Building a national child protection system in Ghana: From evidence to policy and practice

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This case study[1] is part of a UNICEF global initiative, undertaken in collaboration with Global Affairs Canada, to document national child protection frameworks in five core programming countries: Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Senegal and United Republic of Tanzania. The studies are intended to generate a better understanding of the country context, government response, engagement of other actors and other factors that are contributing to success in protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse.

Information for this case study was collected between April 2014 and June 2015, beginning with a review of literature. Consultations and workshops were organized with a broad range of stakeholders to support the budgeting and child abuse costing exercise. UNICEF Ghana commissioned an analysis of current investments for child protection and the economic burden of child protection violations in the country to aid understanding of the financial aspects of a national child protection system.

Introduction

Building a child protection system that is suitable for a country's context and consistent with international standards and good practices is a long-term process. It requires ongoing engagement and commitment from many stakeholders. It takes political commitment and analytical and systematic rigour in approaches and programming. Government ownership is fundamental to the process.

In Ghana, the process of strengthening the child protection system is following the appropriate path from evidence to policy to practice. It began in 2010 with analysis and mapping of the existing child protection system, which found it to be inadequate. The system lacked a national framework and comprehensive approach, linkages between upstream policies and downstream actions, and an effective coordination mechanism. Over the next four years further research determined that funding was inadequate, and much of the legal framework, inherited from the

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[1]Suggested bibliographic reference: UNICEF and Global Affairs Canada (2015). Building a national child protection system in Ghana: From evidence to policy and practice.

colonial era, failed to reflect the country's current context. Also during this period, a comprehensive bottleneck analysis was made of birth registration.

This work provided a strong evidence base for the new National Child Protection Policy framework, drafting of which began in 2013. This both generated and reflected stronger government commitment for reform of the system. The new framework comprises two distinct but linked policies: the Child and Family Welfare Policy, which was approved by the Cabinet in February 2015, and the Justice for Children Policy, which is expected to be finalized by the end of 2015.

The Government of Ghana continues to be at the helm of these initiatives to strengthen the child protection system. The efforts so far – especially the process of developing the new policy framework – galvanized many departments and agencies that were not previously concerned with child protection issues. Particularly noteworthy is the commitment demonstrated by the Ghana Health Service, which is drafting child protection guidelines for health professionals; Ghana Education Service, which is rolling out training on child protection for teachers; and the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs, which is supporting engagement with the Regional House of Chiefs on the role of chiefs and other traditional leaders in protecting children from harm.

Other key actors are playing important roles in advancing the child protection agenda in Ghana, including international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Country context

Ghana, located in the middle of West Africa, is home to an estimated 25.1 million people (see Table 1). It has approximately 50 ethnic and linguistic groups in 8 broad groupings. The country is often cited as a role model for other African countries, given its achievement of middle-income status in 2010, strong economic growth, steady increases in per capita income since 2000 and stable democratic governance.

Social indicators also suggest gains. Under-five mortality has decreased from 80 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2011 to 60 deaths in 2014. Ghana has been a regional leader in delivering education for all, having reached the Millennium Development Goal for education well ahead of the 2015 deadline. As of 2011, the country had an 84 per cent net enrolment rate in basic school (which consists of six years of primary school plus three years of junior secondary school) and had reached gender parity. However, nearly 623,500 children of primary school age are still not enrolled in primary school. Girls from northern Ghana average only four years of education, three years less than the national average.[2]

Socioeconomic progress on a national level has not translated into better protection for children against violence, abuse and exploitation (see Table 2). Close to 90 per cent of children have experienced some form of physical or verbal violence.[3] Among adolescent girls aged 15-19, 17 per cent have experienced sexual violence, and 25 per cent of women aged 15-49 report that

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[2] UNICEF Ghana website, www.unicef.org/ghana/media_8850.html.
[3] Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2011.

their first sexual intercourse was forced and occurred before the age of 15. Child abuse (physical, emotional, sexual) is a widespread problem, often exacerbated by gender norms and traditional practices.[4] This includes sexual abuse and incest, mainly in the family, schools and care institutions, mostly affecting girls.

Table 1. Ghana: Basic indicators

Total population	25,199,609
Population 0-14 years (%)	38.7
Population 15-24 years (%)	18.8
Population growth rate (%) (2013 estimated)	2.19
Population living on less than $1 per day (purchasing power parity, %, 2004)	67.9
Life expectancy at birth (male/female, years)	63/68
Adult literacy rate total (%)	71.5
Literacy rate (male/female, %, 2010 estimate)	78.3/65.3

Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2011.

Table 2. Ghana: Core child protection indicators

Subject to any psychological or physical punishment (male/female, aged 2-14) (%)	90.2/88.2
Prevalence of psychological punishment (male/female, aged 2-14) (%)	84.6/82.5
Prevalence of minor physical punishment (male/female, aged 2-14) (%)	70.7/67.9
Prevalence of severe physical punishment (male/female, aged 2-14) (%)	10.1/9.1
Prevalence of sexual violence (female aged 15-19) (%)*	17
First sexual intercourse forced and before age 15 (female, aged 15-29)*	25
Female genital mutilation/cutting (female aged 15-49 (%)	4
Birth registration under age 5 (%)(male/female)	63/62
Women aged 15-49 in marriage or union before 16th birthday (%)	6
Women aged 15-49 years in marriage or union before 18th birthday (%)	27
Percentage of children aged 5-14 involved in child labour	33.9
Children in conflict with the law (detained with adults/in remand centres, estimate per year)	200
Number of children in institutional care** (approximate)	4,500
Number of children living and working on the street***	33,000

Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2011 except where noted.
* Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, 2008.
** Department of Social Welfare, 2012.
*** National Street Children Policy Framework document, 2006.

