

The story of the Vutamdogo Clubs, Mwanza, Tanzania

Youth clubs run livelihood projects and a literacy programme that provides protection for young children

- Case study -

A case study collaboration between the Interagency Learning Initiative (ILI) on community-based child protection mechanisms, the Community Child Protection Exchange, and Tanzanian Home Economics Association (TAHEA)

This case study tells the story of a youth livelihood and child literacy and numeracy programme in Mwanza, Tanzania. Vutamdogo. (Pull the Little One¹) is a two-tiered model in which youth-led livelihood and savings groups are run after-school learning sessions for Grade One and Two. They teach children basic literacy and numeracy and provide protection and care. The after-school literacy programme was initiated by Tanzanian Home Economics Association (TAHEA) in an attempt to ensure that every student who reached Grade Three was able to read, write and count - an outcome that the schools were struggling to achieve alone. The youth livelihood programme was developed in response to difficulties community youth were facing as a result of a once lucrative but now struggling fishing industry. Many young people missed school to work in the fishing industry and many did not complete their education. TAHEA helped them set up small businesses as individuals and in groups. Additionally, getting the youth involved with teaching younger children allowed them to take up a respected position within their communities, which was protective for them as well as for the young children they were teaching and supporting. We explore how TAHEA has slowly developed an NGO-initiated intervention based on community identified needs into youth-led action, which is very much owned by the young people themselves.

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).

Written by Glynis Clacherty
Edited by Lucy Hillier
With contributions from Mike Wessells
Photographs by James Clacherty

Contact

Lucy Hillier (The Exchange)
lucy@childprotectionforum.org
Mary Kabati, TAHEA Mwanza, Tanzania
marykabati2004@yahoo.co.uk

¹ This is a term used by local fisherman as they pull in small fish with their nets.
August 2018

Elizabeth and Anastasia's story

Elizabeth and Anastasia are two young women who own a dressmaking and tailoring business in the village of Mhonze, some kilometres outside of the town of Mwanza on the edge of Lake Victoria. They started their business with the help of other young people in their community who are part of a Vutamdogo club called *Umoja Wavijana Mhonze* - the United Youth of Mhonze. The other young people run welding, carpentry, fish farming, mechanics and trading businesses.



Elizabeth joined this particular Vutamdogo Club in 2014 when there were only six members. TAHEA facilitated apprenticeships with local “fundis” (tradespeople) for the youth. Elizabeth learned to sew from a local tailor. As Elizabeth went around her community telling people about the Vutamdogo Club other girls became interested in the tailoring business.

“We started as a few but we started to mobilise other girls in the village so they joined the group. They saw the work we were doing and they were inspired: ‘Oh! You are making this shirt! You are making this dress!’ So, more girls became interested to join the group.”

One of these young women was Anastasia. Elizabeth taught Anastasia how to sew and the two of them now run a shop together.

In the morning, Anastasia works with her mother in her mother’s restaurant and then she goes to the shop to work with Elizabeth. In the afternoon, they close their shop, meet the other Vutamdogo teachers to pick up their teaching equipment, and go to Elizabeth’s house where a group of about 20 Grade One children are waiting for them under the trees.

“It is good to be busy. I can work with my mother and then come and sew in the shop. There is no time to go around and around the streets, to be roaming. We are earning our own money and we are not tempted if a man says hello ‘Anastasia, how are you?’ You know?”

In addition to the apprenticeship, Elizabeth, Anastasia and all the other members of *Umoja Wavijana Mhonze* receive regular training workshops from TAHEA in teaching, classroom management and how to communicate with young children. *“At the beginning it was difficult because we didn’t have enough knowledge to perform the work. But those regular trainings helped a lot.”* Elizabeth and Anastasia have now become friends with the children they teach and they look forward to their lessons. We discuss the impact of the relationship between the youth and the children in a later section of the case study.



