Mapping Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms - Uganda

Child Protection in Crisis

Network for Research, Learning & Action

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Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

AIDS – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

ARV – Antiretroviral

CBCPM – Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms

CBO - Community-based organization

CPCN - Care and Protection of Children in Crisis Network

CRC - UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

FGD - Focus group discussion

HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IDP - Internally displaced person

ILI - Inter-Agency Learning Initiative

INGO - International non-governmental organization

NGO - Non-governmental organization

SGBV -Sexual and gender-based violence

Executive Summary

Introduction

In diverse contexts, child protection mechanisms are the systems that protect children from exploitation, abuse, violence, and neglect and promote children's well-being.[1] Components of Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms (CBCPMs) include the people, groups, and networks that exist in communities to prevent and address child protection concerns and violations. The inherent value of CBCPMs lies in their creation in response to local child protection concerns. These responses are conceptualized and implemented by community members according to their existing beliefs and prior experiences in preventing and responding to child protection violations.

The goal of this research is to take a bottom-up approach in examining existing CBCPMs in Arua and Nebbi districts in Uganda. By understanding how communities currently define, prevent, and respond to child protection violations and how local systems connect (or do not connect) to formal protection systems, these mechanisms may then be supported, and enhanced, rather than ignored or undermined. With appropriate support, CBCPMs may be able to increase coverage and efficacy and even improve the implementation of locally appropriate strategies.

Methodology

The methodology and tools used for data collection were originally developed through the work of the Inter-Agency Initiative on Child Protection Systems and Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms in Sierra Leone, coordinated by Save the Children UK.[2] The Centre on Child Protection at the University of Indonesia in Aceh further modified the strategy and tools in Indonesia with the support of Columbia University.[3] Additional inspiration for the tools came from the Child Frontiers research manual for mapping and analyzing national child protection systems. This research utilized an amended Community Mapping approach to explore community perceptions and experiences of child protection. This research addresses the different threats and sources of harm that community members and leaders believe affect the safety and wellbeing of their children, as well as the ways in which those challenges are prevented and addressed.

Data were collected in eight sites, four sites each in Arua and Nebbi districts. Researchers spent six days collecting and transcribing data in each location. Nebbi and Arua were purposively selected to represent the Northwestern area of Uganda, potentially important to child protection due to the region's conflict experience and location on the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. While this research provides insight about CBCPMs in Arua and Nebbi, information herein cannot be extrapolated and applied to children in other areas of the country, or nationally. In each location researchers conducted community orientation and observation, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews.

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[1] Eynon & Lilley(2010); Wessells (2009).

[2] "An Ethnographic Study of Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms and Their Linkage with the National Child Protection System in Sierra Leone" (see the Save the Children resource center at resourcecenter.savethechildren.se/node/4604)

[3] "An Ethnographic Study of Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms in Aceh", the Center on Child Protection, University of Indonesia, June 2011.

Key Findings

Participants most frequently mentioned each of the child protection concerns listed below as issues that make children feel unsafe or insecure in Nebbi or Arua. The risks and challenges faced by children in these districts are segregated into the following categories: neglect, child labour, early pregnancy and marriage, and sexual and physical abuse.

A. Neglect or Lack of Parental Care

Respondents consistently identified a lack of parental care as one of the most pressing concerns facing children in Arua and Nebbi. As described by one girl: "Neglect is where the parents don't provide the basic needs of life to the children, for example, shelter, food and others." A female adult offered a more expansive definition of what things are essential for children, and what constitutes neglect, "This is when parents don't provide basic necessities of life such as food, clothes as well as for scholastic materials e.g. exercise book, uniform and as well as pay school fees". By including scholastic supplies and fees in her definition of neglect, this woman has expanded the population of children who can be considered neglected to all those who are out of school because of a lack of materials. However, these definitions do not address whether neglect is due to an inability to meet children's needs, or because parents make choices about how to spend the family's income, and children's needs are not prioritized.

When describing why neglect is such an important issue, the rationale of respondents most often reflected the severity of the consequences as well as the prevalence of the issue. Children were most likely to believe that parents neglected children on purpose, and simply chose not to meet their needs, such as one boy who explained that neglect occurs because of, "Purposeful refusal of ones own child; refusal to take care of a child by not providing shelter, education and medical care". An adult male linked neglect with parents choosing to provide preferential care, "This is when a parent sometimes cares much for boy child than caring for girl child, leaving this girl child desperate". While child participants often identified such instances as 'unfair', it was explained that culture and social norms dictate the roles parents encourage children to fulfil. With families traditionally structured around males, it is the education of boys that some families considered most important, as it is upon their success or failure that the future of family is believed to rest.

Respondents frequently described parents as being financially unable to provide for all their children's needs. Regardless of the intentions of parents, they may be simply incapable of meeting their children's needs because of a lack of household income. Access to funds, or a means to earn them, can allow a family to function in the face of adversity, while a family without such access may face hunger or other issues. When children are not responsible for meeting their own needs, and have the time, and their family has the resources, to care for them, community members generally agreed that they were unlikely to be neglected. Respondents described neglect as closely associated to children leaving school. Despite Uganda's Universal Primary Education (UPE), which allows all children to attend primary school free of charge, a female youth explained that children must pay for uniforms, supplies, and for transportation.

Child neglect is complex and multifaceted, and contributes to the majority of issues facing children in Arua and Nebbi. Children who do not experience neglect are significantly less vulnerable to many of the risks described, as they are more likely to have access to a sufficient support system. According to respondents, when children face neglect they often do nothing, but if they choose or are able to ask for help, they may approach their parents, relatives, neighbours,

religious leaders, or teachers. On the whole neglect was described as an issue usually addressed within the family or immediate community by adults with whom children have trusting relationships. Without such help, respondents reported that children could choose to keep quiet about the neglect, but that they might have to leave school to start working or get married in order to feel adequately supported.

B. Child Labour

When defining child labour, respondents focused on the types of work that are inappropriate for children, rather than whether children should work.

> *Child labour is when a child performs some work that is not appropriate for their age, like doing so many things yet feels or is too young to do the entire things and carrying something that is too heavy.* – Girl

When considering which kinds of work children should not do, most respondents agreed with the girl above, in that it is child labour when the loads are too heavy, the children could get hurt, or that it was *too much* work for a child. This quantity of work can make it so the child has no time to do other things including attending school, studying, or playing with friends. Respondents described the time consuming nature of children's work as being closely tied to children's academic achievement or attainment. Poor performance or lack of support from parents was described as discouraging children from continuing to study, with child labour as one of several causal factors leading to children leaving school.

When considering whom children might approach if their caregivers ask them to do too much work, or heavy or dangerous work, most respondents said that children would tell no one, as it is viewed as normative and part of being a child. However if a child were to tell someone, according to a male adult, he/she would most likely tell:

> *...relatives or parents come up to take away the child from hard work. That is relocating the child from the place he/she has been mistreated from to another, probably to the biological mother.* – Male Adult

The assumption here is that a child being overworked is likely in a household without his or her biological mother. The responses to child labour were described differently depending on who is making the child work, with the child being returned to biological parents if it is with alternative caregivers, but with the situation being slightly more complex if it is the biological parents themselves who are overworking the child. A child might approach a relative who could call for mediation between family members. However, if the matter is not resolved by family mediation, or if relatives did not offer to host the child, respondents reported that it was unlikely relatives would take further action.

Children might leave home, especially girls, to avoid child labour, which was described as potentially negative, given the risks associated with living away from home, including commercial sex work and early marriage. However, if a child moves to live with a relative or other alternative caregiver, the outcome is more likely to be positive, as the child may have access to emotional and financial support.

C. Early Pregnancy and Marriage

C1. Early Pregnancy

When considering early pregnancy, some respondents defined it as any pregnancy occurring before age 18, while others believed it was only 'early' if the girl was 15 or younger. The consequences of early pregnancy were described as potentially serious for both the girl and her partner. According to respondents, when confronted by a girl claiming to be carrying their child, boys and men could choose to accept the pregnancy, in which case they will often marry the pregnant girl. Alternatively, respondents explained that the man might choose to deny the child, which can lead to anything from involvement of authorities to suicide.

Participants in FGDs and interviews detailed multiple reasons for early pregnancy, and this issue is closely connected to almost every other risk to children discussed in this report. One woman pointed to the lack of sex education, from parents or schools, "Children are not exposed to sex education so they will want to discover but end up pregnant and forced to marry at an early age." Without knowledge about reproduction and family planning, children engaging in sexual activity have few options to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Men were most likely to blame girls for their pregnancies, despite the fact that they were not of legal age to consent, or, in some cases, even if force was used.

When considering the consequences of early pregnancy, one often cited, particularly by children, is the girl's inability to carry and deliver the foetus, due to her incomplete physical development. Respondents described marriage and pregnancy among teens as the norm, especially among children in their late teens. According to community members, children, parents or guardians may terminate education, largely considered a children's domain, so that young people may become participants in adult social structure of building families.

According to respondents, when a girl discovers she is pregnant, her options were described as being relatively limited. First, a girl was described as having to decide whether or not to attempt an illegal abortion or bear the child. Second, respondents said that the girl must decide whom to tell about the pregnancy. After that point, the girl's parents most often make decisions about the pregnancy, not the girl herself.

C2. Early Marriage

When defining early marriage, respondents identified age as the determining factor, "Early marriage is when a girl marries before she reaches the age of 18 year, as recommended by the government of Uganda" according to a male youth. However, despite knowledge of this law, many children, especially girls, are married before 18 years.

A group of female youth in a focus group discussion at a secondary school succinctly described the reasons a girl might get married: 1. Conditions are bad at home and a girl will get married in order to live somewhere else, 2. A girl wants to marry and a man (could be boyfriend or fiancé) will tell her that he will pay her school fees if she marries him, but then he will not send her to school in the end, 3. Parents can force a girl to get married even if she doesn't want to, 4. A girl gets pregnant and then she must marry. While none of the girls in the focus group discussion were married, they were among few girls still attending school in their late teens, and had seen most of their peers leave school for one of the above reasons. When girls are faced with an unsatisfactory home life, they may view marriage as a means of escape, as respondents explained that most girls move to the home of a husband.

Community members shared that some girls' families may encourage them to marry for the wealth, both in cash and in kind, which will come from the marriage. In contrast respondents

explained that some boys' families might want them to marry because they will bring their wives to live with the family, where the new wife would contribute to the labour needs of the family. Most respondents agreed that while many families encourage daughters to marry young, as it is the norm in the area, girls from poor families are particularly likely to experience this pressure, as their families' need for income is greater.

While many respondents described the reasons why children should not marry young or take on early responsibility, the marriage itself was described as a positive coping strategy in response to early pregnancy, unless the parents didn't approve of the marriage. In addition to the potential benefit to parents receiving a dowry, respondents explained that children may resort to early marriage because of a perceived responsibility to family that cannot be fulfilled while attending school. However, not all marriages were described as being entered into by willing parties, and the response pathway if a child is encouraged to enter a marriage against his or her choosing differs.

D. Sexual Abuse

Rape, and defilement were the most frequently mentioned types of sexual abuse experienced by children. According to a male community leader,

> *Children in this region do not get their best in life because of sexual abuse. Many of the girl children produce at an early age of 13-16 years. And this makes them drop out of school, and then because of the early pregnancy they produce children and they cannot look after them*.

Here the connection between sexual abuse, early pregnancy, and school pushout are described as causally interrelated, and the quote suggests a cyclical nature to child neglect. For clarity defilement and rape are discussed separately, but everyone does not always delineate between these terms the same way. In each interview and FGD any respondent using one of these terms was asked to give a personal definition for the term used.

D1. Defilement
Respondents shared different definitions for defilement during data collection. A girl shared the Uganda government's definition: "Defilement is when a child gets involved in sexual relationships with an adult or older person which is against the law of Uganda," leaving out that males are also covered by this law, and can be the victims of defilement. Respondents also described defilement as relating to the extremely young age of the girl: "This is when a man forces a young girl below 5 years to have sex", according to one boy.

However, a male government employee, referred to defilement as the same thing as rape, identifying disabled children as particularly vulnerable, "Disabled children are also more vulnerable because they cannot defend themselves from attacks by strangers and get defiled." The lack of differentiation between defilement and rape may make discussion of the issues between formal child protection actors and communities, as well as between community members themselves difficult, as the issues may be conflated, rather than identified as separate issues. Respondents described defilement as associated with a range of consequences, similar to those for early sex and early pregnancy.

When a child is defiled and decides to tell someone or ask for help, the majority of respondents said that girls would first approach their mothers. While many respondents reported that

defilement was a crime, given that every girl under 18 years who becomes pregnant outside of wedlock has been defiled, according to the law in Uganda, respondents' description of the prevalence of early pregnancy and marriage make it apparent that the formal judicial system is not always engaged.

According to a male health centre employee, when parents want to prove a girl has been defiled, they will bring her to a medical centre for an examination, "In this community cases of defilement is rampant almost every week we receive cases of children that need medical examination and treatment". Once defilement has been confirmed, the response process is very similar to early pregnancy, where the man is asked to confirm or deny that he defiled the girl, and will then owe the family compensation for the defilement, or may marry the victim.

The possibility of arrest and imprisonment for defilement is well known in Arua and Nebbi as stated by participants in data collection, "There are strong laws in Uganda that punishes men who defile children, so men fear," according to an adult woman. However, according to respondents, defilement is a crime which community members are willing to settle within the community in order to help the perpetrator avoid punishment or personal hardship, however their willingness to do so often depends on the community status of the perpetrator.

D2. Rape
The definition of rape was more clearly delineated than defilement, with a boy explaining, "This is the act of having forced sexual intercourse with a young child or grown up woman, either in the bush or in the house", however, the possibility that a male can be raped was omitted. One female government employee differentiated by age when defining rape, "Rape is from 6 – 13. From the age of 14 these girls go willingly to sleep with this man, it is not rape". The idea that beyond a certain age females, especially teenagers and young women cannot be raped because "they want it" was a commonly repeated theme. When asked about the reasons for rape in their communities, respondents gave a wide variety of answers, from child neglect, to peer pressure amongst male youth, or to be used as a tool to punish a girl or woman who is thought to have done something wrong. Children outside of their homes often were described as at a higher risk of rape, whether living on the street or walking alone.

The physical and psychosocial ramifications of being raped were described in detail. The shame would likely be compounded by the social stigma of rape, "Fellow children can make fun of the girl; she can't mix and interact with peer", one boy explained. Another boy discussed bullying, "It can force a girl to leave school because of the shame and embarrassment". Being pushed out of school deprives a girl of formal education and further isolates her from her peers and any support she might have received in school. Physical damage inflicted by a rape was often described as quite severe, as a male youth explained, "This can result in breakage of the child's sexual organ, contraction of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and unwanted pregnancies". That rape could lead to infertility was of concern among respondents, as this would make it difficult for the girl to get married. During data collection there were a handful of reports about the rape of boys; despite the lack in quantity, interview respondents were very knowledgeable and had heard about cases firsthand.

Parents are the most common decision-makers after their child is raped, and are expected to act in her and their family's best interests. The practice of promoting marriage between a child and her rapist mirrors the process for defilement, with respondents describing the potential resolution as related to the loss of virginity, which traditionally leads to marriage. Despite many people

describing rape, and sometimes defilement, as something that should be handled by formal authorities, respondents usually described attempting to resolve the case in the community as the first option, with authorities becoming involved only if informal mediation was unsuccessful. The official process for reporting a rape case involves multiple steps that could be quite onerous to someone unfamiliar with government or with lack of access to transportation. After this process the police may begin to investigate the case if they believe there is sufficient evidence, according to participants in data collection.

Following a rape, respondents indicated that the support offered to a child differs significantly based on finances and services available. The child may be relocated informally to live with a relative in a different area, where the local community does not have knowledge of the rape. While respondents did share instances of girls being moved to live with relatives, it was never reported that a girl's parents would relocate to accompany her.

How Communities Currently Prevent Risks to Children

During data collection participants were asked to reflect upon how the community currently prevents and responds to risks, which actors are involved, and how it might be improved. Respondents told researchers that communities actively protect their children from many of the violations discussed above, often by advising children about appropriate behaviour. An adult female gives an example:

> *The community tells their children to not move at late hours. Giving children an hour when you must be home, let this person who is going raping, let them come and find you home instead. All these bad activities they happen during night hours. So when these kids are prevented from moving during night hours then such things will not happen to our kids.*

This advice from respondents extends from keeping children at home during certain hours to advising girls about how to dress, because some respondents believed that provocative styles of dress made girls vulnerable to rape. Respondents shared another way that communities have attempted to address child protection violations, by asking children to watch out for one another. Through seemingly simple steps such as having children travel to school together, respondents reported that some families and communities are able to reduce the risks that children encounter when away from the home.

Communities in Uganda have the right to create by-laws that apply only to them, as long as they do not conflict with national laws. By creating by-laws connected to child protection, some communities are able to translate national laws into their local context, as well as to increase ownership of the law. Participants in data collection shared that some communities have incorporated children's issues into the mandate of the local leaders. While these forums may address only some child protection issues, the existence of a group of people that prioritizes such issues suggests a strong foundation upon which to build.

Community elders often were described as being involved in settling cases in locally appropriate ways such as punishing perpetrators by making them give the victim's family animals, rather than focusing on sending the person to jail. However, participants also shared that local justice systems may favour people who are from that region or the local tribe, and so members of minority clans or religions, or those who have migrated by choice or during the former conflict

may believe the treatment they receive will be more equitable if they choose to involve the formal legal system, which sometimes was described as less partial.

Referrals and Linkage with Formal Child Protection Systems

When something bad happens to a child in a community, approaching a government official or NGO was rarely described as the first step; it was through a referral that these resources were typically reached. Sexual violence was often cited as the type of case that must always be referred to government authorities, while respondents said they preferred to solve other issues within the community, such as: "Cases like divorce, domestic violence, alcoholism, because it happens to the community members themselves so involving them is better if you want a change," according to a male community leader. Approaching local leaders, including the Local Council, is viewed as beneficial for a number of reasons. One male community leader shared his view,

> First of all I am a leader of this village and I am tasked with seeing to the welfare of the children and the general community. I also act as point of entry for different government program including some of the NGO.

Serving the role of a problem solver and gatekeeper for government and NGO programs is a source of power and recognition within the community. Settling a case with the help of local leaders may be chosen due to negative perceptions or experiences with the formal government system, "With legal services, money is involved for instance in registering cases [with the police]. This demotivates people," according to a male NGO staff member. Some respondents believed that children would be punished or more vulnerable if they were to report a protection violation because their families would be angry with them for involving the police or other formal service. Whereas a community leader is perceived as more likely to promote dialogue or attempt to resolve the case, the government judicial system is viewed as punitive, with negative repercussions for those choosing to file reports. Conflicting perceptions of the value of the local systems and government systems likely reflect differences in how cases are received and handled at both levels in different communities.

Access to Support and Justice

Community members must know what laws exist, and feel it is important to report child protection violations and involve the formal system in order for them to be implemented.

> Ignorance of the provision of laws that protect the children makes community to see defilement, neglect of children, and early marriage as not a crime and this is worst because most of the laws are not fully implemented. – Female Government

Even if community members are aware of the law, they may be unaware of the services available or decline to take advantage of them because of expense involved. Without access to the resources to compensate members of the police or other formal actors, families are not able to report child protection violations, even if they believe that reporting the case will help them or their child. Without faith that the case will be handled appropriately and without bias, many community members did not see reporting the case as in their interest, but instead as a waste of money and time.

