

Brief Report on Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms supported by Plan in Bangladesh¹

Introduction:

Plan is an international child-centred development organization working in 50 developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas. Plan's vision is of a world in which all children realize their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignity. In recent years² child protection has been a key area of programming for Plan, a thematic area in which it can effectively contribute to the realisation of child rights by applying its Child Centred Community Development approach. For Plan International, child protection encompasses the work and activities we undertake to prevent and respond to all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children. Plan's child protection work incorporates our work on child protection in emergencies (CPiE), child protection programming referred to as child protection in development (CPiD) and our policy to safe guard children, Say Yes! to keeping children safe. Specific child protection programmes and strategies encompass:

- Strengthening Child Protection Systems, focusing particularly on community based protection mechanisms;
- Building the capacity of parents, communities and professionals to provide protection;
- Developing children's resilience and their capacity to participate in their own protection;
- Integrated advocacy to strengthen legal frameworks and for access to basic and specialist services.

As a community based organization with multi-level involvement that spread on to national, regional and global arenas, one of the key areas of Plan's child protection interventions revolves around community based child protection mechanisms. Increasing efforts are channelled into establishing and sustaining a variety of local mechanisms, reflecting a specific child rights based situation analysis, aiming at creating protective network and environments expected to ensure protection of all children and contribute towards strengthening national child protection systems.

This brief report provides an overview of community based child protection mechanisms supported by Plan in Bangladesh. It has been prepared as a contribution to a regional comparative analysis on community based child protection mechanisms supported by Plan in the Asia region³. The overall objective of this comparative analysis is to increase learning of various structural and functional aspects of the existing community based child protection mechanisms in Plan Asia and provide a comprehensive report on their potential for increased impact and sustainability. The specific objectives of the regional study are:

- to provide a broad mapping of the scale and coverage of community-based child protection mechanisms supported by Plan Country Offices across the Asia Region;
- to document various models and approaches in establishing, supporting and promoting such child protection mechanisms, including defining roles and responsibilities of various actors and processes supporting their functionality;
- to document common roles, responsibilities and key activities of these community based child protection mechanisms;
- to analyze identified achievements and gaps of community based child protection mechanisms in different operational contexts, including crisis/emergency, early recovery and longer-term development;

¹ ICPREC (2012) Kunera Moore and Claire O'Kane.

² particularly since 2006

³ Encompassing an analysis of community based child protection work in 13 out of the 14 countries where Plan works in the region: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. The study did not include Myanmar where Plan's work is more recent and child protection programme work has not yet started.

- to provide a broad overview of lessons learned on key components and processes contributing towards effective child protection and sustainable community based mechanisms.

Methodology:

The comparative analysis study is being carried out by a consultancy group⁴ in 3 key stages involving data collection, analysis and synthesis:

1. Data collection through a desk review of available information and undertaking a mapping of existing community based child protection mechanisms across Asia (*January – April 2012*)
2. Data collection and participatory analysis through field visits in 5 countries (Cambodia, East Timor, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam) using child/user friendly participatory tools, interviews, Focus Group Discussions and observation with all relevant stakeholders (*May – June 2012*)
3. Analysis and Synthesis: comparative analysis of existing models and report writing (*May – September 2012*)

Ethical guidelines have been applied throughout the study, particularly in preparing for, undertaking and following up to the field work to ensure safe, ethical and inclusive participation of girls and boys with attention to issues of: informed consent, assessment of risks, and opportunities to report on protection concerns relevant to Plan’s child protection policy.

This report has been compiled as part of the stage one desk review and mapping of Plan’s experiences in community based child protection, their scale and scope in each country programme. In countries where the field study did not take place, the report builds upon a mapping exercise undertaken by the consultants based on available country documents⁵ and verified and updated by Plan’s child protection focal points in each country. It is also informed by primary qualitative data from Plan’s child protection programme staff, civil society and/or government partners, as well as adults and children who are members of community based child protection mechanisms. Through co-ordination by the child protection focal point different stakeholders have been involved in undertaking ‘H’ assessments to share their views on the main strengths and achievements, challenges and weaknesses of their CBCPMs; as well as practical suggestions to improve CBCPMs in their country context. In addition, various stakeholders have shared their Stories of Most Significant Change and Most Significant Challenge relating to their experiences of community based child protection mechanisms. In Bangladesh 49 stakeholders were involved in the ‘H’ assessments (8 men, 17 women, 10 boys and 14 girls).

Brief Introduction to the Country Context:

Bangladesh has been governed as a parliamentary democracy since it became sovereign in 1971⁶ and promulgated its constitution the following year. Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country. Bangladesh is one of the most densely-populated countries in the world⁷. Its population is around 162.2 million, 75% of whom live in rural areas⁸. In the almost four decades of its independence, Bangladesh has made significant progress. Over one-third of the population in the country is under the age of 18. While Bangladesh has made significant improvements in human development over the past decade, the poverty rate remains significant. A close look at the recent reduction in the national poverty rate shows that progress has been uneven in different areas of the country and that there are many areas, especially in northern districts, where the incidence of poverty is far greater than the national average. The rapidity with which Bangladesh is urbanising poses another hurdle.

⁴ ICPREC – International Child Protection Rights and Evaluation Consultants led by Claire O’Kane and Kunera Moore.

⁵ Country Strategic Plans, child protection proposals, progress reports, training reports on child protection, and CBCPM, minutes from children’s gatherings/ initiatives etc.

⁶ (Except for eight years of military rule in the 1980s)

⁷ The population density of about 875 people per sq km.