Elizabeth teaches her afternoon class

John Jackson's story

John (below, in front of this group of Vutamdogo members who are talking to the fisherman on their right) is the chairperson of *Umoja Wavijana Igombe*. Igombe is a busy fishing village. The beachfront is full of boats, men fixing nets, boat builders and refrigerator trucks collecting the day's catch. On the main road that runs down to the beach there are a number of pool halls, bars and movie houses along with small shops and people's houses. John lives here with his grandmother and his two sisters.



John is friends with some of the members of the Vutamdogo group in Mhonze and was very impressed with the work that they were doing together there. He decided that he wanted to be part of a club like theirs and started talking to them about how he could start a Vutamdogo Club in Igombe. John contacted TAHEA and organised a meeting in his community to try and organise some volunteers. At first, he really struggled to get the group going. Igombe is a busy place with lots of money going through it. Not

many young people were interested in volunteering and the community was not very receptive to the club. To make matters worse, John's mother died soon after he started the club and he became responsible for looking after his family.

During this time, Frank - the project coordinator - spent lots of time coaching John and making sure he had the support he needed. John would call Frank often to help him resolve conflicts or find solutions to problems. Although the group got off to a slow start, they are now thriving. They all have branded t-shirts that they designed and got made for themselves using money from their lending and savings scheme. They have an office just off the main road and they are busy supporting the new group in Kabangaja. John has also been working as a carpenter's apprentice with the help of TAHEA and has also been able to send himself to driving school.



TAHEA's approach

TAHEA - formed in 1980 - did not start out with the intention of running youth livelihood programmes or literacy classes. In fact, its initial purpose was to promote the study of home economics in schools and colleges in Tanzania. Over time, the organisation moved towards development work in an attempt to become more socially relevant. By the time the Mwanza chapter of TAHEA started in 2000, its mandate from the start was to address local issues. Mary Kibati, head of programmes –TAHEA, Mwanza chapter, describes how:

“When we (TAHEA) started here in Mwanza we spent a few years just looking at what the issues were. We talked to people in the villages around. In the education area we set up Early Childhood Development (ECD) schools—this was a time when ECD was being promoted globally. We focused on education and also child protection and nutrition but we soon realised (because we talked to the community all the time) that you can't do these things without doing economic strengthening of families, so micro-finance became a focus.”

TAHEA's involvement in communities in and around Mwanza is characterised by this needs-responsive approach. They spend time finding out what the needs in the community actually are and then develop interventions in line with the needs that arise.

This case study has used the typology (see table below) developed by the Interagency Learning Initiative (Benham, 2008) and discussed in detail in Wessells (2009) to analyse the extent of community involvement in the child protection programmes we have documented.

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

The TAHEA needs-responsive approach fits in to Category 3 where the action is mobilised by the external agency but with the community involved as analysts and planners. We will look later at how the Vutamdogo Club project has begun to move into Category 4, where the young people themselves run the new clubs.

Promoting literacy through youth engagement

Once the ECD schools were established and running effectively, with help from the local government, community leaders and community volunteers, TAHEA started noticing that many children were completing primary school without being able to read or write.

“So, we had been promoting 0-6 years in the ECD centres and now when they make the transition to school we lost them.”

One of the main reasons for this is the very large classes often found in Tanzanian government schools. The classes in the lake shore areas are particularly large because people had moved to the area to fish. The Vutamdogo literacy work was established in response to this need and was based on the same principles that TAHEA had been using from the very beginning - community analysis and needs-responsiveness.

At the same time, in the early 2000s there was a fishing boom in the area. There was a lot of money to be made catching Nile perch and selling them to processing factories. The fishing industry brought lots of money into these fishing communities and, with it, a number of problems too. Bars and pool houses started to spring up, and drinking became a problem. Children started to skip school to work with the fishermen and eventually dropped out altogether. As fish stocks started to become depleted, many young people found themselves without any means of employment and years behind in their formal education.

"Now, the fishing is not so lucrative, as the perch have been overfished, and these young people have little education. We started talking to community leaders, youth and parents about what we could do about this. We listened to their ideas." Mary Kabati

TAHEA's first strategy was to start football and netball leagues that the young people could get involved in. TAHEA used the sports leagues as an additional opportunity to engage with youth and listen to them.

