

- Truck drivers stand for child protection -
The story of the Regional Association of Truck Drivers Against
Exploitation of Children,
Uganda, Kampala/Mombasa trucking route
- Case study -

A case study collaboration between the Interagency Learning Initiative (ILI) on community-based child protection mechanisms, the Community Child Protection Exchange, and the Uganda Reproductive Health Bureau (URHB).

This case study tells the story of a regional association set up by truckers to protect children, in particular to stop truck drivers from picking up girls under 18 in the towns along the Uganda section of the Kampala-Mombasa trucking route. It tells the story of some of the truckers who took a stand against sexual exploitation of under-age girls as individuals and how they approached the Uganda Reproductive Health Bureau (URHB) to help them with technical information.

The truckers have now formed a regional association that will negotiate with other truck driver associations, government and truck owners about the issue of sexual exploitation of underage girls.

The work done by the truckers is an example of a bottom-up approach where a local group initiates a child protection programme within their specific community (truckers) and then approaches an NGO for help. So often, it is the NGO that defines the 'need' resulting in poor ownership by the community.

This case study is part of collection of work undertaken in 2017 to document interesting or promising examples of community-based child protection in Tanzania and Uganda. The examples can provide insight into how different understandings of and approaches to community dynamics in various contexts can help support deeper community engagement in child protection. A synthesis paper which draws out some of the key learning from the case studies is forthcoming (2018).

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Truck drivers make personal choices

"I grew here in Naluwerere. When I saw the truck drivers I hated their behaviours [sleeping with young girls] even though I was yearning for a chance to be a truck driver. But I said even if I become a truck driver I will not behave like that - even some of the girls at school with me [were selling sex to truck drivers]. That time we had some NGOs [various NGOs worked in the area at the time] who came to tell us that we must not behave like that. I started to talk to them [the NGO workers] and soon I began to talk to other truck drivers, telling them. You know there are truck drivers who are not caring about children – they are interested in the young girls and they are still at school – so we should tell them why are you involved in young girls. You should be an example – you have a family at home. Most of us we are born into a vulnerable community. When I was young I saw the evil acts of the truck drivers and as you know change starts with us so I decided to be a person who speaks out." Kato Falakani, Naluwerere Truck Drivers Association



Kato Falakani



Kadogo Hashim

Kadogo Hashim and Kato Falakani are both from Naluwerere along the main trucking route between Mombasa and Kampala in Uganda, not far from the border with Kenya. Kadogo Hashim has been a truck driver for twenty years.

"From Kampala, Mombasa, Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi, Sudan, Congo, Ethiopia. For most of my life – I was a 'turn man' at first and then a driver. I have been everywhere, Malawi, Tanzania, Sudan." Kadogo Hashim

Kato is a 'turn man' – a name given to the driver's assistant – most drivers start out as turn men.

"I grew in Naluwerere – there is a trailer park around that town. When I saw the truck drivers I was yearning for a chance to be a truck driver. I am three years now a turn man – so patience pays. You have to be strong to be a turn man – your arms need to lift the heavy tires to change them – that is your job. If the truck breaks down the driver goes and you stay – sometimes for three weeks along the road." Kato Falakani

Both men belong to the Naluwerere Truck Drivers Association, which was set up some time ago to represent truckers from the town in local community politics and in negotiations with the owners and managers of the trucks. At first, the truck driver association had nothing to do with child protection. But over time, with the influence of men like Kato and Kadogo, the association has become involved in child protection. Kato and Kadogo describe below how they became involved in an innovative process led by truckers to protect children. For Kato, it was a process that began in childhood as he watched the behaviour of truck drivers in his town, and which he describes above.

For Kadogo it took longer. *"I learnt something not so long ago. I was like them for some time [buying sex from girls and women] but I realised that these behaviours can either destroy the country or me. I saw so many of my fellow truck drivers getting sick and dying and I thought that this would happen to me. This is when I changed. I decided that I would not be alive to look after my children or my wife if I carried on – so I needed to change. I would not spread the disease. I also saw young girls – they could be my daughters and I wanted to do something. **Mimi sitaki watoto** (I do not pick up young girls). I wrote it along my truck. So I joined the Maluwerere Association as they were talking about staying away from buying sex."* Kadogo Hashim

When community initiatives link with external support and services

At the same time as Kato and Kadogo were beginning to realise that they wanted to do something about the issue of under-age girls, the Uganda Reproductive Health Bureau (URHB) was running a programme in the area along the same trucking route. Their focus was on HIV prevention amongst truckers and commercial sex workers. They found it difficult to engage truck drivers so they approached the truck driver associations which existed in most of the towns.

