

# LESSONS FOR PROTECTION

A comparative analysis of  
community-based child protection  
mechanisms supported by Plan in Asia

BRIEFING



# Introduction

Child protection is a priority area for Plan International. Focussing on community-based child protection (CBCP), Plan's increasing efforts are channelled into establishing and sustaining a variety of local protective mechanisms expected to ensure the protection of all children, and to contribute towards strengthening national child protection systems.

From December 2011 through September 2012, a regional comparative analysis of community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) supported by Plan in the Asia region was undertaken to increase learning of various structural and functional aspects of the existing CBCPMs, and to provide a comprehensive report on their potential for increased impact and sustainability.

The analysis covered 13 countries, including field studies in five countries (bold): Bangladesh, **Cambodia**, China, **East Timor**, Indonesia, Laos, **Nepal**, **Pakistan**, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and **Vietnam**, with coordination from the Plan Asia Regional Office. A total of 1,313 stakeholders – 797 adults (362 men, 435 women) and 516 children (202 boys and 314 girls aged 10-18 years) – were actively involved in the comparative analysis process.



*Drawing by a child from a community child protection group, Vietnam*

For full report see ICPREC, (2012) **LESSONS FOR PROTECTION: A comparative analysis of community based child protection mechanisms support by Plan in Asia.**





# Summary of key learning on community-based child protection

## Scope

- Plan's programming on child protection is relatively new in terms of its organisational work.
- As of June 2012 CBCPMs were being supported by Plan in 2,427 communities across 11 country programmes. More than 50 percent of these CBCPMs are in India.
- The majority of Plan supported CBCPMs (89 percent) are in rural communities; with only 8 percent in urban and 3 percent in peri-urban settings.
- Due to current trends in urbanisation and increased protection risks facing children in urban-poor areas, there is recognition within Plan to pilot and scale up CBCPMs in urban settings.
- Most CBCPMs are being supported as part of longer-term development programming. However, there is increased planning to integrate emergency preparedness as one of the CBCPM tasks for child protection in emergencies.
- CPCs in most countries involve 7-20 members including: village chiefs/administrative leaders, teachers, health workers, leaders from existing women's groups, community-based organisations (CBOs) and children or youth groups, and other interested community volunteers.
- While it is strategic to engage local government officials and village leaders/chiefs in CBCP structures, one challenge is that due to their multiple responsibilities they may have limited time and/or interest to dedicate to child protection monitoring, prevention and response. Thus, it is crucial to engage community actors (women, men, girls and boys) who have the interest and time to contribute to child protection initiatives.
- A lesson learned in India, which should be further explored during future evaluations, is that CPCs can be more effective when they have fewer dedicated members who can effectively coordinate with one another, rather than having too many members who may be less clear on their roles.

## Structural aspects

- A fifth category has been added to Behnam's typology of agency engagement with CBCP groups,<sup>1</sup> which emphasises their involvement with local governments and responsibilities for child protection, including support for CBCP groups to better reflect Plan's CBCPM work in the Asia region.
- The most common structure for CBCP supported by Plan across the region is the community-level child protection committee (CPC).
- It is more strategic to strengthen community-based CPCs, which build upon government mandates and guidelines, rather than supporting different structures linked to specific projects (e.g. on safe migration, child labour and trafficking).
- Due to existing gender discrimination, many of the local government officials and village elders, who are members of the CBCPMs, are males. In contrast, more of the community volunteers are female. In addition, girls' and boys' representatives are often included in CBCPMs. Increased efforts to engage fathers and men in parenting and CBCP initiatives are needed.
- Increased efforts are needed to actively involve representatives from the most marginalised families and children in CBCPMs.

## Functional aspects

- The main purpose of the CBCPMs is to prevent and protect children in the community from all forms of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation. CBCPMs have a primary focus on prevention work through awareness raising and early interventions.

<sup>1</sup> USAID Displaced Children and Orphans Fund. Behnam, N., Agencies, Communities, and Children: A report of the Interagency Learning Initiative: Engaging communities for children's well-being, 2008, pp. 12-19.

- Work on positive discipline and parenting education within communities has been effective in creating a more conducive environment within families and communities for child protection work.
- CBCPMs provide a mechanism through which children, parents/caregivers and other community members can report child protection concerns.
- CBCPMs coordinate a response either through direct action by their members or through referrals to higher level child protection bodies.
- While referral mechanisms are well established and used in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and in some Nepali communities, they remain relatively weak in other country contexts. Child protection structures and functional referral mechanisms need strengthening at the district and provincial levels in many countries in the region.
- CBCPMs have a limited focus on reintegrating children into their families (after trafficking or abuse), though there is relatively more focus on this in the Philippines, Vietnam and Nepal.
- In many CBCPMs, the chairperson tends to have the most responsibility for coordination and leadership; while other members, especially community volunteers and children's group members have more responsibilities for awareness-raising, prevention, monitoring and reporting on child protection.
- In many CBCPMs supported by Plan, members' responsibilities relate to their official function (as a child protection officer, education official, health official or a judicial official etc.).
- In the Philippines, men's groups are actively involved in the prevention of violence against women and children. In other countries there is more participation of women's groups and the need for increased efforts to engage men.
- Religious elders (Islamic, Buddhist or Christian depending on the context) play important roles in raising awareness, influencing practices on child protection, resolving disputes and/or mobilising local resources to support the most marginalised children and families in a number of countries.