"The main thing they talked about was that their parents were blaming them: 'you are useless', but we thought they are not useless, they are energetic. We said to them okay if you want to be respected you need to give something to your community."

TAHEA saw how it could promote literacy and numeracy for Grade One and Grade Two children and at the same time give the youth something to do - something which would also improve how people in the community saw them. They would set up groups of youth - called Vutamdogo Clubs - and train them as literacy and numeracy teachers who would run small informal afternoon classes in their villages. The idea came from TAHEA but it was in response to a community-identified need. TAHEA also aimed to allow the youth to own the groups as much as possible - *"In many development projects we always see the big fish, but we thought the small fish (the youth) can do something too."*

Setting up the Vutamdogo Clubs

There are now seven clubs running in the Ilemela district. We met with all of these clubs and asked them to draw the process they went through to start their Vutamdogo clubs. The sports leagues that TAHEA started were a way of making contact with the youth and their communities, learning what needs there were and how the community organised itself. This step was important because from here on the process of setting up the clubs was managed through structures that already existed in each community rather than by TAHEA themselves.

Bernard, the chairperson of *Umoja Wavijana Mhonze* explains how they went about setting up their club. The process was not initiated by the youth themselves but by TAHEA through the community leader. First, the community leader called a meeting for all the youth in the community. The purpose of this meeting was to explain what Vutamdogo is and to ask youth to volunteer, but not many people attended. As a result of this most of the clubs started off very small - as Elizabeth explains below.

"A meeting for the youth is not a common thing in this community and so not many youths came because they thought it would be useless for them to be there. Youth are often not listened to and so many of them thought it would be a waste of time."

Once a group of young people (aged between 16 and 23, each based in a local village) had volunteered, they elected a chairperson, a treasurer and a secretary. Bernard was chosen as the chairperson of the club *Umoja Wavijana Mhonze* - *"At that time I rejected the position. I didn't want to be the chairperson. But later, after I was told that I would receive training from TAHEA on how to be a leader, I decided to do it. The training helped me understand how to lead others. It made me more confident so I accepted being the chairperson."* The training that TAHEA offered at this stage

was mostly organisational and covered things like leadership skills and conflict resolution. They were also given training on how to teach numeracy and literacy to young children.

Literacy and numeracy training

Initially the groups were set up as literacy and numeracy initiatives led by the youth, which aimed to keep these young people busy and to make sure they were giving something back to the community. TAHEA made contact with the nationwide state project to improve literacy and numeracy and worked with the local Ward Education Officer who now trains and mentors the youth tutors, and a local teacher was also assigned to each group and paid a small stipend by TAHEA to support them. The youths and teacher plan the lessons together in relation to the school curriculum. Members of a Vutamdogo Club then work in pairs and threes to teach a learning group of children three afternoons a week at 4.00pm. The children gather under a tree in the yard of the local leader, the teacher, or a Vutamdogo Club member. Because one of the problems in the schools is the large classes, each informal learning group has only twenty children in it. There can be as many as ten groups running simultaneously in a village every afternoon, each facilitated by two or three Vutamdogo Club members.

Also, because the groups are local, children do not have to walk far to get to them. The local head teacher and other teachers are involved and meet regularly with the Vutamdogo Club tutors. They identify children who are struggling and send them to the learning sessions or identify gaps in the children's learning that can be addressed in the learning sessions.



Checking the children's work

Livelihood projects

Once the young people had been trained as tutors and the groups had grown, the young people began to talk to TAHEA about their own personal needs.