⁸ Population Reference Bureau. (2009, December 24). *World population data sheet*. Retrieved from http://www.prb.org/pdf09/09wpds_eng.pdf.

Lack of employment opportunities in rural areas, river bank erosion, and extreme poverty impel people from across the country to migrate to the city of Dhaka, whose population has, in consequence, swollen to around 15 million inhabitants⁹, almost one-third of whom are the poorest of the poor living in slums, on sidewalks and in any open spaces available¹⁰. Furthermore, due to its location Bangladesh is among the most disaster-prone countries in the world facing risks of earthquake, floods and cyclones.

To address their rights and developmental needs, the government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and has passed several acts and developed several policies to implement it. However, the rights of the children have yet to be fully realised. In Bangladesh children's right to protection is challenged by widespread abuse, exploitation and violence at home, at school, in the community, and in the workplace. The major risks include corporal punishment, child marriage, sexual and psychological abuse, domestic violence and trafficking. Child marriage is commonplace, and particularly so among the poorest. Many of the existing laws and policies in the country are ineffective because they are not well enforced. In Dhaka city, the number of street children is increasing rapidly due to rural-urban migration. Governmental and non-governmental interventions remain inadequate to meet the needs of street children and no government policy has yet been formulated to improve their lives.

Legislation concerning child protection includes the Children Act (1974) and the Children Rules (1976), the Bonded Labour Act (2006), the Suppression of Violence against Women and Children Act (2000), and the National Children Policy (1994). Despite these positive steps, the multi-level situation analysis Plan Bangladesh conducted from a child-rights perspective during the development of CSP-III reveals that the rights of the children are not fully realised in Bangladesh. The core causes of rights violations are socio-cultural factors, the lack of sensitivity among duty bearers, weak governance, endemic corruption, centralised institutions, and the lack of democratic mechanisms for public participation.

In Bangladesh local government bodies of elected representatives are entrusted with a large number of functions and responsibilities relating to civic and community welfare as well as local development. These local government bodies include city corporations and municipalities in urban area and the Union, the Upazila (sub-district), and the *zila* (district) *parishad* (councils) in rural areas¹¹. At the grassroots level, the Union Parishad (UP)¹² is responsible for addressing child rights and protection issues through various standing committees. However, many of these committees are non-functional and those that do function lack awareness about and sensitivity to child rights issues and do not consider them in their development plans. Though UPs suffer a chronic shortage of funding, of late donors and international agencies have shown an interest in providing them with financial assistance. The present government has also promised to develop an integrated policy and plan for strengthening UPs.

In Bangladesh children's right to protection is challenged by widespread abuse, exploitation and violence at home, at school, in the community, and in the workplace. The major risks include corporal punishment, child marriage, sexual and psychological abuse, domestic violence and trafficking. Child marriage is commonplace, and particularly so among the poorest¹³. Gender-based violence in the forms of forced marriages and coercive demands for dowry are rife. One-third of girls younger than 15 years old and 74% of those younger than 18 years find themselves married, often against their will.

⁹ UNFPA. (2001). *State of world population*. New York: United Nations Population Fund.

¹⁰ CUP. (2005). *Directory of NGOs working in Dhaka City, Dhaka*.

¹¹ ESCAP. (2010, September 20). *Local government in Asia and the Pacific: A comparative study*. Retrieved from <http://www.unescap.org/huset/lgstudy/country/bangladesh/bangladesh.html>.

¹² A UP is a village-level local government body which administers 15 to 20 villages and around 25,000 people.

¹³ *Bangladesh demographic and health survey. (2007)*. Retrieved from <http://www.measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/GF13/GF13.pdf>.

Almost half of the women and young children experience domestic violence. Bangladesh ranks second in the world in domestic violence committed against women by men¹⁴. It is highly sensitive area in the society that includes issues of power, gender and sexuality. Domestic violence has grave impact on maternal and child health. About 14% of maternal deaths during pregnancy are reported due to domestic violence¹⁵. It also has serious consequences for the children's growth, health and survival. Study shows that in Bangladesh that children whose mothers are exposed to domestic violence grow less and are sick more often than other children¹⁶. The trafficking of children and women in Bangladesh has increased significantly in recent years, and one estimate suggests that about 200,000 women and girls have been trafficked in the last 10 years¹⁷.

Brief overview of Plan's strategic child protection work and the scope of CBCPM work:

In CSP-III Plan Bangladesh is shifting to increase its work with duty bearers, while also continue work with right holders. Plan Bangladesh will emphasise strengthening the capacity of Union Parishads to address child rights and child protection issues at the community and institutional levels. UP members will be sensitised and standing committees of Women & Child repression and prevention will be activated. Based on its critical analysis of the current child rights situation and its experience and areas of expertise, Plan Bangladesh is implementing four programmes in its CSP-III (2011 – 2015): 1) Quality Primary Education, 2) Community-Managed Health Care, 3) **Protection of Vulnerable Children** and 4) Disaster Risk Management.

The Protection of Vulnerable Children Programme primarily addresses the vulnerabilities of street children in Dhaka city through an urban-adapted CCCD model. It aims to improve the quality of their lives and their future prospects through support to drop in centres, night shelters and multi-sector interventions; while also ensuring more action by concerned duty bearers. In rural areas efforts are also underway to establish Child Protection Groups/ Social Protection Groups at the grassroots union parishad level and to activate the UP standing committee of Women and Child repression and prevention to increase child protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation and child marriage. In addition, in rural areas teachers and School Management Committees (SMCs) are also sensitised and efforts to establish child protection reporting mechanisms from the Union to the Upazila education offices are underway to promote violence free primary schools. Plan is also engaged in campaigns at local and national level to reduce child marriage and violence faced by young women and children; this is in fact a key focus of the current CSP, which falls under Plan's Global Because I am a Girl campaign. Empowering children and civil society organisation with the knowledge, skills and opportunities to analyse, report and respond to child protection is also integral to their approach.