Government and NGO Interaction with Community-based Systems

Staff of government and NGOs were asked to discuss the ways that the government interacts with traditional child protection mechanisms, and whether they support or interfere with each other. Earlier, respondents explained that they were most likely to seek support and mediation from the system, whether formal or informal, that was most likely to settle the case in their favour and which they could afford. Despite the potential for the government-based system to work in coordination with informal child protection systems, this is not always possible due to a lack of awareness and harmonization between different service providers. Some local leaders suggested that if residents were more aware of existing government services, they might be more likely to utilize them. However, other community leaders identified cultural norms as strong enough to encourage or deter people from particular behaviours, while laws from the government are not as effective.

Recommendations from Communities

At the conclusion of each interview or focus group discussion, participants were asked how the community could better respond to risk, and whether they had any recommendations to improve the existing systems. Members of all sub-groups suggested significant efforts be conducted in relation to awareness-raising about child protection issues, and what people in the community could do to keep children safe and secure. Increasing access to services, especially health, education, and justice, was emphasized to ensure equal access among socio-economic groups and rural and urban areas. Respondents noted that increasing the prevalence of existing services, as well as augmenting existing services could help increase utilization and appropriateness, leading to improved prevention of and response to child protection violations. Respondents stressed that new local by-laws could be created to better protect children, and that the enforcement of existing laws could be improved.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Communities in Arua and Nebbi care about their children, and are eager to learn more and to receive support in making sure their children do well. Better equipping community members to prevent and address child protection mechanisms is essential, and likely will be more acceptable, and appropriate than increasing the presence of formal services.

A. **There is a lack of common understanding about sexual abuse that makes discussing complicates the creation of awareness about existing laws and their enforcement.**

Encourage dialogue within the formal child protection system to ensure actors are familiar with, and actively use, sexual abuse terms as Ugandan law defines them. When conducting awareness raising and programming at the community level ensure that participants share their own definitions of different terms, especially rape and defilement, and ensure that an understanding is reached about the differences between the two.

B. At the community level there is a lack of knowledge about appropriate ways to prevent and respond to child protection violations.

C. Community members generally view traditional forms of justice as focused on reconciliation and restitution, and government-based justice to be punitive, however despite this delineation, they reportedly are most likely to engage the system that they feel is most likely to reach a resolution that is in their favour.

Rather than focusing on encouraging community members to utilize the formal system in lieu of the informal system, understanding how the two can be integrated to some extent might be more useful; this should include incorporating traditional priorities related to justice, such as reaching resolution and maintaining community harmony.

D. Knowledge and implementation of national laws is limited, however communities are eager to incorporate these as local by-laws if they represent community priorities.

Ownership and knowledge of local by-laws is relatively widespread, and many community members suggested creating local by-laws related to child protection. While this will likely reiterate national laws, it could help engage the community around child protection and allow them to adapt national laws to their local context, and create a detailed action plan for implementation and enforcement.

E. Students are pushed out of school due to issues like lack of school supplies, uniform, lack of parental support, or early pregnancy.

Child protection actors, including government ministries, and national, regional, and international actors engaging in child protection, might further analyze Uganda's education strategy. This analysis should focus, in particular, on how to keep children in school as long as possible, as drop out reportedly has negative effects not only on educational attainment, but also on child protection outcomes.

F. Many children lack a supportive adult in their lives with whom they can discuss problems and who can serve as their advocate.

Training adult community members as children's advocates could be productive on two fronts: in developing a cadre of child protection experts at the community level and also providing supportive resources for children. Respondents shared that supportive adults can offer significant protection for children, identifying child protection violations, offering advice, providing access to formal services, and advocating for children.

G. Child neglect is often the first child protection violations experienced by a child, and reportedly leads to others in many cases.

It is essential to address neglect, as it is reportedly the most widely experienced violation, and is closely associated with future difficulties. The socioeconomic stability of a household appears to be closely associated with neglect, as well as other child protection violations such as child labour and school dropout, and therefore communities may benefit if it is addressed in concert with child protection.

Introduction

Background and Research Justification

In diverse contexts, child protection mechanisms are the systems that protect children from exploitation, abuse, violence, and neglect and promote children's well-being.[4] Components of Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms (CBCPMs) include the people, groups, and networks that exist in communities, at the local level, to prevent and address child protection concerns and violations. Members of CBCPMs include families, community members, leaders, and groups, religious organizations, and locally based government and non-governmental organization (NGO) actors.

Child protection mechanisms exist at local, regional, national, and international levels, and may be composed of formal and informal actors. Defining the line between informal and formal child protection mechanisms may be difficult, as there can be significant interaction and crossover of resources and activities. Here, community members, leaders, and groups, local community-based organizations (CBOs), and any other actors engaging in child protection at the local level will be referred to as part of the informal child protection system. Local Council I (LC1) will be referred to as part of the informal child protection system as the council is reported to be composed of existing community leaders.[5] However, Local Council II, III, and V will all be referred to as part of the formal child protection system, as they exist outside of the community, are not necessarily composed only of community members, and are not a place where community members tend to have significant input. Other potential participants in formal child protection mechanisms include national and international NGOs, government staff, and ministries, including health, justice, and education.[6]

Child protection mechanisms that exist at the local level have the potential to be more organized, sustainable, and appropriate than formal assistance provided by government or NGOs, based outside of the community. The inherent value of CBCPMs lies in their creation in response to local child protection concerns. These responses are conceptualized and implemented by community members according to their existing beliefs and prior experiences in preventing and responding to child protection violations. However, attempting to strengthen CBCPMs without knowledge of what already exists in a given community can duplicate or undermine local systems. A global desk review indicated that when external actors attempt to facilitate child protection at the local level, based on external experiences, it often leads to overlapping or parallel systems that lack sustainability, local ownership, and that can have the unintended consequence of weakening CBCPMs already in existence.[7]

The goal of this research is to take a bottom-up approach in examining existing CBCPMs in Arua and Nebbi districts in Uganda. By understanding how communities currently define, prevent, and respond to child protection violations and how local systems connect (or do not

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[4] Eynon & Lilley(2010); Wessells (2009).

[5] Researchers, recruited from Arua and Nebbi, outlined the defined the distinction between different levels of LCs, in order to ensure that definitions reflect local experiences and perceptions.

[6] The complexity of both types of child protection systems has led to significant debate about the appropriate terms to identify them, and while calling those based in communities 'informal', and those connected to a larger child protection system as 'formal' is simplistic, and interpreted by some to undervalue 'informal' systems, those terms will be used in this report for lack of a better alternative, and due to broad understanding of such usage.

[7] Wessells (2009); Wessells (2011).

connect) to formal protection systems, these mechanisms may then be supported, and enhanced, rather than ignored or undermined. With appropriate support, CBCPMs may be able to increase coverage and efficacy and even improve the implementation of locally appropriate strategies. When CBCPMs are stronger, communities can be better equipped to care for their own children in ways that are culturally and contextually appropriate. This is not to say that communities should resolve all child protection issues on their own, but that by understanding CBCPMs, government agencies and NGOs can better appreciate where connections to formal child protection mechanisms exist, and where those linkages are missing. By understanding how communities protect their children, it is possible to support and help strengthen existing capacity, as well as build connections to additional resources from outside the community. This can enable community members to call upon outside actors when issues arise that cannot be addressed at the local level.

Ugandan Context

According to Uganda census, conducted in 2002, the population of the country was 24.4 million persons, with 56% (13.67 million) children and youth below 18 years. This population was projected to increase to 26.8 million by 2005, and the new total population will be recorded during the 2012 national census. With the majority of the population below 18, coupled with Uganda's rapid population growth rate[8] of 3.3% per year, the wellbeing and security of children and youth is increasingly important, both to ensure the realization of their rights and to build a healthy, and educated workforce as this population ages. Agriculture remains the heart of the Ugandan economy, with 83% of women and 71% of men reporting farming as their main livelihood activity.

Uganda is a diverse nation, with 69.3% of the population being part of one of nine major ethnic groups, and the remaining 30.7% identifying with other Ugandan ethnicities. The country is largely Christian, with approximately 85% of citizens identifying as Catholic or Protestant, 12% as Muslim, and 1% each identifying as following traditional religion or no religion. The most recent census before 2002 was conducted in 1991, at which time 4% of the total population was of foreign origin; that percentage fell to less than 2% in 2002. While the total number of foreign nationals held approximately constant from 1969 to 2002 (increasing from 53,200 to 54,000), the group now makes up a smaller proportion of the population.

Among many development indicators, the proportion of school age children enrolled, as well as the literacy rate, can give a snapshot of the education status of children, as well as the gender equity, or lack thereof, of that education. In 2002, 83.4% of children ages 6 – 12 were reportedly enrolled in elementary school, with almost identical proportions of girls and boys. However, literacy rates of children over 10 years are considerably lower, with 76% of boys achieving functional literacy, compared to 61% of girls. The literacy rate among adult males is approximately the same, 75%, while among females it falls to 54%. Despite reportedly being enrolled in primary school in similar numbers, girls are not achieving literacy at the same rate as boys.

In 2009 UNICEF reported that 21% of births in Uganda were registered, creating serious hardships for children if they migrate, with or without their parents, as well as in attempting to

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[8] Comparative to East African Region: Tanzania and Kenya's population growth rates for same period are 2.9%. (2002 census)

register for school, or vote.[9] The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) lists statehood as a right universally afforded to children. The percentage of children married before the age of 18 is another important child protection indicator: in urban areas 27% of children under 18 are married, while in rural areas this figure jumps to 52%.[10] Child labour[11] is also closely connected to the protection and wellbeing of children, was listed as carried out by 37% of male and 36% of female children.[12]

Arua and Nebbi districts are located on the borders of South Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the DRC, respectively. According to these estimated population growth rates, approximately 565,300 live in Arua, which has a population density of 156 people/km^2.[13] Nebbi has approximately 324,500 residents and a population density of 155 people/km^2. Arua and Nebbi are the most densely populated districts in Northern Uganda, and are significantly more densely populated compared to the national average of 124 persons/km^2. Despite Arua and Nebbi's location in the North of the country, the language, ethnic identification, religious practice, and traditions often differ markedly from those of other districts in the Northern region.

History of the Study and Research Objectives

The methodology and tools used for data collection were originally developed through the work of the Inter-Agency Initiative on Child Protection Systems and Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms in Sierra Leone, coordinated by Save the Children UK.[14] The Centre on Child Protection at the University of Indonesia in Aceh further modified the strategy and tools in Indonesia with the support of Columbia University.[15] Additional inspiration for the tools came from the Child Frontiers research manual for mapping and analyzing national child protection systems. In 2011 the Child Protection in Crisis Network piloted an amended Mapping of Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms in Uganda and Liberia, in association with the Program Learning Groups in each country. These pilots successfully documented the support systems for children experiencing abuse, exploitation, violence, and neglect in selected regions in each country. The pilots were conceived of as the first step in a scaling-up process to document and share the community-based child protection practices, and how they are linked to or disconnected from national child protection systems. In *"What Are We Learning About Protecting Children in Communities"* Mike Wessells emphasizes the importance of CBCPMs in building national systems of child protection.[16] If CBCPMs connect with and support the national system, then the national system of child protection stands a greater chance of being effective and of improving the lives of vulnerable children and families. If, however, CBCPMs and the wider child protection system are poorly linked, the ability of the national system to reach the grassroots level and improve the lives of children and families may be hampered.

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[9] UNICEF. A Progress Report for Children – A Report Card on Child Protection , No. 8. Nov. 2009.

[10] These figures were not segregated by sex or gender in the cited report.

[11] "The term "child labor" is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development." HTTP://WWW.ILO.ORG/IPEC/FACTS/LANG--EN/INDEX.HTM

[12] IBID

[13] Uganda Census 2002.

[14] "An Ethnographic Study of Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms and Their Linkage with the National Child Protection System in Sierra Leone" (see the Save the Children resource center at resourcecenter.savethechildren.se/node/4604)

[15] "An Ethnographic Study of Community-based Child Protection Mechanisms in Aceh", the Center on Child Protection, University of Indonesia, June 2011.

[16] Wessells (2009).

Main Objectives

1. Elicit local understandings of pressing child protection concerns in Arua and Nebbi Districts in Uganda,
2. Identify who children go to in the community to discuss a problem or for support
3. Understand family and community care practices of vulnerable children

Proposed Research Questions

1. What are the main child protection risks or sources of harm to children?
2. What processes or mechanisms do families or communities use to support children affected by various protection threats? What are the outcomes of those mechanisms, and how satisfactory are they in the eyes of different stakeholders?
3. How do child protection risks and responses vary by...
   a. Gender?
   b. Location? Home vs. school vs. community
   c. Age? Very young children vs. school age children vs. adolescents?
   d. Livelihood(s) or socioeconomic status?
4. What informal or traditional mechanisms of child protection exist and how do different groups regard them? Who do they protect? How do they function?
5. What sensitive or complex issues exist in the community? What child protection issues are associated with secrecy and/or shame? How are these issues addressed?
6. How does access to child protection mechanisms differ between community members? What is needed for access? Do some people have 'more' or 'better' access than others? How so?
7. How do government and NGO actors see their roles and responsibilities in regard to CBCPMs? What are instances where resources and support exist at the national level, but they are not connected or poorly connected to the community level?
8. What are the factors or practices in communities, homes, families, and schools that protect children from or put them at risk for abuse, exploitation, violence, or neglect?

Methodology

This research utilized an amended Community Mapping approach to explore community perceptions and experiences of child protection. This approach allowed the research team to focus on current and former community practices, as well as the ways in which tradition, custom, ethnicity, and religion influence child protection practices, and how and by whom decisions are made when violations occur. This research addresses the different threats and sources of harm that community members and leaders believe affect the safety and wellbeing of their children, as well as the ways in which those challenges are prevented and addressed.

Research Ethics, Consent, and Confidentiality

This research was conducted in a safe, ethical manner that embodied the humanitarian imperative to Do No Harm. In all instances the health, safety, and wellbeing of community members and potential interlocutors were prioritized.

Before the start of data collection, all researchers signed confidentiality agreements detailing their commitment to maintaining the confidentiality of all data, and what to do in the case of a breach of confidentiality. All researchers signed ChildFund's 'Child Protection Agreement', which outlined appropriate interaction with children, and identified the reporting chain if a researcher should witness or learn about a child protection violation committed by another member of the research team. This child protection agreement also released all team members from any previous responsibility as mandatory reporters as such reporting could compromise the confidentiality of the research. Instead, all child protection violations perpetrated or reported by community members were to be reported to the research coordinator. No violations of either sort occurred during the course of the research.

At the beginning of each interview or focus group, participant(s) were informed of the confidentiality of the information they shared, that researchers never collected identifiers of any kind, and that researchers could not break confidentiality without the explicit consent of the interlocutor. All respondents were offered contact information for available local service providers offering: health, psychosocial support, legal support, education, and others.

Research Team

The research team was comprised of members of local government and non-governmental organizations based in Arua or Nebbi, all of whom had experience working with children and collecting data. There was one team of four people in each district, led by a senior team member responsible for coordinating logistics, supervision, and initial transcript review. On each team, three of four members were from the district where research was conducted and spoke at least one local language fluently. Each team was made up of three males and one female. The Program Learning Group Coordinator, based in Kampala, attended the training and made several field visits throughout data collection. A Senior Associate from the Columbia Group for Children in Adversity was responsible for the implementation of data collection, including adapting tools to the local context, designing a data collection plan, final review of all transcripts, data analysis and synthesis. Graduate students from Columbia University offered assistance in the revision of tools and data analysis. The research team received methodological guidance and oversight from Dr. Lindsay Stark, Dr. Neil Boothby, and Mark Canavera, of Columbia University and the Child Protection in Crisis Network Global Secretariat.

Training and Capacity Building of Researchers

In preparation for data collection, all researchers and the research coordinator participated in ten days of training in Arua from February 20 to March 1, 2012. The participatory training was designed to further develop researchers' skills in qualitative data collection, specifically working with children and community members, utilizing probing questions, and addressing any potential methodological or ethical issues that could occur. The training emphasized active engagement of researchers in discussions, role-plays, scenarios, presentations, and practice of skills learned, with each other and in the field.

Specifically, the training covered the following topics:

1. Objectives and purpose of the research
2. Roles and responsibilities of researchers
3. Note-taking and transcription
4. Participant observation skills-building and practice
5. In-depth interviewing skills-building and practice
6. Interviewing children and members of vulnerable groups
7. Conducting focus group discussions with adults and children
8. Participatory ranking methodology
9. Ethics, confidentiality and consent
10. Child safeguarding policy
11. Mapping communities and resources, including practice
12. Team building and preparation for fieldwork

Capacity building continued throughout data collection, with each team supported by either the PLG Coordinator or the international consultant for the first week of data collection, followed by continuous feedback, troubleshooting, and review of issues researchers found difficult.

Research Plan and Tools

As mentioned above, the tools used in data collection are based on the work of the Inter-Agency Initiative on Child Protection Systems and Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms in Sierra Leone coordinated by Save the Children UK. That work has been published in "An Ethnographic Study of Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms and Their Linkage with the National Child Protection System in Sierra Leone"[17]. The authors of the original tools were Mike Wessells, Dora King, David Lamin, Kathleen Kostelny, Sarah Lilley, and Lindsay Stark. Some interview tools are inspired by the original work of Child Frontiers in Child Protection Systems Mapping in West Africa.[18]

None of the tools were translated into local language because neither Alur nor Lugbara are often written, and researchers stressed that they were much more comfortable reading and writing in English. Therefore, key terms were translated into the appropriate language and noted, while notes were taken in English. All tools utilized during data collection are described below and can be found attached to this report in the Appendix.

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[17] See the Save the Children resource center at resourcecenter.savethechildren.se/node/4604
[18] West Africa: Mapping and Assessment of National Child Protection Systems. Child Frontiers. http://www.childfrontiers.com/projects.php

Site Selection and Sampling

Research Sites

Data were collected in eight sites, four sites each in Arua and Nebbi districts. Researchers spent six days collecting and transcribing data in each location. The pilot of this study was conducted in Lira and Dokolo districts in Northern Uganda. Nebbi and Arua were purposively selected to represent the Northwestern area, potentially important to child protection due to the region's conflict experience and location on the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. These were also advantageous districts to collect data because Child Fund has strong local partners on the ground to help coordinate data collection and community entry. While this research provides insight about CBCPMs in Arua and Nebbi, information herein cannot be extrapolated and applied to children in other areas of the country, or nationally. If similar work were to take place in other districts, it might reveal that children face experience different realities, and distinct CBCPMs exist in response.

Within each district four sites were chosen for data collection, as the research was funded for 25 days of data collection in each district, and this schedule allowed for six days in each location, with a final day to finish and revise transcripts. Locations within each district were purposively chosen to represent the diversity present within each. Members of the research teams led site selection because of their of depth knowledge about the region, with guidance and input from the research coordinator and international consultant. When considering diversity during the site selection process, attention was paid to: ethnicity, national origin, livelihood, proximity to international borders, proximity to major geographical elements, tribe, language, migration experience, conflict experience, availability of government or NGO services, road conditions, and distance from a major city.

Community Orientation and Observation

Data were collected for six days in four communities in each district. In each location community leaders in government and in local leadership, were contacted so that the research team could describe the research and secure permission to work in the community. The first day in each community was spent conducting preliminary community orientation. Team members first created a physical map of each location, identifying key landmarks like schools and religious centres, community gathering areas, and sites that could contribute to the protection or vulnerability of children. After completing a map, each team member conducted a transect walk, revisiting sites that could be important to child protection as well as visiting areas off the main road that were missed during the original mapping. During both the mapping and transect walks team members introduced themselves and chatted with members of the community, explaining the research and identifying key informants for future data collection. Maps were updated with information gathered during transect walks, and were used during the data collection process to ensure geographical diversity within the town and identify key locations for observation and meeting key informants.