## Children's participation

- By empowering children as active citizens, girls and boys are more able to assert their rights to protection and are more able to protect themselves.
- Many CBCPMs include child representatives; and many CBCPMs work collaboratively with child groups.
- Children and young people are playing important roles in awareness-raising, identification and reporting of child protection concerns, mapping of risks, and organising action to prevent or respond to child protection concerns (such as beating, child marriage etc) through early intervention home visits, discussions and actions with other concerned stakeholders.
- Creative forms of awareness raising including drama, theatre for development, music, art and child-led media initiatives (newsletters, wall magazines, radio or TV programmes) have been effectively used by children to raise awareness and action on child protection.
- Support for meaningful participation is an ongoing process as it involves profound changes in cultural attitudes and beliefs that take time. As a result of sociocultural traditions towards children some parents/caregivers, community elders and local officials still do not understand the importance of children's participation, and many adults continue to underestimate girls' and boys' capacities.
- Increased efforts are needed by Plan and their partners to reach and engage the most marginalised children (children with disabilities, indigenous children, out-of-school working children, child domestic workers etc.) in child groups/clubs and in CBCPMs.
- Time constraints for participation for children as they are busy with education/tuition, household or other work, and leisure activities. Some child protection meetings are organised during study time. Increased efforts are needed to support children's participation in protection activities at times that suit them.
- To strengthen their groups, members would like increased opportunities to network with, and learn from, children's groups to enhance their action and advocacy initiatives on child protection.

## Child protection issues and case management

- CBCPMs have resulted in increased understanding at family/community levels about child protection. Practices which may have been considered normal, such as beating children, early marriage or heavy child work are increasingly identified as protection concerns.
- CBCPMs are solving some child protection cases within the community and making referrals to available services or to statutory child protection bodies.
- While many CBCPMs are increasingly effective in preventing and changing parents', caregivers' and teachers' behaviour to reduce physical punishment and abuse of children, CBCPMs often find it difficult to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse cases.
- Furthermore, child protection concerns such as neglect or children's engagement in work which may be rooted in poverty are often harder for CBCPMs to solve unless there are relevant social protection or livelihood schemes that they can refer vulnerable families to.
- In many areas under-reporting on child sexual abuse, early marriage, harmful child work, and emotional abuse within families remains due to sociocultural traditions. In the case of child sexual abuse, secrecy is often maintained due to shame.
- Local settlement of rape/sexual abuse cases occurs in many communities. Perpetrators pay financial compensation to the family, rather than the family taking the case to court (due to the lengthy time of proceedings, costs of proceedings, corruption and cultural beliefs concerning honour and privacy).
- Increased efforts are needed in countries across the region to support sensitive and systematic responses to child sexual abuse cases, to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of the child.
- Governments are in different stages of developing national child protection systems. Child protection case management is under-developed in the region, and there are insufficient government social workers and functioning referral mechanisms to support CBCPMs.
- While Plan countries spend significant time supporting community-based work, it is also

crucial that Plan staff increase their engagement in national level advocacy and inter-agency efforts to strengthen the child protection system at national and district levels.

- Plan should find local solutions to ensure committees can provide emergency follow-up for cases that require this, without the committees depending on outside resources, especially Plan and its partners. This could involve mobilisation of local community resources (human, financial or material) and/or through local government funding.

## Linkages

- CBCPMs across the region are coordinating and collaborating closely with both local government and local civil society actors within their communities.
- Where national child protection systems exist and extend to district levels, CBCPMs are connected to these systems, refer cases to them and regularly coordinate with them. Given the low capacity levels of national child protection systems across the region, especially at lower levels, more focus on building the capacity of government and civil society partners to strengthen the child protection systems and availability of protection services is needed.
- Close linkages with government are essential to enable sustainability and scale up of CBCPMs. Plan needs to focus on demonstrating how existing CBCPMs can be replicated within the cost structure that the government (or possibly the community itself) can maintain, potentially with the support of a national/local NGO partner.
- Increased efforts to develop and strengthen networks among CBCPMs would enhance learning, quality developments and sustainability.
- Within Plan country offices, the strongest linkages exist between the CBCP programmes and Plan's education programmes across the region. This is through Plan's universal 'Learn Without Fear' and 'Because I am a Girl' campaigns. In addition, strong linkages exist with the ECCD programmes on the local level.
- There are increasing efforts by Plan to integrate disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness into all programme areas, including child protection. There is relatively little evidence of cross-sectoral cooperation on HIV/AIDS or on livelihoods, with the exception of India and Cambodia