Children in Ghana often are raised in extended families. Child maltreatment is pervasive and well-documented. Child marriage is still practised in certain areas, particularly affecting girls. Six per cent of women aged 15-49 years were married before the age of 15, and 27 per cent before the

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[4] Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, 2008.

age of 18. The comparative figures for men aged 15-59 years are 1 per cent (married before the age of 15) and 5 per cent (before age 18). The number of girls marrying before age 18 is highest in the Upper East region (39 per cent), followed by the Western (37 per cent) and Upper West (36 per cent) regions. Similarly the number of girls marrying before the age of 18 is nearly twice as high in rural communities (36 per cent) as urban ones (19 per cent). Data suggest that marriage before age 18 is increasing in at least 5 of the country's 10 regions, while marriage of girls under the age of 15 has increased in 6 regions.[5]

Ghana has been identified as a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking.[6] For the most part, children are trafficked from poorer regions of the country to urban centres and forced into exploitive labour.[7] They are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation within the country (girls more than boys), with a higher prevalence in the Volta region. This is a growing problem in the oil-producing Western region.[8]

Despite improvements in birth registration processes, around 37 per cent of births remain unregistered each year, as gains are cancelled out by population growth. There are no significant variations in birth registration rates between boys and girls, but rates vary widely between urban areas (72 per cent) and rural areas (55 per cent).[9] Just 47 per cent of births are registered among children from households of the lowest wealth quintile, compared to 82 per cent of births in the highest wealth quintile.[10]

Four per cent of women aged 15-49 have been subjected to some form of female genital mutilation/cutting. Less educated women and those from poor households are significantly more likely to have been affected, and the practice is more prevalent in rural areas (6 per cent) than in urban areas (2 per cent). Nationally, 93 per cent of women believe the practice should be discontinued.[11]

Nearly a quarter of children aged 5-14 are engaged in some form of economic activity, including in the worst forms of child labour, such as forced and exploitive labour in fishing, agriculture, mining, street vending and domestic service.[12] Boys are more engaged in fishing and cattle herding, girls in 'head portering' and domestic work. Both girls and boys also work in agriculture, including the cocoa, oil palm and cotton industries.[13]

While statistics on children in detention are not readily available, it is believed that around 300 to 400 children are in detention annually, 90 per cent of them boys. Theft and other minor crimes are the most common offences. Around 100 children are in adult prisons while another 100 are in

[5] Ibid.
[6] United States Department of State, 'Trafficking in Persons Report', 2010.
[7] Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, 'Child Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation and Pornography: Ghana's report', 2007; International Organization for Migration Ghana, 'Baseline on Child Trafficking Northern Region, Trafficked Children at Work', 2006; UNICEF Ghana, 'Midterm Review Report – Child protection', 2008.
[8] Ibid.
[9] UNICEF, 'Every Child's Birth Right: Inequities and trends in birth registration', UNICEF, New York, 2013.
[10] Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2011.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ghana Statistical Service, 'Ghana Living Standards Survey 6: First quarter labour report', 2013.
[13] Government of Ghana/UNICEF, 'It Takes a Village to Raise a Child — National child protection study: Quantitative and qualitative research towards the strengthening of child protection in Ghana', 2014.

remand homes in any given period. According to the Department of Social Welfare, 4,457 children lived in formal care in 2012. Despite efforts for de-institutionalization, only 25 of these children were placed in foster care; the remainder were in institutional care.

Government funding to support child protection services and interventions is limited and legislation is insufficiently enforced, resulting in a gap between the legal and policy framework and practice. Improvements are needed in data collection and monitoring to facilitate analysis of the situation of children, particularly those in vulnerable situations. Establishing real and lasting results for children is a long-term endeavour, and demonstrating results at the local level is the next big challenge in the system-strengthening journey.

Government response

Ghana has established a relatively comprehensive legal framework for child protection, guided by the Constitution and the Children's Act 1998 (Act 560). Work began in 2010 to establish and strengthen a child protection system that sets standards for addressing issues in a holistic manner. This has included efforts to develop a comprehensive policy (described below) that will support better protection of children's rights to survival, protection, participation and development.

Commitment to international standards

Ghana was the first country to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990. Since then the country has ratified a number of international instruments relating to child protection, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Ghana took steps towards ratification of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict in 2010 and is currently working on a possible ratification of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In 2013, the government signed the third Optional Protocol, on a communications procedure. The country ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2012 and International Labour Organiztion (ILO) Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour in 2000. However, Ghana has not ratified ILO Convention No. 138 (1973), the Minimum Age Convention.

Significant progress has been made in domesticating the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols and incorporating other international standards into the national legislative framework, partly in response to the concluding observations in the 2006 report of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. This includes passage of the Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560); the Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732); and the Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694). A gender policy drafted by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) seeks to advance gender equality for women and girls.