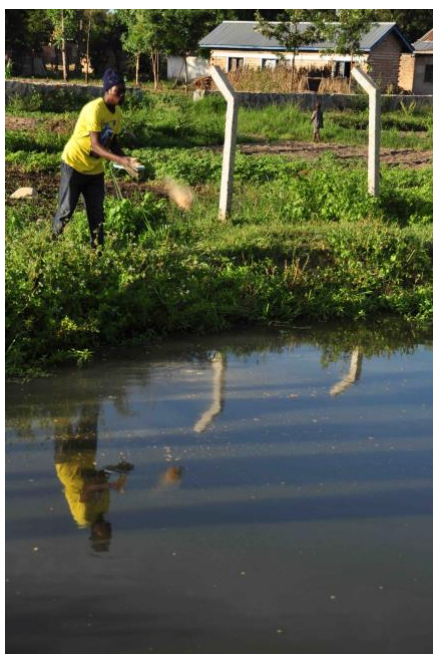
"The community started to see the change in the youth - they were dressing better, and proud, and not hanging around the bars any more – they were teachers. This made them feel confident and that is when they started to think about their future lives." Mary Kabati

"This work has changed me – I now care about myself and the small ones and I can think of my future." Girl, 19, Igombe Vutamdogo Club

Many of the young people had some education - most of the tutors have four years of secondary school - but there were no job opportunities in the local area and none of them had the money to get further education. Working with their previous knowledge of economic strengthening, TAHEA suggested the groups set up a cooperative, register it, and open a bank account. TAHEA would provide training on how to manage the money.

TAHEA also facilitated access to training opportunities in the villages. The youth identified skills and interests they already had, like welding or carpentry, and TAHEA paid local artisans to share their skills and provided a small loan to set up a business. This is how Elizabeth and Anastasia (see page 2) started their dressmaking shop and how John learned to do carpentry (see page 3).

The businesses started by Vutamdogo Clubs include fish farming, furniture making, dressmaking and tailoring, welding, agriculture, soap making and charcoal making. The photo below shows the fish farm that Anastasia mentions in her story. It is a business started by the *Umoja Wavijana Mhonze* group with training and a loan from TAHEA. The group plans to save the money they make and use it for further training for members.



Many of the initial loans have been paid back so the livelihood work is now self-sustaining in most of the clubs. The primary point of contact with TAHEA is Frank Luchagula, the Project Coordinator, who visits each group about once every month to make sure everything is running smoothly and addresses any concerns they might have. This livelihood work could be seen as still part of Category 3 in the ILI typology (see page 4), *"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"* (Wessells, 2015, p.11).

But it is the next step of the process that we think begins to move the project into a real bottom-up approach where the activity is *"community owned and managed and initiated from within the community"* (ibid, p.11). However, before we look at this process, it is useful to consider how the Vutamdogo Clubs promote child protection and why we have included them in this set of case studies on community-led child protection.

Vutamdongo clubs as protective spaces for youth

Building self-efficacy in young people and giving them a sense of power over their lives are identified as protective by a number of child development psychologists (Masten, 2001; Luthar, 2006; Masten & Narayan, 2012). Additionally, having an income makes young women less dependent on economically-created and potentially risky relationships (Ingham & Aggleton (2006). To add to this, approving and positive social networks can also be considered as protective (Ungar, 2011).

As we can see from the stories of Elizabeth and Anastasia, as well as from John's story, being involved in the Vutamdongo Clubs seems to have protective aspects for the youth members. For instance, it can give young people something to focus their energy on, and it can also give them enough of an income for them to be independent and to show the communities where they live that the youth are deserving of respect and have something to contribute to their communities.

One of the clubs we visited gave us a particular sense of how they provide layers of protection in the lives of the young people. The Isanzu Club is in a remote area inland from the lake where agriculture is fairly marginal, access to markets is limited and families are very poor. We arrived at the group office to find only the chairperson present, but slowly, more and more young people arrived. This group has a number of young women - aged between 16 and 20 - who talked about the important role the club played in their lives.



"We support each other in the club. We are all teachers and we advise each other about the children we teach". Young woman, Isanzu Club

"We are important people to the children. We have an important job in teaching." Young man, Isanzu Club

This group showed particular pride in their role as teachers of the children and had obviously gained a sense of self-worth from the role they played. They all knew the children well and told many stories of how children had progressed in their learning and confidence. A few of the girls also mentioned how important the livelihood projects had been in helping them to become independent.