Strategy:

- Working with community including all service providers related to child rights issues.
- Strengthen UP standing committee of Women & Child repression and prevention.
- Enhance participatory and democratic process.
- Ensuring participation of child
- Establish child friendly environment
- Liaison and networking with service providers (Hospital, Upazila Health Complex, FWC, Police Station, ward commissioner's office, UP)

¹⁴ Science Daily (2004), <http://sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/09/080911103916.htm>

¹⁵ Akhter, R. and Ward, K (2009), Knowledge and attitude towards domestic violence: listening to Bangladeshi women voices, paper presented at the annual meeting of the American sociological Association, San Francisco, CA, Aug, 2004.

¹⁶ Monemi, K.S. (2009), Violence against mothers in Bangladesh associated with health Problems in young children, Science News, <http://sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/09/080911103916.htm>

¹⁷ Facts and statistics, Coalition against trafficking in women – Asia pacific, Retrieve from <http://www.catw-ap.org/programs/research-documentation-publications/facts-and-statistics/>

Plan's Child protection groups (CPG) are formed under the umbrella of Union Parishad, specifically under women and children welfare standing committee, where union parishad chairman is the head of the CPG. Plan facilitates the process with its technical support to the union parishad and community. However, it was also recognised that detailed guideline for child protection facilitation by the partners was needed, especially as the nature and functionality of CPGs beyond Plan's sponsorship area were considered to be different. Thus, supporting guidelines for projects working beyond sponsorship areas were to be developed.

In Dhaka Plan Bangladesh has worked in collaboration with Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) a non profit development Organization to implement community based preventive and protection supports to slum children in Dhaka city since June 2006. This partnership has continued under the PHR project.

Districts:	Brief description of area:	CPGs supported in Plan sponsorship areas.	Average member of CPG	SPG supported outside of Plan sponsorship areas	Remarks	
Nilphamari	In poverty affected rural districts in North of Bangladesh	11	20-22		The average number of SPG members of beyond Plan sponsorship areas are-17-20	
Lalmonirhat		06	21-27			
Dinajpur(khansama sub-distict)		06	17-21			
Gazipur		05	18-23			
Dhaka city	Capital urban centre where there are highest number of street children	15	15-20			
Barguna	Southern district that is affected by natural disasters and climate change					
Chirirbandar(under dinajpur district)	Chirirbandar & Bogra are poverty affected area in the northern part and Barguna is poverty as well as disaster porn area in southern part of Bangladesh			12 SPGs in chirirbandor (sponsorship area)		
Bogura				2 SPGs Bogura non-sponsorship area		
Barguna				10 SPGs non-sponsorship area		
	Total	43 CPGs		24 SPGs		

Structural aspects of CBCPMs including child groups:

There are 463 Children organization and 38 forums at Union/Zone level.

Child Protection Group (CPG) is a union based committee responsible for creating a protective environment for children. Plan have been facilitating communities to form CPGs focusing on children in PU areas since 2006. Most of these committees are newly formed by Plan, rather than building upon any existing groups or committees. However, more recently through a 'Protecting Human Rights Project' which is being undertaken in non PU areas the focus has been expanded to consider children, adolescents and adults who face any kind of violence. Thus, in non PU areas the groups are called **Social Protection Groups (SPG)**.

Most of the CPGs/ SPGs have 17 – 23 members. Membership generally includes: 4 representatives from the standing committee of Women & Child repression and prevention; the UP Chairman/Ward Commissioner; 1 teacher; 1 religious leader; the marriage registrar; a representative of LEA; a health person/ doctor; 1 lawyer; 2 community representatives (male and female from CDF/CBO/VDC); 5 children's representatives (2 boys, 3 girls); 2 elected women's representatives; 2 NGOs representative and 1 journalist.

Local officials hold executive positions within the CPG: The UP chairman as the CPG chairperson; an elected female member of the UP as secretary; and members of the Standing Committee of Women & Child Repression and Prevention, the Secretary of UP, and a representative from the local education authorities as executive members. Other members are general members. Approximately 60% of the CPGs include children's representatives.

In areas where the Plan is directly implementing the Plan Area Coordinator (AC) plays a facilitation role of CPGs. The AC is expected to mobilise communities, while seeking technical support from the programme coordinators-POVC. However, if the AC is not skilled in community mobilisation and/or child protection, the PC-POVC will provide support. The Union Parishad should be sensitised and engaged so that take responsibility to support the CPG. In some areas Plan has encouraged reformation of the CPGs and new elections to strengthen the CPG. For example, In some areas due to recent UP elections, most of the UP bodies are new. Thus, with such transitions the CPGs have been reformed with new members

In Plan's efforts to roll out the formation of CPGs in Bangladesh the strategy is to implement in association with Plan staff, partner NGO staff and other stakeholders. The Standing committee of UP is considered as key stakeholder to implement the process with technical support from Plan and its partner organization. Plan follow a process to facilitate formation of the CPG in collaboration with the Union Parishad officials:

- Reviewed the Child Rights Situation Assessment (CRSA) findings at PU level from Program Unit Long Term Planning
- Shared with PU team and PNGO to develop an action plan,
- Sharing with UP to mobilize towards CP and select workshop members
- Organized meeting with UP 'Paribarik Birodh Nirasan, Nari O Shishu Kallyan Standing (Family Dispute Resolution) committee' will take the lead for facilitating CPG.
- Organized workshop at UP levels for CPG formation and make plan of action (concept sharing, action plan, sensitization, demand creation, etc.) with the leadership of UP chairman
- Provided training on child rights, child protection organizational development for enhancing the capacity building.
- Prepared child protection mapping for identifying services considering child protection.