Child protection and the national development agenda

To raise the profile of child protection on the national agenda, the Government of Ghana has embedded the county's overall vision for child protection strengthening in the 2014-2018 Ghana

Shared Growth and Development Agenda. It outlines a number of implementation actions centred on five objectives:

- **Promote effective child development in all communities, especially in deprived areas:** Several strategies will support promotion of effective child development: creating public awareness on the rights of children; formulating and implementing policies and programmes to enhance child protection and development; mainstreaming children's issues into development planning at all levels, especially regarding children with special needs; reviewing and implementing the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy; enhancing capacity to enforce laws aimed at protecting children; and increasing human, material and financial resources for child development, survival and protection.

- **Protect children against violence, abuse and exploitation:** This objective is aimed at implementation of strategies to promote alternative forms of education, including transitional programmes to mainstream out-of-school children, particularly in the most deprived areas and for children withdrawn from the worst forms of child labour. Clear institutional arrangements for identification, withdrawal, rehabilitation and social integration of children engaged in the worst forms of child labour will be established. Integrated programmes and policies will be promoted to establish child-labour-free zones. Other interventions include provision of adequate education facilities, health care, nutrition and recreation to enhance children's physical, social, emotional and psychological development; establishment of a well-resourced continuum of care at all levels to prevent violence, abuse and exploitation and reintegrate child victims of it; and the development and adoption of the National Child Protection Policy.

- **Advance the implementation of free and compulsory universal basic education:** Accelerating implementation of the compulsory aspect of universal basic education will involve intensifying implementation of the policy of attaching kindergartens to all primary schools; expanding the school feeding programme; ensuring the availability of teaching and learning materials; promoting effective teacher-pupil contact hours; and improving education quality to ensure that children stay in school, including through enforcing laws that compel guardians to ensure children attend school.

- **Enhance institutional arrangements for collaboration within and among sectors:** This includes strategies to strengthen the capacity of institutions responsible for oversight of children at all levels. It will also involve improving the implementation of and reporting on international conventions and protocols.

- **Provide timely and reliable child development data for policymaking and planning:** Key elements of this objective include the development of a reliable system to collect, compile, analyse and disseminate relevant data on child development; and building the capacity of the relevant institutions to make effective use of data for decision-making.

Ghana's vision is also aligned within the broader United Nations Development Assistance Framework for 2012-2016. Child protection is encompassed in outcome areas related to social protection and governance.

National child protection framework

Fundamental to reforming the national child protection system is government commitment to scaling up the legal, institutional, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The 2014-2018 Shared Growth and Development Agenda identified the establishment of a comprehensive National Child Protection Policy as a crucial step. This process commenced in 2013, a clear indication of the government's commitment.

The National Child Protection Policy provides a framework for action that clarifies aims, objectives and orientation. It comprises two distinct yet linked arms: a Child and Family Welfare Policy and a Child Justice Policy. The Child and Family Welfare Policy was approved by the Cabinet in February 2015. The Child Justice Policy is in the final drafting stage and is tabled for Cabinet endorsement at the end of 2015.

Implementing these policies involves:

- Strengthening the capacity of formal service providers — social welfare officers, community development officers, police and the judiciary — to perform their child protection role
- Engaging with traditional leaders and other informal service providers (NGOs and community-based organizations) to strengthen their ability to complement and coordinate the services provided by formal service providers
- Supporting community-based dialogues on child protection issues, with the aim of understanding why abuses take place and the role of parents, communities, young people and children in keeping children safe. Positive social and behavioural changes have begun to emerge as a result of this communication, along with national-level advocacy and media engagement
- Instituting legal reforms that ultimately will result in effective legislation for children's protection.

The National Child Protection Policy will draw on the strengths of community structures and traditions. Its two components together outline a realistic, sustainable and culturally appropriate system based on a dynamic partnership between formal and informal structures, emphasizing the role of families and communities. The policy is expected to further drive capacity-strengthening initiatives, curriculum reform and legislative changes. For example, the Ghana Health Service has begun the process of developing guidelines for health workers. Other efforts under way include development of standard operating procedures for the police in handling children's case and of a teachers' handbook on positive discipline.

UNICEF is supporting efforts to align component-specific plans of action (see Table 3) with the new policies to improve coordination and links. For example, the National Plan of Action on the Worst Forms of Child Labour is being aligned with the objectives of the Child and Family Welfare Policy. This is taking place through the National Steering Committee on Child Labour. The new Child and Family Welfare Policy was developed with the engagement of the broad-based Child Protection Advisory Committee (CPAC). Several members of the Steering Committee on Child Labour also participate on this advisory committee. In addition there are plans to set up a

broader sectoral working group on child protection that would bring together all stakeholders to improve synergy and coordination.

