds the power*?" This is a useful question to ask at any point during a project's inception and implementation. In answering this question, we can learn much about why the project/process/focus area is the way that it is. And it might also give us direction as to why a project is or isn't as effective as we would like.

WHO HOLDS THE POWER?

"*Ownership, identity and responsibility*" We discussed how the most effective and sustainable projects mostly have a high level of community ownership. Strong ownership is linked to better sustainability, although it is not the only factor. Community resources and capacity are also important factors. Members might talk about "their" work, as opposed to the "NGO's project". We also discussed how a lack of ownership might encourage communities to start to think that only outside agencies can solve their problems, perhaps creating a culture of dependency. This included considering carefully the issue of stipends and other kinds of community payments and how these might affect motivations and sustainability.

> *"Anything which weakens collective responsibility is an impediment to community ownership. For instance if too much money is put into a community people may become motivated by rewards and not a shared concern for children's welfare."* Mike W.

"*Local culture*": This theme commonly emerged as a perceived challenge when working to promote child rights and child protection within a community. Often it is considered a "problem" by external agencies, as traditional practices and beliefs can conflict with child rights and protection messages. The conflict which can be present between "culture" and child rights is also seen in the rejection of child rights by some communities, where they can be perceived as a threat to children and parents (see below). We also discussed how parents may do things which seem harmful to the child but are intended to be protective.

> *"Let's start from a place of strength - what is good in your community?"* Njeri O., Tanzania

During the workshops we focused on how it is preferable for facilitators to start by identifying local assets and resiliencies as opposed to the negative issues – perhaps start with a question like: "*Let's discuss all the ways in which you as a community keep children safe.*" We also noted the importance of not being extractive when learning about communities, and of feeding back learning to the community.

"*Child rights!*": During the workshops it was highlighted how child rights can sometimes be considered a damaging concept by some community members and parents if the approach is top-down. For instance, in Sierra Leone a local community listed child rights as one of the harms to children. Discussions included looking at how agencies should avoid using imposing child rights or protection language or try to "teach" child rights. One example of a strategy used in Sierra Leone is discussing what helps support children's wellbeing and making connections

> "*Behaviour change cannot be taught, it is a process*"
> Ken O.

with child rights, thereby building on local understandings. We should be aiming to facilitate a truly open exchange and debate within communities about local harms to children which also allows enough time for the process.

"*But what we are doing is already participatory*" The workshops highlighted how it is possible for community members to participate in various project processes that tend to be top-down in nature. For instance, "light" or tokenistic participation, pre-determined project objectives and activities, a lack of understanding of and planning for local power dynamics, the absence of certain groups - e.g. women or people with disabilities, or a facilitation process which is really "facipulation", and which can involve asking people leading questions - can all play a part in making an initiative less participatory than it could have been.

"Raising expectations in communities" We touched on the issue of how expectations can sometimes be raised through the process of community consultation, for instance, communities may think that facilitators or an external organisation will try to address root poverty causes or provide funds in some way. We discussed how it is important during consultation to acknowledge up front that whilst we know there is poverty, we are specifically there to learn about harms to children. We suggested framing discussions in a manner that focuses on human caused harms and avoids wide-ranging discussion of root causes such as poverty, since poverty discussions tend to create a singular

> *"Communities don't see themselves as projects"* Mike W.

focus on economics and swamp efforts to discuss other harms to children. In the Sierra Leone example researchers introduced themselves as the "children's learning group" and did not identify as an NGO.

We also discussed how it is possible to lose focus during a consultation, as the community might want to tell you about everything it needs. We considered the importance of good facilitation in this case and discussing with the community that your presence is only temporary and that it might be better to choose one harm to children to address fully rather than try to address many things at once.
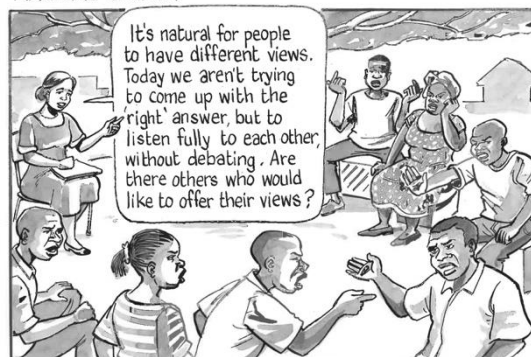
> "*The people in the room are the right people*" Njeri O., Tanzania

"Trust the process" During the workshops we discussed how the process itself is very important in enabling a good decision making process for the community. In Tanzania, we were given the example of the community members who wanted to build a wall around the school

> *"Communities are inherently resilient to adversity, left on their own, they will innovate, mobilise and chart out development destinies that work for them"* Patrick O., Uganda

to protect the girls from sexual harassment by *boda boda* drivers. This was considered a bad outcome of a participatory process as it did not address the fundamental issues. However, it was noted that in this case, good facilitation requires a skilled facilitator, someone who can draw out different groups' perspectives and opinions and support a long enough process to allow for adequate discussion and debate. Bad ideas often fall away during this kind of process.

"Funders and bottom-up approaches" There was some reflection on the role and expectations of funders during the workshop, noting that slow participatory approaches and processes do not always align with the shorter term expectations and timelines of funders. There may be inflexibility in how funds can be spent, or a funder may claim ownership of a project and label it so. However a number of examples were also given of funders which have been willing to use resources to fund slower learning processes, including PEPFAR and DfID, with the suggestion that funders can be open to new ideas. This is especially so if an organisation has evidence that a certain approach may be effective and if proposals speak directly to a funder's strategic priorities. Take time to talk with your donor so that you can get to know each other and build a relationship and consider collecting pilot data that help to make the case for using a community-led approach.

"Just go ahead document it" The workshops highlighted the challenges of documentation for many smaller organisations. We discussed that in order to learn we do need to document our work and reflect on it. However, we also discussed how this process does not always have to be as technical as we might think, as the simple act of recording what we are doing and why can be very helpful for reflection and learning later on. To boost capacity, we could try to make smart partnerships with groups such as universities, who might have students available who can document projects as part of their studies and help build an organisation's capacity.

What next?

The workshops marked the start of longer term reflective and planning process for participants, who started thinking about aspects of existing and future work and how they might approach them differently. This process will include the option to engage further with Mike, Ken and Lucy for the rest of 2018 to discuss ideas and plans and how to put them into action.

Additionally, country groups wanted to stay in touch with their peers so they could share information and support each other. We'll be looking into how we might be able to support this going forward.