The CPGs usually organise monthly meetings and keep minutes of their meetings. 20% of the CPGs have a developed a clear terms of reference for their group. CPG members work voluntarily and do not receive a stipend for their involvement.

As mentioned above through the School Management Committees (SMC) child protection reporting mechanisms are also being established in schools with links from the Union to the Upazila education offices.

Functional aspects of CBCPMs:

The main purpose of forming CPGs is to develop a child protection and prevention mechanism within the target communities that is capable to contribute in reducing incidence of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and other forms of violence against children in Bangladesh. *Specific objectives are to:*

- Develop a model of child protection mechanism for improving the situation of vulnerability and all forms of violence against children.
- Develop a strong monitoring system on child protection issues
- Strengthen existing social protection and prevention system for effectively deliver child protection and legal services to the victim and children at risk
- Build up technical capacities of relevant stakeholders for protecting children and better service delivery.
- Strengthen Union Parishad standing Committees of Women & Child repression and prevention.

The main roles and activities undertaken by CPG members are supposed to include:

- Information collection to identify child protection issues and risks
- Conduct regular home visits, investigations, monitoring & information dissemination sessions to mobilise the community (adults and children) to better protect children
- Organising monthly meetings
- Monitoring and following up cases regarding child protection issues (monitoring planned activities and documenting the process).
- Ensure case reporting through the proper procedures
- Liaison and advocacy with service providers to ensure a proper response to provide legal support, counselling to the abused children
- Coordinate with CDF/CBO, PNGOs of Plan and other stakeholders.

In establishing and strengthening CPGs the role and responsibilities of Plan and/or the partner staff include:

- Area coordinator (AC) of Plan and respective PNGO staff will be responsible to enhance the capacity of the Child Protection Group on child protection issues
- AC will participate in the CPG monthly meetings
- PNGO staff will be responsible to monitor different activities of CPG.
- PNGO will prepare monthly progress report of CPG.
- PC-POVC will consolidate the progress report quarterly basis and will forward to Advisor-Child protection through Program Unit Manager.

In addition to the community based efforts, teachers and School Management Committees (SMCs) are also sensitised and efforts to establish child protection reporting mechanisms from the Union to the Upazila education offices are underway to promote violence free primary schools.

Improved child protection reporting in primary schools in Gazipur:

In Gazipur PU Plan has established functional child protection reporting and responding mechanisms in 157 primary schools. Plan's work has contributed to an increase in the average age girl's marry from 16 to 18 years old. This was achieved by raising awareness among parents and promoting birth registration, as well as stepping up children's participation with the setting up of children's groups. The Gazipur Programme Unit also facilitates online birth registration throughout the district.

During a meeting of Plan Programme Coordinators-POVC in October 2011 discussions indicated that currently the main focus of the CPGs is on raising awareness on child protection to support prevention and response within the community. There is slightly less focus on monitoring, reporting

and referrals outside of the community, however, when needed especially for severe cases of child abuse including child sexual abuse referrals are made. When necessary there is some focus on supporting the reintegration of children in families. Furthermore, as part of prevention efforts the CPG collaborate with the UP standing committee work to prepare list of a vulnerable families who may be targeted for relief distribution in emergency situations.

The main protection issues that the CPGs are identifying and responding to include: Physical abuse, child sexual abuse, child marriage, and child trafficking. When a child protection concern is observed (by an adult or child) or shared within a children's organisation meeting then members of children's organization, CBO members, CPG members, community volunteers, partner representatives prepare report their concern to the CPG. Depending on the severity of the case, the CPG either arrange a special emergency meeting to take steps to respond to the child protection violation, or they discuss the child protection concern in their regular monthly meeting. In cases of domestic violence and family conflict, CPG members may intervene to counsel, raise awareness and to negotiate with concerned family members to change their behaviour to mitigate family violence and conflict. In cases of child sexual abuse or severe physical abuse they refer the victim to health centre for health services; and to the police station and lawyer for legal support to take action against the perpetrator.

In terms of case management the CPGs are responsible to monitor child protection concerns, to identify and follow up the cases, to prepare case reports and document meeting regulation properly, to plan and monitor scheduled activities, and to report through proper procedure and record keeping. However, case management and related data collection systems are still being developed in Bangladesh. Plan Bangladesh is working with the CPGs to enhance their case management capacity.

CPG guiding principles to guide effective decision-making and action planning:

In CPGs supported by Plan Bangladesh the following principles to guide CPG decisions and actions: respect children's voice and rights; respect children, their privacy and confidentiality; adopt a learning attitude that increases knowledge; practice democracy - mutual respect and trust among the members; maximise utilisation of community resources and build upon positive indigenous practices; build trust and ensure non-discrimination. To ensure the child's privacy and confidentiality all the CPG members are encouraged not to share details of child protection cases with anyone outside of their group and to respond sensitively to the child protection cases that emerge.