Table 3. Component-specific action plans	
Child labour	**National Plan of Action for the Elimination the Worst Forms of Child Labour (2016-2020) [under development]**
	This plan of action is overseen by the National Steering Committee on Child Labour, which is mandated to lead the coordination, implementation and monitoring of programmes to combat the worst forms of labour. The primary objective of the current plan (2009-2015) is to reduce the worst forms of child labour to a minimum by 2015, while laying the foundation to strengthen the social, policy and institutional foundations to prevent them in the long term. Areas prioritized for elimination by 2015 include child trafficking, ritual servitude, commercial sexual exploitation, carrying of heavy loads, child domestic servitude, street hawking, begging and work in mining and quarrying, fisheries and agriculture, specifically cocoa farming. In addition, the corporate sector in the extractive industries plays a role in influencing child labour in small-scale gold mining. Discussions are under way to develop the next national plan of action, covering 2016-2020.
Civil registration	**Strategic Plan of Action for Civil Registration (2014-2018)**
	This recently initiated plan is aimed at raising birth registration rates from the current 63 per cent to 75 per cent by the end of 2016, and to 85 per cent by the end of 2018. Implementation will be the responsibility of the Birth and Death Registry Department under the Ministry of Local Government. These actions are linked to the commitments of over 40 African ministries responsible for civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) as outlined in the medium-term regional plan (2010-2014) of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics. It aims to reform and improve national CRVS systems, including the institutional and operational linkages, workflows and results management mechanisms. It also aims to ensure that these reforms support the intersectoral interface of CRVS systems. UNICEF is supporting a new partnership to introduce a more automated system for birth registration, using smartphones and tablet computers for registration and performance monitoring. This will significantly reduce the need for paper registration forms and streamline the registration process. The pilot will be launched in the third quarter of 2015.
Child marriage	**National Strategic Framework for Child Marriage (under development)**
	Currently in the planning phase, the strategic framework will aim to eliminate early and forced marriage and its consequences, such as teenage pregnancy, by increasing preventive actions by traditional leaders, religious bodies and communities. It will also focus on strengthening support to young girls who escape marriage by providing safe and secure shelter. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection has established a coordination unit to implement such interventions within the National Domestic Violence Secretariat. This work will be supported by an overarching communication strategy addressing child protection issues. The work of the child marriage unit is guided by the Child and Family Welfare Policy.

Stock-taking and mapping

Since 2010 UNICEF and others have supported a number of actions to assess progress in protecting children from violence, abuse and exploitation and to understand why progress has been limited relative to the gains made in other aspects of socioeconomic development. These actions are summarized below. The findings of this work have largely reinforced the observations outlined in the concluding observations of the 2006 report on Ghana by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It identified the need to strengthen the systems approach to child protection, particularly on resources/budget allocation, coordination, data collection and translation of the legislative framework into enforceable action.

2010   Mapping and analysis of the existing child protection system
Undertaken by the government with support from UNICEF and others, this mapping and analysis aimed to assess the strengths and gaps of the child protection system and identify opportunities for growth. Key issues assessed included the legislative and policy framework; structures and organizational arrangements; coordination, planning and information management; services for prevention and response; and human and financial resources. Ghana's child protection system evolved from the British legal model from the colonial period, which is largely incompatible with the current context, leaving a wide disconnect between law and practice. An additional challenge is the gap between legal provisions and traditional/community approaches that have typically been used in dealing with child and family welfare issues.

The findings acted as an impetus for commitment to create a national child protection system that is relevant to Ghana's context as well as coherent and sustainable. In 2010-2011, the government embarked on a process of redesigning the system, rooting it more firmly in a systems-based programming approach. This also involved adopting a coordinated and harmonized planning process that aims to strengthen the system's building blocks: structures, functions, capacities, approaches and processes.

2010   Study to assess scale and scope of financial investment allocated to child protection
 This study found that about 95 per cent of allocations to the former Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs were channelled to salaries. Only 1.9 per cent was spent on services, significantly limiting the range, reach and quality of services delivered. Additionally, there were significant gaps between the amounts allocated in the budget from the Ministry of Planning and Finance and the amount that actually reached departments and units, particularly at the local level.

2010   Human resource bottlenecks/budgeting and disbursements for social welfare services
This study, undertaken by the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare, found the need for greater articulation of the social welfare framework. This was required to improve service delivery; create better links with social protection; strengthen the capacity of the social welfare work force; and advocate for more strategic investment and better routine disbursement in national budgeting processes and donor commitments.

2012   Birth registration bottleneck analysis

This gap assessment revealed unequal coverage rates within and among regions, between urban and rural areas, and among different socioeconomic groups. It investigated the barriers to registration and provided strategic recommendations. These were integrated into the Birth and Death Registry's routine planning processes.

2013   Child protection expenditure allocation

This analysis showed a significant increase – 146 per cent – in expenditure allocated to the newly formed Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, compared to the preceding year's budget. On the surface, this suggested greater investments in child protection programming. However, further analysis revealed that the expenditures were primarily targeted to financing Ghana's flagship social protection initiative, the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) cash transfer programme. It supports extremely poor households with elderly people, people with disabilities and children who are orphaned and vulnerable.

LEAP is a strategic priority for Ghana, and investment in it has grown significantly in recent years. Though no evidence suggests the funds channeled to the LEAP programme were drawn from the allocations to broader child protection programmes and services, the disparity in allocations raises questions related to programming balance and priority setting. A 2014 study of the impact of the LEAP programme indicates it improves child well-being and quality of care, enabling children to attend school or access health care. Similarly the initiative can also aid prevention of family separation.[14]

2014   Child protection programmatic baseline study

To strengthen data collection and improve evidence-based decision-making, the research investigated prevalence, contributing factors and perceptions regarding all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation of children. This included physical and emotional violence as experienced at home and school; early marriage; sexual abuse and exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation of children; child labour; female genital mutilation/cutting; drug abuse; and conflict with the law. The study's data and findings will serve as a benchmark against which progress will be measured in coming years.

UNICEF is supporting the Government of Ghana to identify new ways to collect routine data, particularly at the subnational level. This includes support to the Ghana Police Service to modernize its case management system and to improve collection of information related to behavioural and social change at the community level. The 'most significant change' storytelling technique has been introduced as a way to collect qualitative information on significant changes happening with regard to child protection practices, attitudes and social expectations.

