

‘There is nothing for us without us’

**Evaluation of a Multi-District Pilot Scale Up of
Community-Led Child Protection in Sierra Leone**

Drs. Kathleen Kostenly and Mike Wessells
Child Resilience Alliance

April 15, 2024

Acknowledgements

We express our sincere gratitude to the entire team that has contributed to the scale-up effort in Sierra Leone. This includes the Ministry of Social Welfare, UNICEF, the Community Engagement Sub-Group, and the participating NGOs. Special thanks go to UNICEF and particularly David Lamin for their excellent support over many years. We also send special thanks to the talented mentoring team: Amie Tholley (Coordinator and Mentor), Ernest Brimah, Samba Charlie, Francis Johnbull (Mentors), and David Lamin (Advisor).

Most of all, we thank the communities that have used CLCP to enable their children's well-being and taught us so much about community mobilization, collective ownership and action, and the benefits of increased power sharing and people-led problem solving.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	11
Methodology	15
Key Findings	17
Lessons Learned and Way Forward.....	32
References	37

Executive Summary

Background

Dominant, expert-driven approaches to child protection, while valuable in some contexts, enable low levels of community ownership, create dependency, have limited effectiveness and poor sustainability, and marginalize local approaches and local culture. The community-led approach to child protection (CLA) was developed to help overcome these limitations and enable community people led, locally owned approaches to child protection and well-being. CLA puts the power in the hands of communities, who use an inclusive process of dialogue, reflection, and action to address self-selected harms to children.

In Sierra Leone. CLA has been developed and tested extensively since 2011 through partnership between UNICEF, the Government of Sierra Leone, Child Resilience Alliance (CRA), and communities in the Northern and Southern regions of the country. Having established proof of concept by demonstrating the effectiveness of CLA, the next step was to enable NGOs to use CLA, with adaptations to normal operations, in a pilot scale up.

Accordingly, the Community Engagement Group under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs planned and oversaw a pilot scale up. Following an initial training of trainers workshop in 2020 and COVID associated delays, CLA was expanded to 87 communities in 8 districts, with the support of 16 NGOs. Although the initially planned scale up was quite small and focused, the keen interest of diverse agencies and stakeholders led to a larger than expected scale up. To support the facilitation by different agencies, a five-person mentoring team was organized. The mentors, who had significant expertise in the use of CLA, met with and observed facilitators of the community-led work from different agencies, providing coaching and enabling skills development as needed. They also served as the 'eyes and ears' of the work, as they reflected together on how the work was going, what challenges had arisen, possible means of addressing the challenges, and making needed adjustments.

Purpose and Objectives

This evaluation aims to document the accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned in the scale up effort, with an eye toward using what is learned to guide improvements and further efforts to scale up the use of community-led approaches. The primary objectives of this work are to learn about: (1) the effectiveness of the facilitation processes at community level and their fidelity to the principles of community-led approaches; (2) the mentoring processes and their successes and challenges; (3) the organization-level support for the use of community-led child protection; and (4) the community processes and action on behalf of children, with particular attention to inclusivity, ownership, and satisfaction with the community-led process.

Methodology

To enable learning from diverse regions, districts, and agencies, UNICEF guided the selection of two districts for the evaluation, with data collected from 6 agencies and 9 communities as well as staff from the ministry of social welfare. In selecting the districts, agencies and communities, care was taken to achieve diversity and avoid the inclusion of only the more successful implementation sites.

Qualitative methodology was used in order to give voice to different people and learn in an open-ended manner, without excessive reliance on preconceptions about accomplishments, challenges, and so on. Key informant interviews were conducted with mentors, facilitators, trainers, program managers, and agency leaders. Focus group discussions were conducted with community people, including women, men, young women, young men, girls, and boys.

The data were collected in the period May 1-19, 2023 by an international researcher, with support from UNICEF and the mentoring team. The data analysis used a grounded approach, including triangulation across interviews and discussions as a means of discerning convergent evidence and patterns, with attention also to differences across facilitators, agencies, and communities.

The ethical precautions for the evaluation included a verbal consent process and the protection of participants' confidentiality by not using names or other personal identifiers in this report. To help reduce any possible stress associated with the procedure, individuals were not asked about their particular protection issues or challenges. Instead, questions asked about children in general as in 'Before the community-led work began, what were the main harms or protection issues to children in this village?' Also, care was taken to avoid asking questions that might trigger difficult memories, individually or collectively. To avoid dependency, no payment was provided for participation in the data collection. To avoid an extractive approach, the findings of this evaluation will be fed back to communities and other stakeholders in a simple, non-technical manner.

Regarding limitations, this evaluation was kept relatively brief due to limited finances and security concerns. Also, the evaluation did not examine in depth the actual outcomes for children since it was concerned primarily with the fidelity of the work to the principles of community-led child protection. The outcomes analysis is based primarily on children's, parents', and community members' self-reports, which may be affected by social desirability bias.

Key Findings

Facilitation. The majority of facilitators were men, and they were selected primarily through community processes. In some communities, the facilitator was first identified by the Chief and then endorsed by the community. In other communities, the facilitator was elected at a large community meeting. Facilitators had qualities such as being a respected community member and as being honest, respectful, a good listener, and able to take good notes.

To prepare for the training of facilitators, a week-long, participatory workshop was conducted for 20 people in Freetown in early 2020 by David Lamin and Mike Wessells. This workshop, which participants described as 'transformational' and 'eye-opening,' was followed

by step-down trainings by particular agencies. Also, following delays associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF conducted additional refresher trainings.

Significant capacity building came from the mentoring team. Mentors made periodic visits to particular communities, where they talked with the facilitators and/or observed them in action, and offered advice and guidance on how to improve their adherence to the principles of community-led approaches.

The main success of the facilitators was their good adherence to principles of community-led approaches overall in working with communities. The facilitators themselves spoke in knowledgeable ways about inclusivity, participation, and ownership, which are key points in the principles. They also identified consistently important qualities such as humility, respect, and trust that they needed to embody in order to be effective facilitators. The facilitators showed keen attention to power dynamics and also community ownership. In most cases, community members, too, identified particular characteristics of the facilitators' work that confirmed their compliance with CLA principles.

Regarding challenges, most facilitators said that they needed additional training in order to sharpen their skills, learn more about how to talk with children or deal with challenges such as handling resistant community members. This call for additional training may have reflected significant gaps in the step-down training, some of which was found to be insufficiently focused on CLA and inclusive of elements that embody a top-down approach. Another significant challenge was frequent staff turnover, which sometimes resulted in facilitators working under agency Directors or Program Managers who did not support CLA.

Mentoring. The mentors were selected on the basis of their advanced understanding and skills of implementing CLA, and their ability to help communities use CLA in an effective manner. Initially, there were two mentors and a coordinator/mentor who also conducted mentoring. As the scale-up expanded beyond the initial expectations, an additional mentor was hired and trained. On field visits to their assigned regions, the mentors made site visits to support facilitators, agencies, communities, or some combination of these. In visits with facilitators, a mentor usually engaged in discussion about how the facilitator's work was going, what they saw as their strengths and areas for improvement, what challenges they faced, and what they needed to do differently as they moved forward. In many respects, a mentor's visit provided space for stepping back from the tasks of facilitation and enabling reflection about what was going well and what needed adjustment. Participatory approaches were often built into these activities, as were reflections on whether the facilitator was being too directive or whether the community was in the driver's seat and making the key decisions.

The main success of this mentoring system was the good fidelity of most facilitators to the principles of CLA. This was no small accomplishment in view of the complexity of the facilitation process and the larger than expected number of participating agencies and facilitators. The facilitators and social work staff lauded mentors for their effective support and spirit of teamwork. In addition, the mentoring team served as the 'eyes and ears' of the scale-up system and helped to identify challenges and guide needed adjustments in the scale-up work. The

mentors also supported coordination with Government efforts by, for example, meeting with and giving regular updates to District Social Officers.

Among the challenges faced by the mentors, transportation was significant owing to the rising costs of fuel, difficulties keeping motorbikes working, the large distances between some sites, the poor road conditions, and periodic flooding that made particular areas inaccessible. The mentoring system itself encountered a heavier workload than had been anticipated due to the participation of a greater number of agencies and the expansion of the scale up to a larger number of districts. The flexibility, coordination skill, and joint problem-solving ethos of the mentoring team were helpful in meeting these challenges. Also, in some communities, the community facilitator seemed to take a back seat to the mentor, who was described as facilitating community meetings and giving them ideas. In moving forward, it will be important to help the mentors to adhere to their role of supporting the facilitators while staying in the background.

Organizational Support. A significant success has been the keen support for and ownership of CLA by organizations at different levels, from the Ministry of Social Welfare to NGOs that helped to implement CLA in communities. Ministry officials in Freetown spoke highly of CLA, pointing out its beneficial effects for communities. UNICEF's early support played a key role in enabling the engagement of the Ministry and the Community Engagement Sub-Group that supported the scale up. UNICEF has provided important technical support both during the evaluation and in the early/foundational work on CLA.

NGOs, too, supported the scale up of CLA by enabling and supporting it in designated areas. In some cases, NGO staff who had participated in the initial training of trainers brought their enthusiasm for CLA back to their NGO, igniting keen interest there as well among program managers, trainers, and National Directors. Sustainability was seen as an important value added of the approach. Some agencies incorporated the community-led approach into their strategic planning. Also, some agencies incorporated the community-led approach into their work in other sectors such as WASH, youth empowerment, and women's empowerment.

Among the challenges to organizational support, none was greater than the ongoing shortage of funds. The Ministry of Social Welfare has indicated that less than 1% of the national budget is for children. Although the recent hiring of 132 new social workers can contribute to children's well-being, this addition has placed even greater strains on limited budgets, and the social workers themselves focus mostly on case based methods. NGOs also felt constrained by a paucity of funds for CLA.

Staff turnover has also posed significant challenges. Within the Ministries and UNICEF, staff turnover has in some cases contributed to uneven support for CLA, as new staff may favor the use of other approaches. Problems of staff turnover were most severe among the participating NGOs. In one agency, the arrival of a new National Director who had been advised by consultants to switch to a 'report and respond' model, leading them to end the agency work on CLA.

NGOs faced highly significant operational challenges in working with communities in the intensive manner embodied in CLA. The COVID-19 pandemic sharply slowed the CLA

work, and disasters such as floods limited access to communities, thereby impeding the work. Some participating NGOs were inconsistent in trainings and practices related to CLA, even in a few cases intermixing top-down approaches. Also, some NGOs seemed to focus more on chasing COVID related funding than on using CLA.

Community Views, Processes and Actions. Site visits with nine communities revealed that the communities had organized groups such as 7-10 person task forces to help communities address issues such as early pregnancy, children out of school, wayward children, and children's engagement in heavy work. In some cases, the children's focus was integrated into an existing group. Complementing the task forces were other community groups such as youth groups and mothers' clubs, who also brought people into the process of supporting children's well-being.

Since diverse child protection issues were connected with poverty and economic hardship, most communities formed groups to do collective farming. Some of the income from this was channelled into a savings and loan scheme, money from which was used to protect and support vulnerable children. A frequently strengthened support was education, which people saw as valuable in its own right and as a means for preventing problems such as teen pregnancy and early marriage that frequently accompanied school dropout. Activities to support education often included repairing or building a school, providing the breakfast and lunch that many children needed in order to learn, and buying materials such as shoes and uniforms that were required of students.

Other activities were initiated by different sub-groups. Mothers' clubs monitored children's school attendance and ensured that children's basic needs were met. Youth groups discussed the importance of education and encouraged children to continue their education. Parents talked with their children about going to school, especially secondary school for girls which in the past had been attended mostly by boys. Parents also talked with and advised their children about sex and pregnancy. Communities also created by-laws such as one that required children to go to school, or one that banned sexual affairs with school going girls.

In working on behalf of children, communities took a highly inclusive approach that engaged women, children, and people with disabilities, thereby diverging significantly from past community practice. Community people frequently expressed their keen sense of ownership for the CLA and talked about how this was different from what had happened in various NGO projects in their communities. Community members said that they were highly satisfied with the CLA and preferred it over the expert driven approaches used by most NGOs. Diverse community members lauded CLA for pulling people together, enabling the community to address its own priorities and solve its own problems, and achieving positive results for children.

Spontaneously the approach spread to nearby villages, where people had noticed the benefits to children such as reduced early pregnancy and had expressed interested in learning about the CLA. In this respect, the scale up included a mix of planned and spontaneous spread.

Outcomes for Children. The diverse positive outcomes for children that people identified included reduced early pregnancy (under 18 years of age) and early marriage (under 18 years of age), and increased education participation, including for girls. Also, improved social cohesion

and relationships were evident, as both children and parents reported that the CLA work had improved parent-child relationships. The relationships between husbands and wives had improved, as couples quarreled less over typical issues such as whether to use the husband's or the wife's money in buying food and essentials for children. At community level, too, improvements in social relationships were highly visible, as people spoke often about how the community had come together and worked in a collaborative manner.

Lessons Learned and the Way Forward

The pilot scale-up indicated that diverse agencies can use CLA effectively and with good fidelity to the principles of CLA as part of their ongoing operations. Communities expressed high levels of satisfaction with the approach and exhibited high levels of ownership and collective self-reliance, which are characteristic of CLA approaches. Overall, these findings are promising for the scalability of CLA.

The pilot scale up and this evaluation have yielded valuable insights that can be useful in guiding future work in this area.

Lessons Learned. Six key lessons emerged from this evaluation:

1. Ongoing capacity building and mentoring was key for enabling facilitators and agencies to achieve appropriate levels of fidelity to the principles of CLA.
2. Scale up processes should include space for and learn from innovations in CLA such as the integration of food security/economic components and the value of having selected community members serve as facilitators.
3. The scalability of CLA owed to a mixture of structured and spontaneous processes, both of which should be encouraged and analyzed.
4. Additional capacity building and training should be provided to participating organizations, which need to shift their orientation and make a longer term commitment to the use of CLA.
5. Effective scaling up of CLA requires a systemic, collaborative approach that bridges Government and civil society.
6. Additional financial resources are necessary for continuing the scale-up to a national level and making it sustainable.

The Way Forward. The time is ripe for the further, national scale-up of CLA, which is now backed by extensive evidence of its effectiveness, ownership by communities, and sustainability. Although CLA is becoming more widely used in different countries and by diverse agencies, Sierra Leone now has the opportunity to be the first country to develop CLA on a national scale using an empirically based scale up approach. The authors of this report sincerely urge the Government of Sierra Leone, its organizations, and its people to continue the

historic process of scaling up CLA as a means of fulfilling their greatest obligation—the well-being of children.

Introduction

The field of child protection has been limited by excessive reliance on expert-driven, top-down approaches, even in relatively stable settings in which more participatory approaches could have been used. Although they may be necessary in some settings such as acute emergencies, expert-driven approaches achieve low levels of community ownership, create dependency, and have limited effectiveness and poor sustainability (Benham, 2008; Wessells, 2009; 2015). In Sierra Leone, the use of expert-driven approaches to teach child rights caused unintentional harm by creating backlash that made people less supportive of children's rights (Wessells & Kostelny, 2017). Concerns have also been expressed that expert-driven approaches marginalize local approaches and local culture and contain vestiges of colonial systems of Western power and privileging (Wessells 2024).

For these and other reasons, some child protection workers and donors have sought to place greater power in the hands of local people and made increased use of people led, locally owned approaches to child protection and well-being (Ellermeijer et al., 2023; Gomez et al. 2021; Wessells, 2024). The community-led approach to child protection (CLA) is one such approach and has been developed and tested extensively in Sierra Leone since 2011 through partnership between UNICEF, the Government of Sierra Leone, and the Child Resilience Alliance (CRA, formerly called the Columbia Group for Children in Adversity).

Community-led Child Protection

In the community-led approach, an initial learning phase enables communities to understand more fully the lived experiences of children and the risks and harms they face, with attention to gender differences. Communities themselves then use an inclusive process to make the key decisions about which issues to address and how to address them. Having developed a plan, they organize themselves, lead the implementation and community action on behalf of children, monitor their progress and any challenges that have arisen, and make adjustments to strengthen their collective action. Because CLA puts the community in the driver's seat, and enables meaningful participation by girls, boys, women, and men, the community takes ownership of the work and exercises responsibility for both the process and its outcomes for children.

In CLA, which complements the more top-down approaches to child protection, outsiders such as external agencies serve as facilitators, documenters and co-learners, and bridges with the formal child protection system. At every stage, however, communities hold the power and make the key decisions, and work proceeds according to principles, such as these for the initial learning or ethnographic phase (Wessells, 2011, 2018):

- Build trust and learn in a slower, respectful manner about views of children, harms, pathways of response, prevention strategies, and connections with the formal system that does not judge local people.
- Using local language and idioms (avoiding imposition of international terms such as 'child labor'), ask elicitive, open ended questions that assume 'we don't know' and that invite learning about local categories and practices.

- Learn through direct observation about the risks to children and the ways in which families and communities seek to protect children.
- Learn from different sub-groups, contrasting their views by gender and age (developmental stage), about their views of harms to children, the main responses to them, and how to prevent them.
- Learn about the power dynamics of the community and which people or groups are marginalized, and develop a way of learning from marginalized people that does not stigmatize them.
- Avoid ethical problems by managing expectations, protecting confidentiality, respecting informed consent, etc.

The box below shows the wider set of principles guiding community-led approaches, that have been used in numerous countries, including Sierra Leone, Kenya, and India (Wessells, 2018).

**Principles of Community-Led Action:
Putting Communities in the Driver's Seat**

1. Work with humility.
2. Build trust, respect, and relationships first.
3. Listen in an active, nonjudgmental manner.
4. Build on existing community resources and strengths.
5. Learn more fully about the context and community power dynamics on an ongoing basis.
6. Encourage an inclusive community process at all stages.
7. Enable collective agency and action--communities make the key decisions.
8. Use a patient, flexible, dialogue oriented approach.
9. Build community capacities for mobilizing the community, making inclusive decisions, and taking effective action.
10. Enable bottom-up collaboration and linkages between communities and formal child protection stakeholders and mechanisms.
11. Enable children to be key actors in the community-led process.
12. Using child rights as a guide, support social change from within the community.
13. Be prepared to step outside the usual child protection 'box'.

Testing the Effectiveness of Community-Led Approaches

From 2011-2015, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, UNICEF, CRA, and the National Child Protection Committee collaborated in testing and learning more deeply about community-led approaches in the districts of Moyamba and Bombali, respectively. In a quasi-experimental design, each district had two comparable chiefdoms. One—the intervention chiefdom—received facilitation to work on community-led child protection while the other—the comparison chiefdom—did not. In each of the four chiefdoms, there were three communities, for a total of 12 communities. An initial ethnographic learning phase in all twelve communities indicated that the main harms to children were teenage pregnancy out of wedlock, out of school children, maltreatment of children who were not living with their biological parents, and heavy work (Wessells, 2011; Wessells et al., 2012).

Following baseline measures, the intervention chiefdoms both decided through an inclusive, extended dialogue to address the problem of teenage pregnancy out of wedlock. Through their own plans and community mobilization, they implemented interventions that included the use of contraceptives for girls and boys; peer education about puberty, sex, pregnancy, and family planning; discussions with parents about puberty, sex, pregnancy, and education; and community dramas and dialogues about the negative effects of teenage pregnancy and the importance of girls continuing their education (Wessells, Lamin, & Manyeh, 2014). Although endline testing was disrupted by the Ebola crisis, mid-line measures were taken two years following the baseline measures. The key findings were that, relative to the comparison chiefdoms, the communities in the intervention chiefdoms showed increased knowledge of puberty, sex, and pregnancy; increased use of contraceptives, increased education participation by teenage girls; and a reduction in teenage pregnancies out of wedlock (Stark et al., 2014; Wessells, 2015; Wessells, Manyeh, & Lamin, 2014).

Convergent evidence of the effectiveness of community-led approaches has come from Kenya (Kostelny et al., 2020) and India (Interagency Core Group, 2021). In Kenya, communities effectively addressed ‘early sex’, which was an important precursor of sexual exploitation, teenage pregnancy, school dropout, and early marriage. In India, communities effectively addressed the problems of school dropout (in Khunti) and early marriage (in Dhanbad). Collectively, the evidence of effectiveness from three countries provides ‘proof of concept,’ that is, evidence of the effectiveness of community-led approaches.