In preventing and responding to child protection concerns in general the CPGs find it easier to prevent and address physical abuse as they can raise awareness and share alternative ways to communicate that can mitigate physical abuse. However, it is found that other forms of abuse, including child marriage and child sexual abuse are more difficult to prevent and resolve. Child sexual abuse is difficult to address due to the social stigma associated with sexual abuse, power structures within families and society, and legal barriers/ delays. According to Plan Bangladesh, not many victims or their families are interested in seeking legal support as the legal system does not offer them sufficient redress. One of Plan's partners Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) is able to support the community on legal follow up on child protection cases. Plan staff also organises awareness-raising sessions on legal procedure with CPGs and seek expertise support from lawyers in other programme areas to support the victim to file case and handle the case in court.

Child marriage is also challenging to resolve as both socio-traditional attitudes and poverty contribute to this practice. However, at different levels Plan is also actively supporting the Birth Registration campaign which contributes to child protection efforts to prevent and protect children from child marriage and child trafficking (part of the International Because I am a Girl Campaign).

Plan Bangladesh has also planned to work with mass media to raise awareness on child rights and child protection (on domestic violence, child marriage, street children, birth registration etc) to

sensitise duty bearers and CSOs on their roles and responsibilities towards children, including street children. Currently Plan has published a comic series on child protection through renowned daily print media as well as through TV on national and private channels. Children are also supported in their creative initiatives to use songs, dances and plays to send a message to their communities about important issues that affect them - including child rights, child marriage, nutrition, education and security.

Children's participation and involvement in CBCPM:

Children are encouraged to participate actively in their own self protection. Awareness raising and training of children is supported so that girls and boys have increased knowledge, skills and confidence to better protect themselves and also to play proactive and responsive role in children's protection in their communities. In Dhaka Plan Bangladesh will work to increase awareness among street children, especially girls, and their parents and guardians about child rights and child protection issues. The awareness- raising package addresses the risks and challenges of street life and mechanisms for coping with them.

In Bangladesh Plan is supporting 463 children's organisations involving children aged 8 to 18 years of age. Children – girls and boys are given training in child rights, child protection and life skills, including protective behaviour. In communities where CPGs are being formed, members of the children's organisations are informed about CPG and are encouraged to be actively involved in the CPG. Plan also sensitise officials in the UP about the presence and role of children's organizations and the capacity of children. During formation of CPG UP invites children representatives and most CPGs have involved 5 - 6 children (60% girls, 40% boys).

Children who are actively involved in community based children's organisations reach out to other children in their community through child to child approach and peer education. They also organise drama, theatre for development (TFD), music and art to raise awareness among children and adults in the community; and some children are writing publications.

In addition, a Children's Parliament exists in Bangladesh. Supported by Plan, Save the Children and other agencies children's representatives come together for sessions of Parliament to discuss child right thematic issues that affect them. The idea of a Children's Parliament originated from the Child Councils that were set up to deal with local children's issues. Issues that could not be handled by the Union child Councils were taken to the Upazila (Sub-district) Child Councils. The unresolved issues would then be dealt with at the District Child Councils. In response to the need to create a nationwide children's network, a Children's Parliament was formed in 2003. Initially with representatives from a few districts, gradually it expanded to include representatives from all 64 districts of Bangladesh to raise the collective voice of the children to the policy making level. The Children's Parliament includes 128 members from all 64 districts of Bangladesh (one girl and one boy from each district). The Child Parliamentarians are elected by members of National Children's Task Force in each district. Children's representatives are aged 12 – 18 years who represent children from all strata of society – from rural and urban areas, school going and non school going children, physically impaired children, children living in the slum, in the street, working children from ethnic minority groups, and children of sex workers. The Children's Parliament has provided a forum to formulate pro-child policies based on their research evidence. Through this they can identify, discuss, and raise their collective voice to influence the policymaking bodies of the Government, NGOs, donors, and civil society members. The first session of the Children's Parliament was organised in 2003, and since then 9 sessions have been organised. The themes of the children's parliament sessions have included: government budget analysis, quality education, listening to children's voices, health, education and governance, stopping exploitation of children in political activities, and birth registration.

Main advantages of supporting children's participation in community based child protection initiatives include:

- Children are becoming more visible in the community, respect for children is increasing and children's voices are being heard by the duty bearers
- More priority is being given to address children's issues
- Through children's participation more child friendly environments are being created
- Children's confidence and capacity is increasing through their participation
- Increased and more authentic information concerning child protection is brought to the CPGs through children's active participation.

However, ongoing challenges remain in ensuring adult respect for children, as traditional socio-cultural attitudes towards children have to be transformed. Furthermore, time constraints are faced while encouraging children's meaningful participation as children are busy with education, household work, and leisure activities. Furthermore, some children live in remote areas.

Capacity and support systems:

Plan's approach on child protection is guided by the Child Centered Community Development approach which supports child focused community mobilisation, mentoring and technical support to empower children as right holders, and to strengthen the capacity of duty bearers to better fulfil their responsibilities to children. Plan Bangladesh has developed a training manual (including reporting formats) in local languages (Bangla) for Plan and Partner staff on Child Protection Group (CPG) formation. Plan has also provided technical support to Protecting Human Rights (PHR) project staff to facilitate SPGs at the Union level. Training for PU staff, CPGs members, CBO leaders, law enforcement agencies, school teachers and children's organisation members¹⁸ has included training on: child rights, child protection, organisational development, psychosocial protection and care, monitoring, and life skills. Children's skills, knowledge and attitudes are strengthened to enhance their self protection and to play a proactive and responsive role in asserting their rights to increase children's protection in the community. CPG members (including local officials, CBO members) and teachers are given training to increase their capacity as duty bearers to take increased efforts to protect children. However, one of the key challenges in strengthening the capacity of the CPGs is that the members have diverse backgrounds and different professions, thus it is difficult to tailor the training to best fit the needs of all the members.