"I learned sewing and now I have a small business. I can earn my own money." Young woman, Isanzu

What we saw was that in this remote village boys and girls had developed personal confidence and positive supportive friendships, as well as a measure of independence. All of these achievements can be considered protective factors that build a sense of future purpose and mastery - something these young people could not easily access in this remote location - through employment or other social networks.

"I am a teacher. I am also a caregiver."- Vutamdogo clubs as protective spaces for young children

The Vutamdogo programme has also demonstrated some protective aspects for the young children who attend the learning sessions. With two of the groups that we visited, we asked each Vutamdogo Club member to draw a child they had got to know through their teaching. They spent time drawing detailed pictures that had an element of care and respect, as well as knowledge of the children's lives and their personalities. One of the early theorists that looked at building internal protective factors in children (Rutter, 1987) pointed to the power of supportive relationships with adults. In addition, having an adult that you trust means children are more likely to speak out when things trouble them or seek help, which is also protective.



The young teachers then spoke fondly of children they liked, children who excelled at their lessons as well as children who had struggled for various reasons but who continued to come to the learning sessions to receive help. These little stories are indicative of the attention the Vutamdogo Club members pay to their students.

"Japhet likes to go to school but Anna doesn't like school. Japhet encourages Anna to come to the learning sessions. Japhet knew how to read and write but Anna couldn't. So Japhet advised Anna to come to the learning sessions so that she can understand how to read and write. Now Anna has improved because she is coming to the learning sessions."

"Dalahile comes to the learning sessions every time. I always enjoy teaching her."

"Machidia is also a good student who likes school but he does not have school clothes. He goes to school but his clothes are different to the other children and he doesn't feel good about this."

In addition to the learning support that the children receive from the Vutamdogo Club teachers, they also receive emotional and psychological support and, at times, practical interventions when the problems are too big for the children to deal with alone. The children feel comfortable telling the teachers if they are having problems.

"You can tell when children have problems. If they are very quiet then sometimes it is because they have a problem. Then you can go and talk to them and ask what is wrong. Some children also come to the learning sessions and you can find them crying when they are on their way to the learning sessions. If you ask them why they are crying they will tell you that there are problems at home."

R: Do the children tell you if they have big problems?

"Yes, they tell us."

"Children...we make them as friends so when they come to the learning centre they tell us their problems about their homes."

"M had a problem he was stealing pencils and exercise books from other children. So, I went to the (supervising) teacher and we went together to visit the family. We found out that the family had many problems and the father was beating M. The teacher talked to them and the community leader too. Now he is better - the father stopped to beat him."

When we asked the Vutamdogo Club teachers what they would do if they found out about a big problem, such as a case of child abuse, they had a clear understanding of the protocol of dealing with such cases and listed a number of people in their community in both the formal and the informal system that they could refer to.

R: And what happens if a child comes to you with a serious problem like abuse?

"If a child comes to me with a case of abuse then I will take the child to the community leader and the problem will be dealt with there."

R: Who else can you go to?

"The police station."

"The Vutamdogo (mentor) teacher."

"We can go to the mentor teacher and she helps us to report it."

"They help us to report to the CPC (Ward Child Protection Committee)."

The Vutamdogo Club members had all received training in referral procedures and available services. They are taught a procedure that involves telling the mentor teacher, who then works with the Ward Education Officer who, in turn, has close contact with the local Ward Child Protection Committee², the police and the government employed social worker.

The Vutamdogo Project coordinator talked about how this system worked. *"We have the usual problems where the community prefers to deal with cases of abuse themselves. They ask the perpetrator to pay the family of the girl or child, but we train the Vutamdogo Club members to use the legal system. We had a case that went to the CPC and then to court and the man was jailed. So, it takes time, but we try to educate the community through the Vutamdogo Clubs about the correct procedures."* Frank Luchagula, Project Coordinator

Whilst the education given by TAHEA is important, here, as in many other communities, the community choice to deal with cases themselves suggests that other strategies are also needed. This is one of the reasons that case studies such as this one are being documented by the ILI and partners – in order to highlight more inclusive, locally-owned ways of working to support child protection at the community level.