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[14] Roelen, K. and H. Karki Chettri, 'Researching the Linkages between Social Protection and Children's Care in Ghana: LEAP and its effects on child wellbeing, care and family cohesion', Challenging Heights, Family for Every Child, and Centre for Social Protection at the Institute of Development Studies, United Kingdom, 2014.

Recent actions to scale up systems strengthening

Supporting policy development

The process of preparing the Child and Family Welfare Policy has been instrumental in developing strategic direction and action steps, establishing cohesion between sectors and improving coordination. The process was highly consultative and participatory to ensure commitment by all stakeholders and galvanize collective support for reform from child protection actors at all levels.

With support from UNICEF, consultations have taken place with key stakeholders at regional and district levels. UNICEF also supported advocacy to engage decision-makers at that national level, including, for example, the Parliament Select Committee on Children's Issues. At regional and district levels, links have been made in particular to the metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies (MMDAs), which encourages reflection of child protection in medium-term development plans and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Furthermore, performance frameworks have been established to hold districts accountable, including District Development Funds and Functional Organizational Assessment Tools, which have indicators to track implementation of MMDA development plans and child protection-related activities.

Increasing public awareness and demand

To stimulate public dialogue and expand awareness of the new policy direction, national media outlets are being approached to lead television and radio debates. To raise awareness with key child protection actors, UNICEF has supported efforts to develop a strategy on communication for social change. It is helping to bring together key government departments, ministries and agencies, MMDAs and civil society organizations. Many of them have agreed to use a newly developed community facilitation toolkit. A new training manual on child protection for community workers/front-line workers is also available.

Building capacity

As part of efforts to roll out the Child and Family Welfare Policy, a process will soon begin to engage district social welfare and community development officers. It will also focus on other district-level representatives from departments and agencies that have a role in promoting child protection. The aim is to improve understanding and awareness of the policy and its practical implications for the work of district officials. Guidelines and protocols will be developed for the approximately 20 districts involved. Once they are finalized, plans call for an orientation involving all social welfare and community development officers in Ghana's 217 districts.

In the long term, lessons from the district-based process will feed into tertiary level teaching and curriculum reform. A partnership has been established with the University of Development Studies to increase child protection awareness to its 400 development students each year, and similar discussions are under way with the Department of Social Work Studies, University of Ghana.

Strengthening strategic responses to child labour

Achievements have also been made in specific areas of programming. Ghana has made advances in recent years in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, such as piloting of the Ghana Child Labour Monitoring System in 30 communities. In 2013, the government also

undertook its first child labour survey since 2001. Covering 18,000 households, the survey covered children's educational achievement, economic activity in rural areas, and child labour and hazardous work among children aged 5 to 17.

In 2012 Ghana adopted the ECOWAS[15] Regional Action Plan for the elimination of child labour in West African nations. It continues to provide services to children through programmes to reduce the worst forms of child labour in cocoa-producing regions and fishing villages.[16] However, gaps remain in the coverage and enforcement of laws addressing the worst forms of child labour, in part due to inadequate funding. Additionally, existing social programmes are not sufficient to comprehensively address the worst forms of child labour.[17] The Child Labour Unit is not a top priority for funding from national budgets and relies on funding from development partners.

Improving birth registration
In response to the 2012 bottleneck analysis on birth registration, the government administered a registration drive in 2013. As a result, nearly 52 per cent of the projected 2013 births were registered between January and September 2013. This is expected to increase registration coverage among children under 1 year to 65 per cent for the year. Despite progress in addressing the structural impediments to birth registration, challenges remain. For several months in 2014, for example, lack of forms prevented registration in a number of districts. In partnership with UNICEF, the Birth and Death Registry developed a new Internet-based SmartForm that will allow for real-time processing and reduce transaction costs. The system is expected to be piloted in mid-2015.

Coordination among stakeholders

In 2013, the newly elected government realigned the former Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare's Department of Social Welfare into a new Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. By enabling functions to be streamlined under a single ministerial platform, it provides an opportunity to further improve collaboration with other units related to child protection, notably the Department of Children, Department of Gender and the Trafficking Secretariat.

The MoGCSP established the CPAC to guide the development of the National Child Protection Policy. The CPAC's work has led other stakeholders to more seriously consider child protection issues. Notably this includes the justice institutions, including Judicial Services, Ministry of Justice, Attorney General's Office, Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, and Ghana Police Service. This is also seen as a signal of the government's commitment to addressing these issues more holistically.

The CPAC comprises representatives from key ministries, departments and agencies, notably the Department of Children; Department of Social Welfare; Ministry of Local Government and Community Development; Ministry of Justice and Attorney General's Department; Ghana

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[15] Economic Community of West African States.
[16] 'Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, 2012 Country Assessments', United States Department of Labor, www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/advancement.htm#mod.
[17] Ibid.

Education Services; Ghana Health Services; Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice; Ghana Police Service; Legal Aid Scheme; Judicial Services; National Planning Commission; and the Child Labour Unit of the Ministry of Labour and Employment. Civil society organizations, traditional and religious leaders, and United Nations agencies are also represented.