Plan does not provide direct funds to the CPGs. However, if the CPGs plan specific events they may apply to Plan Bangladesh for financial support.

Linkages with civil society and Government:

The CPGs/ SPGs seek to involve representatives from the standing committee of Women & Child repression and prevention and to activate this more 'formal' child protection mechanism. While the Upazila Parishad Act 1998 (amended up to 30 June 2009) requires the Upazila Parishad to set up a standing committees on 'women and child development' / women and child repression and prevention, very few of these standing committees have been activated. However, through the establishment of CPGs/ SPGs members of the UP standing committee for Women and child repression and prevention are reached and included. Furthermore, as described above representatives from Children Organization, CBOs, religious institutions, school institutions, and local authorities are usually involved as members of CPGs. Links between the CPGs and the local Police Station and with lawyers are also made to support legal response to child protection violations.

Study/ exposure visits among CPGs/ SPGs to support mutual learning and capacity building are also organised once a year. In addition the Inter Programme Unit in Plan has encouraged organisations of a child protection consultation to enable mutual learning on child protection among different sectors, however, time constraints are a challenge in its implementation. However, the first

¹⁸¹⁸ See annex X: Overview of training provided on CPG formation and strengthening

Protection of Vulnerable Children (POVC) program coordination meeting was organised in August 2011. The meeting enabled increased identification and planning for integrated programming including integration of DRR, and ensuring that protection planning is integral to emergency preparedness and response. It was recognised that integrated programming (education, health, protection, DRR) leads to a more holistic and effective response to children's rights. Program staff in each sector need to be aware of child protection issues and need to be gender aware.

As mentioned above, teachers and School Management Committees (SMCs) are also sensitised and efforts to establish child protection reporting mechanisms from the Union to the Upazila education offices are underway to promote violence free primary schools (as per the Prevention of Cruelty against Women and Children Act 2000 which was amended in 2003). For child protection in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) piloting has been done in Nilphamari PU. Time constraints were faced as 4 hours was needed to cover the contents. There was also some objection by the teachers and SMC members to establishing a reporting mechanism and a child parliament. However, due to clear understanding on CP and the importance to introduce reporting mechanism now, the CP training for the teacher will go in an integrated way with education program's basic training. Also it was suggested that students should be encouraged to share their views and ideas to the SIP committee, and then the committee can share the plan with Plan. In Gazipur PU a one day training on child protection was organised for different stakeholders including: teachers, local government officials, and members of the school committee. It was suggested that this approach could also be practiced in other PUs. It was felt by the POVC team that child protection in SIP (School Improvement Plans) is a big area. Thus, if Plan Bangladesh and their partners are able to mainstream child protection in SIP it will make both the SIP and the child protection work more effective. Efforts to integrate child protection in basic education training are also being developed by Plan Bangladesh.

Monitoring and evaluation system and process:

Plan Bangladesh has a well-established Research, Evaluation and Dissemination (RED) Department, which independently monitors programmes and conducts research and evaluations. It contributes to programme quality and efficiency and enriches organisational learning. Furthermore, as part of CRSA process consultation with children and adults enabled data collection on child protection in PU project areas. In addition, children and adult community members are involved in the annual participatory program reviews.

In terms of specific indicators to monitor the process and outcomes of CPGS, monthly progress review meetings are organized by each of the CPG/SPGs in their respective areas. However, in Plan's first POVC programme coordinators meeting in August 2011, the programme coordinators discussed about how CPG are performing? And how they will know CPG are working? In terms of the existing indicators of performance Plan Bangladesh staff felt that they needed to further develop and implement regular reporting on the functionality of CPGs. Based on these discussions a quarterly CP reporting format was being developed. Indicators include: Quarterly Meeting; Number of case reporting; Number of case dealings; Initiatives of the group members; Community awareness level regarding specific issues; Mobilization initiatives; Integration with other programs; and Information (data bank).

Sustainability and scale up:

In its CSP-III Plan Bangladesh emphasises the importance of scale-up and mainstreaming of successful interventions and approaches, rather than trying to cover more areas by direct intervention. Programme packages will be consolidated and fine-tuned for replication on a wider scale through local administrators, government line agencies, departments and ministries, and other large players. Plan facilitation local government authority i.e. Union Parishad standing committee to extend their size and capacity. Article 29 of the Upazila Parishad Act 1998 (As amended up to 30 June 2009)

requires that the Upazila Parishad set up one standing committees for each of 13 thematic issues¹⁹, including one on 'women and child development' and one on 'social welfare'. Plan also trying to establish a mechanism for child protection at school based through School Management Committee (SMC). One of Plan's strategies is to provide support to increase the capacity of its partner organizations to facilitate the community CPGs/ SPGs to link with UP standing committee for ensuring child protection and to support the establishment and strengthening of referral systems and linkages among sub-district level service providers

Thus, the CPGs/SPGS seek to involve members of the UP standing committee on women and child repression/ child development; and to activate these structures that are mandated by law. Efforts to support by support prevention and response to child protection concerns are also supported by national legislations relating to violence against children and women. However, there are significant gaps in proper implementation of relevant laws.