As part of this, the Vutamdogo Club members have become child protectors alongside their work as teachers. All the Vutamdogo Club teachers indicated that they felt that they were not just teachers but also there to care for the children and protect them. This is encouraged by TAHEA, who have also run workshops on child protection and psychosocial support for the Vutamdogo Club teachers.

² Ward Child Protection Committees are mandated by Tanzanian Law and managed by the local government.

R: How do children see you?

"As a teacher."

"Also as caregivers."

"In the learning process we teach them in harmony - we don't use harsh word and language in order to help them understand...we are gentle so they see us as caregivers too."

"Also, we play and we dance so they see us as friends."

"They feel they can come to us with a problem."

"The thing we do is to be closer to the children to make friendship with them so you can explore more things with them about their problems and help them."

"I would like to know about psychology so I can help the children more."

"We sometimes ask the leader if we can talk at community meetings and then we tell the parents they must not give the children work that is too hard for their age and not to beat them."

Youth-led expansion

Anastasia, Elizabeth and Bernard's club, *Umoja Wavijana Mhonze*, was started in 2014. Since then, the community members and the Ward Education Officer - who oversees the literacy work - have noted the success of the after-school classes in both improving literacy and emotional wellbeing. The Ward Education Officer subsequently approached TAHEA to ask them to establish groups in communities who did not have them yet. Because TAHEA did not have enough money to support groups in all of the villages, they asked already existing groups to do the work of setting up the new groups.

One might say that this expansion was government-initiated as opposed to community-initiated, but this Ward Education Officer lives and works in the community and is essentially part of the community. Therefore, the request to extend the programme can also be considered as coming from him in his role as a community member and not simply as part of a government mandated scheme. This marked the start of the second-generation groups, which at the time of writing, in May 2017, had been running for about six months, and is an interesting example of community-initiated action for child protection.

This process also started with a meeting hosted by the community leadership. TAHEA was present only to explain the function of the Vutamdogo Club groups. In addition, a group of volunteers chose to become Vutamdogo members. However, instead of these volunteers electing their own leadership, they were "adopted" by an existing Vutamdogo Club in a neighbouring village. For example, Frank from Igombe and his committee manage the group in Kabangaja village, whilst Henrico and his committee from Isanzu manage the Kilabela group. The second generation groups still receive organisational training from TAHEA but the everyday management of the group, as well as the loans for starting businesses are administered by the "parent" Vutamdogo Club. Henrico, the chairperson on the Isanza Vutamdogo Club group and a member of the Kilabela group, describes how they work together:

Henrico: *"We are the overseer of the Kilabela group because we have experience of three years of teaching. I, or one of the group members, frequently come here because the group is new and we are responsible. We are the hosting group so we are responsible to look for them that they are growing in the right direction".*

Isanza member: *"Henrico has an experience on these learning sessions so whenever he comes here we ask him to guide us, and he tells us good ways to achieve our goal. We ask him on the problems facing us here, for example some children were attending and now they are not attending - what can we do to help children attend learning sessions?"*

Researcher: *"What was your advice, Henrico?"*

Henrico: *"I suggested they go to the mentor teacher and they go together and talk to the community leaders of this area - there are two leaders related to this school - and ask them to conduct a meeting with the parents and ask the parents to allow children to attend the learning sessions."*

Once these new groups have been running for a while and have established themselves they will separate from their "parent" clubs, elect their own leadership and register with TAHEA as standalone clubs.

If we consider these new groups in relation to the ILI typology, they probably belong to Category 3 *"The agency is 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"* because TAHEA, an external agency, still stands behind the groups. However, the work done by the older committees to support the younger groups begins to move

the work towards Category 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*”. Future follow up with TAHEA and the Vutamdogo Clubs will reveal how this process develops.