Over the course of data collection all researchers conducted participatory observation, where they identified and interpreted the interaction between children and community members, and how it related to the protection or vulnerability of children. In each location researchers wrote at least two observational transcripts, describing these interactions, which included community members drawing water and washing clothes, or how communities responded to emergencies like a house fire or traffic accident. Team members were encouraged to view these events as

though they were not from that place, paying particular attention to the roles of children and how people interact.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were conducted in every community, and were segregated by age, gender, and community status. Focus groups were made up of six to ten people, and age groups included children (11 – 17), youth (18 – 24), and adults (25+). Status was determined by respondents' self identified roles in their communities, which researchers used to ensure that no participant would feel intimidated or reluctant to speak due to the presence of a local leader, member of government, or other agency providing services. Focus groups were sometimes organized with the help of a community member, local leader, or teacher, but care was paid to also organize some groups independently to avoid possible selection bias, whereby participants would be chosen because they supported or agreed with the organizer.

Two researchers attended each group discussion, one acting as the facilitator and the other taking notes. Each focus group discussion lasted one to one and a half hours, depending on how active the group was. Participatory ranking methodology[19] was used to identify the things in that particular community that make children feel unsafe or insecure, or can affect their development and wellbeing. Once issues were identified, participants were led in voting on which issues were most important or pressing in their community. Each issue was defined according to local perceptions and the note taker recorded explanations and discussions of why it was important. Following this ranking process, the first and second most important issues were isolated and participants worked together to identify the people who usually contribute in responding to the issue, and what that response looks like.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews provided an opportunity for in-depth exploration of issues raised during observation and focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted in confidential and semi-private locations chosen by the respondent. They were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire that provided the researchers the latitude to follow the lead of the respondent. Interviewers were trained to ask probing questions to gain further insight into issues raised. Four separate interview guides were used with: children, adults, community leaders, and members of NGOs or government. Each questionnaire addressed the same core issues, but in varying levels of depth and complexity and from varying perspectives. Interviews lasted from 45 to two hours depending on the experiences and engagement of the respondent.

Data Capture

Researchers used digital voice recorders during interviews and focus group discussions with the consent of the participants. Recorders, along with handwritten notes, allowed the researchers to create abbreviated transcripts for each activity containing extensive direct quotes. Research team leaders conducted an initial review of each transcript, focusing on ensuring the transcript was complete, as well as offering ongoing feedback and guidance to researchers on ways to improve their data collection techniques. Next, the international consultant reviewed transcripts for any additional improvement or feedback. Once the transcripts were finalized all recordings were

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[19] Ager, Alastair, Lindsay Stark, and Alina Potts. *Participatory Ranking Methodology: A Brief Guide*. The Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University. February 2010.

deleted. All transcripts were saved in Microsoft Word documents and double-checked for any potential identifiers.

Data Analysis

The international consultant and a graduate student at Columbia University reviewed all transcripts, reading each multiple times. The transcripts were then entered into Atlas TI and coded according to the issues and themes identified. Atlas TI was used for basic analysis and quote identification, and to identify patterns among codes according to location, age, gender, role of the respondent, and the type of data collection activity. Analysis of the focus group discussions and the functional network matrices was conducted by hand, segregating information by the categories listed above. In addition to looking at the data using these categories, the information was also interpreted holistically, looking at what the data showed about the role of the community in child protection currently, where linkages or disconnects exist between child protection in communities and at the district or national level.

Presentation of Findings

The findings from this research were presented in Nebbi and Arua Districts at verification workshops in November 2012, with separate workshops held in each district for community members and staff of NGOs and government. Participants were asked to review and give feedback on the findings, as well as contribute to the recommendations on actions going forward, both for the community itself and the Uganda Program Learning Group. Participants agreed with findings on the whole, and were eager to offer other child protection violations of which they were aware, many of which were raised during research, but not with such frequency that they are discussed herein. The findings of these workshops were then presented, along with research findings, to the national Program Learning Group members, who will use the findings from both to formulate objectives and plans to use these findings going forward. Key findings will be shared with a wider Uganda audience, with individual PLG members taking responsibility to disseminate findings to their partners and members of other networks to ensure wide readership and knowledge sharing.

Limitations

This research was limited by time, in that it was only possible to collect data from four sites in each district. Thus, while this information is quite rich, it does not include the views and perspectives of individuals outside of those communities, nor of all individuals in each community. This research is based on perceptions of community members, and while observation was informative, time spent in the communities was not sufficient to verify all protection issues raised. While triangulation through multiple data sources is helpful, it does not eliminate the possibility that reporting bias may exist.

Interviewers received ten days of rigorous training, however much of the methodology applied in the mapping was new to them, and therefore there were many instances during data collection where issues were not probed as deeply as possible and depth was missing from those transcripts. Additionally, in interviewer recruitment the research coordinator planned to train more people than needed on the data collection teams, so that those best suited could be chosen; however, due to lack of qualified personnel this was not possible. Finally, oversight in the field was not as stringent as it could have been, leading to disparity in numbers and gender-balance of data collection activities in the two counties. This lack of oversight diminished the capacity of the

teams to shift target groups or activities based on what they observed, for example targeting children of a particular sub-type that was not anticipated during research design, however without ongoing input and oversight of research leaders some of these opportunities to expand upon expected respondent groups and reach members of hidden or vulnerable groups may have been missed.

Whenever data are collected about sensitive subjects, such as child protection, there is always the possibility of masking, whether to make the issues seem more pressing or drastic than they are, or to disguise them from the researchers. The first issue would skew results positively, making it appear as though child protection issues are more numerous or dire than in reality, most likely guided by a hope for outside support and assistance. If the latter type of masking occurred, it could skew results negatively, making it appear as though certain issues were less of a problem. This latter sort of masking could occur could due to feelings of shame about the issues occurring. In particular this type of masking was noted in reference to reporting of boys being sexually exploited or abused, which was reported by some participants but steadfastly denied by others. Masking to minimize the appearance of child protection issues could relate to fear of reporting or lack of confidentiality from other group participants, or fear of punishment as, given the reported prevalence of these issues in communities, it is likely that many of the respondents have committed or been victims of one or more of the child protection violations listed. While this research does not gauge the prevalence of particular violations, triangulation using multiple sources of data helped validate much of the reporting. At the same time it must be noted that even if an issue fails to *be validated* through the multiple methods utilized, this may not be sufficient to conclude the absence of that issue, given the hidden nature of many of the issues.

With members of NGOs and government serving as researchers and the teams being transported in a ChildFund vehicle, it is natural that community members might associate the research team with authority, which may have skewed responses. Additionally, an unrelated group recently conducted research that had the unanticipated outcome of heightening the incidence of domestic violence due to the issues addressed and the methodology. These limitations may have influenced participation in the research, whether positively, where people wanted to participate because of an anticipated benefit, or negatively, where people, particularly women, were hesitant to participate because of past negative experiences.

The history of conflict in the region may have caused limitations; in some areas both community members and government officials met researchers with suspicion. In some places, particularly those with intense and long lasting conflict experiences, government officials would not allow researchers to spend the night in the community, as this could mean they were attempting to recruit youth for a rebel group. While this did not severely limit the actual data collected, it may have caused participants to withhold some answers, and also speaks to the ongoing feeling of the threat of outsiders.

It was more difficult for researchers to reach some hidden or vulnerable groups compared to others, for example children out of school, especially those earning money in an illicit or hidden manner. Additionally, because groups of hidden populations are more difficult to gather for a focus group discussion, their views were mainly heard through interviews.

Key Findings

Data Sources

Individual interviews were conducted in four locations in each district with children (11 – 18 years), adults, government and NGO employees, and community leaders. Government and NGO employees are all individuals who are employed to carry out community development and related activities, they include members of the police, health sector, probation office, community development office, and other government offices based at the sub-county level or higher. Government includes members of Local Councils II – V, while members of Local Council I were considered community leaders as they work exclusively within their own communities and are elected by local constituents. This distinction was made and decided upon by members of the research team. Community leaders are those who participate in community development and child protection on a volunteer or ad hoc basis such as church leaders, leaders and members of community-based organizations, teachers who conduct community outreach, founders of neighbourhoods, elders, and individuals identified by other respondents as leaders within their community.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were held with children (11-17), youth (18-24), and adults (25+), which were segregated by gender. In each location the team attempted to hold one FGD with each sub-group.

Table 1: Number of Focus Group Discussions

		Focus Group Discussion Sub-Type								
		Child		Youth		Adult		Total by District		
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
Arua	# FGD	2	1	4	1	7	4	13	6	19
	# People	18	10	37	10	69	35	124	55	179
Nebbi	# FGD	4	4	4	3	4	4	12	11	23
	# People	38	43	41	28	31	38	110	109	219
FGD by Gender		6	5	8	4	11	8	25	17	42
People by Gender		56	53	78	38	100	73	234	164	398
FGD # Total		11		12		19		42		
People # Total		109		116		173		398		

In total 244 people were consulted through individual interviews and focus group discussions in Arua district, and 301 in Nebbi district.

Key Informant Interviews

In total 148 individual were interviewed, 66 in Arua and 82 in Nebbi. These included 41 interviews with children, 50 interviews with adults, 35 interviews with government or NGO staff, and 22 interviews with community leaders including sub-area leaders, LCIs, and religious leaders. Researchers aspired to interview an approximately equal number of males and females

from each sub-category of respondent, however in each category slightly more males were interviewed than females.

Table 2: Number of Key Informant Interviews

District	Key Informant Sub-Type								Total
	Children		Adults		Gov. or NGO		Community Leader		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Arua	10	6	12	3	12	8	12	3	66
Nebbi	15	10	15	20	10	5	5	2	82
Total/ gender	25	16	27	23	22	13	17	5	
Total	**41**		**50**		**35**		**22**		**148**

Orientation and Observation

Researchers spent their first day in each location familiarizing themselves with the physical aspects of the community, including the neighbourhoods, local gathering points, and places where children tend to congregate. They created maps and conducted transect walks to organize and systematize the process. Each researcher described their experiences and perceptions of the community from that initial orientation process in a transcript. Researchers also conducted participatory observation during their time in each community, choosing locations where children were likely to be present, and where researchers were likely to observe the normal interaction between children, adults, and other children. Researchers conducted observations where they believed they would observe different aspects of children's daily lives including their work, school, play, and movement within communities.

Focus Group Discussion Results

During Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), participants free-listed all the issues they could think of that "make children feel unsafe or insecure". Participants defined each of the issues listed to ensure clarity. Participants then discussed why each issue was important to them and their community, and voted on which issues were most important. Importance was defined according to the participants in each FGD; some participants believed the prevalence influenced importance, while others considered the consequences of the issue to be most important. In addition to 'importance', researchers further clarified by asking participants which issues were 'most pressing' in their community. Once the top three most important issues were identified using voting, participants discussed how communities respond to the top one or two issues, depending on time.

In the analysis described below, frequency of mention refers to the number of groups where a particular issue was mentioned, out of the total number of groups conducted. Issues were counted as mentioned if they were ever listed during a FGD, even if they were not ranked. An issue might be mentioned but not ranked if FGD participants listed many issues, but ranked only some of them, for example if they mentioned 12 issues but ranked only five, this would leave seven issues that were mentioned but were not ranked. Groups were encouraged to list as many issues as possible to allow them the time and space to explore more sensitive issues, however due to time constraints all of these issues were ranked. The goal of calculating the frequency with which a particular issue is mentioned is to determine whether a particular issue was raised amongst all the groups, regardless of whether or not it was ranked. Some risks may be frequently mentioned, although rarely ranked highly, if ranked at all, because they are not viewed as the most important, or only a few participants in each group view the issue as a source of harm to

children. When looking at the results from all respondents, an example can be seen with the female ranking of corporal punishment. One third of FGDs with women and girls mentioned corporeal punishment as a risk to children. However, of the groups that ranked corporal punishment as one of the most important risks, the mean rank was 3.25, far below many other risks that were mentioned less frequently.

The mean rank is the average of all times an FGD voted that the risk was one of the most important risks to children in the community, with 1 meaning most important, and lower numbers denoting less importance. Means were only calculated for issues that were raised in at least ¼ FGDs within a particular subgroup, or overall. The mean rank is important because while an issue may not be raised as often as another, it may be consistently ranked as one of the most important threats to children. For example while rape and death of parents were mentioned with similar frequency (15/43 and 16/43 respectively), the mean rank of rape was 4.4, while the mean rank of death of parents was 1.8, indicating that FGD participants consistently view death of parents as a more important or pressing issue that children face.

Table 3: Risks Mentioned in Focus Group Discussions by All Respondents

Risk	Frequency of Mention			Mean Rank		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total*
Neglect	**14/18**	**19/25**	**33/43**	2.58	2.18	2.35
Child Labour	12/18	12/25	24/43	2.58	2.8	2.69
Early Marriage	5/18	13/25	18/43	3.25	3.17	3.19
Death of Parent(s)	6/18	10/25	16/43	1.8	**1.89**	1.86
Rape	6/18	9/25	15/43	4.4	3.71	3.99
Early Pregnancy	6/18	6/25	12/43	1.4	4.4	2.9
Defilement	4/18	8/25	12/43	4.11	3.8	3.9
School Dropout	4/18	8/25	12/43	2.67	3.67	3.34
Corporal Punishment / Beating	6/18	4/25	10/43	3.25	2	2.75
Drug Abuse	8/18	2/25	10/43	**1.0**	2.33	**1.27**

*Weighted

Neglect of children was mentioned most frequently in FGDs by both males and females and overall. Child labour was mentioned second most frequently by females, and third most frequently by males. Males mentioned early marriage second most frequently, while females brought up early marriage as a risk to children after seven other issues. Females ranked drug abuse as the most important issue (1.0), followed by early pregnancy (1.4), and death of parents (1.8). Males ranked death of parents as the most important issue (1.89), followed by corporal punishment (2.0), and neglect. Overall drug abuse was ranked as most important (1.27), followed by death of parents (1.86), and neglect (2.35). Results are not segregated by data collection location due to the lack of diversity of results, with the exception of drug use and abuse, which was only report in adults and male youths in Arua.

Table 4: Risks Mentioned in Focus Group Discussions by Adults

Risk	Frequency of Mention			Mean Rank*		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Neglect	**5/8**	**8/11**	**13/19**	2.3	2.0	2.12
Early Marriage	4/8	7/11	11/19	3.7	4.0	3.89
Child Labour	**5/8**	5/11	10/19	2.8	2.5	2.65
Early Pregnancy	4/8	3/11	7/19	1.7	3.0	2.26
School Dropout	3/8	4/11	7/19	2.0	1.5	**1.71**
Defilement	2/8	5/11	7/19	3.5	4.0	3.86
Drug Abuse	2/8	5/11	7/19	**1.0**	3.0	2.43
Corporal Punishment / Beating	3/8	3/11	6/19	4.0	**1.0**	2.5
Child Prostitution	1/8	4/11	5/19	5.0	3.8	4.04
Abusive Language	3/8	0/11	3/19	3.7	Unranked	3.7

*Weighted

Adults listed neglect, early marriage, and child labour most frequently; while school dropout (1.71), neglect (2.12), early pregnancy (2.26) were ranked as most important. Women in FGDs mentioned neglect, child labour, early marriage, and early pregnancy most frequently, while they ranked drug abuse (1.0), early pregnancy (1.7), and school dropout (2.0) as most important. Men mentioned neglect, early marriage, child labour, defilement, and drug abuse most frequently, but ranked corporal punishment / beating (1.0), school dropout (1.71), and neglect (2.12), as most important among the things that make children feel unsafe and insecure in their communities. While death of parents was frequently mentioned and highly ranked by both youth and children (which is reflected in its high placement in the overall results), adults did not frequently mention or highly rank this risk. Child prostitution was only frequently mentioned or ranked by adults, and while it was more frequently mentioned by men, it was only ranked as among the most important risks to children in one FGD. Adults did not frequently mention rape or rank it highly, although it was mentioned by slightly less than half of all youth and children's focus groups. Yet, even among the youth and children, this issue received a consistently low, or less important, rank.

Table 5: Risks Mentioned in Focus Group Discussions by Youth

Risk	Frequency of Mention			Mean Rank		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total*
Neglect	**5/5**	**7/8**	**12/13**	2.8	2.43	2.58
Death of Parents	3/5	5/8	8/13	2.33	2.0	2.12
Rape	3/5	3/8	6/13	5.0	5.0	5.0
Child Labour	3/5	2/8	5/13	3.0	4.0	3.4
Early Marriage	1/5	4/8	5/13	**2.0**	2.0	2.0
School Dropout	0/5	4/8	4/8	Unranked	4.0	4.0
Early Pregnancy	0/5	3/8	3/8	Unranked	4.33	4.33
Drug Abuse	0/8	3/8	3/8	Unranked	**1.67**	**1.67**
Corporal Punishment / Beating	3/5	0/8	2/8	2.67	Unranked	2.67

*Weighted

Youth most often mentioned neglect (12/13), death of parents (8/13), and rape (6/13) as the most important issues facing children in their communities. The issues with the highest mean rank, among issues ranked by both genders, were early marriage (2.0), death of parents (2.12), and

neglect (2.58). All FGDs involving female youth mentioned neglect as an issue, followed in frequency mentioned by death of parents, rape, and child labour. Female youth ranked early marriage (2.0), death of parents (2.33), and corporal punishment / beating (2.67) as the most important issues.

In contrast, no male youth group mentioned beating or corporal punishment as something that makes children feel unsafe or insecure. Male youth FGDs most frequently mentioned neglect, death of parents, early marriage, and school dropout. These young men ranked drug abuse (1.67), early marriage (2.0), and death of parents (2.0) as the most important sources of harm to children. Drug abuse was only mentioned and ranked by male youth and adults, however when the issue was mentioned, it was usually ranked highly.

Table 6: Risks Mentioned in Focus Group Discussions by Children

Risk	Frequency of Mention			Mean Rank		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total*
Child Labour	**4/5**	**5/6**	**9/11**	2.0	2.8	2.44
Neglect	**4/5**	4/6	8/11	2.5	**2.0**	2.25
Early Pregnancy	2/5	1/6	3/11	**1.0**	4.0	2.67
Death of Parents	2/5	3/6	5/11	**1.0**	**2.0**	**1.6**
Defilement	1/5	4/6	5/11	4	5.0	4.8
Rape	1/5	4/6	5/11	4	5.33	5.06
Abusive Language	2/5	1/6	3/11	5	8.0	6.0
Kidnapping	0/5	3/6	3/11	Not ranked	5.5	5.5
Forced Marriage	1/5	2/6	3/11	3	7.0	5.67
Corporal Punishment/ Beating	1/5	2/6	3/11	Not ranked	**2.0**	2.0
Sexual Harassment	2/5	0/6	2/11	4.5	Not ranked	4.5
Early Marriage	0/5	2/6	2/11	Not ranked	3.0	3.0
Child Sacrifice	0/5	2/6	2/11	Not ranked	4.0	4.0

*Weighted

Children most often mentioned child labour, neglect, death of parents, defilement, and rape as issues that they or their peers experience. Children were the only group to most frequently mention child labour as a problem. Among issues ranked by both genders, children ranked death of parents most highly (1.6), followed by neglect (2.25), and child labour (2.44). Girls listed child labour and neglect most frequently, while they ranked early pregnancy and death of parents as the most pressing problem facing children. Two of five FGDs with girls mentioned facing sexual harassment; this is the only FGD sub-category that did so. Boys most frequently mentioned child labour, neglect, defilement, and rape. They ranked neglect, death of parents, and corporal punishment / beating equally highly (2.0). Boys mentioned kidnapping, corporal punishment/beating, early marriage, and child sacrifice, while no girls groups mentioned these issues. Children and adult women were the only groups to list abusive language as a source of harm to children.