The Prevention of Cruelty against Women and Children Act 2000 (also referred to as the Prevention of Women and Child Repression Act 2000) was amended in 2003. This Act was formulated to protect women and children from heinous crimes such as rape, dowry, and grievous injury. The Act makes provision for the punishment of sexual abuse and sexual harassment. The law also has put restrictions on the media so that the victims' privacy is protected. The introduction of the concept of the safe custody is one of the most important features of the law. This act introduced capital punishment in cases of rape, and grievous injuries. The important features of the Act are:

- Speedy investigation and trial of cases will be held in tribunals and all crimes under the ambit of the law are non-bail able, with few exceptions;
- A summary tribunal titled Women and Children Repression Tribunal would be formed for every district town to dispose of the related cases;
- The tribunal will complete the trial process within 180 days;
- The investigation should be completed within 60 days of the order by a magistrate or filing of the case;
- Under a provision of the law, a rapist will pay for the upkeep of a child born as consequence of rape.
- However, few Women and Children Repression Tribunals have been established, thus there remain significant delays in dealing with cases that are identified²⁰. It is hoped that the 2010 enactment of a
- Domestic Violence Act will strengthens legal measures to address domestic violence including sexual violence against children and women in families.

In establishing sustainable community based CPGs Plan Bangladesh tries to ensure grant support to provide technical support over a 5 year period (including funds to cover the partners costs). To ensure sustainability the CSP-III describes how the rights-based CCCD process will ensure that communities participate and that local resources (predominantly time, space and materials) are mobilised. These contributions will constitute an estimated 10% of total programme costs. They use UP office for training, event management, UP chairman play a vital role to resolve child protection concern. However, to support awareness raising and monitoring of child protection concerns Plan supports CPGs with practical materials including: a register for writing meeting minutes; a signboard; a billboard; a whiteboard; awareness raising posters; a computer; and guidelines. Furthermore, Plan provides financial support for plans submitted by CPGs to organise awareness raising and celebration

¹⁹ Law and order; communication and physical infrastructure development; agriculture and irrigation; education; health and family planning; youth and sports development; women and child development; social welfare; land; fisheries and livestock; rural development and cooperatives; information and culture; forest and environment; observation, monitoring and control of market price

²⁰ <http://bdnews24.com/details.php?id=197182&cid=2>

day events to increase awareness and action on child protection. Plan is also advocating with the local authorities to provide a fund for CPGs from the local government development fund.

Lesson learned, achievements and gaps:

Key achievements from the CPG work include:

- Increased recognition and respect for children among community people
- Increased awareness on child protection among the community (among children and adults)
- Reduction in beating of children in schools and communities, and reduction in early marriage (in some areas)
- Creation of more child friendly environment in communities
- More authentic information on child abuse (especially through children's involvement) is being brought to the attention of concerned duty bearers
- Community people are taking the initiative to breakdown practices which contribute to the abusive situation in the society
- Increasing birth registration completion rate and local government authority which contributes to efforts to prevent child marriage.

- *Key challenges faced in establishing CPGs/ SPGs:*
- Low literacy rates, high poverty rates, poor social security and low levels of awareness on child rights contribute to child marriage. However, gradually parents are becoming aware and government also supporting for girls education, enhancing law enforcement situation by formulating new laws.
- Traditional practice of seeking justice through local informal justice system which do not often hold perpetrators' accountable, especially if they can afford to pay financial compensation or bribes.
- Large size of urban areas which makes it difficult for CPG members / project staff to reach and involve all children and families in awareness raising on child protection, and/ or to identify and respond to all child protection cases.
- Concern regarding the strategy of SPG formation outside of Plan's sponsorship areas. Questions of functionality and sustainability when organising SPGs outside of Plan's sponsorship areas where the CCCD process is not followed properly were raised, as some staff feared the results may not be so good as facilitation of a good process is so crucial. It was decided that PHR staff must be given training on child protection and the CCCD approach.

Key challenges faced by the CPGs/SPGs (per H-assessment carried out in May by Plan Country Office)

- CPG members are working as volunteers so sometimes they don't find adequate time to promote child protection in their locality.
- Union parishad (lowest administrative tier in the rural set-up) has 13 standing committees, one of these is dedicated to the welfare of women and children. Capacity building of these members is challenging because they don't have any spare time, being elected representatives.
- The CPGs when working on cases sometimes don't find adequate support from the communities and also sometimes after resolving the problem, both parties (victim and perpetrator) compromise with each other, often under the influence of external powers.
- When socially influential persons are involved with extreme cases (like murder, rape), CPGs are stifled and cannot play their role.
- The CPGs have insufficient access to the education institutions and local police stations
- Social safety-nets in the community are not very functional
- Irregular meetings and insufficient participation; Villages need to be made more aware about CPGs and their role
- Some Social Protection group members expect regular incentives to fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

- CPG members facing threats from the perpetrators when they deal with cases of victims.
- Local people sometimes prefer to use the local informal judicial systems which are often corrupt.

Suggestions made by Plan Bangladesh to strengthen its CBCP work:

- Increase number of members in the committees - social activist, retired from service, house wives, journalist, teacher, SMC members, NGO representatives, lawyers, Imam;
- Organize more training on legal aid, child rights and child protection;
- Organize campaigns through rallies, discussion sessions, celebrations;
- Increase linkages through personal contact, interactive discussion, issue based drama, Tfd, music;
- Need to maintain communication through UP chairman or project head.