Creating space for youth to take action alone

One of the things that ILI and others involved in youth-, child- or community-led group action acknowledges is that there are always stakeholders in a community that can facilitate and create space for local action, or even act as barriers. We explored who the Vutamdogo Club members needed to interact with in order to have the space they needed to carry out their livelihood and literacy work. Three of the groups we visited, as well as a group of teachers, drew large diagrams of these different players. From our discussions about these drawings we learned some useful things about stakeholders.

One notable feature regarding the stakeholders in this area was the number of formal “leaders” that TAHEA - in the initial phases, and the groups later on - had to negotiate with. There were layers of leaders which included the Ward councillor³, as well as local “street” or village leaders, who are both government appointed, as opposed to elected. The Ward Education officer was also an important person because the Vutamdogo Clubs work in schools. TAHEA was key to supporting the young people to get permission from the leaders that were higher up such as the Ward Councillor. The sense was that these particular public figures would be very difficult for the Vutamdogo Club members (i.e. young people) to approach alone. Once the initial permissions had been gained, it seemed that the two people most frequently involved were the Ward Education officer and the local street or village leader, as they were both accessible to the Vutamdogo Club members, with the local village leader acting as an intermediary between the clubs and the community.

We interviewed a number of these leaders and they all seemed supportive, with some more so in practical terms than others. In the time available, it was difficult to assess the precise level of any particular leader’s involvement, but one observation was that where the local village leader was easily accessible to the Vutamdogo Club members, and also where the leader had a personal commitment to the care of children in the community, the Vutamdogo group was more easily able to engage with him⁴ and ask for assistance. The most common form of help was to ask the leader to organise a meeting to encourage parents to send their children to the learning groups, but Vutamdogo Club members also went to the leaders about individual children’s problems, and some of the more supportive leaders also visited parents with the Vutamdogo Club.

The Ward Education Officer responsible for the National Literacy Programme in primary schools was an important champion for the project. He facilitated the Vutamdogo Club’s relationship with the teachers and was the person driving the opening of the project in new areas. His involvement highlights how useful it is for a community-based project to have a powerful, formal stakeholder supporting the project.

This is an excellent example of how in the context of child protection systems strengthening a formal stakeholder can support and enable community processes and decisions. In many discussions around community-based child protection and systems, the emphasis on linkages with formal structures tends to be perceived as something which happens in the other direction, namely, with community people referring difficult violations against children upwards to the formal structures. TAHEA’s work with the Early Childhood Development schools had taught them the importance of having a champion within the formal system, and they therefore consciously sought the Ward Education Officer’s support for the tutoring project.

³ The Ward councillor is a political appointee/a locally elected government official.

⁴ All the village leaders were men.

The head teacher and Grade One and Grade Two teachers are another group of stakeholders who need to support the Vutamdogo Club tutors. Initially, TAHEA made the contact with the teachers, but in the new expansion villages the Ward Education Officer made contact alongside the supporting Vutamdogo Club members. It seems that all of the head teachers and Grade One and Grade Two teachers know about and trust the Vutamdogo Club to undertake the literacy and numeracy work. There was the sense was that this was because of the way the Ward Education Officer had championed the Vutamdogo Club afternoon classes.

One qualified formal school teacher per Vutamdogo Club group is incorporated as a volunteer mentor teacher. These teachers receive a small stipend from TAHEA as compensation for their involvement with the clubs. Their primary role is to support the Vutamdogo Club teachers and let them know what is being covered in the children's formal classes. They are also able to monitor the progress of the children in school, identify children who are struggling and suggest they attend the after-school learning sessions.

We talked to a number of these volunteer mentor teachers to ask them how they felt about their involvement in Vutamdogo Clubs: *"We feel good to be involved in Vutamdogo. It makes us feel like are able to do our jobs better. We worry about the children we cannot reach because the class is too big and we know the Vutamdogos can help them after hours"*. This sense of fulfilment is probably one reason the mentor teachers stay involved, although it is also possible that the stipend, even though it is small, also plays a part.