Main Child Protection Concerns

Participants in interviews and FGDs mentioned each of the child protection concerns listed below as issues that make children feel unsafe or insecure in Nebbi or Arua. The risks and challenges faced by children in these districts are segregated into the following categories: neglect, child labour, early pregnancy and marriage, sexual abuse, and physical abuse. The causes and consequences of these risks, as identified by participants, are also discussed. All speakers are identified only by their gender and age category in order to protect confidentiality. Please see Appendix for diagrams of how communities respond to several of the risks discussed below.

A. Neglect or Lack of Parental Care

Respondents consistently identified a lack of parental care as one of the most pressing concerns facing children in Arua and Nebbi. It was the most frequently mentioned source of harm facing children in FGDs with both youth and adults, and was first or second most frequently mentioned in FGDs with children. Children were the only sub-group that did not mention neglect most frequently; labour and overworking was brought up more often during their FGDs. Male adults and youth ranked child neglect as the third most important issue, while male children ranked it as the most important issue. Female adults and youth did not rank neglect, while female children ranked it as the third most important issue.

As described by one girl: "Neglect is where the parents don't provide the basic needs of life to the children, for example, shelter, food and others." In addition to food and shelter a female adult offered a more expansive definition of what things are essential for children, and thereby, what constitutes neglect, "This is when parents don't provide basic necessities of life such as food, clothes as well as for scholastic materials e.g. exercise book, uniform and as well as pay school fees". By including scholastic supplies and fees in her definition of neglect, this woman has expanded the population of children who can be considered neglected to all those who are out of school because of a lack of materials. However, these definitions do not address whether that neglect is due to an inability to meet children's needs, or because parents make choices about how to spend the family's income, and children's needs are not prioritized.

When describing why neglect is such an important issue, the rationale of respondents most often reflected the severity of the consequences as well as the prevalence of the issue. According to one girl, *"Cases of child neglect are so rampant in this community"*. While the number of children affected appears to have influenced the decision-making process, neglect was also chosen as it means that children are deprived of the basic things they need to survive.

The reasons why children are neglected were not explored in depth; however, there were marked differences in some of the explanations given by different sub-groups. For example, children were most likely to believe that parents neglected children on purpose, and simply chose not to meet their needs, such as one boy who explained that neglect occurs because of, "Purposeful refusal of ones own child; refusal to take care of a child by not providing shelter, education and medical care". A female youth identified the consumption of alcohol as a competing interest that some parents face,

> These days people drink excessively, alcohol has become too cheap and affordable to even children. There is no proper law to regulate its consumption yet people start

drinking from morning hours at smart-ways and the Local Council 1 who should have put the law banning early drinking also drinks 24 hours.

From a young person's perspective, drinking alcohol, or spending money on things other than that child's needs may appear deliberate on the part of the parent.

One adult male also linked neglect with parents choosing to provide selective care. As he described, "This is when a parent sometimes cares much for boy child than caring for girl child, leaving this girl child desperate". While child participants often identified such instances as 'unfair', it was explained that culture and social norms dictate certain roles parents encourage children to fulfil. A man explained, "The boy child is considered most important to study because they are taken as the main part of family." With families traditionally structured around males, and later on male heirs, it is the education of boys that some families considered most important, as it is upon their success or failure that the future of family is believed to rest. In addition, while the traditional male role is that of family support and leadership, females in the areas where data were collected continued to be encouraged to engage in gender-specific roles of homemaking, childbearing, and care giving.

> *My father refused to pay my school fees and buy for me scholastic materials like books, pens, and uniform when I was in primary 5. He told me that girls don't study; it is only boys who study. So my father suggested that there was a man who was ready to marry me but I refused to marry the man and ran away from home.* – Adult Female

This father encouraged his daughter to embrace her traditional role within the community, that of wife and mother, rather than that of a student. This woman's experience can serve as a reminder that while universal education is considered a laudable goal among the international development community, educating girls often contradicts traditional conceptions of gender roles and challenge the age at which children, and especially girls, are expected to embrace different identities, such as wives and mothers. Furthermore, respondents explained that when a couple marries, the wife moves to live with her husband's family,

> *More reason for this is that, when you educate a girl child, she will get married even if after completing her studies. The worst thing here is that, she will begin to help the family of her husband instead of helping her maternal family.* – Adult Male

This man describes educating a girl as something that will not benefit her family, because she may marry or become pregnant young, or even if she completes her education, she will move to live with her husband's family once she marries. This is in contrast with educating a boy, which may benefit his parents directly, as he will continue to contribute to the household economy in the future.

In additional to parental considerations about children's contribution to the household economy and their roles in the family and community, respondents also frequently described parents as being financially unable to provide for all their children's needs.

> *Children, whose parents are economically poor, feel much more insecure than those whose parents are well off. This is because without resources / finances, it becomes difficult to solve any problem that might arise e.g. lack of food and purchase of basic necessities.* – Female Youth

In an instance such as that described above, regardless of the intentions of parents, they may be simply incapable of meeting their children's needs because of a lack of household income. As this respondent describes, income is not only something that families use to meet their needs, it also may contribute to the resiliency of a household. Access to funds, or a means to earn them, can allow a family to function in the face of adversity, while a family without such access may face hunger or other issues. Household income not only influences the potential for a household to withstand adversity, but also changes the distribution of labour within a household.

> *Parents that have some money tend to bring in house-girls that are people to handle domestic work like cooking, fetching water, and cleaning the room and in-turn, the maids are paid money for their work done. This saves children from doing too much work.*
> - Adult Female

When a family has sufficient income to shift the burden of work within the household, respondents described this as affecting children, as they are often responsible for daily tasks within the home. When children are not responsible for meeting their own needs, and have the time, and their family has the resources, to care for them, community members generally agreed that they were unlikely to be neglected. It is worth noting, however, that domestic helpers may, themselves, be children, and therefore the child protection concerns associated with neglect and labour may be transferred to those children.

> *You could be staying with a guardian and she will make you work a lot, for example; you are supposed to cook, fetch water, collect firewood yet also study at the same time. If you were with the biological parents, you wouldn't have such problem.* – Girl

This girl describes living with an alternative caregiver as increasing the risk that a child will be overworked. While this could benefit the biological children of the alternative caregiver, as they would no longer be given as many tasks, and might have more time for education, this occurs at the expense of the education, and potentially the wellbeing of another child.

Respondents described a lack of essential things, such as food and shelter, and being responsible for much work at home, and neglect as closely associated to children leaving school. Despite Uganda's Universal Primary Education (UPE), which allows all children to attend primary school free of charge, a female youth explained that children must pay for uniforms, supplies, and for transportation.

> *I arrived in the neighbourhood, and found a child in [school] uniform being questioned by the father as to why he was back home early from school, the child told the dad that he was chased from school because of lack of exercise book; the book got finished and he needed a new one in order to be allowed in class. The father was furious and said that was his stupidity and that of the teacher. The child removed his uniform and changed into other clothes. As he sat on the veranda, the father got a stick and caned him pointing out that the son is looking for ways to misuse his money.*

As described above, sometimes parents do not prioritize their children's educational needs. According to respondents this is often due to the expense or due to a lack of understanding about formal education, as many parents themselves received limited formal education. "The parents don't send children to school to learn to read and write. It is laziness or they just fail to bring their child right*,"* according to one girl. However, enrolling a child in school has not always been

part of raising a child well, and this shift towards education, in lieu of work at home or early marriage appears to be ongoing.

A lack of access to education is not the only consequence of neglect. Basic needs such as food and clothing may be denied if parents spend family funds elsewhere, as an adult man describes here:

> *There is a man who produced seven children and buying food for them or educating them is a big problem. He comes home drunk and beats everyone. When people want to intervene the woman refuses yet it is the children suffering.* – Adult Male

The quote above exemplifies the multiplicity of issues that often accompany neglect, including lack of access to education and food, as well as alcoholism and domestic violence. Factors such as having a large families or insufficient household livelihoods may also influence neglect. What these associated issues have in common is that they are things that children are exposed to, and are beyond their control.

When children experience severe neglect, where they do not have access to food or shelter, respondents explained that children might need to become self-sufficient:

> *Child neglect can force children in to the streets and become street children who beg and sometimes steal to get their needs like clothes, food*. – Female Youth

Working or living on the street exposes children to significant risks, beyond hunger and lack of access to education. Children without the protection and guidance of adults are vulnerable to influence from adults, who may take advantage of their situation, as described by a female youth,

> *Girls always need extra things like smearing oil, rings, sanitary pads among others, which if not provided for by the parents, they go out for boys who can provide in exchange with sex. This puts them in the risk of getting HIV/AIDS*. – Female Youth

All children who are neglected do not leave school or home, nor do all children who are neglected engage in transactional sex; however neglect was very often the first child protection violation reportedly experienced by children, before they experienced others.

Child neglect is complex and multifaceted, and contributes to the majority of issues facing children in Arua and Nebbi. Children who do not experience neglect are significantly less vulnerable to many of the risks described, as they are more likely to have access to a sufficient support system. The issues that can lead to or are the result of neglect will be addressed in more detail further on, but neglect of children's needs is a crosscutting issue that is pervasive and heightens children's vulnerability to many of the issues below.

Responses

According to respondents, when children face neglect they may often do nothing, but if they do choose or are able to ask for help, they may approach their parents, relatives, neighbours, religious leaders, or teachers. On the whole neglect or lack of parental care were described as issues usually addressed within the family or immediate community by adults with whom children have trusting relationships. These are the adults that children tend to interact with regularly, and therefore respondents perceived them as the 'natural helpers' within the community.

Here, a boy describes one of the most commonly mentioned protective factors for children experiencing neglect, a relationship with a 'natural helper', and how, without such a relationship where a child feels supported, he/she may never ask for help:

> *Children deal with the problem alone because most children are still young and therefore do not know how to respond to the problem. If mistreated, they deal with it. Some children fear parents; they don't want to be looked at as if they are challenging parents' authority.* – Boy

According to this boy, neglect is not something a child could discuss with his or her parents alone, but would need the support of another adult to do so. Without such help, respondents reported that children could choose to keep quiet about the neglect, but that they might have to leave school and either start working or get married. These were the options respondents described as available to children who did not seek and receive outside help, whether they stayed at home, or chose to leave home, whether to live on their own or with a friend or relative.

The age of the child experiencing neglect was also described as influencing whether he or she could ask for help.

> *Some children are too young to ask for help. They deal with their problem, especially with regard to child neglect. However, those who are 12 years would tell relatives (uncles and aunties) and peers. The child talks to these people because she/he feels they are easy to talk to, are approachable and understanding.* – Boy

With the help of relatives, according to respondents, a child may be able to approach his or her parents, once the neglect has been verified. As highlighted in the quote above, another option for children, who may be hesitant to approach an adult directly, is to tell a peer about the neglect.

> *When a boy experiences child neglect, he will seek help from peers so that they could talk to his parents on his behalf. He could as well talk to relatives (grandmother, grandfather and uncle) hoping they would support him with his studies.* – Male Adult

According to this man, a peer may help a child speak to his parents, supporting the claim that children need the support of someone from outside their immediate families in order to discuss their care with their parents. This man also pointed to relatives as a source of help. This quote and the previous quote support the idea of relatives both as a source that might provide financial support for unmet needs, as well as mediators who might advocate for the child and positively influence parental behaviour.

When approaching the parents, children and whoever is offering them support and guidance, were described as being most likely discuss the matter with the mother first.

> *The family, which now begins from the mother that the child reported to, will talk to the father of the child and if nothing positive comes out of the dialogue, she goes to the relatives to seek support in talking to the husband. The relatives will call for a dialogue meeting with perpetrator, if the perpetrator accepts taking responsibility, then they set him free but if not, they go to the LCs, sub-county and police.* – Male Youth

Here a youth explains that after the issue is discussed with the mother, and then the father, the father acts as the decision maker, if he fails to provide the child with the things he/she is lacking, the issue may be returned to the relatives to mediate. If a resolution is not reached, the parents may be reported to the LC1 or the police, as neglect was often acknowledged as a crime. During

an FGD with men, respondents reported that the LC1's "can summon the parents of the child and fine them," or if the parents do not have the money, "The LC can also arrest animals and sell them to buy scholastic materials for the child." Such mediation and negotiation was generally described as the outcome sought from involving authorities. The shame of being reported for neglect was also described as influencing parents' future behaviour.

In at least one community, however, measures have been taken to address neglect through the LCI according to a female community leader.

> *For the case of child neglect, we have local law formulated by the local community that parents who neglect their children have to be given 10 days to provide all what the children are lacking and if she/he fails, the parents are imprisoned and receives corporal punishment; but we don't have any decision because parents don't report those cases to LC1.* – Female Community Leader

As described above, the central issue addressed by this community bylaw is the provision of necessities to children rather than punitive measures against parents, unless parents do not comply with the law after being told to do so. Yet, according to this female community leader the law has not been implemented due to a lack of cases reported.

Similarly, young people also expressed that when children experience neglect reporting the issue to an element of the formal child protection system is not always perceived to be an option, according to female youth.

> *The sub-county is not used because such matters like child neglect are settled at family level. Unless all other internal (inside) options within the family have failed. It can also create more rifts between the child and the father (parent). It's therefore less appropriate, though people / leaders know about the option.*

> *Going to police is not an option, a child / family would most likely take because it is viewed as a family issue or concern and needs to be settled within the family.*

While many respondents identified the neglect of children as something that should be avoided, most described approaching outside authorities only for mediation assistance, because if the parent is taken to the police and to court, he or she would be arrested, and the child would continue to be neglected. According to a group of male teachers, *"Parents will be arrested and charged in the court. The parent will feel embarrassed and begin to help the child."* In this case bringing a parent to the police and then the court serves to exert sufficient legal and social pressure on the parent to provide for the child.

But approaching outside authorities was not commonly mentioned as a typical response to neglect. In some FGDs where the response to child neglect was mapped, approaching people outside of the family for support or mediation was not mentioned as an option. Instead this group of women focused on what parents could do better in the future.

> *Parents should love garden work so that they can have enough food to feed the children. If they don't have enough garden, they can rent from those that have in abundance. Children should also be encouraged to give a helping hand to the parents during this process since working for a common goal is not a child labour at all.*

As described by a woman above, child neglect or a lack of parental care is most often viewed as an issue that can be addressed, rather than something insurmountable. Whether it is by increasing garden work, or relying on relatives, respondents identified existing sources of support within their communities to address neglect.

B. Child Labour

During FGDs, adult women identified labour and overworking as the most important issues facing children, while among adult men it was the third most mentioned. However, it was not among the highest ranked issues in either group. While child labour was not one of the most frequently mentioned issues among youth, male youth ranked it as the most important risk to children. Both boys and girls identified labour and overworking most frequently during FGDs, and both boys and girls ranked the issue as the second most important issue children face, behind death of parents.

When defining child labour, respondents focused on the types of work that are inappropriate for children, rather than whether children should work.

> *Child labour is when a child performs some work that is not appropriate for their age, like doing so many things yet feels or is too young to do the entire things and carrying something that is too heavy.* – Girl

When considering which kinds of work children should not do, most respondents agreed with the girl above, in that it is child labour when the loads are too heavy, the children could get hurt doing the work, or that it was *too much* work for a child. According to a boy, "...children are given too much work to do like cooking food, fetching water, collecting firewood, digging in the garden for long hours". This quantity of work can make it so the child has no time to do other things including attending school, studying, or playing with friends. Work that is dangerous to children was also identified as inappropriate, "...[it] can lead to children getting accidents for example when you send a child to the bush to collect firewood and he may be bitten by snake and dies". A male community leader identified other types of work as dangerous for children, "...where children are made to cut trees and burn it to charcoal. Tobacco growing areas also, all of this affects children's lives". Types of work that could permanently disable or even kill children were rarely viewed as suitable work.

The reasons for parents or caregivers asking their children to perform extensive work, or work that other might consider inappropriate for their age or capacity, varied. One boy described child labour as the result of neglect: "Children who are being denied access to education will want to earn a living so as a result, they are given hark work to do". If children are not attending school, they are expected to contribute to the household economy, and some of the work they engage in may be inappropriate.

Labour in households in Arua and Nebbi was described as being gender-specific, and respondents discussed that the work children do is also assigned by gender.

> *This is the cultural division of labour between the male and female sex. You find that girls are over loaded with domestic work in pretence that they are trained for their future husband.* – Male Youth

According to the male youth above, labour is divided amongst children the same way it is divided between adults. However, as women are expected to care for the home, and children

most often work in or around the home, girls tend to have many duties. In assisting their mothers with duties caring for the home and family, girls can spend a significant amount of time working, especially in places that are far from water sources or areas where firewood may be collected.

> *Girls get more problems than boys. This is because of parents' perception on labour distribution at home like girls are supposed to fetch water, cook food, wash clothes and baby-sit, meanwhile, the boys are only to rear animals that is if the animals are there but if they are not there, boys just sit doing nothing.* – Female Youth

According to the female youth above, the work assigned to girls can be both time consuming and physically demanding, which some respondents related to girls lacking time to devote to their studies.

> *At times a child that is young fetches water using a 20-litre jerry-can 8 times a day, yet she is supposed to also study besides going to the market, this affects a child's education.* – Female Adult

While accessing water and food may not appear to be a full day's work, without access to transportation, going to the market and fetching enough water to supply a family could last a full day. Respondents described the time consuming nature of children's work as being closely tied to children's lack of academic achievement or attainment.

> *When a child is over worked and no time is given to read or reach school on time, this child will end up reaching school late and also fail the exams at the end of it all.* – Girl

As this girl describes, a child's work at home is often prioritized over school attendance and studying, which can lead to low academic achievement and attainment. Poor performance or lack of support from parents was described as discouraging children from continuing to study, with child labour as one of several causal factors leading to children leaving school.

Responses

When considering whom children might approach if their caregivers ask them to do too much work, or heavy or dangerous work, most respondents said that children would tell no one, as it is viewed as normative and part of being a child. However if a child were to tell someone, according to a male adult, he/she would most likely tell:

> *...relatives or parents come up to take away the child from hard work. That is relocating the child from the place he/she has been mistreated from to another, probably to the biological mother.* – Male Adult

The assumption here is that a child being overworked is likely in a household without his or her biological mother. The responses to child labour were described differently depending on who is making the child work, with the child being returned to biological parents if it is with alternative caregivers, but with the situation being slightly more complex if it is the biological parents themselves who are overworking the child.

The child may look to an outside 'helper' for support if a biological parent is asking the child to do too much work.

> *When a child experiences too much work, she will inform her peers and aunty. The peers will offer her advice, some will advise her to persevere while others will advise to run*

> *away and possibly elope with a man. On the other hand if she informs her aunty, the aunty will inform other family members and a family meeting is held to sort out the problem. She eventually stays with her aunty or parents.* – Boy

Here a boy describes the difference in responses a child might receive if he or she approached a peer for help, and would receive advice, compared to approaching a relative who might call for mediation between family members.