An important question in Sierra Leone was whether NGOs could effectively use community-led approaches and what would enable them to do so. This question was fundamental for attempts to scale up the use of community-led approaches, as the effectiveness testing in Sierra Leone had been enabled by a team of people rather than an NGO. The question remained whether CLA could be adapted to and used effectively by the NGOs (see WHO & ExpandNet, 2009) who support large amounts of the frontline work on child protection in Sierra Leone.

The Pilot Scale-Up

Even before the COVID pandemic, the Community Engagement Sub-Group under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children’s Affairs, decided to expand the use of CLA as part of its efforts to strengthen prevention in regard to children’s protection and well-being. With the support of UNICEF and the Child Resilience Alliance (CRA), a training of trainers workshop was conducted by D. Lamin and M. Wessells in January, 2020 for 20 child protection workers from NGOs and also 5 District Social Officers under the Ministry. Following the workshop, the community-led work was expanded to numerous communities in multiple districts. A novel feature of this scale up pilot was that the community-led approach was implemented by NGOs working with community partners.

Following the workshop and the COVID pandemic, 16 agencies implemented the community-led approach in 8 districts, with financial support from UNICEF for some of the agencies. The participating agencies that received UNICEF funding included: Family Home Movement, Defense for Children International, Caritas and Save (though they did not participate

in CLA until the end of the grant). Other agencies who did not receive UNICEF funding included Commit and Act, Network Action for Rural Development, Concern, Seed, Praise Foundation, Forut, Pikin to Pikin, Real Women, CCSL, IRC, Amref and Goal. (Plan not do anything; Child fund person left organization). The selected districts included: Bo, Pujehun, Bonthe, Tonkolili, Port Loko, Bombali, Koinadugu, and Kenema.

To enable effective facilitation by different agencies, a mentoring team was formed that included David Lamin (Senior Advisor), Amie Tholly (Coordinator and Mentor), Ernest Brimah, Samba Charlie, and (starting in 2022) Francis Johnbull (mentors). Traveling frequently and spending approximately three weeks in the field each month, the mentors met with and observed facilitators of the community-led work from different agencies, providing coaching and enabling skills development as needed. The mentors observed and reflected together on how the work was going, what challenges had arisen, possible means of addressing the challenges, and making needed adjustments.

Purpose and Objectives

Now that the COVID-19 pandemic has quieted, it is important to step back and take stock of the pilot scale up. The purpose of this evaluation is to document the accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned in the scale up effort, with an eye toward using what is learned to guide improvements and further efforts to scale up the use of community-led approaches. Because it is too early to discern fully the outcomes of the community-led work on children, this evaluation focuses on key processes such as the quality of the facilitation and community ownership that are known to be key determinants of the effectiveness of community-led approaches. Among the key questions to be addressed in this evaluation are:

- Has the facilitation and work by the participating agencies adhered well to the principles of community-led child protection?
- What has been the methodology and role of the mentoring in enabling strong facilitation and fidelity to the principles of community-led child protection?
- What challenges within agencies and outside have made it difficult to implement fully the community-led approach?
- What kinds of community action and what levels of community ownership and satisfaction have been engendered by the use of the community-led approach?

The primary objectives of this work are to learn about:

- (1) the effectiveness of the facilitation processes at community level and their fidelity to the principles of community-led approaches;
- (2) the mentoring processes and their successes and challenges;
- (3) the organization-level support for the use of community-led child protection
- (4) the community processes and action on behalf of children, with particular attention to issues of inclusivity, ownership, and satisfaction with the community-led process.

Methodology

Site Selection

It was not possible to collect evidence from each agency and district that participated in the structured pilot. To enable learning from diverse regions, districts, and agencies, UNICEF guided the selection of two districts— Tonkolili and Bo—for the evaluation, with data collected from the agencies and 9 communities outlined in Table 1 below. In selecting the districts, care was taken to include both the Northern and Southern areas of Sierra Leone. In selecting the agencies and communities, care was taken to achieve diversity and avoid the inclusion of only the sites that were believed to have had successful implementation of the community-led approach.

Table 1. Districts, Agencies and Communities Participating in the Evaluation

Tonkolili		Bo	
Agency	Community	Agency	Community
Family Home Movement (sheet) Commit and Act (notes – Ernest)	Mayepor	Network Action for Rural Development	Nganyamie
Family Home Movement	Petifu	Network Action for Rural Development	Fallu
Concern (no interview)	Matholley	Network Action for Rural Development	Kwella
?? Family Home Movement, Commit and Act	Mabekor	Network Action for Rural Development	Kanjallu
Commit and Act	Macontheh		
Defence for Children International	(KII with Senior Staff)		
Amref	(KII with Senior Staff)		
Caritas	(KII with Senior Staff)		
Praise Foundation	(KII with Senior Staff)		

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methodology was used in order to give voice to different people and learn in an open-ended manner, without excessive reliance on preconceptions about accomplishments, challenges, and so on. The methodology is outlined in regard to each objective in Table 2 below.

<i>Obj.ective.</i>	<i>Methodology</i>
1	- KIIs with facilitators and/or people who train them - FGD with mentors - FGDs with community people to learn about community process, relationship with the facilitator, collective agency, inclusivity, ownership, children's issues addressed, etc.
2	- FGD and day-long workshop with mentors - KIIs with facilitators
3	- KIIs with program managers who oversee work on CLA - KIIs with agency leaders (e.g., CEO) - FGD with mentors
4	- FGDs with parents, teens, young women

Table 2. Summary of methodology used in regard to the four objectives. KII=Key informant interview. FGD=Focus group discussion.

See Annex 1 for the questions that were included in the KIIs and FGDs.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected in the period May 1-19, 2023. The data collection was led by Dr. Kathleen Kostelny, with support from David Lamin of UNICEF, Amie Tholley (Coordinator and Mentor), two mentors—Ernest Brimah and Samba Charlie—and two translators -Sherif Sesay Alhaji and Theresa Boani.

For the most part, the KIIs with Program Managers were conducted in English, and the KIIs with facilitators were conducted either in English or the local language, depending on which they preferred, and were recorded if the participants granted permission. The KIIs and FGDs with community people were conducted in Temne, Mende, and Krio. Two translators (one fluent in Temne and Krio, and one fluent in Mende and Krio) translated verbatim during the KIIs and FGDs, with K. Kostelny taking notes. Points of clarification were discussed with the translators afterwards and also by listening to the recordings. Throughout the data collection, significant attention was given to developing trust and treating people in a respectful manner. Accordingly, Amie Tolley accompanied and introduced Dr. Kostelny for the KIIs in Freetown. She also accompanied Dr. Kostelny to the districts, where the mentor who worked in a particular district made introductions at community level. For all the participants, there was a verbal consent process that explained the purpose of the interviews and discussions, how the data would be used, and any benefits to the participants, with clear emphasis on the voluntary nature of participation and clear advice to prospective participants that they not participate unless they wanted to, or to end their participation at any time if they wanted to do so.

The data analysis, which was conducted by Drs. Kostelny and Wessells, followed a grounded approach as detailed by Charmaz (2004). Triangulation was used throughout to identify consistent patterns. In analyzing the facilitators' fidelity to the principles of the community-led approach, the analysts looked for convergent evidence from sources such as interviews with facilitators, interviews with mentors who worked with the facilitators, and discussions with community members themselves.

Ethical Considerations

As mentioned above, care was taken to insure that participation was voluntary and that prospective participants felt free to end their participation at any time.

To protect confidentiality, no names of community-level participants are provided in this report. To help reduce any possible stress associated with the procedure, the data collection included only general questions about well-being or challenges for the community in general. For example, individuals were not asked about their particular protection issues or challenges. Instead, questions asked about children in general as in 'Before the community led work began, what were the main harms or protection issues to children in this village?' Also, care was taken to avoid asking questions that might trigger difficult memories, individually or collectively. To avoid dependency, no payment was provided for participation in the data collection. To avoid an extractive approach, the findings of this evaluation will be fed back to communities and other stakeholders in a simple, non-technical manner.

Limitations

The evaluation was kept relatively brief due to limited finances and security concerns from the possible turmoil associated with the then impending national elections. As discussed previously, this evaluation did not examine in depth the actual outcomes for children since it was concerned primarily with the fidelity of the work to the principles of community-led child protection. The outcomes analysis is based primarily on children's, parents', and community members' self-reports, which may be affected by biases such as social desirability bias.

Key Findings

Facilitation

Facilitation emerged as a complex, flexible, contextual process, the success of which depended upon multiple factors as indicated below.

Facilitator selection. Both women and men served as facilitators, and they were selected primarily through community processes. In some communities, the facilitator was first identified by the Chief and then endorsed by the community. In other communities, the facilitator was elected at a large community meeting. In some communities, facilitators were volunteers who worked for the Ministry of Social Welfare in a particular district, and were given a stipend and

transportation. Regardless of which selection method was used, people in different communities described their facilitator as being respected, honest, respectful, and a good listener. Some communities also valued having a facilitator who was educated and could therefore write and take notes on meetings. The facilitators all spoke the local languages (e.g., Mende in the South; Temne and Loko in the North) and had a good understanding of the local context in which they worked.

These selection processes contributed to the facilitators' ability to effectively enable community-led work. The fact that most facilitators were good listeners and/or could take notes on meetings enabled them to place the emphasis on community members' views and decisions, as is appropriate in a community-led process. However, the use of different criteria and different selection processes resulted in variation in facilitators' calibre and orientation.

Capacity building. All of the facilitators reported that they had received training and also follow-up support from a mentor or mentors. However, there was considerable divergence in the nature of the training that facilitators had received. For approximately 20 people, the initial training had been a week-long workshop held in Freetown in early 2020 and co-facilitated by David Lamin (UNICEF) and Mike Wessells (CRA). This workshop was described as 'transformational,' 'life-changing,' and 'eye-opening,' and as having prepared them to facilitate in the new manner appropriate to CLA. As participants in the training stated,

If I didn't have the background on CLA, I would never have done it. It was out of the training in Freetown that I got all these ideas. How to guide the process, but the community does the work. (former coordinator)

The training we received we use day in and day out. M was so supportive, encouraging us and being a pillar of learning for us.. (Program manager).

The training was an eye opener for us...the approach is mind blowing... It has changed the landscape of communities. With the use of CLA, we don't struggle with sustainability anymore. (Program manager)

If not for the training, we would still be in the dark...A key learning point was that we had never involved children before. We had not involved the hearing impaired, the disabled....(Program manager)

Following a step-down model, some agencies used the Freetown training to enable their agency to learn how to use a community-led approach, with agency trainers subsequently providing training for their facilitators. Also, since the deployment of facilitators was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, David Lamin (UNICEF) conducted a refresher training in 2022 that helped to prepare facilitators to use the community-led approach.

Valuable, ongoing capacity building came from the mentoring team. As described below, mentors made periodic visits to particular communities, where they talked with the facilitators and/or observed them in action, and offered skills building and advice on how to improve their adherence to the principles of community-led approaches. This system of multi-level capacity building proved to be highly effective in enabling fidelity to the core principles.

Successes. For the most part, the facilitators achieved good levels of fidelity to CLA principles in their work with communities. This key finding emerged from the triangulation of evidence from three sources—the facilitators, the mentors, and community people. In describing how they worked, the facilitators themselves spoke in knowledgeable ways without prompting about inclusivity, participation, and ownership, which are key elements of the principles.

A facilitator should guide and not tell the community what to do. Before, I thought the leader was in control, but now understand. I listen. The community decides what is to be done. During meetings, I dress moderately and simple. I sit with them, like them.
(Facilitator)

The facilitators also identified consistently important qualities such as humility, respect, and trust that they needed to embody in order to be effective facilitators.

Facilitators showed keen appreciation of the importance of attention to power dynamics and also community ownership. As one facilitator stated:

Honestly, it [CLA] helped us a lot. Before, we would just go into communities and have problems. Now we follow the power dynamics—talk to the paramount chief, section chiefs, town chief. Then we can enter the community without problems. We allow the community to talk. They know their problems and solutions. Ownership is key. We are the learners. (Facilitator)

In a significant number of cases, it was possible to compare what a facilitator said about how they worked in the community with the views expressed by the Mentor who had supported that facilitator. It was rare for a facilitator to describe their work as embodying the principles, while the Mentor who had worked with that facilitator disagreed. In most cases, the Mentor could enumerate multiple, specific ways in which the facilitator had followed the principles in working with the community, often showing improvement over time. This level of specificity and of positive trajectory over time seems unlikely to stem primarily from a social desirability bias wherein the Mentor sought to make the facilitators look good as a means of attesting to their own effectiveness as a mentor.

Furthermore, in most cases, community members, too, identified particular characteristics of the facilitators' work that confirmed their compliance with the principles. Community members reported consistently that they themselves made key decisions and that the facilitators had not controlled or directed them.

Challenges. Chief among the numerous challenges encountered, most facilitators said that they needed additional training. Numerous facilitators indicated that they needed refresher training in order to learn more about how to talk with children or deal with challenges such as handling resistant community members. This call for more training likely reflects the complexity of the CLA work, which unearths new challenges that may not have been addressed in the previous training. Also, as facilitators acquired more experience in using CLA, they likely became aware of how they needed additional skills in order to take their work to the next level.

The call for additional training may also have reflected significant gaps in the step-down training. Indeed, the facilitators who had participated in the initial training of trainers frequently described it as ‘transformative’ and ‘eye opening,’ descriptors were seldom used to describe the subsequent trainings. Also, there were indications that some of the step-down training done by individual agencies was less effective or off track in that it did not focus sufficiently on CLA. For example, when a former agency facilitator was asked what had been included in the training, he replied child rights, violence against children, and positive parenting. Although these topics are important in wider child protection work, they typically embody a top-down approach and lack adequate focus on the distinctive processes that are central in CLA.

A second challenge was frequent staff turnover, which sometimes resulted in facilitators working under agency Directors or Program Managers who did not support CLA. Early in the scale up work, UNICEF and the participants in the initial training of trainers invited participating agencies to discuss how they could support the CLA work at different levels. Although this seemed to help agencies to create an environment supportive to the use of CLA, in one case the arrival of a new Director, who had a different mandate from headquarters following a consultation by a Sierra Leonian consulting group (i.e., communities report violations and the organization responds), undermined the support for CLA. For example, a former NGO coordinator indicated that previously the agency had enthusiastically supported facilitators using CLA, but with the arrival of a new director, the facilitators did not have their contracts renewed and the CLA work in communities ended...

Before, Caritas gave me time to do the job [using CLA] in field,,,My previous boss was very supportive... But when the new director came, there was no contract for us. CLA ended. (Former coordinator)

As discussed below, ongoing support from the mentors helped significantly to fill gaps in knowledge about CLA and to strengthen relevant skills of using it.

Mentoring

Recognizing the complexities of the facilitation process and the ineffectiveness of one-off trainings, the mentoring process was designed to provide ongoing training and backstopping of the facilitators and to invite reflection about what was most needed next in the facilitation process. The concept was to have a multi-layered system of support based on a five-person national team, which in turn was supported by M. Wessells. At ground level, different mentors who themselves had extensive experience implementing CLA were assigned to particular regions, where they periodically visited facilitators and worked to strengthen their capacities and help solve challenging problems. Backstopping and supporting the field mentors were David Lamin of UNICEF and Mike Wessells of CRA, who both had been highly involved in the design and implementation of the initial CLA work and who had helped to design and implement the scale up process.

Selection. The mentors were selected on the basis of their advanced understanding of and skills of implementing CLA and their ability to help communities to use CLA in an effective

manner. Recognizing that the mentors needed to have extensive experience as facilitators and supporters of CLA, three field mentors were hired initially. These included (1) Amie Tolley, who served as Coordinator and mentor and had formerly served UNICEF as its Northern Regional Coordinator and had supported the early CLA work in Bombali; (2) Ernest Brimah, who had previously facilitated the initial CLA work in Bombali; and (3) Samba Charlie, who had previously facilitated the initial CLA work in Moyamba. In 2022, as the scale up process brought in more agencies and expanded into more districts, the field mentoring team was expanded to include Francis Johnbull, who had demonstrated strong understanding of and skill in the use of CLA.

Mentoring Processes. In addition to serving as a Mentor herself, Amie Tolley coordinated the mentoring team. Having assigned each mentor specific areas to work in, the mentors then visited their respective region and met in person with various facilitators, including in community contexts. Through monthly meetings with the field mentors and D. Lamin and also via a WhatsApp group, she received regular updates about what was going well or what needed improvement in particular regions or in the work of particular agencies. Amie also travelled for five days each quarter to observe mentors in the field and advise and support them. She used this information to provide monthly updates and reports to M. Wessells.

The field visits by each mentor were tailored to the context and frequently had multiple components. On entering a District or on returning there for the first time in several months, the mentor typically visited the District Officers who worked for the Government of Sierra Leone and helped to coordinate and oversee work by different agencies and communities on child protection and well-being. These visits helped to build valuable linkages between the work of the formal (Government led) work on child protection and the non-formal (civic led) work on child protection done by communities themselves. In fact, several of the District Social Officers had participated in the initial training of trainers and were enthusiastic supporters of the approach and the scale up.

Most field visits aimed to support effective practice of CLA by facilitators, agencies, communities, or some combination of the above. In visits with a facilitator, a mentor usually engaged in discussion about how the facilitator's work was going, what they saw as their strengths and areas for improvement, what challenges they faced, and what they needed to do differently as they moved forward. In many respects, a mentor's visit provided space for stepping back from the tasks of facilitation, enabling the facilitator to reflect on what was going well and what needed adjustment. Participatory approaches were often built into these activities. If it became clear that a facilitator needed additional capacity in a particular area such as enabling full participation by all members of the community, the mentor might pose a hypothetical (yet realistic) scenario to the facilitator and ask them how they would approach the situation to enable inclusive participation. Or, the mentor might ask the facilitator to engage in a simulation of a discussion with someone who had not been participating. Importantly, the mentor sometimes accompanied the facilitator as they worked in the community, enabling the mentor to observe the facilitator's interactions with community members.

In regard to their community work, the mentors asked the facilitators how they thought their work was going and whether their action fit with the principles of CLA. A key question

asked frequently by mentors was along the lines of ‘Is this plan coming from you or from the community?’ or ‘Who’s in the driver’s seat here—you or community members?’ This type of question often helped to bring facilitators back to the core idea that in CLA, the community rather than the facilitator is the decision maker. If the mentor or the facilitator thought that the facilitator needed to do better, the activity would be repeated until the facilitator had improved. This combination of participatory activity, reflection, and repeated action with an emphasis on developing the facilitator’s skills proved to be mutually enjoyable and quite effective in strengthening the facilitator’s capacities to promote CLA in an effective manner.

Successes. The primary success of this mentoring system was the previously discussed fidelity of most facilitators to the principles of CLA. This was no small accomplishment in view of the larger than expected number of participating agencies and facilitators, many of whom had experience mostly in expert-led approaches that in many respects orient one in a direction contrary to CLA. The facilitators and social work staff lauded mentors for their effective support and spirit of teamwork.

Ernest teaches me how to facilitate—to help guide people, how to listen with issues. Let them talk. Don’t come with judgment. The importance of unity. (Community facilitator)

We work as one...almost like a brother. (Social worker)

In addition, the mentoring team served as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the scale-up system and helped to guide needed adjustments in the scale-up work. As the scale-up began in a new district, a mentor was assigned to work with the facilitators and participating agencies there. If the mentor observed that there were significant problems (e. g., floods, or lack of expertise in using CLA) with the implementation, they notified A. Tholley and D. Lamin, who in turn made needed adjustments in the implementation schedule or the schedule for visits and additional training. Through regular meetings with the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Community-Engagement Sub-Group, Lamin and Tholley kept authorities informed of changes and invited thinking about how to strengthen the scale-up process. In this manner, the mentoring systems helped to keep the scale up process on track and to strengthen the confidence and collaborative spirit at national level that are essential for the scale up to succeed.

Challenges. The mentors and the mentoring system itself faced significant operational challenges. Transportation was challenging owing to the rising costs of fuel, difficulties keeping motorbikes working, the large distances between some sites, the poor road conditions, and periodic flooding that rendered particular areas inaccessible. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic posed major obstacles by, for example, making it difficult to travel or to have larger meetings. The pandemic also spawned new levels of risk for children, as schools were closed and children engaged in wayward activities, including sexual activities that sometimes led to pregnancy.

The mentoring system itself encountered a heavier workload than had been anticipated due to the participation of a greater number of agencies and the expansion of the scale up to a larger number of districts. The flexibility, coordination skill, and joint problem-solving ethos of the mentoring team were helpful in meeting these challenges. Nevertheless, it was the mentoring

team members' strength of commitment to the communities and children that enabled the mentoring system to work under challenging conditions.

Another challenge was that in some communities, the community facilitator seemed to take a back seat to the mentor, who was described by some community members as facilitating community meetings and giving them ideas. The exact causes of this challenge are unknown but might have occurred due to the community facilitator's deference to the mentor, or the mentor's perceived need to model with the community how to facilitate or to correct mistakes that the facilitator had made, or other considerations. It is also unclear how widespread a challenge this was. In moving forward, it will be important to help the mentors to adhere more tightly to their role of supporting the facilitators while staying in the background.

Organizational Support

The support for CLA in multiple agencies and organizations is key for an effective scale up and integration of CLA into the national child protection system. Organizational support, however, can be challenging since CLA requires that not only facilitators but also entire organizations, including Directors and Program Managers, change their thinking about their roles and support a different modality of working. In some respects, this power sharing modality runs against the grain of the expert driven approach favored by many donors, organizations, and child protection workers. Nevertheless, the evaluation identified significant successes.

Successes. Among the most significant successes has been the keen support for and ownership of CLA by organizations at different levels, from the Ministry of Social Welfare to NGOs that helped to implement CLA in communities. Ministry officials in Freetown spoke highly of CLA, pointing out its beneficial effects for communities. As one official put it,

It's been of benefit to them. The community tells us what they want. It has been impactful at a district level also.

Similarly, a District Social Officer stated:

Before—when we went to the community, there was no ownership... The key is ownership and participation... But, we are finding that CLA works in communities. We will continue with or without resources. We'll continue looking for resources.

UNICEF's support has played a significant role in enabling the engagement of the Ministry. Continuing a pattern established in the action research that documented the effectiveness of CLA, David Lamin has regularly briefed the Ministry on the benefits and value added of CLA and has cultivated their involvement with and support for the Community Engagement Sub-Group in the scale-up of CLA. Equally important, UNICEF has provided technical support both during the evaluation and throughout the work on CLA. An essential UNICEF support has been the allocation of some of David Lamin's time to conceptualizing and developing the CLA approach, implementation, and scale up; providing training on CLA; supervising and working with the mentoring team; and advising on and helping to operationalize the present evaluation. UNICEF has also provided limited financial support to several NGOs for

their work on CLA. At numerous points in the work on CLA and the present evaluation, UNICEF provided needed transportation support.

NGOs, too, have supported the scale up of CLA by enabling and backing it in designated areas. In some cases, NGO staff who had participated in the initial training of trainers brought their enthusiasm for CLA back to their NGO, igniting keen interest among program managers, trainers, and National Directors. Sustainability was seen as an important value added of the approach.

I: Does CLA fit in with the mission of your organization?

R: 'Oh my God, yes!' The communities are already sustaining. CLA is the only way to sustainability. Otherwise projects will fade away; it won't work. (KII with NGO staff member)

Evidence of ownership for and institutionalization of CLA came from the fact that some agencies incorporated the community-led approach into their strategic planning. Also, several NGOs incorporated the community-led approach into their work in other sectors such as WASH, youth empowerment, and women's empowerment.

The organizations' internalization of CLA was evident also in the enthusiasm for the approach demonstrated by staff other than facilitators, even after the staff had left the agency. One staff member who had been trained on CLA but who lost his job used CLA on his own in a different Chiefdom where many children did not go to school because it was far away. Using CLA, the community decided to build a school, with the community providing labor and doing farming to pay teachers and also raising funds to pay for the school roof.

Challenges. Significant challenges to organizational uptake and use of CLA were visible at all levels. At Ministry level, a significant challenge to the scale up of CLA is the ongoing shortage of funds. The Ministry of Social Welfare has indicated that less than 1% of the national budget is allocated for children. Although the recent hiring of 132 new social workers can contribute to children's well-being, this addition has strained further the limited budgets, and the social workers themselves focus mostly on case based methods. Further, the split of the former Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children's Affairs into two Ministries—the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs has complicated tasks of coordination and alignment. Within the Ministries, staff turnover has in some cases contributed to uneven support for CLA, as new staff may favor the use of other approaches.

Within UNICEF, too, staff turnover has contributed to somewhat uneven support for CLA and its scale up. The fact that the key post of Chief of Child Protection changes hands every few years means that UNICEF attention to and support for CLA may wax or wane depending on the interests and orientation of the new Chief. Also, the limited UNICEF funding has made it difficult for UNICEF to consistently support the use of CLA in its partner organizations.

However, the organizational challenges to the scale up were most visible at NGO level, where challenges such as changes of key staff could spell the end of the work on CLA. In

Caritas, which had been highly active in the scale up, the arrival of a new National Director who had other priorities led to the end of the agency work on CLA. Also, within an agency, decisions were sometimes made internally to move facilitators who had been trained to use CLA to another project, with the result that the staff talents related to CLA would not be used.

Funding, too, emerged as a highly significant challenge. In one case, an NGO had received funding to support an area of work other than CLA, which meant that the agency had to quietly develop CLA ‘under the radar.’ Some of the largest NGOs did not participate, and numerous stakeholders felt that this might have reflected both the COVID 19 emergency and also the large amount of funding associated with the response to it. As one stakeholder put it,

Agencies chase funding—they do what they get funding for. If it’s on paper, then they do it—otherwise, no. If it’s not in the budget, they don’t do it.

NGOs faced highly significant operational challenges in working with communities in the intensive manner embodied in CLA. The COVID-19 pandemic sharply slowed the CLA work, as it became very difficult to have a long, slow dialogue process in communities, or even visits from facilitators and other agency staff. Other natural disasters also limited the work. In rural areas, where communities were often far from towns and where the roads were in poor condition, floods during rainy season sometimes made it impossible to reach the communities.

Also, some of the participating NGOs were inconsistent in trainings and practices related to CLA. For example, agency step-down trainings that followed the initial TOT on CLA were less effective. In one case, a facilitator said he had received training on CLA from his agency. Yet when asked what topics had been included, he mentioned child rights and violence against children, which reflect an expert-driven approach rather than CLA. In addition, although the TOT had emphasized the importance of the facilitators living in the communities they worked with, some facilitators were permitted by their agencies to live in the nearest town, which afforded fewer opportunities for direct observation of and interaction with community members.

Community Views, Processes and Actions

The site visits with nine communities revealed that the communities had organized themselves to address children’s issues such as early pregnancy, children out of school, wayward children, and children’s engagement in heavy work. Most communities created a task force of 7-10 people that focused on children’s issues, addressing specific harms to children and promoting children’s well-being. In some cases, the children’s focus was integrated into an existing group, leading the group to have a strong interest in children’s well-being. The task forces, which consisted mostly of adults, although some included children, helped to facilitate and plan community action to address the harms to children that the community had selected. Complementing the task forces were other community groups such as youth groups and mothers’ clubs, who also brought people into the process of supporting children’s well-being.

Activities. Since diverse child protection issues were connected with poverty and economic hardship, most communities formed groups to do collective farming, with some of the incomes channelled into a savings and loan scheme. Money from the savings and loan scheme

was used to protect and support vulnerable children, especially through education, which people saw as valuable in its own right and as a means for preventing problems such as teen pregnancy and early marriage that frequently accompanied school dropout.

We pay teachers from the savings and loan. We were going to close the school because teachers couldn't work anymore without salary. We paid four million leones for three months. (FGD, adult men)

Before we had a group, we had no idea what to do... But we decided on a large casava farm to pay school fees and give teachers a salary. (FGD, young women)

In one community that had no school, girls had to travel to a neighboring community to attend school. Because of the significant distance, the girls had to travel by *okada* (motorbikes driven by male youths) who then demanded sex in return. To prevent this sexual exploitation, the community built itself a school, enabling the girls to have safe access to education. Women in a focus group described the community planning and action:

R 3: Every time we meet we discuss the issues affecting the community. One is children that go to school a far distance. Whether they go to school or not. That's when we discuss about it and decide to construct a school. We contribute an amount of money. And some of the men get some sticks [to build the school]. For us, the women, we talk to the children, especially the girls, about education. That they should continue. We talk to them about how our community could be developed through education. And the importance of education.

R 5: We also talk about what our children should be eating. We are doing our best for children to have something to eat, even before they go to school.

R3: We talk to them about how they should conduct themselves so they don't get pregnant. We advise them to stay in school. The women talk to the girls. (FGD, women)

R 7: The women also talk with their daughters about family planning.

When they are grown up, they should have family planning... age 15 and up. When children, they don't do that. (FGD, women)

In another community, children could not attend school because they had no shoes, which were required of students, so the savings and loan funds were used to buy shoes for the children. In still another community, the savings and loan funds helped to feed children who otherwise had dropped out of school because they were not eating either breakfast or lunch and were unable to concentrate.

Complementing the savings and loan schemes were activities undertaken by different sub-groups. Mothers' clubs performed tasks such as monitoring children's school attendance and ensuring that children's basic needs were met. Youth groups discussed the importance of education and encouraged children to continue their education. Parents talked with their children about going to school, especially secondary school for girls which in the past had been attended mostly by boys. Parents also talked with and advised their children about sex and pregnancy.

Communities also created by-laws as a means of protecting children. In one village where people learned that a teacher had been sexually abusing girl students, the community passed a by-law that banned sexual affairs with school going girls. Other communities passed by-laws that required children to go to school, required the reporting to the police of perpetrators who impregnated girls, or prohibited children from being allowed out of their houses unsupervised at night. People saw these by-laws as important because they were not handed down by authorities but reflected the will of the people and helped them to protect their children. As a result, people expressed increased willingness to report violations to authorities.

If girls are tampered with, we report them to 'Hands off our girls' [a Government program in Bo]. We had the idea before, but because of CLA, now we have more ideas. We have a plan in place to report. (FGD, adult men)

Inclusivity. In working on behalf of children, communities exhibited high levels of inclusivity, as people spoke frequently about including different people and how the process differed from what had happened before they had used a community-led approach.

Before we were working in disunity with different ideas. Ernest taught us how to come together and raise our own finances so we could do it [build the school] ourselves.... If one stick we are not able to sweep the ground. Only when we put sticks together, can we clean. (FGD, young man)

People frequently reported that the community discussions had become much more inclusive of women, children, and people with disabilities.

Before, we don't go to meetings because we are ashamed. Now that CLA is here, we go to meetings, we listen and we also contribute and they hear our contributions now. (FGD, women)

Before, children and women could not sit like this. The men tell women to sit behind. Now even children have confidence. When children sit with the elderly, they get a lot of knowledge. (FGD, men and women)

Everyone comes. Before, women were at the back. Children were at the back, or not there at all. Women have confidence now. Before, we used to not even talk at the baray. It has even helped us with selling. Now we can negotiate. We can be free to talk! (Makonteh, FGD, women)

Before the blind man never came. Now we take his hand and help him walk to meetings... We work, plant, harvest together. Together we keep the community clean... We mobilize money to give money to teachers who are not paid. (FGD, men)

Youth have confidence. Before, the elders did not ask us... Now they ask us... We are included in meetings... not before. (FGD, young men)

Ownership. Community people frequently expressed their keen sense of ownership for the CLA and the results they were achieving. People frequently reported that they see the CLA as their own work and an expression of their concern and action on behalf of children. They saw this as being different from what had happened in various NGO projects in their communities.

I: *What do you think about CLA.*

[All chime in they like it.]

R2: *It is ours!*

R5: *Before, girls did not talk. Dropped out of school.*

R6: *Before, child goes to school, meets man, gets pregnant. Some girls died when giving birth.*

Now girls no longer go to boyfriends, instead they go to school. (FGD, women)

Mr. Samba came with the idea, but we ourselves identified problems and what to do. (FGD, Task Force members)

Before, there were a lot of challenges. NGOs would come ... They came in with the projects.... But communities weren't part of it. Now, everybody is involved—The disabled, children, women, everybody. Now people solve issues themselves. (KII, Section Chief)

R: *When NGOs came before, we didn't take it seriously...*

I: *Why not take it seriously?*

R: *They have good homes, they come with their big fancy cars. But we have our own traditions... They were imposing on us their ways.. so we did not take them seriously because it's not our tradition. (FGD, women and men)*

NGOs came before, then leave. With CLA, it is our own. We will continue doing it (KII, community facilitator)

Other NGOs came before. . . NGOs come and say 'You should do this. You should do that. You should do this.' Then they leave and the project ends. The main different of CLA is we sit and identify our problem, then we have solutions. (KII, community facilitator)

Consistent with the principle that community ownership for particular work increases its sustainability, community people excitedly expressed their plan to continue the work.

We will not stop because we like our project! (FGD, women)

I: *Will you do these CLA activities when Mr. Samba stops coming?*

R: *Oh yes! We will keep doing. (FGD young women)*

We will continue if Ernest leaves. One can't carry a stone with one finger. You need two or more. Before, we did not raise money to do any development. Now we can work.

Satisfaction With the CLA Approach. Community members said that they were highly satisfied with the CLA and preferred it over the expert driven approaches used by most NGOs. Diverse community members lauded the approach for pulling people together, enabling the community to address its own priorities and solve its own problems, and achieving positive results for children. Asked their opinion about the approach, people said:

CLA shows us many things that we have forgotten to do. How to gather together and push a problem forward. Now we solve problems on our own. We start our own project. When we call people, all come. All have benefitted. (KII, Community facilitator)

It is very good! People like their groups. Money comes at the end of every month. They use it for the benefit of children. Children are in school. Girls are not getting pregnant. (FGD, Task Force)

Before, the NGO would pick what to do. Now we pick what people in our community want. (KII, community facilitator)

Before, the children would go to the farm (to work) and get money. But now WE work and get money... And now our children are going to school, and we are happy about that. (FGD, women)

Spontaneous spread. The satisfaction and excitement around CLA meant that it did not stay within communities that were part of the pilot scale up but spread spontaneously to other villages nearby. In nearly all the villages, people said that the neighboring villages had noticed the benefits to children such as reduced early pregnancy and had expressed interested in learning about the CLA process.

Other villages ask 'how are we doing this?' We have taught others. We talk to other youth when we meet them. We share how we did it, like the savings and loan box. We want Ernest to go there and teach them because we have benefitted and want them to be involved. (FGD, young men)

I: *Have other villages noticed what you are doing?*

R: *Yes! They see the change and want to know how it happened. We explain to other women how it helped and how we are doing it. When they come to our village, we talk about these issues.* (FGD, women)

In a northern town, one Section Chief said that many of the villages that he oversaw wanted to learn about the approach, so he shared information with all of them in their meetings.

I am custodian of 52 villages. Whenever we have a meeting, we discuss the benefits that have come from CLA. The headmen ask how to do. They say, 'what happened?' ... At least 15 have asked for the CLA....

This finding indicates that the scale up of CLA can occur not only from the Ministry of Social Welfare down to the communities but also through a horizontal spread process that is based on communities' preference for and excitement about CLA.

Outcomes for Children

Although the evaluation did not set out to determine the outcomes for children of the CLA, community members reported that there were a diversity of tangible, meaningful benefits for children. Chief among these were reduced early pregnancy (under 18 years of age) and early marriage (under 18 years of age), increased education participation, and increased social cohesion. These promising outcomes and other are described below.

Early pregnancy and early marriage. All nine communities reported that early pregnancy had decreased as a result of community action. Some communities, however, reported greater reductions in the number of early pregnancies, although this may have reflected differences in how many early pregnancies were occurring before the CLA had begun. Not clear

One community reported that there had been 40 early pregnancies in the two year period before the CLA work had begun but there had been no pregnancies in the past two years, during the period of the CLA work.

Before, a lot of girls got pregnant—40 within two years... Now there are none in the last year (FGD young women)

This outcome was confirmed by the community health workers, who noted that early pregnancy had been decreasing and that girls and their mothers wanted family planning, which usually began around 12-14 years of age. A similar pattern occurred in another community, where people reported reductions in the frequency of early pregnancy and also mentioned the use of family planning.

I: *Have there been any changes in pregnancy since CLA?*

R: *Yes... It is minimal now (FGD, women)*

Children are given pills not to get pregnant at about 15 years. (FGD, women)

These reductions likely owed not only to family planning but also to strong efforts to have girls continue their education (see below) and discussions with parents and community members about the problems associated with early pregnancy.

In addition, communities reported reductions in early marriage, which likely were connected with the reductions that occurred in early pregnancy. Traditionally in Sierra Leone, when a girl becomes pregnant, the families of the girl and the perpetrator come together and seek to achieve a 'compromise.' Quite often, the compromise involves elements such as the boy agreeing to marry the girl and to pay her education costs for the past year (Wessells et al.). The reduction in early pregnancies meant that fewer families would be seeking to achieve such a

compromise, meaning that fewer underage girls would become married. The reduction in early pregnancy and early marriage may also have reflected the preventive effects of children's ongoing participation in education. Pregnant girls were not allowed to go to school, and many girls wanted to continue their education.

Education. All the communities noted enthusiastically that more children were going to school. They were particularly proud that more girls were participating in secondary education, which previously had been accessible mostly by boys.

I: Have there been any changes since you have been doing CLA?

“Oh yes! A lot were dropouts, but most are now in school or tech training. Girls before were having pregnancies. No advice from elders or anybody. Girls went to boys to get things. Now we have various groups – for children not going to school, to advise children not to get pregnant. We saw a lot of changes. (FGD, adult women)

Before children would play around. Now they sit and study. We talked to the teacher and he now studies with them at night. (FGD, young women)

Children, too, reported that they had become more serious about their education.

R1: We weren't studying before. But since we created our group, now we are studying. Before we had lots of teen pregnancies because no one was there to advise. But because of our group, no one is pregnant!

R3: Some peers said they weren't going to study, so we engaged with their parents to talk with their children.

R8: We all have passed our exams. (FGD, Teens in secondary school)

Community members attributed these changes to the steps they had taken such as the previously mentioned building of schools and steps such as providing food to enable children to learn in school.

Before we not giving lunch, so girls were involved in sex (to get food). Now we give lunch. No pregnancy here because of advice and encouragement. (FGD Adult women)

If children are hungry and the teacher is teaching, nothing can enter the brain. (FGD, adult women)

We are proud to give lunch to children to go to school. We even give breakfast. Before, we didn't give lunch. Now we garden and get money for lunch. (FGD, adult women)

Before we would give leftover food from the evening and warm up in the morning. The children would vomit. Now we prepare fresh food in the morning. (FGD, adult women)

Collectively, these positive outcomes reflect the fact that communities had become more watchful and organized around preventing or reducing harms.

Improved social relations. Particularly in a collectivist society such as Sierra Leone, the quality of the social relationships in children’s environment is an important determinant of well-being. Both children and parents reported that the CLA work had improved parent-child relationships. Parents talked more with their children, who now listened to their parents and were more respectful and obedient than they had been before when they had often not received breakfast and lunch.

R 1: Before children didn’t listen. Now they are well behaved. Before we didn’t even sit down and talk to them. Now we sit down and talk, work with them, encourage them to go to school. (FGD, elder men)

Because of poverty, we did not have anything at all. Now there is money in box to care for children. So now children listen to parents because they have something to give. (FGD, young women)

Also, the relationships between husbands and wives had improved, and they quarrelled less over typical issues such as whether to use the husband’s or the wife’s money in buying food and essentials for children. Before, the men usually provided only a bag of rice, while the women purchased the vegetables, sauces, and everything else. As a result of the CLA, however, men contributed money equally to support children’s well-being. In several communities, people said that husbands and wives now had better relationships and engaged in more ‘play’ and ‘cuddling in the room’ (sex).

Wives and husbands play together – have sex, we cuddle them in the room. (women, FGD)

At community level, too, improvements in social relationships were highly visible, as people spoke often about how the community had come together and worked in a collaborative manner.

The community has come together. We were disunited before. There were lots of quarrels because some heads were eating all the money. Now the problems of children going to school are solved. Tampering with girls is solved. (FGD with adult men)

People reported that there was less fighting and quarrelling, and that when neighbors had a disagreement, they themselves worked it out in a peaceful manner instead of taking the conflict to the Chief. Overall, then, the CLA process increased the social cohesion within the communities.

Lessons Learned and the Way Forward

The findings discussed above are promising for the scalability of CLA. Indeed, the pilot scale-up indicated that diverse agencies can use CLA effectively and with good fidelity to the principles of CLA as part of their ongoing operations. Communities expressed high levels of satisfaction with the approach and exhibited high levels of ownership and collective self-reliance, which are characteristic of CLA approaches.

These findings resonate with the emerging findings from other contexts. In India, too, multiple NGOs have successfully used CLA as part of their ongoing work while successfully addressing school dropout and early marriage (InterAgency Core Group, 2019). Further, evaluation work currently under way indicates that different NGOs such as Plan India and Praxis are effectively scaling up the use of CLA with positive results.

Of course, additional work is needed to determine fully the scalability of CLA. Since the current pilot phase did not involve the entire country, additional steps are needed to use CLA in all the districts and chiefdoms in Sierra Leone. Also, a country wide scale up will require more complete integration of CLA into the finances and operations of the Government. Without increased financial support, it is unclear whether CLA can be scaled up fully or made sustainable on a national level.

Nevertheless, the pilot scale up and this evaluation have yielded valuable insights that can be useful in guiding future work in this area. In this spirit, this section presents key lessons learned and recommendations for strengthening the scale up work ahead.

Lessons Learned

1. Ongoing capacity building and mentoring was key for enabling facilitators and agencies to achieve appropriate levels of fidelity to the principles of CLA.

The support of the mentoring team at community and organizational level was foundational for the successful use of CLA by different agencies and facilitators. The ongoing training that occurred through the mentoring visits, dialogues, participatory skill building exercises, and reflections was important both for strengthening relevant skills and approaches by the facilitators, who often emphasized that more training was their greatest need. In addition, ongoing training and mentoring was essential because of the high levels of staff turnover. If, for example, a facilitator or the Program Manager that oversaw their work got reassigned and the incoming person lacked appropriate understanding and skills related to CLA, the likelihood of achieving fidelity to CLA principles decreased. Even without staff turnover, ongoing mentoring and training are needed for correcting any back sliding or reversion to the top-down directive approaches they may have used previously.

2. Scale up processes should include space for and learning from innovations in CLA. In work on scaling up, the first step of establishing proof of concept is usually followed by efforts to adapt the intervention to the normal operating conditions of NGOs (XX). This adaptation by NGOs frequently involves innovations that enhance the goodness of fit with their operational procedures and conditions. With regard to CLA, innovations may also occur at community level since CLA is not a recipe but a process for unlocking full community empowerment and potential to address self-selected harms to children. Communities themselves may innovate in ways that are enriching and strengthen the impact for children.

The most important innovation identified in this evaluation was the integration of food security/economic components into the community-led actions to address specific harms to children. In their discussions about which harms to children to address, community people

frequently identified poverty and lack of food as root causes of diverse harms to children. For example, early pregnancy often arose from poverty, as girls who lacked money but wanted to go to school took rides with motorbike drivers, who then demanded sex as a form a payment. Similarly, children often stopped going to school since they had had no breakfast or lunch, which undermined their ability to learn. Being familiar with collective farming and savings and loan schemes, communities built these elements into their actions to reduce harms to children such as school dropout and early pregnancy. This integrative, multi-sectoral approach is innovative in a broader sense in that the humanitarian and development systems are notoriously siloed or fragmented. For the most part, economic supports and child protection supports are developed separately and are infrequently combined in a powerful manner. Fortunately, communities themselves take a more holistic approach of integrating across sectors, thereby enabling them to address root causes more effectively.

Communities also innovated by choosing to address multiple harms to children. The early work on CLA had encouraged communities to focus on addressing one harm to children since it is easier to track work on one issue than on multiple issues and to analyze the causal pathways that enabled issues to be addressed. Also, the focus on a single issue was thought to be more feasible and would also help prevent communities from taking on too much and spreading themselves out too much. In the scale-up, however, communities frequently chose to address multiple, interrelated harms such as early pregnancy, school dropout, and early marriage that had a common root cause. By addressing the common root cause such as poverty, they succeeded in addressing multiple issues simultaneously. Through their holistic approach, communities made even bigger contributions to children's protection and well-being than had been envisioned in the early work on CLA.

Another valuable community innovation was the use of selected community members as facilitators of the CLA work. In the initial work on CLA, outside facilitators were preferred on the idea that they would be less subject to bias and pressuring from the community and would be more likely to treat everyone as equals. However, communities recognized that the process required high levels of trust in the facilitators, which could be achieved by having the facilitators be trusted community members who had been selected by the communities themselves. Broadly speaking, this innovation seemed to be effective, and the mentors' watchfulness and presence may have helped to prevent or minimize issues such as favoritism.

However, some of the facilitators came from outside the communities that they supported. An innovation by multiple NGOs was to have the facilitator live relatively close to but not in the community in which they worked. This was a departure from the early work on CLA, which required that the facilitator live in the community as a means of building greater trust, enriching the facilitator's understanding of the power dynamics and life in the setting, and expanding opportunities for helpful conversations and dialogues related to the CLA work. However, NGOs did not typically require facilitators to live in the communities they worked with and therefore permitted facilitators to live outside but relatively nearby the communities they worked in. This innovation seemed to have no ill effects and may even have given facilitators more time and space for reflection, self-care, and preparation for their next activities with the community.

The fact that these innovations were successful indicates both that CLA allows some degree of flexibility and the value of learning through experience. As new innovations are tried and documented as being either effective, ineffective, or even potentially harmful, CLA will become better tailored to the realities of community life and NGO operations.

3. The scalability of CLA owed to a mixture of structured and spontaneous processes.

Although the scale-up process was planned and structured, it is important to note the scale up also occurred spontaneously in ways that had not been planned but that contributed to the effort. The structured scale-up occurred through embedding CLA within the operations of multiple NGOs, which then implemented and supported CLA in assigned districts and areas. This structured scale-up entailed extensive planning, oversight, and support from the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Community-Engagement Sub-Group, UNICEF, and the CLA mentoring team.

An unexpected but felicitous complement to this structured process was the spontaneous, horizontal spread—mostly by word of mouth and visitations—of the CLA work. In many respects, the spontaneous spread is a bottom-up approach to scaling up that complements the more structured, top-down approach to scaling up. This spontaneous spread likely owed to the fact that communities who had not been part of the structured scale-up saw or heard about the highly positive accomplishments of the communities that had participated in the structured scale-up and wanted their own children to benefit from the CLA work. The fact that the positive outcomes for children were achieved by communities themselves in the structured scale-up likely inspired other communities to realize that they, too, could address problems such as early pregnancy through their own, home grown and low cost efforts. Further, aspiring communities were likely attracted by the high levels of satisfaction with and ownership of the CLA approach that were visible in the structured scale-up.

An implication of this lesson is that efforts to scale-up the use of CLA should provide space for spontaneous spread and should seek to learn from and evaluate the results of the latter. More than being ‘happy accompaniments’, spontaneous, bottom-up approaches to scaling up may entail novel innovations by communities that may contribute to children’s well-being even more than the structured scale-up processes did. Thus it is important to document and analyze these innovations, using what is learned to strengthen future efforts to scale up the use of CLA. Conversely, some spontaneous innovations may be less effective or even unintentionally harmful to children. By evaluating such undesired effects, we put ourselves (and communities) in a position to avoid them and move in directions that strengthen positive outcomes for children.

4. Additional capacity building and training should be provided to participating organizations, which need to shift their orientation and make a longer term commitment to the use of CLA.

The use of CLA can be challenging for many NGOs, whose donors have long demanded quick results and the use of log frames, pre-defined interventions, and adherence to pre-specified schedules. Indeed, most NGOs have internalized the programming modalities, attitudes, and values associated with expert-driven approaches. The use of CLA requires significant shifts or even a transformation in the NGO’s overall approach. At the program level, NGOs need to share

much more power with communities, work with patience and flexibility, create space for community action, and walk with and support the communities as they work to achieve their self-defined objectives. The shift from an expert role to a facilitative, enabling role requires a shift in mindsets and values toward greater participation, humility, respect and appreciation for what communities can do on their own, patience and willingness to work according to ‘community time,’ and prioritization of community ownership.

Not surprisingly, this evaluation noted that organizations frequently requested additional training and capacity building on CLA and that frequent staff turnover increases this need. In the future, it will be important to provide workshops and trainings that not only strengthen skills related to CLA but also enable the shifted mindset and orientation referred to above. At organization level, NGOs should commit to supporting CLA over a longer period of time as a condition of participation in the scale up. This will help to prevent unfortunate situations such as having a new Director with other priorities unexpectedly end their agency’s participation.

5. Effective scaling up of CLA requires a systemic, collaborative approach that bridges Government and civil society. The success of this pilot scale-up owed in no small part to the multi-level collaboration of actors at different levels. At national level, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Community Engagement Sub-Group, and UNICEF provided key leadership, vision, and support for the scale-up. Diverse international and national NGOs provided leadership as well and served as the key implementing partners in the scale up. At district level, District Social Officers of the Ministry offered valuable coordination and assistance. At grassroots level, communities were guided and implemented the CLA, achieving positive outcomes for children and enabling the spontaneous spread of the approach. In the early process, UNICEF helped to connect, mobilize and coordinate actors at different levels, and the mentoring team also provided multi-level support. Future efforts toward scaling up CLA should employ this approach, implemented with a highly collaborative spirit and attention to community needs.

6. Additional financial resources are necessary for continuing the scale-up to a national level and making it sustainable.

The funding to support this pilot scale-up came primarily from external sources, as the Government of Sierra Leone devotes less than 1% of its annual budgets to children’s well-being. This work was supported primarily by external donors via Child Resilience Alliance, UNICEF, and to some extent by the participating NGOs. With the expiration of the external funding that CRA had leveraged, little support will be available for the mentoring function that has been of central importance in the pilot scale-up and that would be even more important in a full, national scale-up. Although UNICEF resources have been instrumental in the scale-up, they have been limited, and challenging economic circumstances, coupled with a multiplicity of priorities, make it unlikely that UNICEF could itself support a national level scale-up. This same challenge applies as well to NGOs. Thus, there is significant risk that the scale-up might not continue, and the current, limited scale-up may not be sustainable. Thus, high priority should be given to fund raising and to finding partners that can play the role in a national scale-up that CRA has played in this initial, pilot scale-up.

The Way Forward

The time is ripe for the further, national scale-up of CLA, which is now backed by extensive evidence of its effectiveness, ownership by communities, and sustainability. Among its other advantages, CLA enables high levels of child participation, youth empowerment, and leadership by young people. Building social cohesion and inclusivity, it unites communities around supporting children, and it sparks local innovations that are holistic, contextual, and likely to endure. From a human rights standpoint, it enables the voice, dignity, and agency of each individual, strengthening norms of equality and social justice. It is one of the few approaches that replaces high levels of dependency—which is widespread throughout the field of child protection—with collective self-reliance. It also provides NGOs with a technical approach that advances the localization agenda, with CLA handing much greater power to local communities than occurs typically through expert-led approaches. For all these reasons and more, CLA is becoming more widely used, including by organizations such as Save the Children, War Child Holland, and ChildFund.

Much of the foundational work on CLA originated in Sierra Leone, which helped to conceptualize it and weave it into the child protection system and where communities have embraced it and developed innovative actions that significantly improve children’s well-being. Sierra Leone now has the opportunity to be the first country to develop CLA on a national scale using an empirically verified scale up approach. The authors of this report sincerely urge the Government of Sierra Leone, its organizations, and its people to continue the historic process of scaling up CLA as a means of fulfilling their greatest obligation—the well-being of children.

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
- Charmaz, K. (2004). Premises, principles, and practices in qualitative research: Revisiting the foundations. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14, 976-993.
- Ellermeijer, R. E. C., Robinson, M. A., Guevara, A. F., O’Hare, G., Veldhuizen, C. I. S., Wessells, M. Reis, R., & Jordans, M. J. D. (2023). A systematic review of the literature on community-level child protection in low- and middle-income countries. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*. Doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2023.2230889
- Gomez, M. R. et al. (2021). *Shifting the field: Philanthropy’s role in strengthening child- and youth-led community rooted groups*. Elevate Children Funders Group (ECFG).
- Inter-Agency Core Group (2021). *Community action to address child marriage and school*

dropout: Findings from action research on community-led child protection in Jharkhand, India. Ranchi: Interagency Action Research to Strengthen Community-Based Child Protection.

Kostelny, K., Ondoro, K., & Wessells, M. (2020). *Community action to end 'early sex' in Kenya: Endline report on community-led child protection. Report for the Oak Foundation.* New York: Author.

Kostelny, K., Wessells, M., & Ondoro, K. (2020). Enabling full participation: A community-led approach to child protection. In N. Balvin & D. J. Christie (Eds.), *Children and peace: From research to action* (pp. 291-305). Cham: Springer Open.

Stark, L., Macfarlane, M., King, D., Lamin, D., Lillley, S., & Wessells, M. (2014). *A community-driven approach to reducing teenage pregnancy in Sierra Leone: Midline Evaluation.* London: Save the Children.

Wessells, M. (2009). *What are we learning about protecting children in the community? An inter-agency review of evidence on community-based child protection mechanisms.* London: Save the Children.

Wessells, M. G. (2011). *An ethnographic study of community-based child protection mechanisms and their linkage with the national child protection system of Sierra Leone.* New York: Columbia Group for Children in Adversity.

Wessells, M. G. (2015). Bottom-up approaches to strengthening child protection systems: Placing children, families, and communities at the center. *Child Abuse & Neglect: The International Journal*, 43, 8-21. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.04.006>

Wessells, M. G. (2018). *A guide for supporting community-led child protection processes.* New York: Child Resilience Alliance.

Wessells, M. G. (2024). Prioritizing Prevention: The Value of a Locally Led Approach in Supporting Conflict-Affected Children. In M. Denov & M. Fennig (Eds.), *Research handbook of children and armed conflict.* Elgar Publisher.

Wessells, M. G., & Kostelny, K. (2017). Child rights and practitioner wrongs: Lessons from inter-agency research in Sierra Leone and Kenya. In M. Ruck, M. Peterson-Badali, & M. Freeman (Eds.), *Handbook of Children's Rights: Global and multidisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 579-596). New York: Taylor & Francis.

Wessells, M., Lamin, D., King, D., Kostelny, K., Stark, L., & Lilley, S. (2012). The disconnect between community-based child protection mechanisms and the formal child protection system in rural Sierra Leone: Challenges to building an effective national child protection system. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 7(31), 211-227.

Wessells, M., Lamin, D., & Manyeh, M. (2014). *An Overview of the Community Driven*

Intervention To Reduce Teenage Pregnancy in Sierra Leone. London: Save the Children.

Wessells, M., Manyeh, M., & Lamin, D. (2014). *Preliminary Results of the Community-Driven Intervention to Reduce Teenage Pregnancy in Two Districts of Sierra Leone: Findings From Participatory Review Workshops With Children and Adults.* London: Save the Children.

Wessells, M. G., Lamin, D., King, D., Kostelny, K., Stark, L., & Lilley, S. (2015). The Limits of top-down approaches to managing diversity: Lessons from the case of child protection and child rights in Sierra Leone. *Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 21(4)*, 574-588.

WHO & ExpandNet (2009). *Practical guidance for scaling up health service innovations.* Geneva: Author.

Questions for Facilitators

As facilitator, what is your role in the CLA?

(How does this differ from other facilitator roles you have had?)

Did you receive training on how to facilitate CLA? If 'yes', please describe the training and comment on its adequacy and effectiveness.

What are the main principles of CLA?

How does the CLAA process differ from that of traditional NGO projects?

Please describe your work as a facilitator.

Prompts: What happens first? Next? CLA Are there changes that happened over time? Please describe.

What is the role of inclusivity in CLA? What steps did you take to enable inclusivity? What did you do to include women? girls? Boys? those who do not usually come to meetings? disabled?

What is community ownership? Why is it important in CLA?

As facilitator, how can you tell whether community ownership is developing?

Why is the inclusion of different community members important in CLA?

What are steps, processes, or activities you have used to increase inclusivity?

How might local people be dependent on you as facilitator? Were other agency staff also involved in the work whom the community might have become dependent on?

What steps and processes have you used to decrease dependency on you or your agency?

Please describe any training or follow up support you have received on CLA, and comment on the usefulness of each.

What things have helped you to be a good facilitator? What things have not helped?

What are your thoughts about the effectiveness CLA? How do communities like it?

What were challenges?

What recommendations do you have?

Questions for Program Managers

What do you see as some of the main principles of CLA?

In your own words, could you please tell me what steps and processes are involved in community-led child protection?

Why were you and your agency interested in using CLA? [prevention, ownership, agency, etc.]

How did you select and train your facilitators for CLA?

How has your agency's use of CLA fit with the principles of CLA?

Prompt – ask about specific principles

How does CLA fit with your agency's overall program?

How does CLA fit with your agency's mission and ways of doing things?

What successes or positives have occurred for your agency in using CLA?

What challenges or problems have arisen for your agency in using CLA?

How do you think donors see CLA?

Prompt - are they eager or willing to support it? Why or why not?

Do you plan to use CLA in the future, and how?

If not, why not?

What would enable your agency to use CLA more effectively and more widely in Sierra Leone?

Prompt – what would you do differently? What would need to change?

Questions for Mentors

How do you see the role of your collective mentoring in supporting agencies' use of CLA?

How do you see the role of your collective mentoring in supporting communities'?

In your view, why is mentoring important in enabling effective CLA?

How did COVID-19 affect your work? During which period was that?

How do you organize your work? E.g., by districts or agencies.

In an average week, how many facilitators do you work with? For how long? In how many communities?

Do you visit particular facilitators or communities repeatedly (according to a schedule)? What has been your schedule the past year? How do you coordinate/communicate with Auntie Amie?

Could each team member please share one success story about your mentoring work.

What has helped you most in doing your work?

As a team, how well or poorly do you think the agencies using CLA adhere to the principles of CLA?

Prompt? Ask which agencies have adhered well? Which agencies have not?

CLA What factors enable or help facilitators or agencies to use CLA effectively?

What factors lead facilitators or agencies that say they use CLA not to follow principles of CLA?

Example?

How well or poorly have different agencies been in selecting, training and preparing facilitators for the CLA work?

Prompt – agencies that have done well; agencies that have done poorly

What are the main challenges you have faced in your work on CLA?

What do you see as the main challenges facilitators have faced in using CLA?

What do you see as the main challenges that program managers or agencies have faced in using CLA?

Aside from COVID, what other external factors have affected your work on mentoring?

What are some of the main lessons learned about effective mentoring that could be shared with other groups that are interested in using CLA?

Questions for Community People

What is your opinion about the CLA process?

Prompts – What do you like about the CLA process? What do you not like? Please explain why you like or don't like particular aspects.

Please comment on each of these questions about the CLA process:

In the meetings,

- was everyone made to feel welcomed and comfortable? (how)
- were new people invited into discussions and decisions? (how)
- was there outreach to people who don't usually come to community meetings? (how)
- were women and girls' voices and perspectives? (how)
- did the facilitator suggest harms to children the community ought to address? If not, how were harms identified?
- was there discussion about which harms to children the community would like to address?

How did this happen?

How were key decisions made - did the facilitator invite the community to make key decisions?

did the facilitator help the community? How? (or how did they not help?)

Please tell or show briefly the steps the community has gone through and what they are doing or planning to do to address harms to children.

Who owns this work for children's well-being? Is it the NGO the facilitator works for, or the community, or who?

What successes has the CLA work had here?

What challenges has the CLA work encountered here, and how have you tried to address them?

Do you plan to continue the community-led process, and how? If not, why not?