## Capacity and support

- Plan's CCCD approach, tools, and the 'Say Yes! to keeping children safe' child protection policy have significantly improved the understanding of child protection across the region. There is emerging evidence of child protection principles being integrated into other sectors.
- There is a need for appropriate contextualised training materials for CBCPMs that are accessible in local languages and not reliant on literacy.
- Committee members are volunteers and need to divide their time between earning a living and attending trainings; thus creative ways are needed to support training and mentoring at times that most suit the volunteers.
- Few CBCP groups manage their own (emergency) funds, which increases their dependency on the NGOs that have assisted in their establishment; this hampers their independence.
- Referral networks are limited and where they do exist, their capacity is often weak.
- There is a need to invest more time and resources in capacity building efforts for Plan staff to ensure their child protection knowledge and practices are up to date so that they can effectively monitor the CBCP work that Plan supports.
- There is a need to invest more time and resources in capacity building efforts of partners, including mentoring support to CBCPMs in the initial years that is crucial to ensure quality developments.

## Monitoring and evaluation

- All Plan Asia countries have well developed general M&E frameworks.
- Specific M&E frameworks that collect systematic data on child protection and the impact of child protection programmes are under-developed.
- Monitoring child protection across Plan Asia offices primarily focuses on processes rather than outcomes and impacts; although efforts are underway to change this.
- Increased efforts are needed by Plan to disaggregate data according to gender, age, disability, ethnicity and other factors.
- Systematic monitoring of child protection caseloads is in early stages and Plan's contributions to government/INGO managed data collection and databases are limited.

## Achievements and challenges

- *Key achievements:* CBCPMs efforts are resulting in increased awareness and reporting on child protection; decreased violence against children in schools and homes; and increased recognition and respect for children and their participation. CBCPMs are also contributing to increased birth registration.
- Some CBCPMs have mobilised communities and the local authorities to develop village codes or ordinances to increase local child protection practices.
- Inter-sector collaborations between child protection, education, ECCD and DRM are also strengthening child protection outcomes at the local level.
- Where they exist, CBCPMs are linking with, and making referrals to, government child protection statutory bodies at higher levels. Plan is also strengthening the capacity of government officials in district and higher level child protection structures.
- In some countries Plan staff have undertaken capacity building with the police, who are more responsive and sensitive in responding to child protection concerns.
- Inter-agency work on different levels and advocacy is contributing to improved child protection policies and practices.
- *Key challenges faced at the community level* include: Preference to solve cases through local settlement and compensation, contrary to the best interest of the child principle; and lack of sufficient guidance or capacity among some CBCPMs to sensitively respond to child sexual abuse cases.
- Time constraints faced by CBCPM volunteers, low levels of awareness on child protection among the community, sociocultural traditions towards children, and the most marginalised sector of the community which inhibit their meaningful participation in CBCPMs.
- CBCP committees lack resources to follow up on emergency cases directly; and local governments rarely prioritise child protection when allocating local budgets.
- *Key challenges faced by Plan* include: limited human resources and capacity building in child protection, and weaknesses in the monitoring and measuring of CBCP outcomes.



# Summary of key recommendations for strengthening CBCPMs by Plan in the Asia region

1. Increase support to strengthen CBCPMs which are recognised and directly linked to the formal child protection system; and avoid the establishment of parallel structures.
2. Increase advocacy and engagement with the Ministry of Social Welfare (or its equivalent) at the national level; and inter-agency efforts to strengthen the child protection system.
3. Increase research and analysis to build upon traditional practices which support children's protection and participation, especially in indigenous communities; and to transform harmful traditional practices.
4. Increase attention to gender analysis and gender sensitivity in all stages of child protection system development; including greater efforts to mainstream the engagement and role of men and fathers.
5. Internationally agreed basic requirements on children's participation<sup>2</sup> need to be more systematically applied by Plan staff and partners; including increased efforts to reach and empower the most marginalised children in CBCP work.
6. Increase advocacy and partnerships to strengthen child-friendly child protection services that support their recovery and reintegration if they have faced abuse, violence, neglect or exploitation.
7. Increase advocacy and/or capacity building roles to support the government and civil society agencies to further develop social work capacity for child protection case management.
8. Learn from, replicate and scale up efforts to strengthen 'multidisciplinary teams' (like the Child Protection Units in Philippines or the 'One Stop Crisis Centres' in Thailand).
9. Support government efforts to strengthen child protection data collection (disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, age and other factors).
10. Improve Plan's own monitoring and evaluation systems and processes for measuring child protection outcomes.
11. Strengthen capacity building for Plan staff, partners and CBCP system stakeholders that contribute to integrated efforts to strengthen the child protection system at community, district and higher levels.
12. Develop new or improved training modules on: sensitive reporting and response to child sexual abuse; child protection case management and referrals; and advocacy to strengthen child protection systems.
13. Learn from existing CBCPM work in urban settings, and to increase research, piloting and scale up of CBCPMs in urban settings in every country.
14. Increase planning, training and support to CBCPMs to integrate emergency preparedness as one of the CBCPM tasks.

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<sup>2</sup> CRC/C/GC/12 (July 2009) Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No.12, The Right of the Child to be Heard.

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