After children approach their relatives for help, an important step was for the relatives to investigate the child's story.

> *If a child in our community is faced with child labour, he can inform his relatives especially the grandparents who would call the parents to inquire if what the child has said is true. If it is true and the parents try to deny it, in such cases the grandparents may decide to take care of the child but still warn the parent not to abuse any of the children left behind.* – Boy

In this case, the respondent describes the grandparents as deciding whether the way parents are treating a child is acceptable, and if it isn't they will not only take the child, but also advise the parents about the care of their other children.

However, if the matter is not resolved by family mediation, or if relatives did not offer to host the child, respondents reported that it was unlikely relatives would take further action. If the overworking continues, children have several options to address the situation.

> *If a child does not want to work at home or do all what is assigned to her, she has no choice but to do it; and after doing it for some time and it has become excessive, or too much a child at times is forced to run away. She either gets married or gets into prostitution.* – Girl

This respondent describes the possible outcomes for children who leave home, especially girls, as potentially negative, given the risks associated with commercial sex work and early marriage. In addition, given the gender-segregated labour roles, it is unlikely that early marriage will result in a girl working less, as she will likely move to live with her husband's family and will be expected to care for that household.

Rather than run away, a child may also move to live with another family, either that of a relative or a friend.

> *Family members who have money or resource will take custody of the girl and support her. However, there are instances where the family can't support the child and she has to now fend for herself.* – Girl

This girl explains the caveat of this option - that the child must have relatives or friends who can afford to support her. Living with alternative caregivers can be positive, but it also carries its share of risks, as respondents described many families treating biological and non-biological children differently.

Respondents occasionally described bringing the issue to an LC1 or community leader as a potential response, or that one of these individuals could approach the family. An adult woman explained, "The community leaders can summon the parents of the child and warn them of the

dangers of child abuse," before such a judgement was given, "It will be the community leaders, the local council of the village who would decide when a child is faced with child labour." This puts community leaders in the position to define was constitutes child labour in a community, as they are the ones called upon to decide whether a parents have been treating a child unfairly.

C. Early Pregnancy and Marriage

C1. Early Pregnancy

FGDs of adult women listed early pregnancy second most frequently, following neglect and child labour, which tied for most often mentioned. Adult men mentioned early pregnancy less frequently than women (3/11 FGDs vs. 4/8) and also ranked the issue as less important, ranking it as tied for the 5th most important issue, compared to women who ranked early pregnancy as second most important, following drug use and abuse. However, drug abuse was only mentioned in Arua; adult women in Nebbi ranked early pregnancy as the most important issue.

Male youth mentioned early pregnancy as something that makes children under 18 (and therefore including themselves) feel unsafe or insecure in 3/8 FGDs, while the issue was never mentioned during a female youth FGD. Early pregnancy received a mean rank of 4.33, ranking it 7th most important.

Girls mentioned early pregnancy as negatively affecting children in 2/5 FGDs, equally as frequently as death of parents; early pregnancy and death of parents also received an equal mean rank of 1.0, which means in every FGD where either issue was mentioned, girls ranked it as the most important. Boys mentioned early pregnancy in 1/6 FGDs, and the issue received an average rank of 4.0, where it tied for 5th next to child sacrifice.

When considering early pregnancy, some respondents defined it as any pregnancy occurring before age 18, while others believed it was only 'early' if the girl was 15 or younger. The consequences of early pregnancy were described as potentially serious for both the girl and her partner, as described by a male community member:

> *There was a girl who got pregnant at the age of 14 years, when she has just seen her second menstruation period. When she realized she was pregnant, and told the boy who impregnated her, the boy denied responsibility and out of frustration, took poison and died.* – Male Adult

According to respondents, when confronted by a girl claiming to be carrying their child, boys and men could choose to accept the pregnancy, in which case they will often marry the pregnant girl. Alternatively, respondents explained that the man might choose to deny that the child is theirs, which can lead to anything from involvement of authorities to suicide, as described above.

Participants in FGDs and interviews detailed multiple reasons for early pregnancy, and this issue is closely connected to almost every other risk to children discussed in this report. One woman pointed to the lack of sex education, from parents or schools, "*Children are not exposed to sex education so they will want to discover but end up pregnant and forced to marry at an early age.*" Without knowledge about reproduction and family planning, children engaging in sexual activity have few options to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Men were most likely to blame girls for their pregnancies, despite the fact that they were not of legal age to consent, or, in some cases, even if force was used. Some community members emphasized that the ways girls act and the clothes they wear could invite sex and assault:

The girls themselves lead to teenage pregnancies. This is because the girls always dress in enticing clothes, that is short skirts, which show almost their private parts. This makes the perpetrators to have a feeling of having them in bed, therefore leading to rape.
– Male NGO

Early pregnancy is more common now than in the past. This is because in the past the girls would dress on well that that means putting on long dresses that make them look decent. But nowadays because of indecent dress that putting on clothes that expose their private parts, which entices a man who in turn ends up raping or marry these young girls, which can result in early pregnancy. – Male NGO

In addition to dressing in a way that entices men, respondents pointed to girls' behaviour and willingness to go to locations where there are men and alcohol is served, as proof that girls want to have sex, and are therefore inviting pregnancy.

Young girls go for discos where they are engaged in sexual intercourse and hence early pregnancy. When they conceive they are sometimes even chased away from home and some times end up not getting married. – Female Adult

Early pregnancy was closely connected to transactional sex in the eyes of many respondents:

Girls in most cases have got a lot of needs, they want to have what they cannot afford and they end up being deceived by big men with money, providing for them their needs at the end she is impregnated. – Female Community Leader

This [early pregnancy] is [caused] when a child begins to misbehave sexually below 18 years of age. When they don't pray to invoke the spirit, which makes them go into sex. And yet sex is a feeling which can be prayed over and it gets off. These are happening with pagans. – Male Community Leader

Above, a female community leader identifies both girls and men as at fault for pregnancies, with girls having many material needs, and having sex with 'big men', or men with money and status, in order to receive those things. A male community leader concurs, describing sexual activity before age 18 as sexual misbehaviour, resulting from other behaviour that is outside the norm in the community, such as a lack of religiosity. However, some respondents identified the boys or men who impregnated to girls as 'at fault' and 'responsible' for the pregnancy.

If a lady got pregnant at an early age, for instance 15 years, the person responsible is interrogated and he will be convicted to pay some money or forced to marry this lady. But this depends on which type of child has been impregnated. Let's take for a case of schoolchild; here the man will be imprisoned. – Female Adult

The woman above describes the age of the girl who is pregnant as the factor that determines whether the boy or man will be asked to pay a fine or dowry and marry her, or whether he will be brought to formal authorities.

When considering the consequences of early pregnancy, one often cited, particularly by children, is the girl's inability to carry and deliver the foetus, due to her incomplete physical development. "Children have difficulty during delivery when they marry while too young as some times they are operated upon" according to a girl. With many girls having children before 18 years, respondents explained that education is also significantly affected, as girls may leave school

either by choice or by mandate of the administration once a pregnancy is discovered, as described below:

> *It can force a girl dropout to school and this is very common in this school. We lost about seven girls last year due to early pregnancy.* - Girl

> *In our primary school, there are few girls in primary seven (P.7). There only 4 girls because of early pregnancy and recently a girl of P4 conceived.* – Girl

Respondents described marriage and pregnancy among teens as common to such an extent that they are the norm, especially among children in their late teens. According to community members, children themselves or parents or guardians may terminate education, largely considered a children's domain, so that young people may become participants in adult social structure of building families.

Responses
The incidence of pregnancy in girls under 18 in Arua and Nebbi is high, as was visible from observation during data collection, and according to accounts given by community members. According to respondents, when a girl discovers she is pregnant, her options were described as being relatively limited. First, a girl was described as having to decide whether or not to attempt an illegal abortion or bear the child. Second, respondents said that the girl must decide whom to tell about the pregnancy. After that point, the girl's parents most often make decisions about the pregnancy, not the girl herself.

The response to an early pregnancy, when out of wedlock, was described as relatively uniform among all the data collection sites and respondent sub-groups. Participants in data collection explained that once a girl finds out she is pregnant and decides to bear the child, it is likely she first will approach a female friend, relative, or her mother.

> *When a girl gets early pregnancy, she will share with her peers, who share with their parents who in turn inform the victim's mother. When the mother learns about it, she informs the father of the victim. The victim informs her peers because she is close to them and it is easy to talk to and they would understand her situation. She doesn't tell parents directly because of fear, but eventually when both parents know about it, the family approaches the perpetrator's family and negotiations are involved to sort out the issue.*
> – Boy

When considering parents' reaction to learning that their daughter was pregnant, respondents shared that the next step is usually to hold a dialogue with the parents of the boy who impregnated her, as described by a boy above. Respondents noted an exception to this response pathway, where is if the girl refuses to reveal who impregnated her, in which case either she might have to raise the child as a single-parent, possibly apart from her parents if they will not allow her to remain in their home. Many community members shared the perspective of the woman below, who explained that if the girl does reveal who the father is, the next step is usually to talk with the boy/man and his family and ask him to 'own' or accept responsibility for the pregnancy.

> *The family member will have to first ask for the man who impregnated their daughter and later they will go to the boys' family to ask for his consent on whether he is the one responsible for that pregnancy. If he accepted, they come to dialogue with the boy's family.* – Female Adult

Community members reported that through this dialogue both sets of parents will negotiate the dowry or bride price for the girl, the amount of which depends on the cultural background of the families, and can be negotiated by a clan elder. According to a boy, "Once successful, money is made to the victims parents but if negotiations fail, the boy is arrested and imprisoned after being reported to police by the victims parents". However, according to this boy the majority of respondents who discussed early pregnancy, refusal to own a pregnancy and marry the girl may lead the person who impregnated the girl to be arrested on charges of defilement. Respondents reported that parents' decision to negotiate for bride price or to report the boy/man to the police depends upon willingness to pay and the age of the girl, as described by a male youth:

> *The family members have to make follow-up by looking for this man responsible for impregnating their daughter, the next step will depend on both the girl's status and the response from the man. If this girl is a school going lady, the man will have to be taken to court. But if the girl was out of school, they can force this man to marry the girl and pay some money.*

If the pregnancy is unwanted, the girl, with the help of her friend, mother, or female relative, may attempt to abort, either at home or with traditional medicine. If the abortion is successful the girl may return to her normal life; however, if the abortion is unsuccessful, as is reportedly often the case, the girl may suffer permanent disability, sterility, or death.

> *For the case of early pregnancy, some say abort, some say run away from home because if it is discovered that you are pregnant, your father will kill you. Some good people advice the child not to abort; she should wait after giving birth; she can go back to school. – Male Adult*

While women and girls often mentioned abortion during data collection, it is generally condemned within the largely Christian population, and reportedly is associated with shame if discovered. Below a male youth describes what could happen to a girl if her parents learned she aborted a pregnancy.

> *They [community members] can advise this girl's family and the girl at large, because this girl can decide to abort and may be the parents can beat this lady to death, so they can advice to cool the situation. – Male Youth*

Abortion is illegal in Uganda, except in special cases, and therefore, respondents explained, that if a girl is found to have undergone one, regardless of the reasons, she might experience shame and even be harmed by other members of the community due to cultural and religious beliefs. Excluding the case of a successful abortion, respondents very frequently described the consequences of an early pregnancy as significant and usually life altering, such as moving away from home or leaving school. . At no point in the mapping of responses to early pregnancy did anyone mention going to an NGO or other members of the formal child protection system for assistance.

C2. Early Marriage
Early marriage was the second most frequently mentioned issue among both male and female adults, but was not ranked in either sub-group. Youth males mentioned early marriage in half of the FGDs conducted with that sub-group, and ranked it as the second most important problem, tied with death of parents. Female youth mentioned early marriage in one of five groups, but in the FGDs where it was addressed, it was ranked at the second most important issue. Only boys

ever mentioned early marriage during FGDs, and it received a mean rank of 4.0 in the two groups where it was discussed, indicating that they perceived it to be of relatively low importance when compared to other issues raised.

When defining early marriage, respondents identified age as the determining factor, "Early marriage is when a girl marries before she reaches the age of 18 year, as recommended by the government of Uganda" according to a male youth. However, despite knowledge of this law, many children, especially girls, are married before 18 years. In fact, according to the 2002 Uganda census, 52% of children under 18 are married in rural areas.[20]

A group of female youth in a focus group discussion at a secondary school succinctly described the reasons a girl might get married:

> *1. Conditions are bad at home and a girl will get married in order to live somewhere else;*
> *2. A girl wants to marry and a man (could be boyfriend or fiancé) will tell her that he will pay her school fees if she marries him, but then he will not send her to school in the end;*
> *3. Parents can force a girl to get married even if she doesn't want to;*
> *4. A girl gets pregnant and then she must marry.*

While none of the girls in the focus group discussion were married, they were among few girls still attending school in their late teens, and had seen most of their peers leave school for one of the above reasons. Respondents of both genders and among different age sub-groups consistently mentioned pregnancy, the wishes of a girl's parents, or the incentive of the girl herself as reasons for early marriage.

> *Some times this is an initiative of the girl herself. She feels she is ready to get married or it can be from the forces that surround her for example, rudeness of the parents, lack adequate provision by the parents, or peer pressure.* - Female Adult

This woman explains that when girls are faced with an unsatisfactory home life, they may view marriage as a means of escape, as respondents explained that most girls were likely to move from their parents' home to the home of a husband. According to respondents, parents of some girls and boys might encourage them to marry early, primarily for the benefit it can bring to their family:

> *There are also some bad parents in the community who encourage their children to get married at early age. For girls they will want wealth, but on the side of the boys, they will expect the woman their child marries will provide labour at home.* – Male Adult

Community members shared that some girls' families may encourage them to marry for the wealth, both in cash and in kind, which will come from the marriage. In contrast respondents explained that some boys' families might want them to marry because they will bring their wives to live with the family, where the new wife would contribute to the labour needs of the family. Most respondents agreed that while many families encourage daughters to marry young, as it is the norm in the area, girls from poor families are particularly likely to experience this pressure, as their families' need for income is greater.

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[20] Uganda Census 2002

Children whose parents are poor are vulnerable to early marriage compared to children from middle families and especially when the parents do not know the important of education. – Male Adult

It is majorly children from the humble families. Boys of 11 and above are dropping of school because of fishing and girls of 13 years and above are being impregnated day and night. Take for example; out of 203 students we have in this school, only 39 are girls. Where are others? Marriage. – Male Adult

Respondents perceived children from poor families as less likely to complete their education, while children not in school were supposed to be more likely to marry earlier. As described by a male adult community member, "Once the child is out of school, they are likely to be viewed as adult members of the household and community, and therefore are expected to contribute economically or begin their own families."

The ability of some boys and young men to earn their own income may contribute to early marriage, whereby boys from communities that harvest cash crops could be more likely to marry young, according to a male community leader:

There are also cases of early marriage in this community. Young girls get married to the businessmen and farmers and the young boys marry at an early age because they have money they get from tobacco farming, so they drop out of school.
– Male Community Leader

Respondents described access to financial resources as the main prerequisite to marriage for boys and men, and therefore, if they earn an income at a young age, they may also marry young. Once boys are able to support themselves, participants in data collection shared that their family and community often perceive them as adults, and therefore, they are sanctioned or encouraged to engage in adult activities, such as marriage and starting a family. There was little description of young people who are not in school, earn an income, and are not married or parents. However, respondents often described young marriages as volatile and prone to problems or failure:

A girl does not understand issues of relationship in a marriage, any small quarrel; she packs and goes to her parents. Quite often when she is in her parents' home, she is involved in sexual relationships with other men and eventually she gets infected with HIV. – Female Adult

This is sometime called trial marriage. It is when the young children want to discover the logic behind marriage. This is common with boys of 15-17 years of age. – Female Adult

Some community members perceived that early marriages are less likely to be long lasting and therefore children produced by such unions may experience greater likelihoods of being raised by single parents or alternative caregivers. Early marriage was also described as potentially stressing the household economy of the girl's parents if she moves home after her marriage ends, with little education and few marketable skills. According to one boy:

I have a sister who got married last year when she was in Primary six [13 years old] *and as I talk to you she has a child but they divorce and now she back in our home with the child. She does not go to school.*

With most families already struggling to meet their basic needs, caring for a child as well as any children she has had could stress a family's resources significantly, and which in turn makes her more vulnerable to other protection issues.

Responses

While many respondents described the reasons why children should not marry young or take on early responsibility, the marriage itself was described as a positive coping strategy in response to early pregnancy, unless the parents didn't approve of the marriage. Respondents explained that if parents object to a marriage, they do so at the risk of losing their daughter's dowry:

> *For early marriage they would want to settle the case to get wealth and they know if it comes to our attention we shall involve the police so they will not get the wealth.*
> – Male Community Leader

In addition to the potential benefit to parents, receiving a dowry, respondents also described why a girl might seek marriage. Respondents explained that another direct response to early marriage because of a perceived responsibility to family that cannot be fulfilled while attending school.

> *Many girls and boys have dropped out of school due to early marriage since they have to take care of the family needs. It can also force a child out of school since she has to take care of the young family.* – Male Youth

Similarly to many respondents, this male youth closely associates early marriage and early pregnancy, explaining that a girl who marries early will soon have a family, and will therefore need to prioritize caring for them above her education.

However, not all marriages were described as being entered into by willing parties, and the response pathway if a child is encouraged to enter a marriage against his or her choosing differs. Respondents explained that the child might first talk to peers or a trusted adult,

> *When the child goes to the peers, she can be encouraged to get married or resist the force from the parents. If the child resists getting married, she can easily run out of home to the friends or relatives. While if the child goes to the religious leaders, they also call for the dialogue with the parents and if the parents refuse to change, they just give-up.*
> – Boy

As is the case with other problems, peers are generally a source of advice for children, giving recommendations about the correct course of action, or perhaps giving the child a place to stay, but rarely provide more extensive help. Another boy explained that children are unlikely to address their objection to the marriage directly with their parents, but instead will approach relatives for support.

> *The most friendly point of reporting is the relatives, who call for a dialogue with the parents of the child, and if the parent withdraws his/her force over the child, she or he is left free but if the perpetrator refuses to respond positively, the relatives will go to the parents' friends, LCs, and police which arrests the parent, drags him /her to court and then prison. However when the parent refuses to listen to the relatives, they can as well give-up and the child gets married.*

Here a boy describes the two potential pathways of response most frequently mentioned by respondents following an unsuccessful family dialogue: the relatives could contact other members of the community who might be influential, and then go to the formal authorities.

However, while multiple groups of children described approaching the police or LC1 as a response to early or forced marriage, none could provide an example where such a case was actually reported to the formal child protection system. Such reports may be examples of what children believe should happen, as opposed to what actually takes place. Alternatively, instead of reporting the issue to the police, relatives might drop the case if a dialogue fails, and the child may go on to marries.

D. Sexual Abuse

Rape, and defilement were the most frequently mentioned types of sexual abuse experienced by children during FGDs. According to a male community leader,

> *In Arua, children's issues are numerous and in fact are the worst in Uganda. Children in this region do not get their best in life because of sexual abuse. Many of the girl children produce at an early age of 13-16 years. And this makes them drop out of school, and then because of the early pregnancy they produce children and they cannot look after them.*

Here the connection between sexual abuse, early pregnancy, and school pushout are described as causally interrelated, and the quote suggests a cyclical nature to child neglect. For clarity defilement, rape, and incest are discussed separately, but every person and every community does not always delineate between these terms the same way. In each interview and FGD any respondent using one of these terms was asked to give a personal definition for the term used, and similar care should be taken to use clearly and locally defined terms when engaging with communities.

