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Timeline

2011-2012

Sample Size

140 Villages in Moyamba and Pujehun Districts, Sierra Leone

Research Implemented by IPA

Yes

Child Protection Knowledge and Information Network (CPKIN)

Policy Issue

Children in post-conflict environments are a population of particular concern, exposed to violence, displacement, and death of family members. The impact of poverty means that child labor is common among children. Though no reliable data exists, indications are strong that sexual abuse and exploitation is a fact of life for many girls and teenage pregnancy has been identified as a child protection concern. In addition to the physical and mental health challenges posed by war experiences, these children remain susceptible to continued exploitation and abuse, often by those familiar to the child, during peace as refugees return home and community members cope with difficult pasts.

Context of the Evaluation

The situation of children in Sierra Leone continues to be precarious as 27% of the 2.7 million children are identified as vulnerable, lacking the protection of a primary care giver. Formal structures for child protection exist within police stations and local Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), but capacity and community trust in such institutions' efficacy are limited in many rural areas[1]. To reduce violence against children, existing social structures, most paramount, section, and village chiefs, are frequently leveraged to respond to reports of abuse and to mobilize local protective factors.

To respond to the resource constraints faced by formal child protection systems in Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) is experimenting with a policy framework that explicitly links local chiefs and community members to the formal child protection sector. This policy was articulated in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2010 by the MSWGCA, CWCs, and the Council of Paramount Chiefs. The MOU and focal person system are currently being implemented in Moyamba and Pujehun districts, with potential to expand the program nationwide. The MOU creates a framework through which chiefs, MSWGCA, CWCs, and the Family Support Unit (FSU) of the Sierra Leone Police can collaborate to protect children. Village chiefs appoint a focal person for child welfare in a public meeting of village residents. Focal persons report cases of child abuse to chiefs and chiefs, with the assistance of focal persons, follow up with the formal child protection actors to ensure that cases of child abuse are addressed appropriately.

To help focal persons connect informal systems for child protection to the formal roles of the FSU and MSWGCA, UNICEF and other local child protection NGOs have developed a training program that introduces focal persons to general approaches to child protection, as well as to their roles and responsibilities under the MOU. Despite the grounding of these trainings in both international best practices and local norms and understandings, key stakeholders have expressed concerns about whether one-time trainings will provide focal points with sufficient capacity to effectively serve as a link between communities, chiefs, and formal child protection systems. At the same time, repeated trainings or sustained in-depth monitoring by international or national child protection agencies is not sustainable in the context of rural villages in Sierra Leone.

Details of the Intervention

Mobile phones and SMS messaging provide one potential avenue for bridging the gap between the need for sustained support of focal points and the high costs of transportation in rural Sierra Leone. To leverage the growing use of this technology in Sierra Leone, a consortium of non-profit, academic, government, and private-sector stakeholders have collaborated in developing the Child Protection Knowledge and Information Network (CPKIN). CPKIN (pronounced as "See Pikin" or "See the Child" in Krio, a language spoken throughout the country) is a system that will be used to send focal persons automated text messages asking questions about the welfare of children in their village and prompting them to engage in discussions in their community to help answer these questions. Focal persons will then be encouraged to send their answers back to the central CPKIN system using a free text message. These text message questions and responses will be sent and received through a software program that makes it possible to manage, organize, and analyze high volumes of outgoing and incoming messages with a large list of recipients

There are several hypotheses underpinning the design of the CPKIN program. The first hypothesis is that the process of receiving questions, discussing the questions with community members, and sending answers will encourage focal persons to critically examine the situation of children in their communities and then to act with the resources available in

their villages. A second hypothesis is that having a focal person who is active with respect to reporting abuses, taking proactive steps to improve the welfare of children, and engaging community members in discussions regarding children has the potential to cause dramatic shifts in community level knowledge, norms, and practices regarding child protection, which in turn may lead to greater connections between informal and formal child protection systems.

Given the novelty of the CPKIN system as a child protection intervention, it is necessary to assess the extent to which sending regular, open-ended text messages to village focal persons using this system can increase the capacity of focal points and their communities to proactively and reactively respond to local child protection issues. In particular, the effectiveness of CPKIN and the validity of the underlying hypotheses will be evaluated using a randomized evaluation in 140 villages in Moyamba and Pujehun districts. The randomization will occur at the village level, with the 70 villages randomly assigned to the CPKIN treatment, and the remaining 70 villages comprising the comparison group, in which there is no intervention. In treatment villages, the village focal person will receive a one-on-one training on the overall aims of CPKIN, how to receive and send CPKIN messages, and how to use CPKIN as a starting point for engaging their community members on issues concerning child protection. Shortly after this training, focal persons will begin receiving regular CPKIN prompts.

Baseline and endline surveys regarding child protection and child welfare will be conducted before and after the six to eight month intervention in all 140 villages in order to assess the relative effectiveness of the CPKIN support system, with survey questions designed to elicit two kinds of information:

- 1.) The capacity of key stakeholders (children, parents, focal persons, chiefs, FSU, and CWCs—where they exist) to identify and respond to child protection issues.
- 2.) The protection and support for children within their communities, and their overall level of welfare (including the prevalence of both abuses and protective factors).

Results and Policy Lessons

Results forthcoming.

Sources

[1] Human Rights Watch. (2011). *World Report 2011*

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