Parents are another group of stakeholders whose involvement is crucial to the success of the youth action through the Vutamdogo Clubs. Parents need to understand the intentions of the Vutamdogo Clubs and also be willing to release their children from their household work. Given that the youth in these communities did not have a very good reputation, and so it took some work to ensure that the parents trusted the Vutamdogo Clubs.

Laurian Songwa, the community leader of Igombe village told us that at first the community was suspicious of what the Vutamdogo Club youth were teaching their children. *"At the beginning the community did not know the importance of the youth. During the process of learning and after seeing the results from the children, now the parents understand that the youth are doing good things for their children. So after that, they support the children"*. Seeing the benefits of the clubs as their children's performance improved at school has also grown support amongst parents.

Reflections and conclusions

The literacy and numeracy work, as well as the livelihood projects have important protective aspects for the youth and for the young children, with the Vutamdogo Club youth now playing an important protection role in the lives of children. The Vutamdogo Club youth are a bridge between children and their parents, as well as with other adults in the community, and can help link children to formal services when there are problems.

To add to this, the Vutamdogo project is an example of a local organisation initiating a youth and child protection programme in response to careful participatory needs analysis. TAHEA have successfully brought key role players in to support the youth so that the programme, over time, has become a more bottom-up process, with the young people taking on more and more responsibility for their own livelihood projects, including setting up small cooperatives. After the support from TAHEA in the form of loans, training, and support to make connections with local artisans, the youth run their income generation projects largely on their own.

Additionally, the literacy and numeracy tutoring has become a community-owned enterprise with the Vutamdogo Club tutors supported by a local official and teachers. However, there are still questions regarding the sustainability of this model, as it is not clear to what extent the TAHEA

stipend for mentor teachers plays a role in their ongoing commitment. If the stipends were withdrawn, would mentor teachers be as committed?

Finally, the expansion of the project into new villages is led by the Vutamdogo Clubs themselves, with the help of the Ward Education Officer. This more community-led phase has moved this initiative towards a truly community-owned process which has much potential in terms of its sustainability.

References

- Behnam, N. 2008. *Agencies, Communities, and Children: A report of the Interagency Learning Initiative: Engaging communities for children's well-being*. Washington, DC: USAID Displaced Children and Orphans Fund. Available online: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/the_funds/pubs/comaction.html
- Ingham, R. and Aggleton, P. (2006) (Eds), *Promoting Young People's Sexual Health: International Perspectives*, Routledge USA.
- Luthar, S.S. (2006). Resilience in development: A synthesis of research across five decades. In D. Cicchetti & D.J. Cohen (Eds.), *Developmental psychopathology: Vol. 3. Risk, disorder, and adaptation* (pp. 739–795). Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.
- Masten, A.S. (2001). Ordinary magic: resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3):227–38.
- Masten, A.S. (2012). Risk and resilience in development. In *Oxford Handbook of Developmental Psychology*, ed. P.D. Zelazo. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Masten, A.S., & Narayan, A.J. (2012). Child development in the context of disaster, war, and terrorism: Pathways of risk and resilience. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63, 227–257.
- Rutter, M. (1987). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57, 316–331.
- Ungar, M. (2011) The Social Ecology of Resilience: Addressing Contextual and Cultural Ambiguity of a Nascent Construct. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. Vol.81, No.1,1–17.
- Wessells, M. (2009). *What are we learning about protecting children in the community? An inter-agency review of the evidence on community-based child-protection mechanisms in humanitarian and development settings*. London, England: Save the Children.
- Wessells, M.G. (2015). Bottom-up approaches to strengthening child protection systems: Placing children, families, and communities at the center. *Child abuse & neglect*, 43, 8-21.

Please feel free to share and use this case study for the purposes of learning, advocating for community-led child protection and other educational, non-commercial uses. You can use information or quote extracts from this case study but we request that you acknowledge the source. The photos cannot be used by anyone for any other purpose other than to illustrate this case study. www.childprotectionforum.org

© Community Child Protection Exchange, 2018