E1. Defilement

Defilement was mentioned by five out of eleven FGDs held with children, four of which were made up of boys. While boys mentioned defilement more frequently, the issue received a mean rank of 5.0 from boy and 4.0 from girls, indicating that neither gender of children perceives defilement to be one of the most pressing issues. Defilement was mentioned during two youth FGDs, one conducted with females and the other with males, however, neither group gave the issue a high ranking, nor was the issue included in overall analysis as it was mentioned in less than ¼ of groups. Adult mention of defilement corresponded somewhat with children's, as it was mentioned in 7/19 FGDs, and five of the seven groups were conducted with men. On average, women ranked defilement at 3.5, while men ranked it at 4.0, demonstrating that while the issue is a concern, it is the not the most pressing. Of note is that overall defilement was mentioned in 10/30 FGDs held with males, while it was mentioned in 3/18 FGDs held with females or proportionally, was mentioned twice as often by males, although males consistently ranked the issues as less important than did females.

Respondents shared many different definitions for defilement during data collection. A girl shared the Uganda government's definition: "Defilement is when a child gets involved in sexual relationships with an adult or older person which is against the law of Uganda that says a girl can marry above 18 years," leaving out only that males are also covered by this law, and can, in fact, be the victims of defilement. In fact, no child can consent to sexual activity below the age of 18, although most respondents believed the law applied only to girls, such as this boy who defined defilement as: "A man/boy having sexual relationship with a girl who is less than 18 years of age". However, many respondents believed that defilement referred to the age gap between the people participating in sexual activity:

This is when an elderly person of 50 years has sexual intercourse with a girl 15 years. This can be when they are both consented and it was discovered, by either some elders or this girl's relatives. – Female Youth

This female youth points to the difference in ages between two consenting people as the issue, as well as the girl's young age. Respondents also described defilement as relating to the extremely young age of the girl: "This is when a man forces a young girl below 5 years to have sex", according to one boy.

Some respondents connected defilement to the infiltration of Western culture into Uganda. This was evident in the showing of Western movies and pornography in public video halls, which one must pay to enter, but onlookers outside can see the movies.

The children of 0-5 years are easily raped and defiled just because they learn by imitation so they are at the risk of being defiled. Children of 6-10 years are easily defiled because they are easily taken up by what they watch like pornographic photos and films. At the end of watching, children tend to practice what they have seen. – Male Adult

This man cites defilement as something in which children consent to participate, as seeing others 'practice sex' influences them to want to do the same. However, another respondent, a male government employee, referred to defilement as the same thing as rape, identifying disabled children as particularly vulnerable, "Disabled children are also more vulnerable because they cannot defend themselves from attacks by strangers and get defiled." The lack of differentiation between defilement and rape may make discussion of the issues between formal child protection actors and communities, as well as between community members themselves difficult, as the issues may be conflated, rather than identified as separate issues, where defilement concerns any sexual activity in which at least one participant is a minor, whereas rape refers to any forced sexual contact, regardless of the age of the victim.

Respondents described defilement as associated with a range of consequences, similar to those for early sex and early pregnancy. According to an adult male, defilement "Leads to dropout of children from school because stigmatization of emotional trauma, get pregnant in the process". There is also shame associated with defilement, according to a girl,

At times it is defilement, the child drops out of school, either pregnant or not, due to the shameful nature of what happened. She would fear being among her peers. Most perpetrators disappear and relocate to other areas until the situation calms down, they come back after about a year.

According to this child, defilement is viewed as something for which a child may face ridicule or blame, leading to school drop out regardless of whether she become pregnant.

Responses

When a child is defiled and decides to tell someone or ask for help, the majority of respondents said that girls would first approach their mothers.

Here when a girl is faced with defilement she will tell the mother, the mother will inform the father who will report to the LCI of the area, the LCI of the area will take the issue straight to the police because they are not allowed to handle because it is capital offence, the police will arrest the perpetrator and produce him in court for judgment.
– Male Adult

While the man above describes what could be described as what *should* happen when defilement occurs, given that every girl under 18 years who becomes pregnant outside of wedlock has been defiled, according to the law in Uganda, respondents' description of the prevalence of early pregnancy and marriage make it apparent that this formal legal route is not commonly pursued.

Respondents explained that responses to defilement can be complicated if the child wants to protect her friend or boyfriend, while her parents may want to pursue the matter through the legal system or to press the boy or man to pay dowry.

> *Even if some one defiles a child and the family comes up wanting to imprison the perpetrator, the child also arises in protest and even threatened to commit suicide if her boy friend is imprisoned.* – Female Youth

According to this female youth, parents may want to pursue the matter through the formal justice system, but, if the child has a relationship with him, this could be difficult without her cooperation. According to a male health centre employee, when parents want to prove a girl has been defiled, they will bring her to a medical centre for an examination, "In this community cases of defilement is rampant almost every week we receive cases of children that need medical examination and treatment". Once defilement has been confirmed, the response process is very similar to early pregnancy.

> *In most cases if a perpetrator has resources and has defiled a girl, it is quickly negotiated, and the perpetrator is left free, even if he does not promise to marry the girl, there is no much pressure since the parents of the victim will care less. But if the perpetrator's parents do not have money or are poor, the perpetrator will be disturbed much as parents might negotiate with the perpetrator. This case might end in police, and the perpetrator arrested. What happens is that if a perpetrator knows his parents have less resources or are poor, he will run away and only come back when the issue seems to be settled, due to fear of arrest and imprisonment.* – Female Youth

The possibility of arrest and imprisonment for defilement is well known in Arua and Nebbi as stated by participants in data collection, "There are strong laws in Uganda that punishes men who defile children, so men fear," according to an adult woman. Some respondents were also aware of the prison term, according to one man "Cases of defilement carry a maximum sentence of 7 years imprisonment". However, as described above, respondents informed researchers that in order to avoid punishment, or family shame, the parents of the girl may negotiate instead, "Last week a child was defiled by one of the community members in our village and the girl was given to him," leaving a girl to marry a man who may not be of her choosing. In addition to the man wanting to avoid a prison term, respondents explained that the two parties may also negotiate in an attempt to avoid the rumours and stigma in their community.

> *Defilement is an issue people don't really like to talk about or share because of fear. Most often both boy and girl are age-mates 15- 16 years. The family, they would be laughed at that their daughter was immoral and that they didn't properly take care of her. The family of the boy would also want the issue not known otherwise the boy can easily be arrested for defiling a young girl.* – Boy

Another common theme raised by participants when discussing defilement was the variance in response depending on the status of the perpetrator with the community. One female youth described a case where the guilty party was closely allied with the community,

Defilement, early pregnancies are sensitive and rarely talked about especially if the perpetrator has allied with the local council [the perpetrator has negotiated with the local council not to be disturbed by paying some money to them]. *However they are mostly sensitive because the perpetrator might be arrested and imprisoned for more than seven years as a way of making him suffer, and if the perpetrator stays or originates from within the community, the community members do not want their own child to suffer.*
– Female Youth

According to this female youth, defilement is a crime which community members are willing to settle within the community in order to help the perpetrator avoid punishment or personal hardship. However, the opposite occurred when a priest was accused of defilement,

The case a priest who defiled a girl child (16 years) the case was tried at home and wanted to keep out of public because the family benefited from the priest. The community could not tolerate the issue and blow it out to the public. – Male Government

This case was a described by a government employee, demonstrating that if knowledge about defilement becomes widespread, the community may force a family to engage the formal judicial system. A girl aptly described why she believes a defilement case should be brought to the authorities,

Cases such as defilement should be taken straight to the police, and then the perpetrator can be brought to justice, instead of it being settled by elders in the community and the perpetrator is given a light punishment.

Here, the elders in the community are identified as negotiating defilement cases, as might be expected given their role in maintaining community harmony and arranging for compensation of wrong parties.

E2. Rape

Rape was only frequently mentioned in FGDs held with youth and children, not in groups held with adults. Youth mentioned rape third most frequently overall, with 3/5 female and 3/8 male groups mentioning the issue. Rape tied for the third most frequently mentioned issue by youth overall; death of parents and defilement were mentioned with equal frequency. Although rape was mentioned by a greater proportion of female than male youth FGDs, the two genders assigned the same average rank to the issue, 5.0, indicating that they did not consider it one of the most pressing issues. . Children mentioned rape in 5/11 FGDs, however it was mentioned by 1/5 groups of girls, compared to 4/6 groups with boys. Neither boys nor girls ranked rape as very important, as the one group of girls ranked rape at 4.0, while the four FGDs with boys assigned a mean rank of 5.33 to the issue. Although rape was among the three most frequently mentioned things that make children feel unsafe or insecure in communities among children and youth, neither group consistently ranked rape as one of the most important challenges children face.

The definition of rape was more clearly delineated than defilement, with a boy explaining, "This is the act of having forced sexual intercourse with a young child or grown up woman, either in the bush or in the house", however, the possibility that a male can be raped was omitted. One female government employee differentiated by age when defining rape, "Rape is from 6 – 13. From the age of 14 these girls go willingly to sleep with this man, it is not rape". The idea that beyond a certain age females, especially teenagers and young women cannot be raped because "they want it" was a commonly repeated theme.

Indecent dressing also causes harm. The way you dress talks a lot about you. We have had girls who dress inappropriately; they exposed their thighs, wear short skirts, leggings and "kundi-show" [A top supposed to be put on by a baby, it exposes the waist]. A child easily can be raped because of the above behaviours. - Female Adult

When asked about the reasons for rape in their communities, respondents gave a wide variety of answers; a male government employee indicated that child neglect was a cause:

Lack of parental care to the children, for example when parents are not at home, the children are vulnerable to defilement by strangers who can just break in to the room where such young girls sleep and force them into sex. – Male Government

While the government employee above names the crime he described defilement, he is also describing rape. He describes children who are left home alone as most vulnerable to defilement, even if the children remain at home, which was described by other respondents as a way to protect children from rape. This government employee did not speak about the reasons why a stranger might break into a home to rape a child, however, one male youth cited opportunity and peer pressure amongst males as a cause,

This normally happens in lonely places (bushes, forests, and dark corners) and due to group influence, like a number of boys can decide to encircle a girl, then they start using them one after the other. – Male Youth

This male youth describes group participation in gang rape, due to peer pressure. Additionally, this youth calls raping a girl 'using' her, depersonalizing the act, and describing her more as an object than a person. Rape was also cited as a tool to punish someone who has done something wrong,

There was a woman who had gone to steal cassava from someone's garden. Unfortunately, the owner caught her and demanded for sexual intercourse as payment for cassava. The woman was forced into it without even making an alarm because she knew she was on the wrong. – Boy

Despite the fact that the story this boy told was about an adult, he describes rape as an appropriate punishment for stealing food, and emphasizes that the woman can have no recourse because she did something wrong first. It is possible that this is not an isolated incident or rape may also be used to punish girls.

Child labour, leading to a child living away from home, was also cited as likely to increase a child's vulnerability to rape,

Child labour can also make children run away from home. For example a child may decide to leave in streets because she/he feels overworked by the parent or the guardian. This can put them at risk of rape and defilement. – Female Adult

Children outside of their homes often were described as experiencing a higher risk of rape, whether living on the street as described above, or simply walking alone, "Children are sent at night to buy things, where they meet groups of bad men who pressure them into sex most especially in lonely places, a child is abused." Here a woman described the risk to children when alone at night; however, it is the parents who have asked the child to go out after dark to purchase something. Tied to the risk of being outside alone after dark, is the increased risk, described by a female youth, if there are men around who have been drinking, "There can be

drunkard men who find young girls when they are walking and grab them". Some respondents described drinking as common in their communities, and researchers observed many children outside after dark, exposing them to the risk of rape.

The physical and psychosocial ramifications of being raped while living in Arua or Nebbi were described in detail, however the issue was never ranked as one of the top three causes of harm to children during focus group discussions. One girl described the mental and emotional difficulties a survivor of rape might face, "If this girl is raped by an elderly person, she will have a psychosocial problem, like she will not feel secure and will have the shame". The shame described would likely be compounded by the social stigma of rape, " Fellow children can make fun of the girl; she can't mix and interact with peer", one boy explained. Another boy described one of the outcomes from that bullying, "It can force a girl to leave school because of the shame and embarrassment". Being pushed out of school not only deprives a girl of formal education but also further isolates her from her peers and from any support she might have received in school.

Physical damage inflicted by a rape was often described as quite severe, as a male youth explained, "This can result in breakage of the child's sexual organ, contraction of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and unwanted pregnancies". That rape could lead to infertility was of concern among respondents, as this would make it difficult for the girl to get married. One researcher reported that during a casual conversation an interlocutor mentioned that the prison sentence for the rape of a child was significantly harsher if the child were left infertile.

During data collection there were a handful of reports about the rape of boys; however, despite the lack in quantity, the interlocutors were very knowledgeable and had heard about cases firsthand.

> *Sodomy by truck drivers: these are the young boys on the street, there can be boys from 7-11 years, mostly who sleep on the street.* – Female Government

Homosexuality is largely taboo, and entirely illegal, in Uganda, and therefore it is understandable that few respondents mentioned it, and additionally government or NGOs never mentioned resources for male victims of sexual abuse.[21]

Responses
Parents are the most common decision-makers after their child is raped, and are expected to act in her and their family's best interests.

> *If it is a girl who gets pregnant because of sex abuse, the girl will be asked to marry the man and the perpetrator pays the fine (dowry) and the issue is settled.* - Boy

The practice of promoting marriage between a child and her rapist mirrors the process for defilement, with respondents describing the potential resolution as related to the loss of virginity, which traditionally leads to marriage.

Respondents explained that negotiation and reconciliation are often valued above a desire for formal 'justice' when communities seek to resolve the harm caused by defilement or rape.

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[21] The Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Bill Addendum, proposed in 2009, reiterates the illegality and immorality of homosexuality and criminalizes the promotion or support of such relations by individuals, government, or nongovernmental organizations. http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/uganda/report-2012#section-23-11

Traditional beliefs in my community also act as barriers, for example when a girl gets sexually abused by someone, she is given away for marriage and yet she would not be willing to marry at that age. This affects the girl negatively. – Male Adult

This man describes marriage as an appropriate response to rape only if the girl is thought to be of an appropriate age to marry. If a young child is raped, respondents reported that the consequences for the perpetrator are likely to be more severe, according to a female member of government:

Rape can result in mob justice and the person can be killed or beaten badly and if you are lucky you will be rescued by the police. The community response is just to beat or kill or to burn your house. By raping a small child, like maybe if you are HIV positive you are intending to kill the child. The mob went straight to the home of that guy and he was killed.

Respondents described the rape of children as different than that of girls who have reached puberty, where a small child is always assumed to be a victim, whereas an older child is not perceived the same way.

Responses to rape depend on the child reporting the rape, and secondly on how that person, most often a parent, decides to pursue the matter. According to a member of the government, "Rape is a very big crime that the community can not handle or settle at the community level. The community members therefore report to the police." However, despite many people describing rape, and sometimes defilement, as something that should be handled by formal authorities, respondents usually described attempting to resolve the case in the community as the first option, with authorities becoming involved only if informal attempts to reach a solution were unsuccessful.

Since the people always come to the police stations late to report their cases, when we send them to the hospital for medical check up, the doctors don't get any sign of penetration in the victim and this makes it difficult for us to take this case to court. Even if it is taken, the court drops the cases since there is no evidence to support the victim. Therefore, the perpetrator remains free. – Female Government

In this case, even though the rape survivor and/or her parents report the rape, because she was not able to have a rape kit conducted a timely manner; the case could not be pursued. The official process for reporting a rape case involves multiple steps that could be quite onerous to someone unfamiliar with government or with lack of access to transportation. A government employee described the process, "After to rape occurs, come to the police and fill Form 3, this will be followed by a medical examination and Post Exposure Prophylaxis" this is followed by bring that medical form back to the police once it has been completed by the hospital. After this has occurred the police may begin to investigate the case if they believe there is sufficient evidence, according to participants in data collection.

Rather than engage with the formal justice system, respondents explained that a girl's family might choose to resolve the case within the community,

There was a 15-year-old boy who raped a child of 3 years. When the mother of this girl took a step to take this issue to LC, the relatives of her husband were against her because this boy was related to the husband. – Female Adult

A relationship between the alleged rapist and either a member of the victim's family or an authority figures was often cited as the reason for a case being resolved at the community level.

Respondents also identified the location of where a rape occurred as influencing how a case is handled, focusing on difference between rural and urban areas. According to a female NGO employee:

> *Families in rural places will respond by going to the elders in the clan or to the LCs if the case is like the child is pregnant. Sometimes they will also keep quiet about such issues because they feel ashamed to reveal the issue to the public. They will only take the girl to stay with a relative.*

This respondent describes living in a rural area as increasing the likelihood that a rape case will be resolved within the community, although she did not specify whether this was due to the culture of rural areas, or difficulty accessing other possible options.

Following a rape, respondents indicated that the support offered to a child differs significantly based on finances and services available.

> *After that, a child has to be relocated to another new place, a new home to stay in. You need to relocate the child, because if other children know about what happened other children will tease the child and be reminded. We take the child to a new environment where people are all green about what happened to the child and the child can begin life anew.* – Female Government

The child may be relocated informally to live with a relative in a different area, where the local community does not have knowledge of the rape. While respondents did share instances of girls being moved to live with relatives on their own, it was never reported that a girl's parents would also relocate to accompany her.

How Communities Currently Prevent Risks to Children

During data collection the first half of FGDs and interviews consisted of discussions about the things in the respondents' community that make children feel unsafe or insecure. Following this, participants were asked to reflect upon the ways in which the community currently prevents and responds to those risks, which actors are involved those response pathways, and how they might be improved. Through these discussions, general lessons were learned about how communities in Nebbi and Arua support and protect children including: what referral networks exist and how they function, equitability and ease of access to support and justice, what services are currently in place, how formal systems interact with community-based child protection, existing monitoring systems, and finally, recommendations from children, youth, adults, community leaders, and members of the government and NGOs.

Respondents told researchers that communities actively protect their children from many of the violations discussed above, often by advising children about appropriate behaviour. An example is given by an adult female:

> *The community tells their children to not move at late hours. Giving children an hour when you must be home, let this person who is going raping, let them come and find you home instead. All these bad activities they happen during night hours. So when these kids are prevented from moving during night hours then such things will not happen to our kids.*

This advice from respondents extends from keeping children at home during certain hours to advising girls about how to dress, because some respondents believed that provocative styles of dress made girls vulnerable to rape. According to a female government officer:

> *Right now they are trying to teach these young girls very well, because these young girls end up being raped because of their ways of dressing. If you are putting on something very short and you are going to fetch water and you are meeting this hungry man on the way. Don't you think that man will be attracted to have you? If you dress well then you will prevent that the man will see your thighs and begin to salivate. By teaching the children how to dress very well it will help the children from being raped.*

While all participants did not share this belief, adults most frequently mentioned monitoring how girls dress and act as a way to prevent rape and defilement. Interestingly nothing about addressing or changing the behaviour of men who commit these crimes was discussed.

Respondents shared another way that communities have attempted to address child protection violations, by asking children to watch out for one another,

> *Some parents ask the children to go to school together and to remember to wait for their siblings. The bigger boys in the family sometimes take care of their younger sisters both in school and on the way home. – Female NGO*

Through seemingly simple steps such as this, respondents reported that some families and communities are able to reduce the risks that children will encounter when away from the home.