"You found going directly to the truck drivers at times it was difficult they were touching me and wanting a relationship. They would say, "You are a beautiful girl - I want to travel with you." wherever I would go to talk to them. So we went to the existing truck driver associations – they were handling other things like disputes between truck drivers and owners. At first we were mainly looking at HIV prevention and not child protection. But the truck drivers in the association and the community started to ask us to do something about young girls. Some [of the truck drivers] realised...they said amongst them to go around talking to their fellow truck drivers to stop them going to young girls." Female social worker, URHB

The social workers describe that they too had noticed that many underage girls worked as sex workers. This was an issue they too were keen to do something about.

"So many young girls come from the villages and were desperate. So they go to the truck drivers. We did a survey at first and we found out that the truck drivers are mainly using

young girls – because the older ones are expensive – they rush for those young ones.” Male social worker, URHB

In late 2013, URHB and ChildHope UK commissioned a participatory study (Kakaire & Wakasenza, 2014) in the three towns of Bugiri, Mbiko and Busia to gain “a broad understanding of the reasons why young girls engage in commercial sex work” (Ibid, p. 8). This research provides more information about the issue that both the truck drivers and URHB sought to address. Some key findings are summarised in the box below.

Research on young girls involved in the sex trade

The study undertaken in 2014 by Kakaire & Wakasenza for URHB was conducted in the transit towns of Bugiri (close to Nalawerere where Kato and Kaogo live), Mbiko and Busia. It used what the researchers describe as a “participatory ethnographic evaluation and research (PEER) approach” and worked with what they termed “commercially sexually exploited girls” [sic], adult female sex workers and truck drivers. This extract from the research report describes some of the reasons young people gave for getting involved in sex work.

Drivers for commercially sexually exploited girls into sex work:

Underlying factors:

- Extreme household poverty which puts pressure on the girls to contribute to the household income.
- Backgrounds of sex work in the family particularly where either the mother or other relatives were involved and it is now considered a primary livelihood option.

Triggers:

- Physical and emotional abuse at home and parental domestic violence forces girls to abandon homes and find alternative places to live.
- Availability of initiators: Majority of commercially sexually exploited girls suggest being initiated into sex work by adult female sex workers rather than peers.
- Heightened night life and sense of adventure in stop-over towns entices girls.

Reinforcing perceptions and beliefs:

- Sex work is the easiest way to earn a living and material possessions.
- Peers engaged in sex work are well-off.
- A foreign client will take them out of the country to live ‘a better life’.

Other factors:

- Broken relationships with boyfriends or ‘husbands’.
- Parents renting rooms for their daughters in stop-over towns so they can access better education opportunities but with little supervision. Girls become easily influenced.
- Mothers who are ‘girl-friends’ of truck drivers relinquishing parental responsibilities to truck drivers who then groom girls for sexual exploitation.

Extract from Kakaire & Wakasenza, 2014

URHB used the research to develop an intervention called “From Sexual Exploitation to Education (FSE)” that targeted the girls, but they realised that they also needed to reach truckers. What emerged was a programme that included work to get young girls off the street and prevention work to stop girls from becoming sex workers - both run by URHB

and described in the box below - as well as a communication campaign run by the trucker associations to stop truckers picking up underage girls. Drivers like Kato and Kadogo and the trucker organisations ran the communication campaign with technical support and some funding from URHB. The truck drivers suggested that using SMS messaging would be one way to reach truckers who all had mobile phones to stay in touch with truck owners and family. They developed the messages for truck drivers¹, which included messages such as these:

- “I am a good father, I look after my family especially my daughters.”
- “If I sleep with young girls, someone else might be sleeping with my daughters as well.”

Alongside the SMS messages, the truck drivers also spent time talking to fellow drivers. The social workers at URHB supported them with this work by giving training.