The process of developing the new Child and Family Welfare Policy and the Justice for Children Policy has improved coordination as well as alignment of various initiatives. The operational plan for the Child and Family Welfare Policy identifies a child protection sector working group as a new coordinating body that will monitor roll-out of the system changes. At this stage it is unclear whether the CPAC will remain and be reconfigured into the child protection sector working group with a redefined remit.

This will be Ghana's first sector-wide working group for child protection. This key milestone will elevate and give greater prominence to child protection issues in the country. Sector working groups are coordinated under the umbrella of the National Development Planning Commission, which develops and coordinates the country's national development plans.

The consultation processes in developing the Child and Family Welfare Policy also raised awareness of child protection issues, parental responsibilities and communal accountability for protection. Some traditional leaders involved in the process (such as Queen Mothers[18] and chiefs) have also taken initiatives to promote protection issues in their communities. Strengthened awareness and coordination at community level was an unintended and beneficial consequence of the policy development process, and it should be exploited as the policy is fully rolled out and operationalized.

Until recently, Ghana suffered from a lack of comprehensive multi-donor investment for child protection and systems strengthening. Support had mainly been targeted to specific areas of work. Under the more comprehensive approach, recent engagement includes the following:

- The US Agency for International Development has supported initiatives for orphaned and vulnerable children, particularly in relation to efforts to de-institutionalize children and move towards family-based care approaches.
- The governments of Canada and the Netherlands have recently given strong signals of commitment to system strengthening, with Canada investing $17 million (US dollars) and the Netherlands $6 million in support of Ghana's system-strengthening goals.
- The United States Government has announced a new $5 million child protection compact for Ghana. In 2015 it launched a new programme addressing violence against women and girls, with a particular focus on girl's empowerment and community action.
- UNICEF (through the UN Gender Team) and other United Nations agencies are supporting the MoGCSP's change management process. This includes aid for integrating the work of the Department of Social Welfare within the ministry, as well as decentralization processes.

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[18] Queen Mothers are responsible for welfare in communities. They address child abuse and conduct informal, community-based mediation processes and issue punishment and prevention orders.

Ghana also participates in a number of global and regional partnerships and initiatives to reach national child protection aims. These include the global public-private Together for Girls partnership, which aims to end violence against children, especially sexual violence against girls. Partnership on CRVS with the United Nations Population Fund has increased, and the Ghana Statistical Service is being aided in the roll-out of a CRVS system. Ghana and the World Bank also partner in the CRVS reform process, including in upcoming strategic planning work, as well as in improving the efficiency of mobile birth registration in low-performing districts. UNFPA and UNICEF have engaged on both regional and national levels in developing a results framework on child marriage.

Civil society groups, including religious groups, are significantly engaged in child protection. They are working at both national and community levels, including with children, to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation and to address harmful social and traditional practices.

Other partners include PLAN Ghana, Action Aid, World Vision, Defence for Children International and numerous local NGOs, including Parent and Child Foundation. Most recently, UNICEF entered into a partnership with eight new small community groups supporting local actions for behavioural and social change, with a particular focus on child marriage. UNICEF is also fostering five new longer-term partnerships with NGOs to address child protection more generally.

Challenges

In the Shared Growth and Development Agenda, the Government of Ghana acknowledges a number of bottlenecks that continue to plague the development of a sustainable child protection system. These include overlapping mandates and poor coordination among sectors; weak enforcement of legal provisions; inadequate budgets; and inadequate institutional capacity for monitoring and evaluation. The integration of child protection into the national agenda 2014-2018 shows the government's strong commitment to identifying and responding to these challenges. The government has embarked on a positive path, especially in recent years with the development and roll-out of the Child Protection Policy. However, challenges persist. They must be fully addressed before the child protection framework can be implemented comprehensively.

Prior to 2012, many efforts focused on specific actions – 'quick fixes' – such as establishing guidelines, forming committees and conducting trainings, without truly delving into the systemic changes needed. This led to a system that was not culturally appropriate, financially viable or sustainable. These issues are largely responsible for the continued system challenges. Ghana is now moving towards a system that allows for measurement of changes at different levels. It may take time, but it will ultimately generate better and more sustained results.

Sustaining the momentum of system change is vital, and it requires maintaining stakeholder commitment. The level of engagement with partners is high, particularly in terms of policy development. The partner engagement strategy calls for developing a roadmap for reform that outlines key steps and 'personalizes' the approach to make a child protection system fit for Ghana. This creates connectivity and also enables partners to see results along the path to change. Equally important is the need for high-level support, and the well-informed Minister of

Gender, Children and Social Protection has been instrumental in this respect. Specific issues that need to be addressed include the following.

Legislative frameworks

Enhancing the implementation of and reporting on international conventions and protocols is a key objective. Ghana has yet to fully commit to a number of international standards and is still working to ratify others. Lack of social and political consensus on key issues, such as agreements on setting the minimum age for work in compliance with ILO Convention No. 138, obstructs progress and implementation of a number of international standards. However, there are encouraging signs of progress. In early 2015, the government approved ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and approval for accession to the 1993 Hague Convention on the protection of children and cooperation in respect of inter-country adoption was also granted. These decisions now have to be tabled in Parliament to complete the ratification process.

Capacity

Decentralization reform is in process at regional and district levels. However, the reforms have weakened the links between policy agencies (e.g., MoGCSP) and district social welfare and community development departments. Operational funding for these departments is the responsibility of district assemblies, but many lack revenues and may not prioritize the work of these departments.