Achievements, challenges and lessons learned from an evaluation of community based protection work in slum areas in Dhaka city undertaken by BNWLA ²¹

Organization which has worked in collaboration with Plan Bangladesh to implementing community based preventive and protection supports to slum children in Dhaka city since June 2006. An evaluation of their community programme was undertaken in early 2009 to assess the impact of the project in terms of reducing violence against children in project areas²². A cross-sectional study combined both quantitative and qualitative approach was conducted in 4 slums (Mohammadpur, Agargaon, Bashabo and Dhalpur) out of the 7 slums in Dhaka city where the BNWLA program was run. The study involved children who were in risk of any kind of violence, slum dwellers, different child and community groups, community leaders (e.g. ward commissioner), member of law enforcing agency, local NGO representatives, journalists, teachers, lawyers, parents and guardians and local elites/influential people²³. The study shows that the rate of violence against children of any forms is high in slum areas. Despite the program children in the slum areas are being exposed to both mental and physical tortures which include beating, slapping, kicking, scolding, abduction, trafficking, sexual abuse and rape. Early marriage happens frequently in the slum areas. Children who work outside home are experiencing hazardous torture and sexual abuse by their colleagues and employers. Children of 6-10 years of age are more vulnerable. Most children face scolding and physical abuse by family members, relatives and neighbors. Children's employers, relatives and neighbours are the main perpetrators for sexual abuse and hazardous tortures. Most incidences of rape cases are not reported to the Social Protection Centres, to the BNWLA lawyers or to the police. Community people did not have a clear understanding about the role of the Social Protection Centre, nor the type of support that could be offered. Many community members were not aware of NGO interventions, including the activities run by BNWLA. A more significant number of victims attempted to seek justice from the local informal judicial system (bichar/ shalish/ panchayat).

The study identified some strengths and challenges of the projects. According to respondents, case Identification through home visit, awareness building through different training such as life skill, child protection and HIV/AIDS were opportunities to reduce violence against children. The formation of the Social Protection Group and Child Group, and free legal support were also considered to be good initiatives among those who knew of the BNWLA activities. However, the study also explored

²¹ Mohammed Awlad Hossain (April 2009) An evaluation of Developing Social Protection and Preventive Mechanism against Children's Vulnerability to Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (DSPP) project in Dhaka City. Plan Bangladesh

²² Mohammed Awlad Hossain (April 2009) An evaluation of Developing Social Protection and Preventive Mechanism against Children's Vulnerability to Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (DSPP) project in Dhaka City. Plan Bangladesh

²³ A total of 260 households were surveyed with a structured questionnaire. On the other hand, 16 key informant interviews, 8 FGD and 4 cases study were conducted to get the in-depth information from different level of audiences

the challenges of the project. Field staff found it difficult to cover their programme areas. Many people do not know the SPG members in the respective areas, and aside from in a few areas the formation of SPG was not participatory. Some Social Protection group members expect regular incentives to fulfil their roles and responsibilities and they lack sufficient training. Inadequate communication and transfers of field staff have also negatively affected the quality of the programme. Social Protection Group members said that they faced regular threats from the perpetrators when they deal with cases of victims. Local people preferred to use the local informal judicial systems which are often corrupt. Furthermore, many sexual abuse cases go unreported due to social stigma. Parents of victims fear that disclosure of sexual abuse may hamper the possibility of marriage of their daughter and people would dishonour them in the society.

However, some children and SPG members have increased awareness and capacity to identify and respond to violence against children. Justice seeking behaviour has started to change due to intervention of BNWLA with more people seeking justice from the formal sector through SPG, especially as they can access free legal support rather than have to directly report to police who may request fees to file a case. Through their community based prevention and response programme (DSPP project) supported by BNWLA in Dhaka some children and adults felt there were reductions in trafficking, abduction, rape, hazardous tortures, and early marriage.

Recommendations to strengthen the programme based on the evaluation included:

- Increase awareness among different level of people in the community as well as institutions through frequent home visit, training, meeting and advocacy workshops.
- Popular drama, songs and documentary on real life oriented should be arranged to aware the community people. Also, billboards, leaflets, posters, brochures should be disseminated.
- Some agents should be recruited from the community people who will assist field staffs to identify cases and link victims with SPC.
- Employers of working children (e.g. garments factory) should be monitored by a committee who will ensure 'good behaviour towards children'.
- Kazi (marriage registrar) should be sensitized on the impact of early marriage.
- Formation of Social Protection Group (SPG) should be fully participatory. Some innovative initiatives should be taken to stimulate inactive members of SPG.
- Members of SPG and field staffs should be capacitated on how to work better with violence against children.
- Increase the number of SPGs and field staffs if the area is big in terms of population.
- Ensure exemplary punishment of perpetrators.
- Involve local leaders, local elites and influential persons in the project and make environment to contribute to reducing violence against children.

Annex I: Overview of training provided to support CPG formation and strengthening:

Year of training:	Name of training (main subject):	Who was included:	Who facilitated:	Was there a follow up training?
2010	a. Training on UN CRC b. Training on Child Protection c. Training on organizational development	CPG members, school teachers, CBO leaders, CO members	Plan staff (Program Coordinator-Enabling Environment & Area Coordinator)	Yes
2011	a. Training on UN CRC b. Training on Child Protection c. Training on organizational development d. Training on monitoring e. Training on Psychosocial protection and care	CPG members, school teachers, CBO leaders, CO members, partner staff, UP members	Plan staff (Program Coordinator-POVC & Area Coordinator)	Yes
2012	a. Training on Child Protection b. Training on organizational development c. Training on monitoring d. Training on Psychosocial protection and care e. Training on life skills	CPG members, school teachers, CBO leaders, CO members, partner staff, UP members	Plan staff (Program Coordinator-POVC & Area Coordinator) and partner staff	Yes