“We began to go with the truck drivers [such as Kato and Kadogo] to their fellow drivers – at first we went hand in hand and told them [the truck drivers] things like “You must have an ID, this is what you need to say about testing.” At one point we had to accompany them but now they talk to the truck drivers without us. We also gave them training on child protection. We taught about sex with a child as illegal.” Social worker, URHB

The truck driver-advocates also referred fellow drivers to the URHB-run clinic and HIV testing campaigns in the area.

“The truckers from the associations are also encouraging their fellow drivers to use the clinic we have in Bugiri and we do moonlight testing – at night because that is when truckers have stopped – the truck drivers [from the association] help us.” Social worker, URHB

Kato describes how the Maluwerere trucker association also got involved in the work that URHB was doing with the girls and adult sex workers.

“We had dialogue meetings between truck drivers and girls with the social workers [from URHB]. We would tell the girls you need a good future so go back to school. We are also going door to door with the big women [the adult commercial sex workers] and tell them the benefits of education. Mostly these commercial sex workers when they are getting old there is a way how they acquire these young ladies and they put them in the system. Then they get some money. So we talk to them about young girls needing to go to school.” Kato Falakani

¹ A similar campaign was used to reach adult sex workers and young girls.

² As this case study focuses on the reduction of sexual exploitation of underage girls we have not gone into a debate about March 2018

The Regional Association of Truck Drivers Against Exploitation of Children



The next step for the truck drivers in their protection work for children was the formation of a regional association. The photo above shows members of the Malaba Truck and Taxi Drivers Association.

In April 2017, members of this association, who had been involved in the “From Sexual Exploitation to Education” campaign and working with URHB, called a meeting of all the associations in the area to form a regional Association of Truck Drivers against Exploitation of Children (Regional Association). They requested support from URHB for some refreshments for the meeting and also asked for technical support. Twelve people from Busia, Mbikko, Naluwerere (Kato and Kadogo attended), Malaba and Idudi town truck driver associations attended the meeting. They elected a chairperson and other office bearers and developed a set of objectives for the organisation which included:

- To sensitise truck drivers on the dangers of child abuse e.g. stop having sex with children.
- To sensitise street children (including the community at large) on the dangers of living on streets and link them to formal education and vocational skills training e.g. hairdressing and selling.
- To sensitise the community on child rights.
- To empower truck drivers with knowledge and information to influence behaviour change i.e. protecting children from any form of abuse.

(Extract from Minutes of inaugural meeting of regional Association of Truck Drivers against Exploitation of Children)

The Regional Association is in the process of being registered as a CBO and they have a plan of action, which includes targeting truck owners to get involved in educating truck drivers about sexual exploitation.

The child protection work has gone beyond the issue of the sexual exploitation of girls. The Malaba Association is also particularly concerned about the issue of children on the street. Their office is in a large informal market square where groups of children do odd jobs for local stalls and the truckers parked in the area. Most are not attending school, and some sleep in the area.

"If you come in the morning you will see many children – they do many activities. We need to save these children as they are being deceived and enter into trade when they are young and it spoils their future. If you go into trade as a primary school child you get used to having "small, small" money and think you can go into business. Some of their parents are not having money to support them at school so once they learn there is a way to get money they get used to that. So we are trying now to visit industry – we have three big factories here in our area where these drivers go and the children follow and do sodomy and work for cheap labour. So we want to stop that problem. We want to help these children - maybe to build a school here for them." Silver Kanyole, Chairperson Malaba Trucker and Taxi Association

URHB has been talking to the Malaba Association about allowing their social workers to work with the association to find out the best approach to working with the children, which children can be returned home and if a school is viable or necessary.

Impact of the work done by the truck drivers

There has been no formal evaluation done on the work of the Regional Association's initiative or on the URHB campaign, although URHB is presently undertaking an evaluation of their work with young girls involved in sex work.

However, URHB social workers and truckers themselves report many changes. Perhaps the most relevant change in the context of this case study is that social workers and truck drivers involved with URHB report changes in the behaviour of the truck drivers.

Below is an extract of a conversation between Glynis (researcher) and URHB social workers:

Researcher: How successful has the campaign been with the truck drivers?