Functions and structures

Efforts are still needed to enhance the institutional arrangements for collaboration within and among sectors, both in terms of the roll-out of the Child Protection Policy and in programming for child protection. Though the MoGCSP has taken great steps in leading the drive for reform, weaknesses remain in the capacity of oversight institutions, especially in terms of rolling out at the subnational level. Now that the Child and Family Welfare Policy has been approved, policy roll-out and strengthening of the social welfare and community development workforce at district level is an immediate next step.

Data and evidence

A further challenge is the lack of evidence on the impacts of system change. Though there is consensus about the approach, evidence supporting its validity is not yet available. Ghana has worked to establish a foundation of research and assessment for use in measuring the results of system change. However, the country is not able to evaluate the success of the reform steps it is making nor measure the impact in terms of results for children.

Budget allocation

In its 2006 report to the government of Ghana, the Committee on the Rights of the Child called for increased spending and prioritization of child protection in national budgetary processes, yet resources for child protection remain insufficient. The government has commissioned a number of studies to identify spending trends and budget allocations for the sector, yet little action has been taken to fully integrate child protection costs into the national budget process. This is partly because Ghana has yet to comprehensively chart out the costs of the Child Protection Policy and its implementation plan, or the costs of routine service delivery (see 'Funding system reform').

Funding system reform

Successfully rolling out the National Child Protection Policy at all levels hinges on solid partnerships and sufficient funding of national budgets in the coming years. Though the government has signalled its commitment to strengthening the child protection system, the necessary allocations have yet to be firmly rooted in annual budgets.

Budget analysis

As a preliminary step to scaling up action in this area, the government and UNICEF undertook a costing and budgeting analysis to ascertain the current and recent levels of expenditure on child protection, assess whether budget allocations reflect equitable distribution of resources relative to regional levels of poverty, and project the cost of child abuse violations (discussed below). The research, which took place between December 2014 and June 2015, was guided by a steering committee comprising key ministries involved in child protection.

The research found that at national level the budget suffers from structural imbalances that affect the service delivery capacity of ministries, departments and agencies. The major impact is cash shortages and in-year budget reductions that reduce the ability of these institutions to plan. There is also an imbalance in the distribution of funds allocated to compensation, goods and services, and capital. This results in inadequate allocations for goods and services, which diminishes programme capacity. Programme budgeting reforms provide a useful mechanism for ministries, departments and agencies to highlight deficiencies in current budget resource levels.

While funding for child protection appears to have increased in the MoGCSP, the main increases have resulted from government structural changes (merging the Department of Social Welfare into the MoGCSP) and the LEAP programme.

Decentralization reforms are designed to bring resource decision-making closer to the beneficiaries of government services. The Child and Family Welfare Policy assigns responsibility for service delivery to MMDAs. However, the reforms have weakened the links between policy agencies (such as the MoGCSP) and district social welfare and community development departments. Operational funding for these departments is the responsibility of district assemblies. Many do not have abundant revenues and may not prioritize the work of these departments. In many districts the staff of these departments have meagre allocations for goods and services – and some have none.[19] To counteract this, it is recommended that:

- Sector ministries, departments and agencies engage fully with the programme-based budget reforms by refining programme and subprogramme structures; allocating programme and subprogramme managers and training them for their role; comprehensively costing programme and sub-programme activities; and developing performance measures and targets that directly relate to levels of budget resources

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[19] Department of Children, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and UNICEF, 'Investing in Children Earns Huge Dividends: Investment, budgeting and economic burden of child protection violations in Ghana (draft), 2015.

- Sector stakeholders closely monitor the implementation of decentralization to ensure that service capacity at the district level is enhanced, not weakened, by the reform, focusing on:
  - The revenue collection performance of district assemblies and the extent to which revenues are used to fund social welfare and community development departments. Where district assemblies are underperforming relative to their revenues, they should be supported to improve their performance.
  - The strength of links between policy and coordination (involving the ministries, departments and agencies) and service delivery capacity (involving the MMDAs). For the latter, the effectiveness of Regional Coordination Councils with respect to child protection should be monitored.

Poverty and equity at the regional level

The research found that reported child protection violations and violence against women and children generally correlate with poverty levels at the regional level – the 'poorer' the region, the more the violations reported. One anomaly is the Northern region which, although it has very high rates of poverty, does not appear to have the same prevalence of child protection violations being reported. In part, the explanation could be cultural; people in this region (including those amongst the economically least well-off) may be less willing to disclose violations. Alternatively it may be explained by the success of the many interventions undertaken in the region. Clarifying this issue will require further data analysis and study.

Research also revealed that allocations from the LEAP programme are made based on poverty levels, but allocations from the Ghana school feeding programme and budget allocations to the regions by the MoGCSP are not. Overall government funding in the regions is also linked to poverty levels and levels of child protection violations, but non-governmental funding is not. Recommendations to address this include:

- In allocating funding to schools across Ghana, the school feeding programme should strengthen its consideration of poverty levels.
- Given there is a regional structure within MoGCSP, it would seem appropriate to ensure that funding is distributed relative to poverty levels where possible. As part of their coordinating role, the regional staff should address equity within the regions and work on this with districts as needed. This could include using an evidence-based approach with Regional Coordinating Committees.
- The social development sector should consider what drives NGO location and coverage in Ghana and relevant incentives. The MoGCSP should work with international NGOs and other partners to assure a coordinated approach to ensure that the location and focus of NGOs support equity throughout the regions.