Communities in Uganda have the right to create by-laws that apply only to them, as long as they do not conflict with the national laws of the country. According to both community leaders and members of government, these by-laws usually are created through community consensus of leaders, both elected government officials and traditional or clan leaders. Some communities

have used this right to develop by-laws aimed at protecting children. For example, one male adult shared:

> *Community always have or set by laws for example children should not be allowed in the disco hall and all parents should send children to school. Some communities encourage cases of abuse of children to be reported so that the perpetrator is punished and this is mostly with cases of neglect. There are always clan leaders and in cases of child neglect, the parent is summoned to appear before the clan, which levy penalties on the parents of the children.* – Adult Male

By creating by-laws connected to child protection, respondents explained how some communities are able to translate national laws into their local context, as well as to increase ownership of the law, as it is then something that the community has chosen to focus on and enforce. In some data collection locations, respondents described community leaders' work to create awareness about existing laws relating to children to increase knowledge and compliance:

> *Yes, like sensitization of parents on children's rights, like the right to be protected, live and study. This has been done several times by traditional leaders, local council 1, and the elders of the community.* – Female Adult

In addition to creating awareness about child rights, participants in data collection shared that some communities have incorporated certain children's issues into the mandate of the Local Council:

> *Community meetings take place here in the trading centre; people talk about free education and also talk about drug abuse. They ask the LCs to arrest such people who make children to get addicted to drugs and alcohol. But child labour is not and has never been talked about.* – Boy

This boy points out that this forum address only some child protection issues, however, the existence of a group of people that prioritizes such issues in the community suggests a strong foundation upon which to build.

In addition to facilitating discussion and sensitization about child protection issues, respondents described actions taken in some of their communities to be actively involved in punishing those they believe to be guilty of a violation, "When a man defiles a child, the community can easily excommunicate him because it is a very shameful act," according to a female adult. The woman describes excommunication as something that can be ordered by a community leader, or de facto, when a community decides to take that the individual has done something unforgivable. Another way in which a community might respond to child protection violations could be physical punishment,

> *Yes, mob justice. That is rushing in big numbers and beating the culprit by the community members so that it serves as a warning to other lawbreakers*. – Female Adult

In this case, the perpetrator was the target of a community beating, the goal of which was direct punishment of a crime, as well as indirect prevention of future crime. Respondents described community responses to offenders as potentially harming children, especially if children are the perpetrators,

Some children most especially boys have become thieves not because they want it, but because they have nothing to eat. So once caught in such and act, they are heavily punished by the community or even killed. - Female Youth

This female youth describes children who have begun stealing due to neglect and hunger, although this differentiation is not made within the community, and they are subject to punishment by community members. Some respondents described this form of 'traditional' justice as being desirable, as it is meted out by the community, and does not have the possibility of being 'dropped', as was reported to be the case with the police. There are additional incentives for pursuing cases at the community level according to a female adult,

This involves the elders, the parents of the victim, the victim, the perpetrator and the relatives of the perpetrator. The solution for settling the matter is commonly to levy charges on the perpetrator, and is paid in the form of cows (5-7) and goats (10-15) varying from one family to another, and some money for the elders. This money is called the elders allowance. – Female Adult

Community elders often were described as being involved in settling cases in locally appropriate ways such as punishing perpetrators by making them give the victim's family animals, rather than focusing on sending the person to jail. A female community leader explained why many members of the community prefer to avoid government or NGO services, and resort to those based locally,

Government or NGOs only come to carry awareness or rules that are there, they do not ask for the community to give reasons for the way they believe or why they use local means to solve issues. In my view, the government should consider that some traditional rules concerning relationships and marriage should be adopted, so that if for example it is a young boy and a young girl, the issue should not go to court. But if it is young boy or girl, and an old man or woman, then the law can be applied.

This community leader describes government laws and the enforcement of those laws as an external system imposed upon the community, which does not take into account the community's capacity for self-governance. However, a female youth explained why pursuing a case through the community system is not always the best option:

The local council (LC) also discriminate people to some extent, they side with tribes mates if the victim is from another area or religion and don't understand local language, and they side with perpetuator who is a tribe mate.

According to this youth, local justice systems may favour people who are from that region or the local tribe, and so members of minority clans or religions, or those who have migrated by choice or during the former conflict may believe the treatment they receive will be more equitable if they choose to involve the formal legal system, which is described as less partial.

A. Referrals and Linkage with Formal Child Protection Systems

When considering community-based child protection systems, and relating them to those formal systems, it is essential to take the circumstances and mechanisms of interaction into account. When something bad happens to a child in a community, approaching a government official or NGO was rarely described as the first step for a community member; it was through a referral that these resources were typically reached. Many community leaders were very clear about

which cases they would always refer, *"We solve most of the cases here, but cases relating to sexual abuse like rape and defilement are referral to the police for assistance"*. Sexual violence, particularly against children, was often cited as the type of case that must always be referred to government authorities, while respondents said they preferred to solve other issues within the community, such as:

> *Cases like divorce, domestic violence, alcoholism, because it happens to the community members themselves so involving them is better if you want a change.*
> – Male Community Leader

According to respondents, community leaders, including members of the Local Council and clan elders often serve as gatekeepers to accessing formal authorities, as they have the connections to make such referrals, and additionally, a written report of the offense may need to be presented to the police or other authorities.

> *When a child experiences problem the parent of the victim goes to the local leaders of the community in which the issue has occurred and then if the LCs are defeated to help the concerned persons, they refer the issue to the police or the elders of the community.*
> – Male NGO

Here, a referral to a formal source of support was described as only being made if a settlement could not be reached among community members. Approaching local leaders, including the LC, is viewed as beneficial for a number of reasons. One male community leader shared his view,

> *First of all I am a leader of this village and I am tasked with seeing to the welfare of the children and the general community. I also act as point of entry for different government program including some of the NGO.*

Serving the role of a problem solver, as well as the gatekeeper for government and NGO programs is a source of power and recognition within the community, which local leaders might be reluctant to forfeit. Settling a case with the help of local leaders may be chosen due to negative perceptions or experiences with the formal government system, "With legal services, money is involved for instance in registering cases [with the police]. This demotivates people," according to a male NGO staff member. In addition to the financial consequences of engaging with the legal system, the consequences of government involvement are viewed as potentially harmful for the child,

> *Children fear to report parents to any institution. If they do, they would be disowned, to maintain parental love; they solve any problem by themselves.* – Female Adult

Some respondents believed that children would be punished or more vulnerable if they were to report a protection violation because their families would be angry with them for involving the police or other formal service. Whereas a community leader is perceived as more likely to promote dialogue or attempt to resolve the case, the government judicial system is viewed as punitive, with negative repercussions for those choosing to file reports. However, the local system was also occasionally described with mistrust, due to perceptions that their handling of cases may be biased.

> *The options could be using the Local Council system; however it's never used because Local Council doesn't tend to take issues concerning children seriously. Some of them are culprits of harm, some don't care sending their children to school, while others overwork their children, they don't notice any slight problem.* – Male NGO

Conflicting perceptions of the value of the local systems in comparison to government systems likely reflect differences in how cases are received and handled at both levels in different communities. The inconsistency in the perceive value of informal and formal systems leads to irregular reporting, which may depend on which system a the community member believes will address the issue in their favour or in the way they prefer, rather than which system is 'best'.

B. Access to Support and Justice

Community members must know what laws exist, and feel it is important to report child protection violations and involve the formal system in order for them to be implemented.

> *Ignorance of the provision of laws that protect the children makes community to see defilement, neglect of children, and early marriage as not a crime and this is worst because most of the laws are not fully implemented.* – Female Government

As described above by a male adult, even if community members are aware of the law, they may be unaware of the services available or decline to take advantage of them because of expense involved, which is beyond the resources of a family of low socio-economic status.

> *For example community members fear coming to approach police. Some parents do not have money and because of that they feel reporting cases are very expensive thinks to do. They better use the money to buy food.* – Male Adult

Without access to the resources to compensate members of the police or other formal actors, families are not able to report child protection violations, even if they believe that reporting the case will help them or their child. The costs associated with reporting a crime create a substantial barrier to access for families without significant cash income,

> *Yes, money problem for an example when you go to police to report a case of early pregnancy, the police will ask for money to open a file on the case and when a child or child's parents have no money, the case just dies in air. It normally affects victims.* – Male Youth

Although the government does not officially sanction the fees associated with reporting, they are very common, and without this payment many government officers may not address an issue brought before them. Some community members view the government system as not only costly, but also corrupt and inefficient.

> *I don't think [*there are services available*]. Because the government workers are too reluctant, they just want to sit in office and eat money and yet people are suffering outside. Even they don't help our parents and elders in communities. Even if you take your case they will first request for money.* – Female Youth

Without faith that the case will be handled appropriately and without bias, many community members did not see reporting the case as in their interest, but instead as a waste of money and time. Additionally, as many people in Arua and Nebbi do not have access to transportation, they may also lack the funds to reach the police or other offices to report a case.

> *Imagine a woman who has walked from her house with a child who has been raped and they arrive and they charge 3,000 or 5,000 UGX and she doesn't have the money. What*

> *can she do other than return home with that child? Also the hospital can ask for money, also at hospitals that are privately owned you must pay money for the examination.*
> – Female Government

As this female government officer implies, economic barriers also exist for survivors of rape or defilement who may need PEP as well as a medical report to verify the crime, in order to file a case. Without funds for transportation, the hospital, and to file the report, respondents reported a case was unlikely to be addressed.

The need for funds in order for a case to be addressed is not unique to the formal government system; however, as described by a female youth, community leaders may also require payment.

> *Possibly involving elders (for instance clan leaders) in trying to resolve the problem. However this is not used because bringing elders together requires resources (always a goat and other things are needed to finalize the matter) and mostly likely the perpetuator may end up being punished severely by elders.*

According to this young woman, it can be costly to seek any form of mediation or 'judge' whether at an informal or formal level. This opposes a generally held belief that informal and community-based interventions and resolution are more cost effective. Above, respondents clearly describe disparities in access to informal and formal justice as closely related to the child's, or his family's, ability to pay. Access to any authority that could address a child protection violation may require money or goods, which likely affects children from poor families disproportionately, as they are reported to be the most vulnerable to violations, and the least likely to be able to access either justice system.

C. Available Services

If a community member decides to access services from the government or an NGO, having overcome obstacles of transportation, fear of authorities, and lack of funds, are there appropriate and useful services available?

Existence of Services

Data were collected in eight purposefully diverse communities, and therefore the existence and perception of services and government is, unsurprisingly, different between them. For example, one female adult reported an almost total lack of services:

> *The communities would follow them if there were services but since the services are not there, they do not have access to them. In my community services to children that exist is only education where the local leaders ensure that all the children are in school. People in the area are able to access the education for their children as schools are built near communities where they can easily take their children but other groups like NGOs have not being present in the community in which I live.*

These differences show an uneven distribution of services and resources across communities, such that some areas have better access than others, leaving some communities at a disadvantage. A female government staffer agreed with this perspective,

> *I don't think there are any [*organizations working on child protection], *I have gone for child protection training, but I don't think there are any associations here. They train people to go and train others, I was trained and I now go out to train people in*

*communities, but it [*local people and groups working for child protection*] has not happened here.*

While this government officer received training about child protection, and she now trains other individuals in the community, she did not perceive this training as contributing to the community's involvement in preventing and responding to child protection violations. Another respondent reported on the apparent presence of NGO services, but a marked absence of government services:

For the case of Compassion [an NGO program that partners with churches to promote local poverty reduction strategies] *the services reach the indigenous people of the community although they do not cover the whole district. However, government services are just a myth to people, I mean full of promises that do not come true.* – Female NGO

This NGO employee's comments imply that while community members may be aware that the government offers services of which they are the intended beneficiaries, they may not see the evidence of such programs locally. Many respondents reported little travel outside of their local area, and therefore if government offices are located only at the district or sub-district level, residents outside of urban areas will have little access to them. An employee of a male NGO offered a similar perspective,

Government services don't reach the community. They have great plans but they remain on paper but on the ground, there is actually nothing. For example our community has four villages but there is only one water point... This is all because of corruption, where people just think of filling their stomachs but not for the government targets.
– Male NGO

In this explanation, it is not that government services are nonexistent, but rather that the programs themselves do not reach communities, especially because of the isolation of rural communities and the embezzlement of funds at higher levels of government.

Types of Services

NGO services also varied between communities, as data collection covered multiple sites across two districts. Issues addressed by NGOs included:

- Voluntary counselling and testing for HIV/AIDS, as well as education and access to anti-retrovirals
- Hygiene and sanitation promotion
- Literacy classes
- Community Empowerment Programs
- Promotion and support of education, especially girls'
- Drug abuse prevention and education
- Special support for orphans and vulnerable children
- Household livelihood training and strengthening
- Human rights education and promotion
- Access to healthcare, including following protection violations
- Support for single mothers
- Child neglect response, such as providing school supplies or clothing

Despite the number of NGOs reported as operational in these two districts, their existence was most often mentioned by NGO staff, members of government (if the NGO is an active partner), and occasionally school children if the NGO had done outreach. While it is unlikely that all possible services exist in each district, especially in more rural locations, it is also apparent that many community members are unaware of the services that do exist. These services would likely see higher utilization if they conducted more awareness-raising and other activities to facilitate access.

Government Services

Community Development Office (CDO)

During an interview, a female government staff person summarized the services provided by the Community Development Office, which works at the district and sub-district levels and is responsible for community outreach:

> *Under community-based service, [*there are*] five major programs that include; community mobilization and empowerment, probation and social welfare of children, social rehabilitation of people with disabilities, elderly, and Orphans and other Vulnerable children (OVCs), linkages and networking with other development workers like NGOs, and development planning which is mainly done by the town planner. All these activities are done in the institutions, villages, and households within the town council boundaries, for example, if a child is neglected, we call a community sensitization meeting to address such issues and lay strategies on how to completely eliminate them.*

In addition to addressing the specific issues mentioned, the Community Development Office also provides psychosocial support, children tracing and also collaborates with probation and social welfare department in data collection.

> *This is* [Town A] *Sub-county Local Government. I work closely with the Community. Yes, with CDO and probation and social welfare department, we are so prominent on the ground providing services. For example right now we are mapping out OVC households... People are accessing our services, such as psychosocial support is offered to the parents who have neglected their children, children themselves and other people. We also do child tracing for example, if the child is lost, we try to trace the homes of those children, and we refer children to Kapirikisi for rehabilitation.*
> – Male Government

While the Community Development Office is responsible for awareness raising, sensitization and counselling, the mandate also includes dialogue facilitation, but not prosecution:

> *We do child protection under probation and social welfare, this office handles cases of children whereby in case of any harm reported, we call the child and the perpetrator, and try to reconcile. But if it fails, we bring in force for example imposing charges on to the perpetrator. In cases that we cannot handle, we refer them to the district probation for example if a young boy below 18 has sexually harassed a girl of below 18 years.*
> – Female Government

Here the government employee explains that the mediation process also exists at the government level, where the CDO will try to resolve a case, before pursing it through the legal system. While community development officers work at the community level to address child protection

concerns, child protection is not their only priority, as they are also responsible for issues related to health, education, and employment.

Probation and Child Protection Office

Unlike the Community Development Office, the Probation and Child Protection Office's works exclusively to coordinate the implementation of polices and programs to respond to the needs of vulnerable children in the community. This includes community awareness raising and education, advocacy, and supervising children's institutions.

> *The major thing we carry out in the community is sensitization in the community. Like how some of those risks can be prevented before the child is affected. We respond to issues concerning welfare at home and the problems they go through. Issues like rape are reported to the police, the probation officer goes to the court and advocates for the child in the court.* – Female Government

Other issues addressed by the Probation Office, according to the female government officer include: child neglect, child abandonment, failure to pay school fees, child discrimination, misuse of orphans' property, and child custody. She went on to explain, "Most of these cases are reported at the sub-county level, and are then referred to the district level where we are. We cover the whole district."

Of government offices that address children's issues, the Probation Office is seemingly the most well known, however a female NGO staff describes why access to services is limited despite greater awareness of the office:

> *The most important office is the child probation office, but currently these people only sit in district offices. I would recommend that probation office be established at the parish level to handle such cases and provide sensitization so that prevention is done before it actually occurs.*

Although the Probation Office is reportedly underfunded and understaffed, other members of the child protection community, including NGOs, believe it is doing good work, but is not reaching children and their families at the local level, making accessing services and reporting violations difficult.

Child and Family Protection Unit

The Child and Family Protection Unit is a branch of the Ugandan police force specifically tasked with addressing crimes concerning women and children.

> *The child and family protection unit handles issues concerning children and families, most especially support of women... So by solving family issues, we are protecting the children who always suffer secondary effects from the family problems. For example if the family is full of domestic violence, then the child is bound to be hit in the process or also adopt the same characters in future. We sensitize people on tips of how to live a peaceful life and in a peaceful society. In cases of domestic violence, we counsel the women, men and children differently [separately] then after the first session, they are all brought together for reconciliation.* – Female Government

Members of the Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU) receive special training about addressing domestic violence and child protection violations, additionally; the CFPUs have been a target of the decentralization process and now exist at the sub-district level.

Resident District Commissioner

While the Resident District Commissioner is not tasked directly with protecting children, his mandate does relate to safety and security of a district.

> *The work of the RDC is to mobilize communities on different issues especially on issues of security. We ensure that every project taking place in the community is known to RDC before any implementation. The RDC also connects the presidential office to the district, for example we are mandated to report all issues that happen in the district to the president. These activities are carried out in the whole district that is in the entire 15 sub counties for example we have Nebbi and Pakwach as town councils and then the rest of the 13 are sub counties.* – Male Government

The description of the RDC places him at the intersection between district and national level politics, and as someone whose office could be involved in helping translate national policies to the district level. Additionally, the RDC approves all projects implemented, including those by NGOs, and should be actively connected to Probation and Community Development Offices. Such a coordinating body, particularly charged with maintaining safety and security, could have an important role to play in child protection.

Child Protection Committees

Child Protection Committees (CPC) do not exist in the majority of communities visited during data collection. A community leader discussed the role of an active CPC in one location.

> *The relationship is good because when something happens in the community, the local leaders consult with the Child Protection Committees to resolve the issue. And it can be improved through regular sensitization of the local community leaders on the basic child protection issues like the right to food, shelter among others.* – Male Community Leader

In the community described above, the CPC serves as a mechanism to coordinate community members and service providers to respond to child protection violations. It also is described as helping identify community members interested in being involved in child protection prevention and response so they can be targeted for capacity building.

Most community members, NGO members, and government officers reported that CPCs do not exist, and many people also reported that they had never heard of such a group. However, the notion of a CPC is not foreign to the Arua and Nebbi region, as explained by a female NGO staff:

> *Village committees should be established by government and facilities to monitor child protection issues occurring in the communities or that they are dealt with before becoming a major challenge.*

Here an NGO employee is suggesting the establishment of CPCs to address issues within the community and to serve as a grassroots monitoring body. A concern raised by the international child protection community has been that CPCs are often created or catalyzed in response to priorities that are identified externally to communities or without sufficient input from informal

child protection actors. CPCs are external creations, and therefore lack sustainability and impact. However, if communities are asking for these kinds of groups, there is significantly greater likelihood that the approach will be contextually appropriate and owned by the local population.

D. Government and NGO Interaction with Community-based Systems

Staff of government and NGOs were asked to discuss the way that the government interacts with traditional child protection mechanisms, and whether they support or interfere with each other. Earlier [section C], respondents explained that they were most likely to seek support and mediation from the system, whether formal or informal, that was most likely to settle the case in their favour or in the manner they preferred, and which they could afford. One male community leader described what he perceived as a positive and reciprocal relationship:

> *The formal system like the police, work hand in hand with the LCs in the communities, then I also work with the traditional leaders like the clan leaders and chiefs to see unto it that our children are safe. For example the police can call for workshops on child and family protection but the participants are the community leaders and some other community members.*

Despite the potential for the government-based system to work in coordination with local leaders and informal child protection systems, this is not always possible due to a lack of awareness and harmonization between the different service providers.

> *All the systems support each other's well; I do not see any conflict although people are not aware of the government protection system; that is why they still insist on the traditional system of protecting the children.* – Male Community Leader

This community leader implies that if residents were more aware of existing government services, they might be more likely to utilize them; that it is a lack of knowledge that leads to reliance on traditional systems. However, another community leader shared a disparate opinion about the reason why traditional child protection mechanisms are popular:

> *They* [traditional ways of protecting children] *don't agree* [with formal systems] *because government services are weak in relation to child protection as compared to the traditional where people were guided by norms that were very strong unlike the weak laws of the government today. For example in the past cases of abortion, homosexuality, and defilement were unheard of.* – Male Community Leader

This community leader identifies cultural norms as strong enough to encourage or deter people from particular behaviours, while laws from the government are not as effective, and have even been the cause of the introduction of new harmful behaviours. An adult male also agreed,

> *Like traditional leaders, because people tend to fear them than even the LC1s and even sub-county officials. Don't forget to always use traditional institutions to emphasize on child abuse because they are more feared than the law.* – Male Adult

Compliance with norms and laws is often enforced through fear and punishment, as discussed in many of the previous sections, and therefore as the traditional leaders are feared by community members, this means they are stronger than the government, and it is more likely that people will follow child protection standards developed by traditional leaders than by government.

E. Monitoring Systems

Given the number of NGOs and government agencies working to prevent and respond to child protection violations, it is essential that their work is based on evidence, and that their monitoring and evaluation is coordinated on the large scale to avoid duplication. Documentation of the success of existing programming is also warranted, so local best practices can be developed and shared.

There was a significant difference of opinion between respondents about the presence of monitoring systems for reporting child protection violations and responses. One government employee explained:

> *Yes, they collect data using book records, interview and other data collection methods that may deem fit and this data is normally presented to the government and the nongovernmental organisations so that action and implementation of intended projects can be effected.* – Male Government

However, this government officer does not specify who collects data, and none of these data were available to be shared with researchers at this or any other visit with employees of government or NGO offices. Another government officer described a one-time data collection activity with children living or working on the street: "We carried out a survey on street children for the ministry a year ago to know whether there were street children in Nebbi. We carried out the survey for them and sent them a soft copy and we are waiting for the responses". However, neither analyzed data, nor the report, were ever received, and therefore the office has been unable to implement changes based on the findings.

While a government officer was aware of the national Orphans and Vulnerable Children survey, once again the results of the data had not been received at the district level.

> *On Orphans and Vulnerable Children, we have partners like TPO and Sunrise, we carried out a survey in July on the whole of the district. This was by TPO funded by Sunrise. They sponsored it and it was free, they gave us the funds*. – Female Government

The partnership between government agencies and NGOs in the OVC study is encouraging; however, without analysis and dissemination of the results, followed by active engagement of stakeholders to interpret them and implement changes based on the findings, the data collection itself can have little impact. A female NGO employee pointed to health centres as the central point of data collection for child protection violations:

> *The health centres, all children who are brought with such cases are recorded and such data is available, the problem is that there is no follow up mechanisms. I learned that resources are not available for follow-up. The data is kept in health card registers and if you ever need it again you can access it.* – Female NGO

While collecting data about victims of child protection violations who present at health centres is a start, it gives an extremely limited perspective, given how rarely community members reported taking children to health centres as a result of a violation. Secondly, if resources are not available for follow-up, the value of collecting monitoring data is diminished, as it cannot be put to productive and active use. Additionally, an employee at the health centre in the same data collection location was also asked about child protection monitoring systems, he replied, "There is completely no documentation of cases". The responsibility for monitoring and evaluation of response and programming for child protection is not clearly mandated to one government

agency or program, nor does it appear that the government demands this from NGOs operating in the region.

While the lack of an official system limits the ability to track cases and collect aggregate information about them, a female NGO employee pointed out the potential failing of any formal monitoring system:

> *There are no systems for monitoring, documenting or reporting child protection concerns unless the concern reaches the police and then the police take the victim of the risk to health centres for collecting data.*

With high utilization of traditional community-based child protection responses, and low levels of reporting to the police or other government agencies, any reporting system would be bound to miss many, if not the majority, of the cases. However, without some sort of monitoring systems it is extremely difficult to gauge the needs of communities, the success of programs, and the cost of interventions, in order to request and receive funding.

F. Recommendations from Communities

At the conclusion of each interview or focus group discussion, participants were asked how they thought the community could better respond to risk, and whether they had any recommendations to improve the existing systems. Members of all sub-groups suggested significant efforts be conducted in relation to sensitization and awareness-raising about child protection issues, and what people in the community, both adults and children, could do to keep children safe and secure. Increasing access to services, especially health, education, and police and justice, was emphasized to ensure equal access among socio-economic groups and rural and urban areas. Respondents noted that increasing the prevalence of existing services, as well as augmenting existing services could help increase utilization and appropriateness, leading to improved prevention of and response to child protection violations. Respondents stressed that new local by-laws could be created to better protect children, and that the enforcement of existing laws could be improved. Children were more likely to recommend more extreme enforcement of laws for all types of child protection violation, from keeping children out of school to beating, however youth and adults also emphasized that punishment for crimes was crucial to minimizing the incidence of violations, and suggested that the most severe punishments be given to perpetrators of sexual violence.

Community Involvement, Sensitization and Awareness Raising
The primary recommendation from community members was increased sensitization, education, and discussion about child protection issues, as well as training about how to address them. This included the suggestion from an adult male that children be made aware of their rights and how to respond if they are victimized, "Create awareness so that children know what services are available and how the services help them. They should also be told not to fear". Similar education was also recommended for parents and other community members, both as a way to prevent abuse, as well as way to increase reporting and service utilization. However, all respondents did not agree with this recommendation,

> *My personal opinion is that, don't compromise role of parents to groom children well. Some children learn by being warned, some require a few strokes of cane. Some parents*

also have negative attitude about civil society organizations that make children become defiant and difficult to deal with... – Male NGO

While several respondents did agree with this NGO employee's opinion that education about child rights may have a negative impact on child rearing, the impression that educating parents and children about child protection and child rights could potentially improve wellbeing and child protection was much more prevalent. One female child recommended, "sensitizing the parents on the rights of children, that is rights to study, get health facilities, free from hard work, and right to be protected". This girl explains that if parents are aware of the rights of children, they are more likely to respect and protect them. A boy shared an additional perceived benefit, "If children know their rights, it will help them from getting risk and they will get help." This boy closely links knowledge about one's rights with knowing when it is appropriate to seek external help and support.

Community engagement on child protection was also emphasized, as community members often requested support in mobilizing and organizing members of their communities in child protection, rather than requesting that someone from outside perform this duty.

> *Community empowerment/ sensitization should be done focussing on establishing child protection committees in the local communities. Communities should appoint child protection volunteers, who can handle child protection issues properly.* – Male Government

Community members expressed confidence that they can protect children and address violations appropriately if they receive education and training to do so. There was also the opinion that organizing the community to work as a group for children would improve protection overall:

> *Yes, parents should be made to form groups village by village to help monitor children issues and report to the concerned people like police, Friends of the Child among others.* – Male Youth

> *Yes, the elders should get more serious about child protection issues in their respective communities. The issues of each one caring for his/ her own children and the rest can do what they want, should stop and they start looking at all children as their own children. This will make children to fear some activities such as early sex and opium smoking.* – Female Government

By facilitating community groups to address child protection, especially parents, this female government officer explains that it will enhance community cohesion, a sense of community responsibility, and awareness of ongoing child protection violations, which in turn, could improve protection.

Access to Health Services
Improved access to health services was listed as important, both for survivors of abuse and girls experiencing early pregnancy:

> *Government should put in place specific fund to support victim in accessing medical examination and facilitate the police to carry out investigation.* – Female Youth

> *Early pregnant girls should be given free medical care so they don't suffer infant and maternal mortality. If this medical service is for money some of these girls are poor and*

cannot afford to raise the money for maternal care so at the end the girl doesn't attend to the pregnancy and can suffer both the death of the girl and the baby. – Male NGO

When describing access, respondents specified that the services should be affordable or free, and that the health centres should either be close to communities, or that, there should be "Provision of free transport to the victim to the places of services and free treatment of victims by government workers like nurses and doctors".

Education and Teachers
The education-related recommendations were largely aimed at reducing student drop out and push out as well as making school a safer place for children.

> Government should provide loans to parents to enable the parents pay school fees and also sending children to school.
> -*Male Child*

> *Teachers should be taken for trainings to change behaviours so that they do not disturb young girls in schools.* –Male NGO

> *In some places, children are accompanied to school by a caregiver or even the parent and collected in the evening, the helps to avoid strangers to get near the children.*
> – Female NGO

While the provision of scholastic materials might require outside capital, ensuring that children are accompanied to and from school, and working with teachers to improve their treatment of students are both things that could be taken on by community members with the assistance of NGOs.

Changes to Existing Services
When discussing changes to existing services, reducing the funds needed to utilize government services and reduce corruption were frequently mentioned:

> *Free services to victims or children with problems; it can be improved by injecting more funds in sectors of police and health so that they don't ask for money from victims.*
> – Male Adult

Respondents also recognized that while corruption and asking for money for services may be due to greed, also it might be due to a genuine lack of funds at the district or sub-district levels.

> *The government should increase salaries of Probation Office so that they are motivated. They should be supported to move in villages and solve problems where they are happening. They should meet families, parents and offer advice.* – Girl

Accountability for use of funds, and ensuring that government employees have sufficient funding to visit rural areas of their catchment areas regularly is an essential part of ensuring coverage and improving access. In connection with appropriate funding, a female adult emphasized that services and programs must reach rural areas.

> *Organisations that deal with children issues should set up offices at the grassroot so that cases of child abuse can be reported immediately as they occur.* - Boy

> *I recommend to all service providers for children to also go deep in the village in order to provide adequate service to the children in the villages and rules against their rights to*

be provided since the children in the villages suffer the most than children in town areas. – Male NGO

Given the pervasive lack of transportation, unless child protection education, sensitization, and programming is brought to rural areas, these places will lack access to government and NGO services, and community leaders and parents will be unable to receive education about how to best care for children, which many of them requested.

Reporting
Respondents also expressed a desire to increase reporting of child protection violations to both community leaders and elements of the formal system.

> *The community leaders/elders could be involved in child protection concerns, as they are the nearest individuals to witness cases in the communities. Their attitudes towards the community should always be positive so that the children in the communities are helped.* **-** Female Government

Increasing the ease of reporting was the focus of these recommendations, as respondents asked for concrete steps involved in reporting directly, perhaps rather than through gatekeepers, as well as access to government officers in central locations to whom they could report directly.

> *The government should continue to establish steps for the community to report all such cases. Also have in place offices and officers to handle such issues at the community level.* – Female NGO

This female NGO member implies that people might report child protection violations more if they had the opportunity, and currently the risk, effort, and cost of such reporting outweigh the cost, which could be changed. A few children mentioned the need for education about to whom to report child protection violations that they or their peers experience. According to a male child, "Sensitising children about the ways of accessing help from the government, so that they can report any case of abuse to them by any person," is an important step in improving community-based child protection. Without the knowledge about what should be reported and who they can go to for help, children who lack helpful adults in their immediate surroundings may have no other path to ask for assistance.

Creation and Implementation of Laws
Community members suggested the creation of a number of district or sub-district level by-laws, as well as national child protection laws, all for the purpose of better protecting children.

Some individuals suggested by-laws to prevent harmful activities from occurring in their communities, such as an adult male who suggested, "Putting strict rules regarding discos in the community". Given the harm reportedly related to discos, this is certainly possible and one community where data were collected reported that they have already employed this by-law.

Suggestions about implementation of laws from children tended to be more severe than those from adults, such as the suggestion from several boys that "The community should come up with a by-law that those who impregnate young children should be castrated**."** Despite the improbability that such a by-law could be passed, it does express the perceived direness of the situation, and the extent to which children believe punishment should be imposed upon guilty parties. Several children focused on sexual violence when discussing punishment, "For girls, communities should expel perpetrators who sexually abuse young girls especially those below

the age of thirteen years." Adults also, generally, focused on sexual abuse if they identified a crime that they believed should be punished more harshly than others. Increasing punishment for crime in general was another suggestion given by several children,

> *By giving heavier punishments like digging the whole day or making someone do community work for months like sweeping the market and the streets. This will bring shame and the person [who committed a child protection violation] will reform.* – Girl

This girl identifies physical labour as an appropriate punishment, in part because the work would be done in public, causing shame for the guilty party, which could play a role in preventing that person and others from committing future crimes. In connection to these suggestions, given that several laws already exist related to issues like child labour and sexual abuse, raising awareness and improving enforcement of existing laws could also address some of these issues through legal means.

Child Participation

Respondents also emphasized the need to engage children in addressing child protection concerns. An NGO staff member suggested, "The government should establish forum where they can allow children to speak about bad things they face, instead of adults speaking for them." Continuing to incorporate the experiences of children is especially important at the local level as programs and interventions are designed, those they are meant to serve can play an important role in their conception, development and implementation. To facilitate this participation a girl suggested:

> *Maybe if there are NGOs for children, they should come to school and start child protection clubs and child forum when children can talk about such bad things and know from them how to get out of trouble.*

In addition to child protection focused activities, a female community leader recommended promoting interaction between children:

> *If children are brought together, they will learn a lot from each other through exercising their talents in football, netball, athletics and other things. So let the government plan for children who do not have access to equipments used for the mentioned activities.*
> – Female Community Leader

The importance of recreation and social interaction with diverse groups of peers is emphasized by this community leader, and could have an important role to play in child protection, as children with attentive support systems often are more likely to do well.

Children themselves identified the role they could play in promoting prevention of and response to child protection violations, where they could be active participants in sharing information with parents and children.

> *Children should be put in groups to educate others on the important of education or report to the sub-county parents who do not support the education of their children.*
> - Boy

Respondents explained that engaging children in the conception and implementation of child protection activities could improve the acceptability of the message delivered, as well as ensure that sensitization and outreach activities reflect protection concerns as local children and youth experience them.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Citizens of Arua and Nebbi reported that community-based child protection mechanisms play an important role in preventing and responding to child protection violations. With this in-depth knowledge about how CBCPM function, who is involved, and where informal and formal systems are well-connected or disconnected, it is possible to identify ways to improve both the support offered within communities, as well as the ways residents, including children, access formal support when needed. Communities care about their children, and are eager to learn more about how to do so, and to receive support in making sure their children do well. Better equipping community members to prevent and address child protection mechanisms is essential, and likely will be more acceptable, feasible, and appropriate than focusing solely on increasing the presence of formal services within communities. To better equip communities to prevent and address child protection violations, participants in data collections recommended that tangible resources related to transportation, communication, and the presence of services in rural areas are needed, in addition to awareness raising and community engagement. Understanding what exists in communities is essential before engaging in child protection programming, which could undermine existing local strategies.

The following are key findings from data collection in Arua and Nebbi, followed by suggestions about how they might best be addressed.

A. **There is a lack of common understanding and terms about sexual abuse that makes discussing the issue difficult, and complicates the creation of awareness about existing laws and their enforcement.**

Encourage dialogue within the formal child protection system to ensure actors are familiar with, and actively use, sexual abuse terms as Ugandan law defines them. When conducting awareness raising and programming at the community level ensure that participants share their own definitions of different terms, especially rape and defilement, and ensure that an understanding is reached about the differences between the two, why the differences may be important, and how the different crimes may be referred to in both English and local language going forward. This differentiation could enable members of the informal child protection system to engage in discussion about whether the two matters should be addressed similarly or differently, and whether they feel equipped to handle both types of cases.

B. **At the community level there is a lack of knowledge about appropriate ways to prevent and respond to child protection violations.**

Community members in every community expressed eagerness to learn more about child protection and about how they can better prevent and respond to child protection violations within their communities. Identifying such residents as 'focal points' for child protection awareness, so that they could receive child protection education, and then share it with their neighbours and community could create awareness and ownership in a cost-effective manner. However, this process should be reciprocal, where community members both gain knowledge about child protection, and also are given the opportunity to further share their experiences with government and NGOs delivering programming, to ensure that their conceptions of child protection reflect community realities.

C. Community members generally view traditional forms of justice as focused on reconciliation and restitution, and government-based justice to be punitive, however despite this delineation, they reportedly are most likely to engage the system that they feel is most likely to reach a resolution that is in their favour.

Rather than focusing on encouraging community members to utilize the formal system in lieu of the informal system, understanding how the two can be integrated to some extent might be more useful; this should include including incorporating traditional priorities related to justice, such as reaching resolution and maintaining community harmony. Working with communities to identify which parts of each system best serve and protect children could facilitate this process. Additionally, engaging someone who is part of the traditional justice system, but who could focus specifically on children could be helpful, as this might allow a child-focused traditional justice system to function with an explicit child protection focus. When considering changes that could affect the traditional community hierarchy, it is essential to consider existing roles and privileges that accompany those, so that any adaptations are conceived of in a way that does not threaten existing power structures.

D. Knowledge and implementation of national laws is limited, however communities are eager to incorporate these as local by-laws if they represent community priorities.

Ownership and knowledge of local by-laws is relatively widespread, and many community members suggested creating local by-laws related to child protection. While this will likely reiterate national laws, it could help engage the community around child protection and allow them to adapt national laws to their local context, and create a detailed action plan for implementation and enforcement.

E. Students are pushed out of school due to issues like lack of school supplies, uniform, lack of parental support, or early pregnancy.

Child protection actors, including government ministries, and national, regional, and international actors engaging in child protection, might further analyze Uganda's education strategy. Doing so, through a child protection lens, could help identify further potential linkages between education and child protection, and how schools and the education system can play a central protective role in communities. This analysis should focus, in particular, on how to keep children in school as long as possible, as drop out reportedly has negative effects not only on educational attainment, but also on child protection outcomes.

F. Many children lack a supportive adult in their lives with whom they can discuss problems and who can serve as their advocate.

Training adult community members as children's advocates could be productive on two fronts: in developing a cadre of child protection experts at the community level and also providing supportive resources for children. During data collection respondents shared that supportive adults can offer significant protection for children, identifying child protection violations, offering advice, providing access to formal services, and advocating for children at home and at school when necessary.

G. Child neglect is often the first child protection violations experienced by a child, and reportedly leads to others in many cases.

Community members emphasized their eagerness to take part in the prevention of child protection violations, as well as improving their response. In order to successfully engage in such prevention it is essential to address neglect, as it is reportedly the most widely experienced violation, and is closely associated with future difficulties. Participants in data collection explained that, while it is possible that neglect may occur because parents overlook children's needs, it is often the case that parents do not have the financial means to meet those requirements. The socioeconomic stability of a household appears to be closely associated with neglect, as well as other child protection violations such as child labour and school dropout, and therefore communities may benefit if it is addressed in concert with child protection.

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Annexes

Data Collection Guides