"Now those truck drivers they have stopped using young girls - they go for adults²."

Researcher: How do you know that? What do you see or hear that tells you that?

"More truck drivers are joining the associations. We go to their meetings of the associations and you hear what they say. Also as you go on the ground you hear the feedback from the community – they have changed – they no longer go for these girls – the community says it. But also the truck drivers have realised that spending their money on nonsense – they are just now saving – so even the adult sex workers say there are no customers."

"Even you can hear from the young girls on the street – they say, 'When we go to the truck drivers they are counselling us to go to school – they don't want to buy sex from us'."

"I have heard that too from some of them."

"We also have meetings with the bar managers and they tell us the young girls are not coming there any more."

"Also some truck drivers are sleeping in their trucks because the truck drivers said the young girls would go and knock at their doors [in the overnight lodges] and they would be tempted and so they sleep in their trucks."

"Exactly I heard that too."

² As this case study focuses on the reduction of sexual exploitation of underage girls we have not gone into a debate about the role of adult sex workers.

Kato acknowledged that it was difficult to change behaviour and that not all the truck drivers listened but that he too has seen some change in attitude.

“Some of them [truck drivers] are good – we are in transition – some have been living in another way from us. Changing behaviours is not easy – we are still working on this project to change behaviour. The commercial sex workers are familiar with us now - we were pulling ropes with them before but as for now they come and get tested in a moonlight VCT – they learned how to keep their life safe from HIV and they care for their lives too. Some of the truck drivers too they say, “We don't want to hear such things – take that away!” But for us we have to keep on doing our job. At first there were only five who used to come to our meetings in the association about child protection but we now have 30 in our town – they say we thought you were telling us nothing but we now know we need to take care of ourselves and these girls.” Kato Falakani

The photo below shows trucks on the road between Bugiri and Malaba close to the Kenyan border. It illustrates how many truck drivers pass through this area daily and the importance of the contribution of people from the community of truck drivers speaking out for children.

A formal evaluation of the impact of the work of the Regional Association would be a powerful example of how a community of truck drivers can drive their own child protection interventions and make a difference in the area of child protection.



A queue of trucks between Bugiri and Malaba, near the Kenyan border

Reflections and Conclusion

In writing these case studies we have used the ILI typology of community ownership (Benham, 2008; Wessells, 2009) to help us reflect on the level of community involvement we observed.

Four different means of engaging with communities and the resulting level of community engagement for each.

Category	Description	Ownership level
1	Direct implementation by agency: The agency is a service provider; community members are beneficiaries.	Low
2	Community involvement in agency initiative: The agency is a promoter of its own initiative, a planner and a trainer, and community members are volunteers and beneficiaries	Low to moderate
3	Community owned and managed activities mobilized by external agency: The agency is a catalyst, capacity builder, a facilitator of linkages, and a funder after community ownership has developed. The community members are analysts, planners, implementers, assessors, and also beneficiaries.	Moderate to high
4	Community owned and managed activities initiated from within the community: The agency is a capacity builder and funder, and community members are analysts, planners, implementers, assessors, and also beneficiaries.	High

Benham, 2008; Wessells, 2009

One of the things we learned when working on these case studies was that many of the projects we looked at define community in a way that is different from the commonly-held idea of a 'community' as a village or neighbourhood grouping made up of all ages and levels of income and power. However, in this case, the truckers can also be understood to be a 'community'. There is some interaction with the broader town communities they live and travel through but the focus of the initiative is the **community** of truckers.

If one accepts this conceptualisation of community we can understand the truckers to be a community and we could place the initiative in Category 3 or 4 in the ILI typology. The initiative came from within the trucker community - truckers themselves set the agenda, made their own decisions and formed their own association. They sought help from URHB who provided technical advice and training. It is an interesting example of the good that can happen when a local group asks for the specific help of an NGO in addressing a need that they themselves have identified.

Aside from broadening our idea of community, what makes the project particularly interesting is that it is one of the few examples of a child protection programme or a gender-based violence programme that focuses on changing the behaviour of existing or potential perpetrators. Given this, it would be exciting to see further evaluation of the impact of the project as this would add to our understanding of how smaller community groupings can create their own focused child protection projects.

References

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