Costs of child abuse

Establishing the costs of child abuse in any country is challenging due to the difficulty of and sensitivities involved in defining the abuse, establishing prevalence rates and determining which costs to include, since both individuals and governments bear costs. Data limitations in developing nations pose additional challenges.

In estimating the costs of child abuse in Ghana, this study included direct costs (the cost of prevention activities, abuse-related welfare and medical interventions, and law enforcement); indirect costs (those related to the incarceration of criminals who were abused as children); and lifelong costs (such as the expense of chronic illnesses experienced by victims of child abuse and their loss of productivity/earning capacity).

The study projects that the annual cost to Ghana of child abuse is on the order of $223 million to $347 million, based on a range of prevalence rates. This represents 0.81 per cent to 1.36 per cent of gross domestic product, similar to the percentages found in other countries through international research.

It is clearly important to invest in prevention, given the cost savings to both individuals and the nation, in addition to the incalculable human and social cost borne by the victims. In this regard, it is essential to focus on parental and caregiver education and to explore the role of Queen Mothers.

The study was unable to determine what cost reduction would be associated with any particular investment in child protection. The many variables include the nature of the interventions funded and their impact on changing societal attitudes. However, if the funded interventions are carefully selected and matched to the needs of the country and context, it is reasonable to expect a positive impact.

Next steps

Implementing the National Child Protection Policy
Implementing the National Child Protection Policy is a major next step in advancing the child protection agenda in Ghana. UNICEF will play an integral role in supporting the MoGCSP in this task. The policy aims to redress the inequity in investment among child protection institutions and raises the emphasis on collaboration and delivery mechanisms. The process of developing the Child and Family Welfare Policy has brought many stakeholders together, and it more clearly clarifies roles and responsibilities. Remaining gaps may be identified as the policy is rolled out.

UNICEF is playing a key role in discussions on implementation of the policy. The approach is incremental, beginning with selected districts. Their work will result in lessons about the practical implications of the policy on the daily work of key actors, such as the Department of Social Welfare, civil society groups and NGOs. The system will then be tested and assessed and the experience evaluated. It is hoped that this process will result in national guidelines and operational procedures detailing roles, actions and mechanisms for coordination and cooperation. The emphasis will be not just on response to abuses but on prevention of them. It will also focus on data collection.

Strengthening child welfare systems and services
Another priority will be strengthening the social welfare function, reforming the system of alternative care of children and ensuring greater access to child protection services by children and their families. This will also include extending the role of informal and community-based child protection mechanisms.

Although the Children's Act requires the Department of Social Welfare and Department of Community Development to report and investigate all cases of suspected child abuse, neglect, exploitation or abandonment of children, this activity is not yet fully functional. There are as yet no protocols or operating procedures requiring police, teachers, health-care professionals and childcare providers to report suspected cases of abuse, and no formal referral linkages between district welfare officers and other professionals. The government is striving to integrate the emerging standard operating protocols into the police training curriculum, with support from UNICEF. Efforts will address both development of standard operating procedures/guidelines and training for service providers (social workers, NGOs, teachers and health care professionals) on how to apply policies and procedures. Another emphasis will be improved delivery structures and institutionalization of core services.

Reform of the current system of alternative care of children will centre on establishing a robust and transparent system for adoption and foster care; promoting family-based instead of institutional care; strengthening monitoring, oversight and licensing of residential care facilities, including dismantling facilities; and reintegrating children into family-based care.

Reforming justice for children

Once the new Justice for Children Policy is instituted, the focus will be on implementing institutional and structural changes. This will include legislative reviews and reforms in relation to the Juvenile Justice Act (Act 653); support for the new Witness and Victim Protection Bill; and amendment of the Criminal Code and the Domestic Violence Act.

With UNICEF support, there will be a push to implement broader diversion programmes. These will include those connected with court-related mediation programmes and strengthening community-based resolution and other informal mechanisms. A backbone to strengthening the sector will be efforts to build the capacity of juvenile justice actors at all levels.

Increasing birth registration rates

The government has committed to overcoming some of the barriers to birth registration and to significantly increasing birth registration rates by 2018. Efforts will focus on alleviating governance and management constraints currently facing the Birth and Death Registry, improving delivery of services and strengthening data management and reporting mechanisms. Priority will also be placed on improving knowledge and understanding of the birth registration process and increasing efforts to register children in hard-to-reach areas, where registration rates are lowest. Standard operating procedures are being revised and service delivery improved though the use of mobile phones and information and communication technology. Transportation and logistical support are being improved. UNICEF will aid these efforts, including by advocating for increased annual budgetary allocations to the registry.

Commitments are being made to scale up formal partnerships with other line ministries and service providers. These include collaboration with Ghana Health Services and Ghana Education Services to register children, particularly girls, at the time of birth and school enrollment.

Preventing child marriage

The MoGCSP has announced that addressing child marriage is a top priority for 2015. A new coordination unit has been set up and communication for social change activities are being planned. These will include engagement with traditional leaders and the media, along with stronger efforts to coordinate and monitor actions by departments, ministries and civil society. New ways of monitoring prevalence at the subnational level are being planned.

Acronyms

CPAC   Child Protection Advisory Committee
CRVS   Civil registration and vital statistics
ILO   International Labour Organization
LEAP   Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (cash transfer programme)
MoGCSP   Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection