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MAPPING AND ASSESSING CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

A FIVE-COUNTRY ANALYSIS PAPER

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Executive summary

This paper presents the findings and insights generated through the mapping and assessment of national child protection systems in five West African countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone.[1] The research process began in July 2009 and was completed in January 2011. The goal of the country research was to provide national actors with a profile of their existing system and an initial assessment of its contextual appropriateness and relevance to the populations being served. The need to undertake this research was prompted by the recognition that African perspectives – and the prominent role of communities – have not been fully integrated into the global dialogue that is evolving around national child protection systems.

In examining the state of child protection systems in the five West African countries, the research explored the following questions:

- What formal and informal child protection system components are currently in place and how do they function?
- How do children and families experience the child protection system?
- Is the current child protection system appropriate to the local context and is it relevant and sustainable?

Overview of national child protection systems in West Africa

The child protection systems in the five countries are adaptations of European models adopted long before each country's independence. Each of the countries has modified the inherited colonial models over the past several decades, and they are at varying stages of adapting their system to their contemporary national context. Nonetheless, the systems appear largely to continue to reflect external priorities rather than the beliefs, values and approaches to child protection that are commonly shared among each country's population.

What the mapping and assessments suggested across the five countries is that there appears to be a significant disconnect between the formal systems and the beliefs and practices of communities about ways to protect children. Although local populations perceive child well-being as fundamentally rooted in the context of families and communities, the approaches of the formal system rely largely on concepts of individual rights, frequently deploying programmes and services to reach individual children according to predetermined categories rather than families or communities.

The mappings and assessments across the five countries indicate that children and families are rarely accessing the formal child protection services available to them. Although the community research methodology for the national mappings and assessments were not representative but merely suggestive indications consistently emerge that these populations continue to rely upon endogenous practices to manage their child and family welfare and protection concerns – practices that prioritize community harmony and consensus over individual children's rights.

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[1] The initiative was conceived to include several countries from West and Central Africa; however, the countries that finally participated in the research process were all located in West Africa.

Some of the factors contributing to the lack of access to services include: incongruence between the service delivery model and community practices (in many cases, communities demonstrate mistrust or suspicion of government service providers); limited service coverage, limited community members' physical access to services; and lack of knowledge about the services provided.

Analysis of the formal child protection systems components

Analysis of the components of the formal national child protection systems across the five countries suggests the following trends:

The **legal frameworks** of each country remain largely a reflection of their colonial origins. There remains a consistent gap at the highest policy levels in terms of an overarching framework that defines the State's relationship to families and communities and the rationale for state action in relation to child protection.

The French and British models differ in significant ways. In the three former French colonies (Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Senegal), the model reflects a view of the State as providing a wide range of social services oriented to families and children that address problems as they arise, while in the two former British colonies (Ghana and Sierra Leone), state responsibility for protective interventions is narrowly confined to situations in which a child has experienced or is at risk of significant harm.

Customary law is integrated into some national legal frameworks in a limited fashion. The incorporation of customary law into the legal frameworks is one domain in which there is more integration between the formal and the less formal components of the national child protection system in some countries.

Child protection **strategies** that these West African countries have developed are organized by specific categories of children and types of abuse. This approach is marked by an emphasis on initiatives for specific categories of children that largely reflect international donor trends, such as orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV or AIDS, trafficked children, street children and victims of gender-based violence. They are often overlapping and duplicating, and their isolated, categorizing nature can lead to competition among child protection agencies and fragmented service delivery.

Service provision is heavily concentrated in urban areas; even in the best-case scenarios like Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, services reach less than half of the lowest administrative unit. In most countries, the services offered tend to lean heavily towards response rather than prevention. The types of services offered are specific to groups of children defined by the categorizing approach and are frequently considered irrelevant by families and communities that have been consulted.

Coordination was noted across the five countries as a problematic component of the national child protection systems. Each of the five countries has several coordinating mechanisms that address child protection either directly or tangentially, and yet none of the countries demonstrated effective strategic coordination.

At the devolved level and despite common challenges, however, some interesting models of integrated service provision are beginning to emerge. In Niger, for example, judge-presided

Local Committees bring together a variety of multi-sector state service providers with local leaders and members of civil society to determine the best path forward for children who enter into contact with the legal system.

Financial resources raise many questions. Based on information for three of the five countries, none allocates more than 1 per cent of its national budget to child protection, and in one case it is significantly less than that. Child protection and social protection budgets are extremely small even when compared with other social sectors. Most countries remain heavily dependent on donors to finance their child protection sectors. None of the countries analysed demonstrates a tradition of costing child protection activities to understand fully the costs of service provision and administration.

Countries demonstrating stronger economic health have demonstrated the capacity to develop important infrastructure for child protection systems; Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal are able to support more service delivery structures and human resources than the low-income countries that were analysed.

In some countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, however, the actual allocation of funding is also a fraction of the approved budget. This reality demonstrates limited administrative capacity to spend the budget and the challenges that social services demonstrate in functioning within the budgeting rules of a centralized bureaucracy.

Human resources available within the systems are quite limited across the board but range broadly from country to country. The lower-middle-income countries are able to allocate more financial resources for their child protection workforces than the low-income countries, even when budget proportions are similar. In doing so, they are able to ensure that far more child protection workers are available for service provision. Whereas Côte d'Ivoire's social welfare workforce contains nearly 700 social welfare workers, in Niger fewer than 100 government workers are dedicated to child protection and family welfare. The distribution of these workers across the national territory remains of some concern because most workers in all countries are concentrated in urban settings. In all countries, the numbers of child protection and welfare workers are far less than those needed to take on the social challenges they are facing.

There is significant reliance on volunteer workers in both the government and non-government arenas, raising questions about sustainability, quality and accountability.

Social workforce capacity development opportunities and facilities present different scenarios in different countries. Three countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Senegal) have schools for social work training; Niger's social work training is situated within the national public health school and offers little training around children or families; and Sierra Leone's social work training centre, destroyed in the conflict, has not yet been re-opened. It appears that the social work schools are generalist and do not consistently provide specialization or sound training for working with family challenges and child protection issues in a culturally appropriate way. These schools are populated by long-standing social workers who have been adapting their education to the practice in their country-specific context, but this work has not yet translated into adapted social work courses.

Endogenous community practices and beliefs

Among the community members participating in this paper's research processes, endogenous community practices are their primary reference when responding to child protection issues. These practices seem to be virtually the only practices in use for large segments of the populations across the five countries.

The various community consultations revealed that families across the five countries tend to respond to child protection challenges with similar patterns of behaviours that often go beyond the family and involve broader family networks and community processes. The pattern of response that occurs across the five countries involves family, extended family, neighbours, community elders, chiefs and finally, – where formal services are available and deemed appropriate to call upon – formal child protection actors from the government and non-government service providers (often limited to police and/or health services).

Challenges

One core challenge confronting child protection actors across the five countries is the apparent disconnect between the formal child protection system and the reality of the country's populations. Four factors contributing to this core challenge emerged through the analysis:

- The preponderance of top-down policies, strategies and programmes translated into services that target specific groups of children, with an agenda and priorities largely influenced by the outside.
- The lack of synergy and coordination between child protection actors.
- Limited cross-sector collaboration with allied systems – notably, health, education, labour and poverty-reduction initiatives. None of the five countries shows evidence of strong strategic links with allied systems at the sector level.
- Human and financial resource constraints.

A way forward for systems strengthening in West Africa

Fundamental choices about the future of the child protection systems in these countries need to be made in order for systems-strengthening efforts to adhere. These decisions should be rooted in national priorities concerning child protection and relevant to local communities and the national situation.

Some of the entry points for strengthening and transforming national child protection systems in West Africa include various initiatives that have political and economic weight, including programmes for orphans and other vulnerable children, social protection initiatives and some justice reform processes. Other initiatives that are taking root are linked to strengthening discrete components of national systems, such as developing the social welfare workforce and providing integrated service delivery at the decentralized level.

Although child protection actors may choose to work on discrete aspects of the system, these efforts will have positive systemic repercussions only when certain conditions are met:

- The interventions affecting discrete components of the system are planned with a clear and wider understanding of their positioning and function within and interconnection with the other parts of the system.

- ▪ The processes take into account issues of relevance and congruence and seek to fill the gap between the various drivers of the national child protection system's agenda.

Put another way, efforts to strengthen individual components must contribute to a commonly shared vision of the scope, contour and role of the national child protection system. Establishing a common vision to strengthen or transform national child protection systems will require significant consultation and reflection.

The actors leading the policy reform – be they governmental or other – will need to engage in a broad, consultative process to build consensus on the foundational values of the national system, its scope and the roles and responsibilities of various actors in its functioning. They need to explore the current endogenous community practices for protecting children and strengthening families and consider how positive practices can be incorporated into the national child protection system while safeguarding against harmful traditional practices.

Contents

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AEMO	Action Educative en Milieu Ouvert (Senegal)
AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CAPE	Cellule d'Appui à la Protection de l'Enfance (Senegal)
CPPE	Centre de Protection de la Petite Enfance (Cote d'Ivoire)
CRC/UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
DESPS	Direction de l'Education Surveillée et de la Protection Sociale (Senegal)
DOVVSU	Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (Ghana)
ENSP	Higher education in social work at public health school (Niger)
GDP	gross domestic product
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
LEAP	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty
MASSN	Ministère de l'Action Sociale et de la Solidarité Nationale (Senegal)
MFGFPA	Ministère de la Famille, des Groupements Féminins et de la Protection de l'Enfance (Senegal)
MESW	Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare (Ghana)
MFGFPE	Ministère de la Famille, des Groupements Féminins et de la Protection de l'Enfance (Senegal)
MPPFPE	Ministère de la Population, de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant (Niger)
MSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (Sierra Leone)
MWAC	Ministry of Women and Children
OVC	orphans and other vulnerable children
PARRER	Partenariat pour le retrait et la réinsertion des enfants des rues (Senegal)
PPP	purchasing power parity
RRPE	Réseaux Régionaux de la Protection de l'Enfant (Niger)
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
SEJUP	Services Educatifs, Préventifs et Judiciaires (Niger)
SWD	Social Welfare Directorate (Sierra Leone)

Terms and concepts

Child: Consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), 'children' refers to persons younger than 18 years.

Family: The term 'family' is used as shorthand to refer to those within the caring circle of a child. This caring circle varies according to culture and circumstance; thus, the use of the term family recognizes that in many societies the care environment of a child is broader than the immediate family and includes the extended family. The term also recognizes that, in some circumstances, children are primary caregivers.[2] However, it is important to clarify that individuals from the community or service providers who are not extending daily emotional, physical and psychological care to children would not be considered family.

Social welfare system: Social welfare refers to a sense of human well-being that exists in which social problems are managed, human needs are met and social opportunities are maximized. A social welfare system is the organization of services that promote social welfare. The distinguishing factors of a social welfare system for children and families are the specific objectives of promoting children's well-being and their protection while improving the capacity of families and communities to perform their responsibilities.[3]

Child and family welfare system: The child and family welfare system refers to those aspects nested within the social welfare system (or social protection system where applicable) that are aimed at promoting children's well-being and protection while improving the capacity of families and communities to fulfil their responsibilities.

Justice for children: In keeping with the United Nations' Common Approach to Justice for Children, the goal of the justice for children approach is to ensure that children are better served and protected by justice systems. It specifically aims at ensuring full application of international norms and standards for all children who come into contact with a justice system as victims, witnesses and alleged offenders or for other reasons where judicial intervention is needed; for example, regarding their care, custody or protection.[4] A justice system consists of both i) state-run justice and law enforcement institutions, including the judiciary (criminal and civil), justice and interior ministries, the police, prisons, criminal investigation and prosecution services and ii) non-state justice mechanisms – the whole range of traditional, customary, religious and informal mechanisms that deal with disputes at the community level.[5]

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[2] Krueger and Delaney (2008) "An Overview of the Role of a Social Welfare System for Child Protection and Promoting Children's Well-Being," in UNICEF (2008) *East Asia and the Pacific Region Child Protection Strategy: Toolkit,* Bangkok: UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office.

[3] As defined by Krueger and Delaney (2008).

[4] Justice for children goes beyond juvenile justice – work with children in conflict with the law – to include all children going through a justice system for whichever reason (victims, witnesses, care, custody, alleged offenders, etc.). Child Frontiers notes that there is sensitivity around the use of the word 'victim' as opposed to 'survivor'. In light of the regional context, however, where the word 'survivor' may create confusion – especially when translated into French – Child Frontiers has opted not to use 'survivor' for this paper but rather to attempt to use not only the word 'victim' but also the phrase 'child who has experienced abuse, neglect violence or exploitation'. Child Frontiers notes that the use of these terms is in no way intended to diminish or downplay the resilience of children and their families.

[5] See *United Nations Common Approach to Justice for Children* (2008).

Child protection: Strives to prevent, respond and resolve the abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation experienced by children in all settings. It is often a specialist policy and service sector but of necessity works very closely and is sometimes integrated with other sectors.[6]

Child protection system: For the purposes of this paper (and the pieces of research for the five countries), a child protection system refers to a set of laws, policies, regulations and services needed across all social sectors – especially social welfare, education, health, security and justice – as well as community and faith-based groups and other private service providers. It is part of social protection and also extends beyond it. In keeping with UNICEF's West and Central Africa child protection framework, the core sectors of the child protection system are child and family welfare and justice for children while allied sectors include education, health, labour.

Prevention services: Services that include the promoting of knowledge and skills and the strengthening of the overall capacity of community for keeping children safe and cared for. It also includes those services targeting families and children who are experiencing difficulties in order to change those situations before they create actual harm to the child.

Response services: Child protection interventions respond to circumstances in which a child is at risk of harm or has been abused, neglected, abandoned, exploited or is without appropriate family care. These services seek to reduce the possibility that harm will be repeated and to restore a child's well-being.

Formal system: Refers to government, international organizations and local NGOs (including community and faith-based organizations) involved in providing child protection that are recognized or endorsed by and subject to supervision and regulation by the government. Some groups, such as traditional leaders, have clear roles within both the formal and informal systems.

Informal system: Refers to child protection initiatives undertaken by families, communities and children. In this paper, many of the informal initiatives are referred to as 'endogenous community practices'.

Both the formal and informal systems should be considered as the two ends of a continuum and that there are likely to be elements of crossover between them. This paper highlights the gaps and links between the two.

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[6] For agency-specific definitions please see, UNICEF: http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/What_is_Child_Protection.pdf
Save the Children Alliance: http://www.savethechildren.net/alliance/what_we_do/child_protection/

1. Introduction

A consensus within the international child protection community has emerged in the past few years around the need for new, more effective approaches to protecting children. The traditional methods have typically been issue-specific – targeting certain groups of children or forms of child abuse, neglect, violence or exploitation. As well, they have largely been reactive, focusing on the care and support provided to children only *after* they become victims.

Child protection actors now agree on the need to shift to a systems approach. This would move the child protection field away from small-scale, isolated projects and towards a model that considers the child and family in a long-term, holistic fashion and includes a strong focus on prevention. The systems approach levies the necessity of a comprehensive, tailored, well-organized set of measures to prevent and mitigate the incidence of violations and, in doing so, seeks to make the most efficient use of limited resources. It also recognizes its role in supporting social and economic development, and thus places the child protection system within the national development agenda.

Although the recent international discourse has advanced general 'systems' thinking, an African perspective has yet to integrate into that dialogue. Anglo-Saxon and European models dominate much of the current literature on systems; to date, very little child protection systems research has been conducted in African countries.

Additionally, much of the existing literature on child protection in Africa tends to focus on the negative aspects of cultural practices and traditions in relation to child protection. Little information is available on local definitions of child protection, positive cultural practices and protection mechanisms. Moreover, although some of the systems literature speaks to the allocating of child protection resources, the literature on systems has not, to date, incorporated analysis of systems for which the government resources available for child protection are very limited, as they are to varying degrees in many African contexts.

Internationally, different approaches to protecting children and supporting families have evolved over time and are rooted in particular traditions and socio-political-cultural contexts. In contrast, the origins of many current African child protection systems are rooted in imported colonial models and approaches that may or may not have incorporated more culturally appropriate practices and local values. As a consequence, many national child protection structures in African countries have developed isolated, top-down programmes that consider only what communities are lacking and fail to build on positive practices that foster children's well-being. These positive family and community practices and beliefs are essential components of a systems approach and must be understood in order to develop more effective protection of children.

In 2009, Plan International, Save the Children International and UNICEF came together to map, assess and analyse the child protection systems in five countries: Côte d'Ivoire,[7]

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[7] The research process in Côte d'Ivoire was completed in April 2010 and therefore the findings reflect a pre-conflict situation, it is unclear how the latest developments in the country and the humanitarian assistance is impacting the system.

Ghana, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone.[8] The rationale for this initiative was the need to develop conceptual frameworks for systems work specific to Africa. The objective of the exercise was to provide national actors with a profile of their existing system and an initial assessment of its functionality, effectiveness and contextual appropriateness. This regional group of organizations was specifically interested in looking at issues of congruence (how well the national child protection systems 'fit' with beliefs and practices at the community level); access (how were children and families accessing services and what were some of the factors limiting their ability to or interest in doing so); and efficiency (whether limited resources were being allocated in a sustainable way that would maximize impact).

The following research questions guided the mapping and analysis exercises:

- What formal and informal child protection system components are currently in place and how do they function?
- How do children and families experience the child protection system?
- Is the current child protection system appropriate to the local context and is it relevant and sustainable?

The methodology for the mapping and assessing processes entailed a dual approach: on one level, it sought an overview of the various components of the child protection system and their interactions. This portion of the mapping and assessment was representative of each country and furnished a full picture of the existing components of each national child protection system, including: founding principles and approaches; the legal, policy and strategy frameworks; the rationale informing the functioning of the system; available resources and services as well as their distribution; coordinating efforts; data collection, planning and evaluation mechanisms; and the interaction of various actors and decision-makers. In addition, a number of child protection programme managers from the government, civil society and international agencies completed an online survey about their work and various aspects of the child protection system.

On the second level, the research sought to understand how the child protection systems function 'on the ground'. To acquire a sense of how the system that existed on paper was actually functioning in reality and to gauge what locals really thought about child protection priorities, four to six communities were selected in each country for a group consultation, involving five to six people (men, women, adolescent boys and girls); in addition, interviews were conducted with child protection front-line workers, traditional and religious leaders and members of a child protection or welfare committee and women's associations. In Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, regional and district social welfare staff also were interviewed.

The discussions sought out views on the actual and/or perceived functioning of the national child protection system in specific communities and how it interacts with clients (families and children) as well as beliefs and perceptions about child protection and well-being. This side of the research also pinpointed community caring practices and response mechanisms for cases of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.

From the interviews and discussions, a rich set of insights emerged. This information enabled the shaping of hypotheses, suggestions and strong 'leads' about certain issues. National system actors were subsequently advised to explore these leads on a national

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[8]The research process began in July 2009 and was completed in January 2011.

scale or to validate them with further research or through a consultation process. Although the discussions at the community level were not nationally representative, they served as case study examples intended to raise questions for additional exploration.

The dual approach reflected the emphasis on examining the interactions between the formal components of the national child protection system and local perceptions and practices of child protection. In examining the interplay of these various components, the research hoped to scrutinize the ways in which the more formal components of the system were congruent or incongruent; it also sought to understand the circumstances in which children and families were accessing the services available to them and – in cases where they were not – some of the reasons underlying this lack of access. The approach also allowed for the exploration of hypotheses about why certain aspects of the system did or did not function as expected. The two elements at times required different types of research tools and thus different informants, targeting strategies, data-collection methods and forms of analyses (the research manual can be accessed online at: *WCA_Research_Manual.pdf*).

The scope of the research in the countries that participated in the first phase – Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone – was different from what was used in the second-phase countries of Ghana, Niger and Senegal. In the first phase, the analysis covered only the child and family welfare system, whereas the second phase expanded the scope to include the child justice system.[9] Both phases of the research looked at the core components of allied systems (notably, education, health, labour and social protection) insofar as they had been explicitly linked to the core child protection systems. Because the research revealed that few such links had been officially established – with some notable exceptions highlighted in the paper – the analysis provides only limited articulation of the roles that these allied systems play in the core protection systems of child and family welfare and justice for children.

The purpose of the multi-country analysis, which brings together findings from across the five studies, is two-fold:

- document and describe the characteristics of each national child protection system in the five West African countries and identify commonalities, trends, assets and gaps
- highlight challenges for national child protection system development as well as opportunities and the next steps for those seeking to catalyse reform.

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[9] The first phase of the research also examined the justice systems as they pertained to child victims of abuse; however, the second phase looked more comprehensively at the components of the child justice system and also took note of considerations for children in conflict with the law.

2. Profile of national child protection systems in West Africa

2.1. Origins of child protection systems and the influence of colonial models on national frameworks

The five child protection systems analysed are descendants of either French or British colonial models imposed prior to each country's independence but that have remained, although adapted over the years.[10] At the highest level, each country's constitution codifies the family as the fundamental societal unit and positions the State as responsible for ensuring that families can conduct their child-rearing duties. This relationship between the family and the State plays out differently from country to country, but as discussed in the next section, the centrality of the family is not well spelled out in operational plans and programmes.

The French and British models differ in significant ways. In the three former French colonies (Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Senegal), the model reflects a view of the State as providing a wide range of social services oriented to support families and children addressing a similarly wide range of problems as they arise. This model positions the government as a centralized system involved directly in service provision rather than as a regulator of service provision. In the two former British colonies (Ghana and Sierra Leone), state responsibility for protective interventions is narrowly confined to situations in which a child has experienced or is at risk of significant harm. The focus of interventions is on an individual child rather than being family-centred.[11]

Being thus rooted in European models, the child protection systems in the five countries do not necessarily reflect commonly shared beliefs and values about child protection problems and approaches or about the appropriate relationship between the family, community, society and the State. Moreover, they start from typologies emanating from welfare states in which national governments have relatively sizeable resource bases with which to develop and implement their services, a reality not available to most countries in the West African region. Of the five countries analysed, Niger and Sierra Leone both have low-income status. Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Senegal have transited from low-income to lower-middle-income status (although Ghana made that transition only very recently and Côte d'Ivoire has been sliding back towards the low-income category for several years).

Despite the importation of these models, the modus operandi of most governments in West African countries is rarely to intervene in family life. Anglophone countries, in line with their stronger focus on individual rights, have promulgated laws that address children's rights with a formal recognition of the importance of the family unit. Sierra Leone developed a National

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[10] The one country that represents something of an exception to this rule is Niger because the French colonial administration did not include a ministerial structure charged with social welfare. But even in Niger, the legal framework for social welfare and justice interventions date largely to civil and penal codes imposed during the colonial period. The exception to this trend in Niger is the juvenile justice framework, which was revised in the early years of the 2000s as part of a European Union programme to strengthen the justice sector and which – from a juvenile justice standpoint – introduced a more reformist, less punitive approach to juvenile justice.

[11] For an interesting comparative discussion of how these models function in current-day Britain and France, see Lucock, Barry, "Child Protection in France and England – Authority, legalism and social work practice," *In Child and Family Law Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1996): 297–312.

Policy on Child Well-Being in 2006 and a comprehensive Child Rights Act in 2007; Ghana passed its Children's Act in 1998.

In comparison and among the French-speaking countries, only Niger and, to a certain extent, Senegal have introduced reform of their national legislative frameworks in the area of juvenile justice.[12] Aside from this area, none of the French-speaking countries has introduced wide legislative reform that revisits the national approach to child protection and children's rights more broadly, leaving the regulatory framework fragmented.

The legal frameworks as imported are not practised as they are written; there is instead widespread acceptance of the necessity for family-based guardianship (including the extended family) and substantial deference to family and parental decision-making in child-rearing decisions that is not reflected in those frameworks. The region does not demonstrate a tradition of removing a child from the family or terminating parental rights in order to transfer parental rights to the State.

In all of the countries analysed, child protection services are often supported primarily – or at least in significant part – by financial resources external to national governments, opening the door to the influence of donors and external actors who might demonstrate priorities that differ from those identified at the national and local levels.

Table 1: Income-level classification, poverty level and GDP of each country

	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Senegal	Sierra Leone
Income-level classification	Lower-middle income	Lower-middle income	Low income	Lower-middle income	Low income
Poverty % (1994-2008*)	23%	30%	66%	34%	53%
GDP at purchasing power parity per capita (US$)	1,681	2,615	755	1,819	807

Source for income-level classification: World Bank 2011 data;[13] source for GDP at PPP: International Monetary Fund 2010 data

At the highest level, donor agencies are not coordinated in their embrace of child protection. Global trends that have emerged recently demonstrate that donors regard child protection in precisely the categorizing vertical approach that is replicated at the regional and country levels in the form of programmes, strategies and actions plans. Notably, the Government of the United States has earmarked funding for orphans and other vulnerable children activities and anti-trafficking programmes in West Africa. The International Labour Organization tends to work independently on issues related to human trafficking and the worst forms of child labour without linking its efforts bilaterally to activities of the United States Government or even to UNICEF. The World Bank's approach to social protection nearly always takes the form of cash transfers, whose beneficiaries are selected based on poverty thresholds. Bilaterally, countries often choose support categories – with, say, a European government

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[12] In Senegal, the 1973 adoption of the Family Code was intended to further institutionalize the inherited French approach to family-related issues, doing away with all family-related local customary practices except those governing marriage formalities.

[13] The most recent data available online from the World Bank, dating from January 2011, indicates that Ghana is still classified in the low-income category; however, that country's research reference group has provided information indicating that Ghana has met the criteria to pass to a lower-middle-income country.

focusing on female genital mutilation/cutting in one country and an Asian government funding efforts around street children in another.

In all countries, however, the most influential beacon guiding any recent reform efforts has not been locally identified priorities but rather external efforts largely driven by donors with specific and divergent priorities. The reference framework for action focuses on the rights of individual children as codified by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). These efforts have been translated in the categorizing by groups of children, as discussed further on, and have largely favoured interventions for individual children outside the context of their families and communities. This interpretation of the CRC has its limitations.

As recent research examining the operationalizing of the CRC in transnational contexts has pointed out, "It is becoming increasingly clear that interpreting and implementing the Convention in contrasting political, economic and cultural settings has revealed considerable diversity of thinking about children's rights and how to implement them, even among groups that strongly support the UNCRC."[14]

Indeed, the establishment of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), which was adopted very shortly after the CRC, grew out of the desire of various African heads of state to ensure that the CRC was made relevant to the African context.[15] According to a group of scholars in referring to the relationship between the UNCRC and the ACRWC, one "critical contribution of the Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is its concern with traditional or customary law and extended family practices, including guaranteeing the rights of the child within the extended family and community contexts."[16]

If experience and research have established that there are a number of ways to approach the realizing of children's rights to welfare and protection, the findings emanating from these five countries suggest that the way children's rights discourse and implementation has taken place is one that does not sufficiently take into account some of the critical contributions of the ACRWC.

The question is not whether children's rights should be the primary reference or whether the right to protection should be promoted; rather, it is a question of how best to do so. "The children's rights discourse should focus not on the framing of rights from either universal or cultural perspectives but on the consistency in supporting all children's well-being."[17]

In the process of reforming the legal framework, it is perhaps inevitable that there will be areas of contention as the State begins to take on a role not recognized by traditional practices, which raises the profile of children and calls for additional protections that are not practised by communities. However, in moving forward, international actors who are supporting ongoing legal and policy reform efforts should re-examine the history of the

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[14] Una Children's Rights Learning Group (2011), *Children's Rights in Cultural Contexts,* Una Working Paper 8, Belfast 8: Una, p. 8. Available at: www.unaglobal.org This working paper cites the following source on the quoted sentence: Myers, W.E. (2001). "The Right Rights? Child Labor in a Globalizing World". *In* Alan, W.H. Neil, A.W. and Jude, L.F. (eds.), *The Analysis of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. Children's Rights*, pp. 36–55. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

[15] Ibid. p. 12. Additional citation: Murray, R. (2004). *Human Rights in Africa: From the OAU to the African Union*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p. 10. Additional citation in that document: Hart, R. (2006). "Putting children in the picture" *In Forced Migration Review*, July (supplement), pp. 9–10.

ACRWC as a complementary, regional children's rights instrument to the CRC, why it came into being and what its implications are for establishing child protection and welfare regulatory frameworks.

2.2. Current parameters of these systems

The parameters of the five national child protection systems appear indistinct. Although through their constitution each country has codified the family as the fundamental societal unit and positioned the State as responsible for ensuring that families can conduct their child-rearing duties, none has put into place any coherent policies that outline this relationship – including consideration of the ways in which the State should support families in their duties or the threshold for state intervention when families become incapable of caring for their children or when children are at risk of harm.

While there is some evidence of policy progress in each country, there remains a consistent gap at the highest policy level in terms of an overarching framework that defines the State's relationship to families and communities and the rationale for state action. The countries that appear to have made the most progress in moving towards a common vision of child protection are Ghana and Sierra Leone, in the form of their Children's Act and the Child Rights Act, respectively. The development of both of these acts, however, was fundamentally rooted in a British 'rescue' model of protective interventions that builds on community assets and contributions only to a limited extent. This intervention typology requires extensive resources and a skilled, effective bureaucracy, both of which make it inappropriate in the context of countries with a small base of public resources.

Systematic consultations with communities and considerations of how to build upon the assets at the community level have not taken place in all five countries, although there have been promising consultative processes in some of them. In Sierra Leone, for example, a national consultative research exercise was used to collect information from households across the country about their protection needs and priorities.[18] These findings have since been used to generate policy commitments at the national and subnational level. In Niger, the development of national guidelines for the care and protection of children in situations of vulnerability was undertaken through a lengthy, region-by-region series of consultations that included government and civil society child protection actors as well as traditional leaders.[19]

In the absence of a coherent overarching framework for state intervention, the de facto strategy for achieving child protection-related objectives evident across all five countries is a series of vertical strategies, programmes or plans of actions. The resulting uncoordinated actions often lack oversight, integration, monitoring or regulation by the State. This de facto situation differs by country, but there are commonalities; primarily, nearly all are formulated according to specific categories of children or types of abuse. Table 2 provides a summary of the main categories in each country.

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[18] This process is described in Rossi, A. (2009) *Strengthening Research Capacity for Evidence-Based Action in Sierra Leone: Methodology , findings and recommendations*. Copy available upon request.

[19] The resulting guidance document is Direction de la Protection de l'Enfant, Ministère de la Population, de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant, Niger (2010) *Orientations Nationales pour la Prise en Charge des Enfants en Situation de Vulnérabilité*.

Table 2: National plans of action or programmes, by country

	Child labour	Early childhood care and development	Female genital mutilation/ cutting	Gender-based violence	Orphans and other vulnerable children	Street children	Talibé	Trafficking
Côte d'Ivoire	✓			✓	✓			✓
Ghana	✓	✓			✓			✓
Niger	✓				✓			✓
Senegal	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
Sierra Leone				✓				✓

The category-focused 'groupings' of isolated, unconnected strategies and programmes undermine each system's capacity to serve the nation's children and families in a way that takes into account the complexities of their lives and the sources of their vulnerability. In some instances, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, competition has emerged among government agencies around the vertical programmes. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, service providers at the regional and district levels indicated that their work has been overstretched by the top-down development of programmes that target different groups of children, with different approaches or service packages for each. The categorizing strategies and programmes ultimately have eroded the already-limited capacity of the system at their level. In Ghana and Senegal, there is clear overlap and duplication, both in terms of the target group covered and the types of services.

In all five countries, to varying degrees, the approaches promoted by a specific plan of action have led to each programme becoming self-contained – leading to inefficiencies: duplication and a waste of resources. In Niger, for example, orphans and other vulnerable children programming relies on cash transfers while the child labour programming promotes professional training, neither of which was designed in a manner consistent with the national care and protection guidelines for vulnerable children. Similar examples have been documented in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal.

From the assessment of the strategies applied in the national plans of action or programmes (table 1), there is a clear reflection of international child protection priorities – a sign of the disproportionate role that international and donor agencies play in setting national priorities. For instance, human trafficking, which has become one of the most pervasive protection priorities globally, is a priority issue in each country and typically includes a national task force and plan of action. The large number of programmes on child labour, orphans and other vulnerable children and gender-based violence is also consistent with international trends.

In some instances, there is overlap between what the consulted community members (during this research) identified as priority needs – such as child labour in Niger and sexual violence in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. However, the various strategies in place at the country level suggest that donors are prioritizing issues according to international trends rather than locally identified needs. External actors perceive these problems as primary issues for

countries in West Africa; but their presumptions can ultimately distort the impact by seeking funding for perceived priorities rather than for communities' perception of need. There is some evidence that countries, such as Ghana and, to a more limited extent, Senegal (in the child justice sector), are negotiating with donors in a way that enables nationally defined priorities to guide the debate, as long as the heavy influence of internationally perceived child protection priorities remains clear.

When donors do put specific issues on the agenda, they must do so in a manner that is more coordinated than it has been in the past and that inserts itself in an already defined set of strategies that are applicable to a number of needs. Rather than national task forces and action plans for a variety of such specific concerns, a more concerted approach would harmonize the work of child protection actors and rationalize the use of scarce resources.

Finally, attention should be paid to linking such programmes to community conceptions of child well-being and protection. What the vertical strategies and programmes seem to miss in the perspectives of community members is a perception of child well-being and protection that does not single out specific kinds of children or abuse but is fundamentally rooted in the strength of families and communities. The community members consulted for this research expressed a stronger focus on access to basic services in which child protection and family strengthening interventions play a role rather than programming that addresses only the most egregious protection concerns for specific groups of children and types of abuse. If international approaches are tailored to maximize the positive endogenous practices and local beliefs (while upholding the need to minimize harmful practices), they likely will benefit from more local and national buy-in and gain traction towards positive change.

2.3. Overview of the characteristics of formal system components

Legal, policy and strategy frameworks

In all five countries, the national legal framework (mostly stemming from each constitution) codifies recognition of the family as the principle supportive unit for the upbringing of children and regards the State as an entity that should support parents in their child-rearing responsibilities. Despite the generalized conception of the State playing a supportive role to parents and families, the threshold obligating the State to protect children remains vague across the five countries. The threshold for intervention is set out in both Sierra Leone's and Ghana's recent children's acts, but they retain out-dated British definitions of 'children in need of protection' that do not clarify intervention triggers. In addition to a lack of clarity around this threshold, the limited reach of scarce resources and capacities dedicated to child protection services also hampers these governments' ability to deliver services that are outlined in the legal and regulatory frameworks.

In general, the five countries have ratified the majority of the international and regional conventions and treaties related to child protection. The exceptions are the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption (which none of the five countries has signed), the optional protocols of the CRC and the child labour protocols of the International Labour Organization (ratified only in some countries). In each country, international and regional agreements either supersede national law or are expected to guide the implementing of national law; however, national laws in each country have not yet been adequately adapted to ensure compliance with the international obligations.

Only Ghana and Sierra Leone have a single, central legal framework that guides child protection services in a systematic way.[20] But in the case of Sierra Leone, the national policy remains theoretical, yet to be made operational through an implementing strategy. A gap between the legal provision and its implementation is apparent in these two countries. Discussions in selected communities within Sierra Leone during the research for this analysis paper suggest that the Child Rights Act is perceived as a Eurocentric, rights-based approach that does not coincide with local child protection realities and child-rearing practices. In both the Anglophone countries, the central law still falls short in terms of guidelines and procedures to inform the practice.

The legal framework in the three French-speaking countries is essentially a patchwork of laws and policies, which is consistent with their French civil law heritage. The diverse laws and policies are not harmonized, and the policies that are supposed to contribute to the overarching legal framework by adding the necessary details and guidance are either absent, out-dated or conflicting.

Across the five countries, the laws and policies guiding child protection services rarely contain operational guidance to indicate what considerations child protection workers should take into account when making decisions when responding to cases. The West Africa region also has no tradition of costing interventions and initiatives; this lack of costing is a challenge because it allows overly ambitious frameworks to be proposed, raising questions about whether plans are feasible and affordable.

All countries require a legal mandate to mobilize most child protection services for children in danger, beginning with a process of formal investigative responses and court-ordered interventions. But these responses are typically reserved for the most extreme cases and decisions concerning guardianship. Sierra Leone is the only one of the five countries to stipulate a preference for family preservation.[21] While keeping at-risk children in their homes is one option for child protection workers, others include institutionalizing them or placing them with relatives or trusted third parties. But no guidance is available to assist the child protection workers in determining which recourse to pursue.

Additionally, services generally do not focus on help and rehabilitation. Only Senegal's system has links to the mental health system to address child and family behaviour problems; but this service provision is limited to one centre with limited capacity. Child protection workers do provide 'psychosocial support' in other settings, but it is not systematized and does not follow any national guidance or standard.

The innumerable strategies and programmes that underpin the national legal and policy frameworks call for standards, guidelines and care protocols for the specific categories that they target. But they are not informed by and do not feed into more comprehensive national planning efforts around child protection and, in essence, pull the sector in a variety of directions rather than towards a common goal. This fact fosters several inconsistent, sketchy and unpredictable systems that offer certain kinds of services in some places and different

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[20] In Ghana, this framework takes the form of the 1998 Children's Act, the 1998 Criminal Code (Amendment) Act and the 2003 Juvenile Justice Act; in Sierra Leone, it is the 2006 National Policy on Child Well-Being and the 2007 Child Rights Act.
[21] The Child Rights Act states that no child can be denied the right to live with his/her parents and family except by a court order and only when it has been proven that living with the parents would significantly harm the child.

kinds in others, without addressing the basic commonalities of all child protection issues and the family challenges in a national way.

The five countries are at varying stages of developing a comprehensive national framework on justice for children.[22] Ghana's Juvenile Justice Act provides the legal foundation for a separate and distinct approach for handling children in conflict with the law, based on a welfare model. Niger likewise has made major strides with its recent Juvenile Judiciary Protection Programme, which has brought about numerous judicial protections and provisions for children in danger and children in conflict with the law. For such cases, the new provisions are strongly rehabilitative in nature, seeking to help children reintegrate into their family and community.

An interesting new model of working on cases for these two groups of children (children in danger and children in conflict with the law) has also been adopted in Senegal and Niger. In Niger, for example, children's judges preside over Local Committees, bringing together a variety of state service providers (from the legal, social welfare and, in some cases, education sectors) with local leaders and members of civil society to determine the best path forward for children who have come into contact with the legal system.

In Senegal, a separate framework on justice for children does not exist, although there are some child-specific provisions in the Penal Code and the Penal Procedure Code. The juvenile justice sector has expanded its mandate to try to deal with the root causes of child offences. This experience represents a significant departure from the original French model and an interesting case to study for other reform efforts. The Ministry of Justice has developed a policy and services targeting vulnerable children at large, considering that because of their vulnerability (due to poverty, lack of family or history of abuse, etc.) they are more at risk of entering into conflict with the law.[23]

The following are important points that surfaced regarding the justice for children frameworks in the three countries for which the systems were analysed:

- Countries generally have weak procedural protections for child victims and witnesses.[24]
- There are possibilities for pre-trial diversion in all three countries, but their use is not systematized, fully funded or sufficiently operationalized, failing to specify what alternative measures should be. Explicit guidance promoting diversion does not exist in any of the countries.
- In theory, children in conflict with the law are entitled to legal representation, but this right is realized to varying degrees in each country, and many children in conflict with the law do not benefit.
- The maximum allowable prison sentences for children in Niger and Senegal, despite being lower than those for adults, remain harsh by international standards. For example, in Niger, crimes for which the allowable prison sentence for adults would be life imprisonment or the death penalty would translate to a punishment of 10–30 years

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[22] This section's analysis does not include Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire due to the difference in research scope between phases one and two.

[23] This expansion of the mandate led to an overlap with the Ministry of the Family.

[24] (exceptions: Niger and Ghana for human trafficking cases)

for children. However, by international standards, anything in excess of 10 years, even for murder, is considered excessive for children.

Customary law

Customary law is by far the more common normative reference guiding the lives of community members across the five countries. Despite this reality, the degree to which customary law is integrated or taken into account in the national legal framework and therefore the child protection system varies from country to country. The incorporation of customary law into the legal framework is one domain where there is more integration between the formal and the less formal components of the national child protection system in some countries, to some extent recognizing and validating community values.

Both English-speaking countries as well as Niger demonstrate pluralistic legal systems that incorporate modern and customary law. In Sierra Leone, the role of chiefs as overseers of customary law is formally accepted in the national legal framework. The law recognizes traditional *bare* gatherings in which, for example, family disputes, welfare issues and inheritance matters can be resolved. Ghana's National House of Chiefs brings together traditional leaders, and both chiefs and Queen Mothers are partially integrated into the formal legal system, although not in a particularly codified way. Niger's Constitution gives voice to the role that chiefs play in society, and the legal framework creates specific domains in which customary law can be applied – notably, family affairs, inheritance, marriage and custody.

In both Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, which are civil law countries, the national legal framework co-exists with customary law, but the contours of this co-existence are not clearly delineated in the national legal framework. In theory, Côte d'Ivoire does partially recognize the contribution of chiefs to the functioning of the national administration by giving them auxiliary status to the state authority for settling minor disputes. The limits of this authority – and the boundaries of each actor in decision-making – are not clearly spelled out. In some instances, such as in an urban community in Côte d'Ivoire, the practice of customary law demonstrates rather formal and complex customary law usage in communities by which traditional authorities make judgements and deliver sanctions on virtually any kind of social issue, including the most serious (such as murder, sexual abuse and incest).[25]

Data collected during the research for this analysis reveals that the customary legal framework is highly codified (including typed documents outlining customary legal practices). Indeed, cases defined as crimes in a penal code are frequently managed by a chief and the structures under his control. Although customary law does continue to guide the lives of communities in Senegal, the country remains an outlier in this domain; the national legal framework does not recognize the role of a chief or customary law.

Services

Approaches to service delivery vary from country to country, with some commonalities evident; the balance between prevention and response services also varies. In Niger, for instance, child protection actors devote far greater energy to response services, whereas in Senegal, prevention initiatives were clearly preponderant. In all systems, the number of

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[25] Original hard copy provided to the researchers by customary authorities: 'Code Coutumier', Abidjan-Adjamé, 2008.

abuse and neglect cases that the formal system deals with is very limited and typically represents the worst-case scenarios – extreme cases that moved well beyond the community capacity to care for the children and thus were brought to the attention of police or other services.

Prevention

All the prevention work analysed exhibited a tendency towards emphasis on awareness raising and information dissemination; in only a meagre portion of cases was assistance actually provided to families and children. Beyond some limited cases in which attempts were made to tackle poverty or single parenthood, none of the five systems had strategies or services to support families when they have difficulties (such as domestic violence, family breakdown, inadequate parenting or problematic reconstituted families[26]).

Prevention initiatives

In all countries, prevention work by and large takes the form of community awareness-raising sessions on children's rights and various child protection issues. Only in some rare instances, such as the holistic approach that the government and certain non-government organizations have adopted to tackle female genital mutilation/cutting in Senegal and Niger, is there evidence of an approach that seeks to affect changes in societal attitudes, norms and behaviours. No evidence was found of a systematic, comprehensive strategy that guided the communication strategies and information campaigns to prevent child abuse, exploitation, violence or neglect in any country; in the absence of such a strategy, the topics covered largely mirrored donor priorities, such as the worst forms of child labour, gender-based violence and violence in schools. In Ghana, the lack of an overarching behaviour change communications strategy has resulted in duplication of awareness efforts in some districts.

Targeted, family-level prevention services

In no country did much evidence surface concerning prevention services at the family level – that is, interaction with at-risk families to prevent abuse before it occurs. Sierra Leone's Family Case Work Department represents a step in this direction, with social welfare officers assuming a family mediation and case work role in their districts. Ghana is the only country in which household economic strengthening efforts have been explicitly linked to child protection objectives, via the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) initiative, which has reached about 35,000 households in 80 (of 170) districts. Social protection interventions are relatively new to the region, with Ghana among the pilot countries and one with sufficient fiscal space to support such interventions; preparations are also underway to launch a social safety net programme, including cash transfers, in Niger, and small-scale initiatives are also taking place in Senegal. Cash transfers to households with orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV or AIDS include a number of protection-related conditions.

International research within the community of actors working to provide better care and support to children affected by HIV or AIDS has given prominence to the role of social

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[26] A reconstituted family is one in which either one or both adults has children from previous relationships.

protection as a central strategy, moving beyond simple cash transfers to promote what is called a 'cash plus' approach (including additional interventions, such as the elimination of school fees, parenting training or linking families to microfinance and social security schemes).[27]   The West African region can tap into this global learning as household-level conditional cash transfers take root, but countries should ensure that the additional social interventions linked to these initiatives (the 'plus' of 'cash plus') are relevant and effectively address vulnerabilities not exclusively related to economic factors.

Response services

In most countries, as noted, response services for children who have experienced abuse, neglect, violence or exploitation have been designed for specific categories of children, according to the various national agendas, programmes and plans of action. In reality, the issues of abuse and neglect in families is not addressed at the root but rather is responded to by addressing some of the categorical programmatic issues (street children, talibé, working children, trafficking, gender-based violence and others). In most countries, interventions for working and exploited children are managed independently, and their approaches are not well integrated into national protection discussions.

Specialized services for child protection responses are developed in Ghana and to a lesser degree in Sierra Leone. More generalist services address family challenges, and child protection concerns are developed in the Francophone countries.

Common to all countries are the challenges of coverage and accessibility. Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are able to provide coverage at the lowest administrative level in some parts of the country, as is Senegal to a lesser degree. Niger and Sierra Leone are able to offer very few services that reach beyond the regional level.

The mapping exercise revealed the following observations, by country:

- Response services in Côte d'Ivoire are quite limited. Although formal services have the structures to 'cover' 49 per cent of the departments in the country, their capacity to deliver child protection services to children and families is extremely limited because of physical access problems. Their coverage is largely restricted to towns or sections of departments because of the sparse means available to provide outreach services, perhaps combined with a centralized service delivery model with little tradition of outreach. In general, community members consulted during the research for this analysis could not describe a formal system service to which they would turn in cases of child maltreatment; the few mentions of the police were in reference to using them as a threat to perpetrators of abuse rather than as an available response service.
- In Ghana, a specialized Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit within the police department has become the main entry point for child protection services. As a result, services are generally only available for children who have experienced the most severe forms of abuse or exploitation, typically 'defilement'. While progress has been made in improving inter-agency referrals, there is generally limited capacity to provide continuing monitoring and support to children and families after the initial crisis stage.

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[27] See, for example, www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/index_socialprotection.html (accessed 14 June 2011) and www.odi.org.uk/work/programmes/social-protection/ (accessed 14 June 2011).

Government welfare officers have very little resources to serve the communities within their catchment area and tend to be restricted to the capital of each district.

- Niger's child protection actors recently developed National Response Guidelines for Children in Situations of Vulnerability, which delineate clear roles and responsibilities from the community up. Currently, the referral and coordination mechanism at the district level is largely managed by the Local Committees, which are each presided over by a children's judge but include social welfare and other actors, including traditional leaders. To date, the cases discussed and followed through this mechanism have focused largely on children in conflict with the law, and service coverage is extremely limited due to human resource issues (discussed further in this section). Still, this is a positive example of how government is linking with traditional leaders and creating district-level coordination across ministries. Although most current cases deal with children in conflict with the law, these Local Committees do deal with other cases (such as trafficking and early marriage), and there is a potential opportunity to expand their mandate to do more.

- Therapeutic services for child victims of abuse in Senegal are primarily available via one centre in Dakar. Although services remain very limited, some progressive initiatives are underway. By targeting vulnerable children as a whole, the Ministry of Justice is attempting to address, at least in theory, the root causes of child victims of abuse, neglect, violence or exploitation.

- In Sierra Leone, response services are mostly limited to emergency services provided by the police and medical workers and only for the most extreme cases. A recently developed National Referral Protocol for Child Victims of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence outlines the roles and responsibilities of actors in caring for victims of sexual abuse, but the mapping exercise suggests that tremendous work remains to put the protocol into practice.

All five child protection systems provide some sort of out-of-home care for children. Government placement of children in institutions is not a common occurrence in the five countries. Although some families negotiate for care directly with private care facilities, it appears that most children are cared for within their extended families. Only in Ghana is there evidence of relatively heavy reliance on institutionalizing children in the response continuum, while in other countries, many actors interviewed noted the absence of institutions even for emergency placement as an obstacle to their capacity to provide adequate response service. None of the countries make any explicit preference for family preservation in their policies and service provision strategies, nor are there clear statements regarding institutionalizing children as a last resort.

There is little regulation of residential centres for children. Each country requires residential centres to register with the government; but only in Sierra Leone and Ghana have more detailed regulations for the oversight of these centres been considered. In Sierra Leone, a draft regulatory framework for children's homes is being implemented, and official government inspections of residential centres have been conducted since 2009. Ghana finalized its Standards for Residential Homes for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in 2010 and is in the process of inspecting and accrediting all homes.

Virtually none of the other governments accredit or monitor any service provider in child protection generally as well as alternative care specifically.[28] The lack of oversight of residential institutions results in unnecessary placements, missed opportunities to identify more appropriate care options for children and creates opportunity for child protection abuses and exploitation.

Services for children in conflict with the law

Services for children in conflict with the law were only examined in Ghana, Niger and Senegal. In each of these countries, there is a separate and distinct system for handling children in conflict with the law, and the systems are gradually evolving to represent a more rehabilitative approach than a punitive one. Still, as already noted, the maximum allowable sentences for children in Niger and Senegal remain very harsh by international standards. In all three countries, public prosecutors have the capacity to divert cases, and in Ghana, police can do so as well. But there is no explicit preference for diversion over the formal criminal processing, and anecdotal evidence suggests that diversion is rarely used.

In Ghana, newly established children's panels are tasked with resolving minor offences through mediation, but the functioning of these panels remains questionable. In Niger, the principle of deprivation of liberty as a last resort is explicitly supported but not operationalized. There is no explicit preference for deprivation of liberty as a last resort or any explicit alternative measures that can be adopted in the other two countries.

Legal representation appears, in theory, free of charge for all children in conflict with the law in each country (the situation in Ghana is unclear), but the extent to which it is accessible to children was not easy to discern. Each country has a handful of legal aid NGOs that provide such services, and in Niger, a network of community volunteers has been trained to provide representation. Even so, access to legal assistance remains limited and sporadic, reflecting the paucity and coverage of the organizations providing these services.

Services to support community-based alternatives to post–sentence detention are taking root in each of the three countries. Ghana recently established probation committees in its regional capitals, and 127 welfare officers were designated as probation officers. In Senegal, the Action Educative en Milieu Ouvert (AEMO) manages all cases of child victims and children in conflict with the law and covers approximately half of the national territory. The AEMO officers determine how cases will be dealt with, including whether a child is referred to a residential centre. Two Centres d'Adaptation Sociale offer services only to children in conflict with the law. The four Centres de Sauvegarde and the four Centres Polyvalents provide services to both child victims and children in conflict with the law. In Niger, 27 social welfare workers, many of whom are national civic service volunteers, are assigned to the Education, Preventive and Judiciary Services throughout the country, largely for the rehabilitation of children in conflict with the law. Despite these facilities, there are indications of a slow uptake; one rehabilitation centre in the country's second-largest town remains underused.

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[28] One exception might be Senegal in which the Ministry of Justice has promoted stringent agreements with service providers to ensure that civil society actions complement their own actions and services; however, they recognize that they do not have the resources to monitor and oversee these agreements.

Coordination and information management systems

Each of the five countries has several coordinating mechanisms that address child protection – either as a subsector of a larger concept (children's rights, social protection) or in a specific category (such as vulnerable children or trafficking). And yet, none of the countries have demonstrated effective strategic coordination, and there is a shared perception among actors in each country that coordination is problematic, as indicated in the results of an online child protection sector survey conducted in each country during the research for this analysis paper. The typical tasks of national strategic coordinating bodies, such as setting priorities and overarching policies, become lost in a multiplication of mechanisms that are frequently redundant, sometimes competitive and lacking in leadership and direction. Effective coordination is a necessary element of systems management, development or reform. The weak coordination in the different countries poses a real challenge to any efforts to strengthen the child protection system.

Challenges to effective coordination cited across all five countries include weak leadership, a lack of inclusiveness, funding constraints, inconsistent information flows, lack of commitment from relevant parties, absence of clearly defined tasks and priorities, infrequent meetings, weak or inconsistent representation for participating agencies and lack of commitment to move discussion to action. Solid strategic coordination between the government and international agencies can be weakened primarily by the different priorities of actors; in Sierra Leone, for example, NGO officers stated clearly that they do not use the government agenda as a reference point in designing their programmes.

Taken together, the coordination challenges reflect the lack of an overarching child protection framework in each country. They also highlight the leadership that will be needed to take the child protection sector forward through systems reform and development.

The lack of effective strategic coordinating mechanisms also impacts the capacity for joint planning in each country. Some national child protection laws, strategies and plans of action were drafted through broad consultation processes, with input from a wide range of participants. However, the annual planning and budgeting processes of various government departments with child protection mandates is done at the individual agency level, with limited input from or coordination with other relevant ministries, departments or external agencies. The mapping exercise revealed that the multi-year strategies and programmes are not clearly linked to the annual planning process of each agency, and individual agency priorities do not necessarily reflect the commitments assigned to them under an inter-agency action plan, where one exists. Such a well-orchestrated planning process, through which consensus emerges so that limited resources can be mobilized in a common direction, is unlikely to take root until a strategic coordinating process is invested in and becomes functional.

In Niger, at least nine national coordinating bodies exist, six of which include child protection issues as a subsector of a larger sector (such as justice, protection in emergencies, HIV or AIDS and social protection) and three of which address specific child protection issues (such as street children). Only in Ghana was the functioning of most of its 12 national committees

that address child protection from a variety of angles considered satisfactory, but again it's a patchwork of responses.[29]

Where resources were allocated specifically to coordinating efforts, the harmonizing of service delivery seemed to work better than in other circumstances in which efforts tended to lose traction, focus and a clear sense of direction. For example, Sierra Leone's National Child Protection Committee, which in theory would be an ideal vehicle for systems reform discussions, is perceived as largely ineffective by national child protection actors. The Committee functions alongside five other committees with overlapping mandates (the Child Rights Act Committee, the National Alternative Care Committee, the National Child Justice Taskforce, the Trafficking in Persons Taskforce and the National Commission on Gender-Based Violence). In Senegal, the recently established Cellule d'Appui à la Protection de l'Enfance or the Comité National des Droits de l'Enfant might, in theory, be well placed to coordinate and harmonize national child protection initiatives. But the former, being an initiative of the Office of the President, is perceived by some key government actors as being insufficiently independent and apolitical; the latter is dormant.[30]

There are examples of time-bound, concrete goals used to catalyse coordinating mechanisms to create consensus and provide guidance for setting standards and norms. These positive examples represent potential opportunities for creating a common language and vision of child protection that will be necessary to systems-strengthening efforts. Such is the case of the national referral protocol for child victims of sexual violence in Sierra Leone. Likewise in Ghana, members of the Child Abuse Network are developing inter-agency protocols and procedures for handling child abuse cases. These initiatives relate primarily to the practice of child protection – referrals and protocols – which are important factors in strengthening a national system and building more reliable, predictable and quality responses.

At the level of service delivery, there is a similar lack of evidence of effective coordination to ensure that the available services are delivered in a coherent, efficient and coordinated way. This lack of coordinated service delivery creates the real possibility that government service provision functions in parallel with those services provided by non-government actors. Moreover, there is some evidence that donor-identified categories of children are being reflected in a plethora of service delivery coordination mechanisms at the devolved level specifically dedicated to the discrete categories. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, service provision for each of the major categories of children to receive services is coordinated by a different mechanism at the subnational level, such as 'platforms' to assist orphans and other vulnerable children, 'listening centres' for victims of sexual violence and department-level committees to support children involved in the worst forms of child labour.

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[29] Ghana: Multi-Sectoral Committee on Child Protection; OVC Coordination Committee;
National Juvenile Justice Committee; Child Abuse Network; Human Trafficking Management Board;
National Steering Committee for the Elimination of Child Labour; Child Labour Partners' Forum; Domestic Violence Secretariat; Social Protection and Livelihood Team; National Early Childhood Care and Development Coordinating Committee; NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child; Social Protection and Vulnerability Group.
[30] Senegal's other committees: la Cellule de lutte contre les Pires Formes de Travail des Enfants; le Comité de l'Enregistrement à la Naissance; le Comité de Pilotage pour l'Abandon de l'Excision; le Comité de Lutte contre les Violences Faites aux Femmes; les Comités de Coordination en Situation d'Urgence; and la CONAFE.

However, there are some promising practices emerging in some countries, such as Niger, with the Local Committees.

Information management

The availability of up-to-date, accurate and relevant information is a crucial element of coordinating, planning and strategic thinking. Unfortunately, little of such data is available to policy-makers in the five countries due to the weakness of their information management systems. There is no formal system in any of the five countries for collecting comprehensive statistics and data on the overall situation of children vulnerable to abuse, neglect, violence or exploitation.

In many of the countries, the child protection agencies or programmes are primarily making use of internal data management systems, where these exist. In Niger, for example, nearly 90 per cent of the agency officers who responded in the online child protection sector survey conducted for this research claimed to be using an information system internal to their organization, a proportion that remains at more than 60 per cent in Senegal. In another telling example, Ghana's Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit maintains a national database on child victim cases, but the figures reflect only the cases that it has directly handled and do not include those investigated by the general police force.

There are some systems demonstrating potential within thematic programmes, such as the orphans and other vulnerable children database in Côte d'Ivoire, the street children information management system in Senegal or the Ghana database of cases previously noted. Unfortunately, the systems exist in isolation and compete with other systems; they do not provide material for conceptualizing, understanding or developing national policies beyond the narrow focus of orphans and other vulnerable children.

At the country level in the French-speaking countries, statistics are typically collected within departments of statistics and/or studies, but they are not systematically shared with technical directorates or other agencies. In Ghana, however, the Department of Children has a research unit that conducts periodic situation analyses on children. In Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs does not yet have a department dedicated to information management, research or data, although a Policy Development and Strategic Planning Directorate will be created under a current restructuring plan.

The lack of an information management system is not a technical challenge that can easily be addressed through the creation of indicators and data collection methods; rather, the development of such a system – if it is to be useful to service providers and policy-makers – will need to be rooted in practical consideration of what types of information will be useful at each level and how to collect, aggregate and disseminate that information in an effective and timely way. UNICEF is currently helping three governments (Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Senegal) put in place a national information management system, although all three remain in the early stages.

In Ghana, there appear to be several initiatives to develop an information management system that could inform national strategies; among them is a single registry system being implemented in connection with the LEAP initiative, which provides perhaps the most promising experience of a national information system around child-related vulnerabilities. The Department of Social Welfare is developing a database on children in residential care

and has begun the process of collecting information on all children in privately run homes. Through the LEAP initiative, the Department of Social Welfare has initiated a common targeting system and a single registry for all government benefit schemes, including LEAP beneficiaries, education grants schemes and the National Health Insurance Scheme. As part of a new national child labour monitoring system, the Child Labour Unit of the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare plans to develop a decentralized, single registry system integrating community data on children's age, sex, household status, education, health and labour activities. Community registers will be consolidated at the district level, and the information used to produce regular child labour monitoring reports submitted to the national level. Although not currently envisioned as such, these initiatives could constitute a good entry point to develop a broader database on interventions to address child-specific vulnerabilities.

Financial resources[31]

Resources allocated to the child protection sector are quite limited. The analysis revealed the challenge of obtaining consistent and comparable data on national budgets while still providing data for some suggested considerations. Among the notable limitations: accessing first-hand budget information from governments; the challenge of identifying the portion of the budget allocated to social services for children and families; and a general tendency to analyse social expenditure in a way that does not always illuminate specific allocations for education, health and social welfare (including social protection initiatives). The lack of budgetary data disaggregated beyond top-level categories is a matter that should be considered by the different actors in each country.

No country where full data was available appears to allocate more than 1 per cent of its national budget to child protection, and in one case it is significantly lower than that. It is equally notable that child protection and social protection budgets are extremely small even when compared with other social sectors, such as health and education. The comparative analysis of the five countries suggests that while the relative investment in child protection or welfare seems to be consistent at around 1 per cent or less of the national budget across countries, differences emerge in absolute terms. Those countries with larger budgets in absolute terms – such as Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana – show an evident difference in terms of system structures development (as illustrated in the discussion in the human resources section).

Although child protection allocations are increasing in some countries, nowhere are they keeping pace with increases in the other sectors. Moreover, although specific data were not available in all countries, there is consensus that the child protection sector relies heavily on external funding in many of the countries. This fact affects the dynamics between national governments and donors and lays the groundwork for donors to have disproportionate impact in setting the national child protection agenda.

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[31] Human resources are discussed in the section examining the system's challenges.

Table 3: Overview of available data on financial resources of national child protection systems

Financial resources (US$)	Cote d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Senegal	Sierra Leone
% of national budget to social welfare for families and children	-	-	<1% (women's promotion and child protection)	0.8% (allocated to MFGFPE)*	0.29% (allocated to MSWGCA)*
Other available indicators	0.2% of the social sector spending for child protection	-	-	0.2% of GDP allocated to social protection in 2009	-
Overall child protection budget estimate (2008)	$8,200,000	$2,843,000 (only non-government)	$2,921,000	$19,000,000	$3,233,000 (only non-government)
Proportion of government contribution to overall budget estimate (2008)	63%	-	-	-	-
Government budget release/ expenditure	53% (expenditure)	25% (release)	-	-	25%
Additional information	-	1.9% of MESW* budget is spent on services	Increasing government budget in welfare	-	-

MFGFPA= Ministère de la Famille, des Groupements Féminins et de la Protection de l'Enfance
MSWGCA= Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
MESW= Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare

The research analysis indicates there is an unbalanced allocation of the available budget in all countries in terms of central-level versus devolved-level budgeting and among ministry/system functions. Expenditures for child protection services remain largely allocated at the central level, with few resources going beyond the central level or to service delivery. In Ghana, for example, just 1.9 per cent and 0.8 per cent of the total social welfare budget were spent on services and investment, respectively. Perhaps even more telling, a regional breakdown of Ghana's 2010 Department of Social Welfare budget shows that the country's two poorest regions, Upper West and Upper East, received the lowest allocations. In Côte d'Ivoire, more than half of the current national budget is devoted to the social worker training institute, while somewhere between 10 and 15 per cent of the budget is directed beyond the central level.

A notable tendency concerning intra-sector allocations is a significant portion of budgets going to institutions. This trend serves to demonstrate the high cost of running institution-based services. Nearly a quarter of Côte d'Ivoire's national child protection budget is spent on operating three orphanages, while the budgeting for three other similar institutions in Niger is more than double the total spent for child protection service delivery in all eight of the country's regions. In most countries where such data is available, there is a noticeable trend to link budget allocations to material resources, such as office supplies, maintenance,

furniture and other running costs. While such resources are important, they often absorb the funds needed for service delivery.

Another relevant element emerging from the limited data is the partial release and/or expenditure of the allocated government budget. In Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, for example, the actual expenditure for the child protection sector remains far below the budgetary allocation. This disjuncture between allocations and expenditures also points to inefficiencies in the systems that are unable to spend what are essentially quite meagre resources in a given time period. Factors causing this situation include complex and centralized voucher systems for disbursing funds (Côte d'Ivoire) and limited capacity to manage timely financial disbursements from the central level and to monitor a largely cash-based system of expenditure (Sierra Leone). Ghana's Department of Social Welfare spends all the money it receives, but it only receives a quarter of what was originally budgeted. This situation points to important challenges in efficiency and capacity in the social welfare sector that need to be addressed; otherwise, they will hinder the advocacy required to push for budgetary increases.

Some countries, such as Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone, rely heavily on donors for their child protection budgets, a reality that opens the door to more heavily donor-driven agendas and reduces national ownership of the child protection sector. However, even in countries where the government investment in the child protection sector is not negligible in comparative terms, such as pre-conflict Côte d'Ivoire, the same heavy donor influence in child protection policies and strategies is still evident, a fact that is explained by the substantial resources that donors provide.

The budgeting process is a highly centralized annual exercise in all five countries. This connotes an element of stability in some contexts, such as in pre-conflict Côte d'Ivoire where primary allocations change little from year to year; but in other instances, the process is opaque and guarantees little stability or transparency. There has been some devolvement of the budgeting process in Ghana and, to a lesser extent, in Niger, but these are works in progress; an increase in child protection allocations has yet to materialize.

None of the countries has undertaken any costing exercise to gauge the real costs of implementing national strategies, laws, service delivery or to estimate cost effectiveness of various service activities, making it difficult for child protection leaders to advocate for increases in budgetary allocations. Even in situations where the services are covering half or more of the national territory, there is no up-to-date financial projection and investment plan to complete the system roll-out. This lack of costing also results in unrealistic, sometimes unaffordable national strategies and plans of action.

Human resources

Human resources are an aspect in which the five countries exhibit a wide variation of commitment, investment and approaches. While some countries demonstrate a concerted

effort to invest in human resources for the child protection/welfare[32] sector, other countries engage only moderately.

None of the countries has developed a comprehensive human resources management policy for the child protection/welfare sector. Job descriptions and the clear delineation of roles and responsibilities for child protection/welfare workers are more or less non-existent across the board. This reality is in part driven by the lack of overarching child protection policies that would help to orient the work of formal system workers. In some countries, such as Niger and Sierra Leone, structural adjustment reforms have hindered the ability of the government to recruit any new workers in the system.

Graph 1: Child protection and welfare workforce statistics[33]
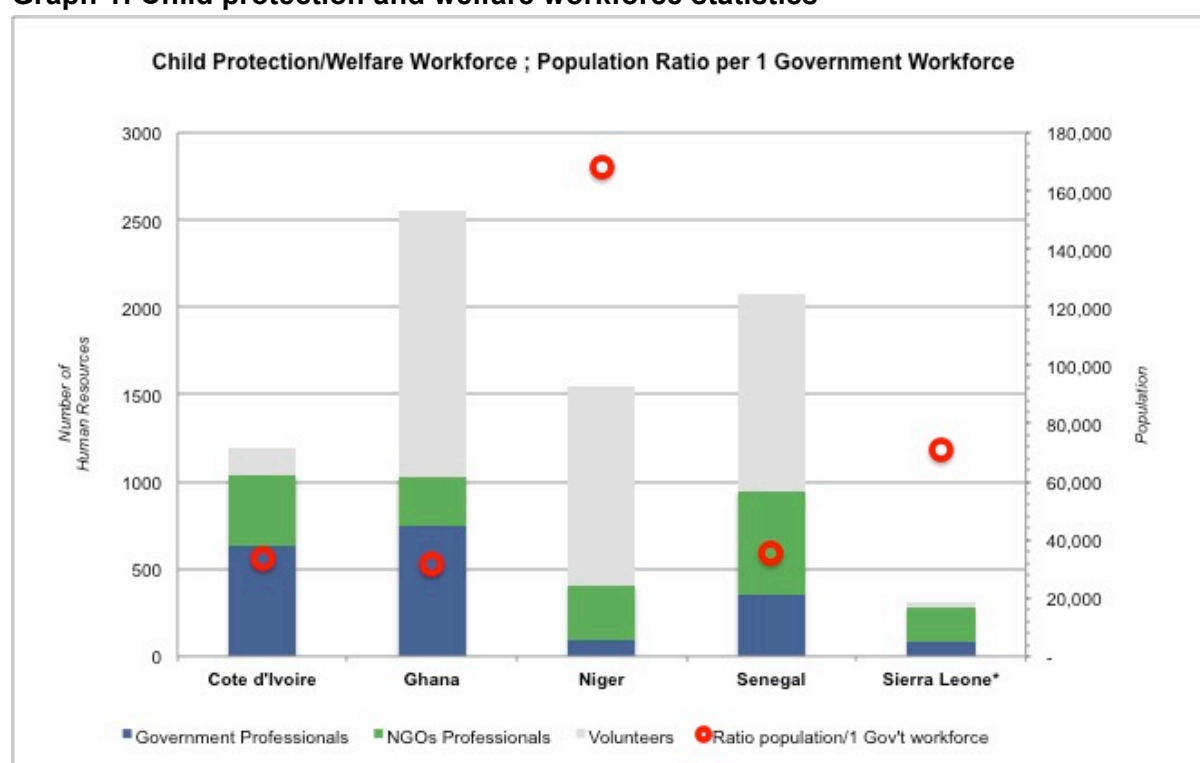
The lower-middle-income countries invest more heavily in their child protection workforces than the low-income countries and thus are able to ensure that far more child protection/welfare workers are available within the system. This is evident when considering the difference in government professionals deployed in Ghana (750) and Côte d'Ivoire (629),

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[32] In this section, we use the term 'child protection/welfare sector' because in some countries it was not possible to obtain specific information on child protection services, but the information provided indicates general social welfare services.
[33] It is important to emphasize that the definitions of child protection workers varies significantly from country to country and thus cross-country analyses should be undertaken with great caution. The data available on government child protection workers was provided by national governments according to their own human resources categories, which differed from country to country. In most instances, government workers referred to social workers whose remit included – but was not limited to – child protection activities. In the instance of Niger, however, the social workers and other government actors with a child protection remit is more specifically defined, and therefore, this graph includes only those workers with that specific remit (and thus excluding social workers who do not have a specific child protection mandate). The data on NGO professionals – which derived from the online child protection sector survey – was self-reported data that emanated from NGOs whose definitions of child protection workers may vary widely, depending on each organization's internal definition.

followed by Senegal (352) and to a much smaller extent in Niger (91) and Sierra Leone (an estimated 80).

The national ratio of population per one professional in the five countries reflects the capacity and strength or limitations of the system structures. Despite the approximation of the data available, the comparison seems to confirm the research in each country, with Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal having a similar ratio, ranging from 1:31,750 (Ghana) to 1:35,600 (Senegal). Very different is the situation in Sierra Leone, with a ratio of 1:71,000, almost double of those three others, and Niger is more than four times higher, at 1:168,000. It is important to keep in mind that even in those countries where the ratio is relatively better, the service capacity is still not able to match the challenge.

Focusing on the national ratio risks providing a skewed picture of the workforce reality in these countries. The distribution of these workers across the national territory remains of some concern because most are concentrated in urban settings.

Although there is one social welfare worker for every 13,000 inhabitants of the district around Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire, the average for the rest of the country is approximately one worker for every 52,000 inhabitants, a ratio that gets even more dramatically insufficient in the impoverished northern regions of the country. Similarly in Senegal, the country's relatively small network of formal social welfare workers is heavily concentrated at the central level, with only 25 per cent posted at the devolved level; even at the devolved level, some 60 social welfare workers are assigned to Dakar and Thiès, leaving only 60 others working throughout the rest of the country.

Niger delegates only one child protection worker for every 104,000 children in the country. Although Ghana's ratio does not vary dramatically across regions (despite more limited coverage in the North and the West), Niger's two poorest and most populated regions have the fewest number of social welfare workers among all eight regions. Sierra Leone's official numbers were unavailable, but it appeared likely during the mapping exercise that there is not even one social welfare worker per each of the 149 districts; during the mapping, a significant proportion of unfilled positions were found in visits to districts.

Another important element of the workforce analysis is the use of volunteers. In some countries, child protection workers across the broader sector (government and non-government) are largely volunteers. In Senegal, for example, the sector-wide online survey findings suggest that 70 per cent of all child protection workers are volunteers, an incidence that rises to 74 per cent in Niger. This finding, which remains to be examined more closely across countries, has clear implications for the sustainability, predictability, quality of service and accountability of the human resource dimension of the child protection system.

Professional qualifications and development also vary significantly among countries. Three countries have higher-education courses for social work; none of them though offer a specialized course on child protection and/or family problems. Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Senegal have devoted considerable state resources to formal training for social workers. Senegal's training institute, which is perceived as producing quality social workers, will begin offering a specialization to its 250 annual students in child protection in 2011, and Côte d'Ivoire's national social worker training school has continued to produce 500 graduates per year, even through the period of civil unrest. Both of the schools offer two- and three-year

degree programmes; Ghana's national university has a department of social work that offers two-, four- and six-year programmes. The university recently revised its curriculum to offer more culturally appropriate approaches to social work.[34] Social work programmes in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal remain largely influenced by French and Canadian models.

At the other end of the spectrum lie Niger, whose social work training is situated within the national public health school and which offers very little in the way of training around children or families, and Sierra Leone, whose social work training school was destroyed during its long period of armed conflict. Although a new national training centre was established in Freetown to build the in-service capacity of social development workers, courses are neither specialized nor skills based but offer training on broad welfare issues. Perceptions of the quality of training of welfare workers in general, as expressed through the online child protection sector survey, were generally regarded as 'poor' (46 per cent) or 'satisfactory' (31 per cent), with only 23 per cent of respondents stating they thought that the training and professional development opportunities available were of good quality.

Training on children's issues for judges is minimal and ad hoc in all five countries. With support from NGOs and development partners, judges and magistrates in several countries have participated in in-service training workshops on children's rights, child labour, trafficking, juvenile justice, domestic violence and other topics. However, in Ghana, there is no child-focused training that judges must undergo before being assigned to the Juvenile Court or the Family Tribunal. In Niger, such training consists only within a two-week module. In Senegal, although there are some relevant juvenile justice modules that can be followed, it is not compulsory for judges assigned to the child tribunals.

Training for police and gendarmes on child protection varies greatly by country. Only in Niger has a comprehensive manual on child protection, delineating the specific role that police play in the system, been integrated into the national police school's curriculum. In the other countries, training for police tends to be issue-specific and/or offered on an ad hoc basis. The other examples of child protection-related training for police that emerged in the course of the research include:

- **Côte d'Ivoire:** The inclusion of a module on child trafficking in the curriculum of the national police school.
- **Ghana:** The Anti-Trafficking Unit has conducted periodic in-service training programmes for its staff, with a particular focus on child-sensitive procedures; steps are also underway to add introductory courses on domestic violence, trafficking and child labour into the standard induction training programmes offered by the police colleges.
- **Sierra Leone:** Although there is no formal pre-service training on child abuse issues, there are plans to introduce a specialized course on gender-based violence into the formal police training curriculum.

In-service training workshops tend to be short and dependent on external funding.

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[34] Kreitzer, L. and Abukari, Z. et al. (2009) *Social Work in Ghana: A participatory action research project looking at culturally appropriate training and practice*, Ghana School of Social Work.

Cross-sector collaboration with allied systems, such as health, education, social protection and labour

Although there is consensus developing around the need for cross-sector collaboration in efforts to address child protection, there are no structural links between the child protection sector and the other social sectors in any of the five countries. For instance:

- Although medical care is a frequently emphasized component of the response services in some countries, especially for victims of sexual violence, the health sector is not formally involved in identifying or referring cases of child abuse in any of the five countries. The only health protocols for medical care for child victims of abuse are specific to victims of sexual violence.
- Across the five countries, the mandated role of the education system in the national child protection system is limited to efforts to combat violence in schools, and even this has not taken root in each country. Despite anecdotal evidence that teachers assist in identifying some protection concerns, such as child marriage, in none of the countries are teachers mandated to assist with identifying children at risk of abuse or children who have suffered abuse.
- Some countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Niger, have clear examples of confusion emanating from the overlap between departments dedicated to social protection and child protection. In other countries, such as Ghana, large-scale social protection efforts like the LEAP initiative include conditions linked to vulnerability reduction for orphans and other vulnerable children but do not figure into larger strategies for child protection prevention and response. As noted previously, each country requires additional work to clarify the distinctions between social protection and child protection. This clarification will be especially important in light of current and upcoming initiatives to provide large-scale cash transfers and community support in some countries.
- Across countries, efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour and to reduce exploitive child labour exist independently of national child protection discussions. In countries where these efforts were assessed, such as Niger, the approaches varied considerably from others in the child protection sector.

Across these sectors, the lack of a common understanding of child protection is apparent. In some cases, actors from other sectors understand child protection quite broadly – for them, child protection encompasses any activity that helps to realize children's rights; this suggests, for example, that increasing children's school attendance is itself a child protection response. One next step that might prove fruitful across the countries would be for the core actors in the child protection sector to reach out to other sectors to work together in systems development and reform efforts, encouraging them to join in the debate about the contours of the national child protection system and the roles that they can play in moving forward. In some countries, this debate has taken some initial steps, while in others the allied sectors, such as health and education, are not included in the current child protection systems dialogue.

2.4. Overview of community perceptions and practices

The five countries offer interesting community perspectives on child protection and child protection systems, although these views must be qualified as limited to the selected communities and not representative of the countries. One major overall consideration is that despite the illustrative nature of the knowledge generated by the research, the picture emerging from communities is far more consistent across countries than the information relative to the aspects of the formal systems and thus merits further exploration in the region.

While the number of sites considered in each country study does not allow for statistical comparative analysis, the qualitative information is a crucial factor in understanding issues of relevance and access of these systems to children, families and communities. It is important to underline that across the five countries, the comparison between urban and rural settings and among different sectors of the communities did not expose glaring discrepancies beyond the variations reported here.

There was a slight trend in some places in which children's voices seemed more assertive concerning the incidence of violence and abuse in their life (in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, with particular reference to sexual abuse); there was also a widespread feeling among children of isolation and little help available, both at the community level and at the formal service level. The statement of a young boy in Cote d'Ivoire sums up the feeling of most young people consulted in most of the countries: "We can only turn to God."

Perceptions of child well-being factors and protection problems

Table 4 presents a summary of the prime factors contributing to children's well-being and child protection problems in the communities consulted during the assessment exercise.

The community conceptions picture compiled among the five countries depicts the way some populations perceive child welfare and protection. There seems to be a strong common thread in which the importance of family and a positive family environment are considered as essential for children's well-being and protection.

Table 4: Community-identified well-being factors and child protection problems

	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Senegal	Sierra Leone
Well-being factors	1) Good family 2) Education 3) Economic means	1) Parents and family 2) Teachers and school 3) Police	1) Access to education 2) Good family environment 3ex*) Health services 3ex) Satisfaction of basic needs	1) Satisfaction of basic needs 2) Economic means 3) Good family	1) Good family 2) Basic needs 3) Education and health care
Child protection	1) Maltreatment 2) Sexual violence 3) Poverty	1) Child labour 2) Parental irresponsibility/lack of care 3) Rape/sexual abuse	1) Child exploitation 2ex) Lack of health care 2ex) Negligence or lack of parental care 2ex) Break-up of family units 2ex) Food crisis	1) Difficult access to education 2ex) Maltreatment 2ex) Poverty	1) Poor parental care, discipline and communication 2) Lack of basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) 3) Lack of access to quality education

*ex=equal ranking

Community members' child protection concerns are situated within a broader social development agenda and concepts of poverty reduction. Although strong families are certainly crucial for children's well-being – indeed, a good family environment is the only element that was prioritized in all five countries – community members reiterate the notion that the child protection sector needs to link with the education, health and security sectors if their concerns are to be addressed in a comprehensive way.

Nonetheless, as mentioned previously, this emphasis on family support is not strongly reflected in any of the formal systems, which provide few services oriented towards reinforcing the family but more so focus on individual support to children who fall within specific categories. Family breakdown, relational problems and parental irresponsibility are also consistent factors creating child protection problems.

Methods of responding to child protection concerns

Invariable across the countries, endogenous community practices are the primary reference when responding to child protection issues. Although these practices have not been assessed for their impact, they seem to be the most widespread practice in use for large segments of the populations across the five countries. Communities expressed methods for responding to child protection concerns in a way that indicated they were not making use or accessing child protection services.

The various community consultations revealed that families across the five countries tend to respond to child protection challenges with decidedly similar patterns of behaviours that go beyond the family and involve broader family networks and community processes. The pattern of response that occurred across the five countries was: family, extended family, neighbours, community elders, chiefs and finally – where formal services were available – formal child protection actors.

In almost every discussion with community members for this research, cases that they deemed to merit intervention were taken to elders or the chief; they would only refer a case to the police if it was considered too serious to be handled locally, a decision that was made in different contexts but rarely across the board. Some examples include child protection cases that involved more than one community (in Côte d'Ivoire) or cases where abuse perpetrators did not change their behaviour after community-level interventions (in Niger). In Sierra Leone, chiefs were managing cases of sexual abuse despite clear national law guidance that such cases should be referred to the Family Support Unit.

The response to child abuse provided at the community level takes a variety of forms. A decision on what to do is typically made in a public way, through traditional meetings or community sessions that do not immediately correspond with rights-based notions of confidentiality, individual dignity or victim protection.

The following lists the various community practices cited during the consultations but which vary by country and community:

- medical care for the victim (either traditional or modern) as well as other forms of support, such as clothing and food

- prayers for all concerned parties (noted in nearly every community and group discussions in Niger)
- advice or counselling for the perpetrator of abuse
- mediation, typically at the family level rather than between the victim and the offender
- public reprimand of the perpetrator of abuse
- the perpetrator of the abuse asking for forgiveness
- payment of a fine to the family of a victim.

The focus of these response mechanisms is strongly oriented towards the preservation of community harmony rather than on the provision of support services to child victims. Although material recompense, for example, may be made to the family (food, livestock), direct services to protect, care for and ensure the emotional well-being of the child are not the norm.

Indeed, in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, with the exception of police, most community groups interviewed during the mapping exercise did not mention accessing more formal child protection services, including those offered by government and non-government actors, at all. For the majority of protection concerns discussed, only community practices were highlighted. In Sierra Leone, even the most extreme cases were handled locally, while in Ghana and Niger, there was slightly more noticeable community willingness to seek government referrals, although the situations remained rare and to be used as a last resort. Such case studies suggest that the formal systems have yet to capitalize on community protection practices and need to identify ways to improve access to the majority of the population.

In all communities that participated in the mapping, there was a strong reluctance to report cases of child abuse and exploitation to government authorities. Several group discussion participants noted that children could not go directly to government services because it would result in rejection by the family or the community ostracizing them. The majority of community discussion group participants were of the view that informal ways of resolving problems were preferable to the formal system. These issues of relevance are further reflected by the notion that community caring mechanisms would be more appropriate or 'comfortable' for the children and families involved.

When cases of child abuse, neglect or exploitation are officially reported, it is generally the police rather than social welfare authorities that families and communities turn to for intervention. (In Niger, urban communities also expressed a willingness to turn to NGOs.) This is probably because the police are better known and more easily accessible than social welfare officers. A significant minority of community members interviewed in Ghana were of the view that it would be preferable for the police to intervene in order to seek justice, but this opinion was not apparent in other countries. Where police were mentioned in other contexts, such as urban sites in Côte d'Ivoire and in Niger, it was typically as a threat for recalcitrant perpetrators of abuse who were refusing to take responsibility for their actions or as a back-up when the chief's authority was not being respected.

In some instances, especially in Ghana, Sierra Leone and urban areas of Senegal, community members expressed clear reservations about engaging with the formal child protection system for dealing with child protection cases. In many other settings, including some rural communities in Niger and Senegal and all in Côte d'Ivoire, people seemed either

unaware of or uninterested in engaging with the formal system. They considered their community mechanisms and practices as sufficient, although they didn't even know about the services available (often because there were not any available in close proximity).

Only in urban settings in Niger did most community members comment that the formal system was a viable option for them and that they would be comfortable approaching government and non-government agencies for assistance. This finding is surprising, given that child protection service coverage in Niger is so severely limited; among the various descriptions of responding to child abuse, it was clear that community practices were the overwhelming recourse for the communities in which assessment consultations took place.

However, the discussions in all the communities also revealed a general perception that formal government services are primarily a means of imposing justice or punishment on the perpetrators rather than a potential source of support and assistance to families and victims. Most community discussion group participants expressed limited or no awareness of the role of welfare officers or of the support and protective interventions available to children within the formal child protection system, indicating that a problem around information dissemination exists in addition to more basic issues about the limited reach of available services.

Perceptions of links or lack thereof with the formal system

In most of the communities visited across the five countries, there appears to be a somewhat large gap between the informal and formal systems for handling child protection cases, with limited links between the two. Although there is some evidence of links between the two systems generally, such as the inclusion of traditional chiefs in the Local Committees in Niger and in government-led child protection mechanisms in Sierra Leone, the reality in most of the communities consulted for this research – which, to reiterate, are merely suggestive and not representative – indicate that significant work remains to be done to facilitate interaction between the formal and informal ends of the spectrum.

This lack of access seems to be rooted in a number of factors, including: the limited reach of services (especially in rural communities); the lack of knowledge and information about the availability and type of services; and, in many instances, mistrust about involving government actors in community affairs. This lack of access might also be due to the fact that, generally speaking, the services that have been considered so far are not able to provide much more help or support to families and victims compared to what the community does. Put another way, the capacity of therapeutic and support service delivery is extremely limited, leaving much more space to the administration of justice, which the community undertakes on its own terms.

In the consultations, community members consistently identified chiefs, religious leaders and elders as the most appropriate people to resolve a protection issue when the family or extended family does not succeed in doing so. Both front-line workers and community members commented that government officials were generally viewed as 'intruders' or 'as an imposition', the underlying idea being that the involvement of external actors with no familial links to a particular case represented a transgression of social norms. In other instances, social services explained that they had little choice but to conform their own action to the community practices (most apparent in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone). Even

where cases were officially reported to the police, family members, religious leaders or chiefs would often intercede to have the case dropped and resolved within the community.

In general, there are strong suggestions that the formal and informal systems operate with limited overlap.

There are, however, some nascent efforts to include traditional chiefs in formal system activities. In Niger, for example, chiefs are members of the regional child protection coordination networks and sit on the Local Committees that address both children in conflict with the law and other protection concerns. Customary law is also recognized and governs family law matters in Sierra Leone, where traditional *bare* gatherings are recognized as mechanisms through which some forms of child abuse can be managed; in this instance, traditional leaders are mandated with specific protection responsibilities. In the former example, however, the role that chiefs are expected to play has not been fully articulated. In the latter example, despite the clear boundaries by which chiefs are only supposed to oversee 'less serious' forms of child abuse – while referring more serious cases to family support units – the community consultations made clear that virtually all cases are managed by chiefs at the community level. In Senegal, no effort has been made to include traditional chiefs, in the formal system, and there is no dialogue between the two entities.

3. System challenges and opportunities: Congruence, relevance, resources and efficiency

3.1. Challenges

One of the core findings of the mapping exercise across the five countries is that the child protection systems appear to be somewhat incongruent with community conceptions of child protection issues, practice and priorities; and there appears to be a functional disconnection between endogenous community practices and formal service providers. The barriers that hinder the ability of children and families to access services designed for them include:

- attitudes that reflect mistrust of formal services and an understanding that the services available within the community are more appropriate, relevant and preferable to formal services
- limited reach and distribution of the formal services on offer
- limited knowledge of these services.

These disconnections effectively limit the inroads that actors in the formal system can make into the lives of the general population and reduce the effectiveness of prevention and response initiatives. The sources of the disjuncture are multiple and must be taken into account if future reform and strengthening efforts are to reduce the chasm between formal efforts and endogenous community practices.

Discrepancies in the way that community members and policy-makers define child protection problems and responses

The research suggests that one of the most important sources of the incongruence might be the way in which child protection is conceptualized. In general, community members perceive child protection problems as emerging from a number of problems, many of which emanate from the breakdown in harmony within families or other family challenges. While formal protection actors might also recognize this, they approach child protection in a way that is based on categories of individual children who are being abused or exploited or in specific forms of abuse; this approach does not allow formal actors to reach out to all families in an equitable way. Each set of actors operates independently, with communities using their own practices to manage child abuse and exploitation, while formal system actors design programmes that target specific categories of children in a way that does not always seem relevant and appropriate to community members.

To revisit table 4, the ranking issues shown reflect how the consulted community members in each of the five countries prioritized child protection concerns. What emerged across the countries are concerns that are related to poor parenting and family breakdown, lack of access to basic services, maltreatment and poverty. As already noted, the child protection systems analysed were not systematically addressing family strengthening or the root causes of family breakdown and difficulties; such concepts rarely appear in the national policies or strategies. Community perceptions emanating from this research raise the question of whether a foundational schism must be bridged to bring in line national visions of child protection with community-identified concerns.

The community-identified concern about the lack of access to basic services suggests the need for a child protection sector that is situated among and has strategic and functional links to other sectors, notably health, education and security. The mention of maltreatment as a priority in communities in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal is disconcerting insofar as neither of these countries' systems takes a holistic view of maltreatment, focusing instead on specific forms of abuse and exploitation. That community members in some countries consider poverty to be a root cause of child protection problems reinforces the systems approach insistence that child protection systems be harmonized with and integral in national development programmes and poverty-reduction strategies. In these instances, national poverty-reduction strategies have an opportunity to pair economic initiatives, such as conditional cash transfer programmes, with other activities that also seek to reduce other forms of vulnerability.

In two of the countries (Ghana, Niger), child protection is explicitly prioritized in the national development agenda. In both Ghana and Niger, recent or upcoming social protection initiatives will reach large swaths of the population and represent a potential entry point for child protection and family welfare to become more firmly situated in and integral to national poverty reduction efforts.

At the country level, the following observations emerged through the community consultations:

- In Côte d'Ivoire, only one of the three top priorities – sexual violence – figured into the priorities being addressed by formal sector child protection policy-makers.
- Communities in Ghana identified child protection concerns that were both specific (child labour, rape and sexual abuse) and general (parental irresponsibility and lack of care). There is some congruence between these community views and national priorities in that national policy-makers are focusing some efforts on both child labour and sexual abuse. However, even though the LEAP programme is taking a household-focused approach, more reflection will be required to attack the issue of parental irresponsibility, which was an issue raised in the community consultations for this research.
- In Niger, community priorities little resemble national priorities. Child exploitation, identified overwhelmingly as a priority, does not figure into the national discussion around child protection. Rather, national discussions about child labour are focused exclusively on the worst forms of child labour, which of course merits concerted attention. However, forms of exploitation that do not fall into this strictly defined category are rarely discussed in the national policy realm.
- The data from communities in Senegal suggests the need for an approach that is well linked to the education sector and to the socio-economic development and poverty-reduction agenda, neither of which are evident in the numerous national child protection policies and strategies.
- Sierra Leone's national child protection agenda is focused largely on referral pathways and case management for child victims of sexual and gender-based violence. While these are important issues that are – as some research has suggested – unlikely to be addressed by community processes, additional attention should also be paid to the ways in which child protection efforts can be situated within broader service delivery initiatives, as community discussions have suggested.

The previous section (2.4) on perceptions and practices outlined the basic tenets of community responses to abuse and neglect, highlighting the preeminent role played by local communities in caring for child victims and, in some instances, mistrust of or hostility towards formal sector child protection workers. By the same token, formal child protection workers often perceive community mechanisms for child protection in a negative light; for example, a recent report on Koranic schools in Niger pointed out that while communities regard such schools to be pillars of child-rearing, government and NGO workers often painted them as gateways to juvenile delinquency.[35] The resulting standoff affords little room for finding common ground or exploring ways to bring national strategies for delivering protection services in line with community perceptions.

On the other hand, many front-line workers in Côte d'Ivoire and some in Senegal indicated that they had little option but to participate in and adapt themselves to community practices rather than follow legal provisions or their formal mandate, due to their isolation, lack of means and meagre leverage with communities.

Despite some initial attempts to include traditional leaders in formal child protection mechanisms in some countries, national child protection policy-makers have as yet made few efforts to examine community-driven child protection responses or to consider their potential as a viable partner for service delivery.[36] The incorporation of customary law into the legal frameworks is one domain in which more integration between the formal and the less formal components of the national child protection system has begun in some countries; additional efforts are required to examine the overlap and to strengthen the links between these two components of the system.

Preponderance of services generated by top-down, vertical policies that identify specific groups of children to target

As previously described, service delivery does not benefit from a comprehensive strategy in any of the five countries. Lacking an overarching vision, the delivery of services thus becomes stratified and differs by target group. For example:

- In Côte d'Ivoire, services for orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC) are organized by seven areas for support (education, health, housing, psychosocial, birth registration, etc.). While this approach is promising in that it situates care and support for these children within broader service provision initiatives, national guidance does not clarify for workers how to assess and prioritize these forms of care. Each NGO implementing the national OVC programme is free to identify and to provide services for vulnerable children however it sees fit, as long as the services remain within the seven areas. This approach is used only for OVCs who fit relatively strict, donor-defined criteria. Service providers who are operating within the framework of gender-based violence focus largely on medical service provision, and those actors in the child labour group focus on economic strengthening.

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[35] Sanda, Mounkaïla Ouamarou.(2007). *Enfants dans les écoles coraniques: Etude de Caritas Développement Niger.* Niamey: Caritas Développement Niger, Bureau Diocésain de Niamey, Programmed Appui à la Réinsertion des Enfants en Difficultés (PARED).
[36] The one exception is the national guidelines for the care and protection of children in vulnerable situations in Niger, which make explicit reference to community- and family-driven responses. This reference needs to be further detailed so that it can be made operational.

- In Niger and despite the National Response Guidelines for Children in Situations of Vulnerability, service delivery takes several forms. Orphans and other vulnerable children receive cash hand-outs while children working in the worst forms of labour receive skills training. The response depends not on the needs of a child or family in question – and indeed, many of the same children could have qualified as both vulnerable and exploited children – but on the identification process of the agency implementing the project at hand. This gap suggests the need for countries to focus on standards setting and capacity building as a primary systems-strengthening strategy to ensure more reliable, predictable and quality responses

Limited or lacking synergy between actors within the child protection system

Child protection actors in all five countries appear to work in isolation, concentrating on the specific target groups of children that their projects focus on and the individual approaches to supporting children and families. This results in a lack of a child protection vision and strategies, as previously cited, and in many ways reflects the impact of top-down, vertical policies advocated by disparate members of the donor community, leading to a duplication of efforts and an inefficient use of resources. The lack of effective and inclusive coordinating mechanisms, also previously noted, plays a large role in perpetuating the lack of collective action to provide comprehensive services for children and families.

International agencies, which are positioned in a space that spans the donor community (often acting as donors themselves at the country level), national governments and, in some instances, local communities, are only beginning to adopt an approach that considers child protection in a systemic way. These agencies, among whom the primary players are UNICEF, Save the Children International, Plan International, Terre des Hommes and World Vision, continue to advance the global debate around child protection systems but have been slow in adopting common definitions, not via lack of effort but rather as a result of the complexity of the field and its interdisciplinary nature. In the meantime, much of the work that they continue to undertake while this global consensus takes shape falls in line with the categorizing approach.

One emerging trend among international agencies is their search for ways to strengthen the child protection system, even if it is through a categorized approach. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, one agency is seeking to strengthen the national child protection system through a child labour programme and another is working through a gender-based violence programme. These efforts offer as many opportunities as challenges in not breaking the limitations of categorization. This reality is likely to persist until donor agencies begin a conscious discussion around systems reform. International agencies will need to devote serious consideration and evaluation to the ways in which their categorizing approach to systems strengthening is playing out.

National governments often find themselves strongly influenced by these international priorities, especially those whose budgets are largely dependent on foreign aid. In such instances and despite the rhetoric of government leadership, the same top-down categorizing, based on internationally defined child protection priorities, becomes apparent. Not only can this create tension between ministries, for example, in the case of child labour-focused funding, which is typically provided to labour ministries rather than to social welfare ministries, but also within agencies of a given ministry. For instance, no fewer than three

agencies within the central social welfare ministry in Côte d'Ivoire applied for gender-based violence funding when a call for offers was launched. Sierra Leone's central social welfare ministry has had a department designated to handling the human trafficking problem since 2007. In Niger, confusion emerged over which department of the central social welfare ministry should manage an orphans and other vulnerable children project.

It is difficult to imagine that the limited synergy between actors will improve until there is a concerted attempt on the part of the multiple child protection actors to converge around basic questions about the contours of the national child protection system and to harmonize strategies. This convergence process might be led by government, international or local agencies, and while it would be optimal to have all actors involved, the process will require different stages and approaches, depending on the context.

A common challenge to a national child protection system in a variety of settings is that the sector, which itself is only beginning to emerge in many countries, does not benefit from a clearly articulated vision of leadership that would allow for decisive and concerted action to be taken and accountabilities to be ensured. The delineation of the child protection sector in relation to the social protection sector remains a major challenge: the main actors in each country will need to clarify the boundaries between these two sectors, determining in which ways child protection serves as a 'subsector' of the larger social protection system and in which ways the child protection sector moves beyond commonly held understandings of social protection.

The relationship between the child and family welfare sector and the justice for children sector also poses a challenge. Although there is growing consensus that both child and family welfare and justice are central sectors for child protection, structural links between these two sectors remains nascent. Some emerging examples of structures that are beginning to create links across sectors include the previously highlighted creation of the Local Committees in Niger and the establishment of joint police-social worker Family Support Units in Sierra Leone. Beyond the level of such units for service provision, higher-level structural links between these two sectors lack a clear contour.

In some ways, this lack of structural linking is 'natural' in that each of the sectors is managed and coordinated by a distinct central ministry and actors responding to and motivated by different agendas and logics, as in most countries in the world. However, for the sector to move forward in a way that promotes inter-sector synergy, the elaboration of responsibilities of the two sets of actors will need discussion, clarification, compromise and consensus. The attempt in Senegal to transcend a ministry-level conception of child protection by placing a special child protection unit within the office of the country's president has met so far with limited success in creating sector-wide shared conceptions of child protection. In Niger, the inclusion of social protection within the prime minister's office has been met with resistance from some actors who suggest that the high-level placement hinders the efficiency of efforts to operationalize social protection services.

As long as the leadership for the child protection sector remains uncertain, the same problems of operationalizing may continue to be felt at the level of service delivery. Still, there have been some promising steps forward for more systematized service delivery in some countries. In Sierra Leone, a clear protocol for child victims of sexual violence has been established, as has a similar protocol for victims of domestic violence in Ghana. The

recent development of national guidance for supporting children in situations of vulnerability in Niger also represents a positive step forward, although this guidance has yet to be adopted in the national policy framework and made operational across the country. Some experiences suggest that the solution may be a bottom-up one because decentralized integrated service delivery models that link with community protection workers demonstrate a way forward that can then inspire and inform leadership at higher levels. However, this approach is only likely to work if it is conceptualized from the outset as playing a demonstrative role within the wider system.

The efficiency challenge, addressing: a) the donor disconnect; b) the lack of sufficient resources and c) inefficient use of limited resources

The lack of sufficient resources is a clear hindrance to the evolution of the child protection sector in all five countries. As previously noted, in none of the five countries where full data was available did the allocation to social protection services surpass 1 per cent of the national budget. As long as the budgeting remains so limited, it is not conceivable that child protection actors can deliver adequate services, even in small geographical areas. Although most of the five countries have made progress in apportioning more of the national budget to the social sector, social protection and child protection shares remain marginal when compared with increases in the health and education budgets. In systems reform and development efforts, the child protection sector will need to articulate why it requires additional resources, including system costing.

Even within the small budgets that the child protection sector receives (and even though the mapping and assessment exercises did not involve a systematic analysis of the national child protection budgets), some notable trends have emerged and require additional exploration. First, some countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Niger, demonstrate heavy investment in child protection institutions (such as orphanages and rescue centres), a trend that moves against international recognition of the low cost-effectiveness of such services. Second, the budgetary allocation for actual services is extremely low in some countries, such as Ghana, where less than 2 per cent of the national budget for the Department of Social Welfare is dedicated to service delivery. Finally, most countries exhibit an unfortunate case in which budgetary allocations surpass actual expenditure, hampering advocacy efforts for increases to the sector. This situation raises major questions about government capacity to deliver services and suggests the need to improve administration of protection services before mobilizing additional resources.

Donor approaches present additional challenges in relation to financial resources, notably the fragmentation of resources allocated along the lines of targeted groups of children. In most countries, donors have targeted their funding to specific portions of the child protection sector, such as the European Union funding initiatives to strengthen the justice sector (including justice for children), the United States Government focusing on orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV or AIDS and anti-trafficking activity, the International Labour Organization funding work to tackle the worst forms of child labour and so on. The World Bank is launching large-scale social protection cash transfer schemes in several of the five countries; initial planning documents suggest that the World Bank hopes to include child-focused considerations in its efforts, although it remains unclear how they will bear out in practice. UNICEF's recent efforts to support systems reform through, for example, the mappings and assessments that form the basis of this paper, is one hopeful sign.

3.2. Opportunities

There are some important opportunities available to child protection actors who are undertaking systems reform and strengthening efforts. These opportunities, if seized upon, could form the basis for future activities to strengthen national child protection systems.

Growing consensus

In each of the five countries, important actors are developing consensus around the potential benefits of a systems approach that seeks to revise the national child protection system fundamentally rather than continue with top-down, vertical interventions. The participation and contribution of ministries and agencies in the mapping exercise demonstrated essential buy-in, and the research process itself was informed by the oversight of both an advisory committee regrouping core participants in the systems reform process and the involvement of broader-based groups.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the publication of the national mapping and analysis was followed by a process in which the Government reached out to actors in other sectors, notably health, education and labour, to gauge their reaction to the findings and to discuss ways in which a more concerted systems reform could be carried out collectively. Sierra Leone similarly demonstrated a willingness to share the findings with a broader group of relevant parties to launch a discussion around the current state of the national child protection system and to continue reflecting on the entry points for reform. The Government of Niger and UNICEF have launched a process of sector-wide consultations to begin determining a shared national vision for child protection. Ghana has been undergoing a process of strengthening its Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare, and this process could be leveraged for engaging in a comprehensive process of re-conceptualizing the child protection system to be more relevant and sustainable. These processes have opened the door to new opportunities to build partnerships and improve collaboration.

Recognizing the need for improved coordination around child protection

Although coordination was repeatedly highlighted as a weakness in the national child protection systems across the five countries, the online sector surveys conducted in each country revealed that actors recognize this limitation and have ideas for improving coordination. These include:

- allocating resources specifically for coordination, a strategy that has shown results for time-bound coordinating mechanisms with clear goals[37]
- clarifying various actors' roles and responsibilities, a recommendation in sync with systems-strengthening efforts
- developing coherent policies and strategies to guide service delivery
- collaborating on future situation analyses to ensure that actors are speaking a common vocabulary
- improving resource sharing among organizations
- establishing common procedures and protocols for collaborating
- increasing mutual respect.

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[37] Examples include the use of coordinating groups to create the national protocols for gender-based violence in Sierra Leone, for domestic violence in Ghana, and for overseeing the development of social protection situation analysis and framework in Niger.

Senegal represents an interesting example in that the Office of the President created a special unit for supporting child protection initiatives as a demonstration of the high-level commitment and leadership to this issue.

Experience of child protection social workers

Situated at the front line between formal child protection and community realities, social welfare workers and other child protection workers in each of the five countries serve as something of a bridge between the formal and informal systems. They understand the logic and motivations that drive various constituencies of actors and in many cases have learned to adapt rights-driven approaches to the realities of communities in which they work. The case stories collected from front-line workers over the course of the mapping and assessment exercises in the three second-phase countries suggest that, although the child protection workers often experience challenges in adapting to local realities, many of them have developed innovative strategies for working with children, families and communities. Capitalizing upon these experiences should be a focal point of systems-strengthening efforts because these front-line workers work within the formal child protection system but remain in close contact with community realities.

Endogenous community practices

Although they require additional exploration, the endogenous community practices used to protect children are an asset that cannot be sidelined in the West African setting. The assessments conducted in the five countries have only begun to scratch the surface of such practices, and further ethnographic studies will disclose more detail – the rationale, the decision-making that takes place within families and communities, more nuanced understandings of the processes and so on.

Because past studies of community practices have focused almost exclusively on the negative aspects of traditional practices, future studies should look at both *protective and harmful* endogenous community processes and examine ways in which formal system actors can strengthen the former while working in partnership and open dialogue with communities to minimize or transform the latter.

What remains clear, however, is that some community practices are strongly protective, and because these form the first line of protection for the overwhelming majority of children in West Africa, it is critical that child protection actors understand how they function and how they can be supported and bolstered.

Engaging with communities is also an efficiency issue; in countries where child protection resources are scarce, it is important that all protection actors work together towards a common goal. Incorporating those protective endogenous community practices that can strengthen the national system would help to rationalize these resources. As systems reform moves forward, there will need to be nuanced thinking in each country about how state and non-state actors can and should engage with communities, where the boundaries and responsibilities of each set of actors begins and ends and where lie their complementarities.

The example of Niger's Local Committees can represent a promising approach that seeks to bring various social strands together into one coordinating mechanism for service delivery to children in danger and children in conflict with the law. The formal recognition of the role of

chiefs in Sierra Leone's child protection system can as well represent a similar step in the right direction to close the gap that separates children and families from the more formal services that are available to them.

Economic considerations

Countries with stronger economic health have demonstrated the capacity to develop important infrastructure for a child protection system. This is noticeable in Ghana, where decentralized service and human resources coverage is stronger than they are in the other four countries. Likewise, in Côte d'Ivoire, despite nearly a decade of armed conflict, a vast network of social welfare centres and a trained cadre of social workers reach all of the country's regions and nearly half of those regions' departments. Even if none of these systems has yet managed to approach truly national coverage (and indeed the case of Côte d'Ivoire shows that advances made can be easily wiped out), these countries do demonstrate that the increase in resources available for public spending can result in the expansion of the infrastructure through which child protection services can be appropriately delivered.

4. A way forward for systems strengthening in West Africa

The current moment is one of intense learning, discussion, debate and investment in thinking about the best ways to build, reform and strengthen national child protection systems. The undertaking of the mapping and assessment process that this paper represents was a crucial step for taking inventory of the current state of affairs. While some ground has been covered in better understanding child protection systems in the region, more needs to be done to clearly articulate how to strengthen them.

Moving forward, a number of new approaches are being tested and explored for ensuring that national child protection systems become more effective and efficient in providing relevant services to a wide spectrum of children and families. The inclusion of West African perspectives in the global debate also represents a positive step forward, and serious analysis and consideration will help to inform the best next steps to take to ensure future efforts achieve as much impact as possible.

Primary actors in the national child protection system in each of the five countries need to make some fundamental decisions in order for future systems strengthening efforts to adhere. These decisions should be rooted in national values and beliefs around children, families and society and how these components function together concerning child protection in a way that is relevant to local communities. Although this paper has highlighted trends that are emerging across the five countries, each country is starting from a very different place. Some countries are just beginning to build their systems while others are in a process of considering systems reform and strengthening.

Several approaches could be used to advance a national child protection system, but core guiding principles should include:

- The system must be relevant for local populations, taking into account and addressing some of the tensions and disconnections between the more formal child protection systems and the informal practices and processes in place.
- Child protection services must be accessible to all children and families. Ensuring that the system is more relevant and responsive to locally identified concerns should help to improve this access by making the services more attractive to the clients they are intended to serve. In addition to concerns about relevance, however, child protection actors can also increase access to service by making more efficient use of the resources available to them, thus expanding their ability to increase their service provision coverage. Information about these services will also need to be disseminated effectively.

Entry points to take systems strengthening efforts forward

Despite the multiple challenges outlined in the analysis across the five countries, there are several initiatives that offer some perspective and certainly suggest a situation in motion.[38]

Although the attitudes of international agencies and donors are unlikely to change quickly, the emphasis and the resources made available to certain initiatives should be considered as potential strategic entry points for system reform. Child protection actors should capitalize on the various approaches being promoted in the region – and globally – and make use of these opportunities to leverage wider systems reform. To contribute to systems strengthening, these initiatives may need some adaptation and adjustment; otherwise, they may be incorrectly promoted as 'systems strengthening' when in reality they could perpetuate some of the systems' limitations presented in this analysis.

Some of the most obvious opportunities currently presenting themselves are the major initiatives that carry political and economic momentum in a number of the countries and represent potential entry points for systems strengthening. Among others, these include:

- OVC programmes
- social protection initiatives (including conditional cash transfers 'plus' other family- and household-strengthening components)
- some justice reform processes
- efforts to strengthen the social welfare workforce (including community, NGO and government welfare workers)
- initiatives to improve decentralized service delivery mechanisms that link state and non-state actors, including communities.

The first three of the above potential entry points demonstrate clear links to strategic conceptualizing and systems thinking. However, it will be important to make sure that the scope of these entry points is expanded to be more inclusive than they have traditionally been. For example, OVC programmes could easily encompass a wider range of beneficiaries, expanding the definition beyond the impact of AIDS to include the most vulnerable children and those whose clearly articulated family vulnerabilities put them more at risk of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation.[39]

To seize upon this opportunity effectively, child protection actors need to balance a focus on the original programme while raising significant resources and political momentum available for OVC programmes to serve a much wider population. In practice, they have the opportunity to design an appropriate system able to prevent a wide range of family challenges and child protection issues. In other words, an OVC-initiated effort that expands its strategies and definitions might well influence the entire shape and design of the child protection system.

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[38] Despite the evident challenges they pose, emergency situations or post-conflict scenarios like the one in Cote d'Ivoire can present opportunities; the influx of rehabilitation resources can be used as an opportunity to recreate or reorient pre-emergency or pre-conflict approaches (as was the case in the Indian Ocean tsunami experience).

[39] Recent global trends for OVC programmes indicate a willingness to expand definitions of OVCs beyond children affected by HIV and AIDS to include children vulnerable for a variety of reasons. See the 'vulnerability analysis' section of UNICEF (2011), *Taking Evidence to Impact*, available at: www.iattcaba.org (accessed 20 June 2011).

Similarly, for social protection initiatives, initial efforts by child protection actors should ensure that the emphasis on cash transfers does not crowd out the capacity of social services to provide the so-called 'plus' of the 'cash plus' initiatives; these are the social services directed to reduce other types of family challenges not related to fiscal vulnerability. Expanding the focus of social protection initiatives would necessarily require the design of a system able to address a range of vulnerabilities and to respond to different needs of the population, including but not limited to poverty.

Some justice reform processes should as well offer the entry point to expand a child protection system's ability to address the prevention of child offences and to deal with family challenges (see the mentioned promising experience in Niger).

In seeking to bring together the myriad actors working to support children and to avoid duplication of efforts, these initiatives are beginning to address issues related both to congruence – and the need to link government and customary processes for supporting vulnerable children – and efficiency.

These three entry points are naturally aimed at working through reinforced coordination and government leadership. Moving forward, governments should take the leading role – rather than a tokenistic one – in decision-making. Each of the five countries has a central ministry with a clear mandate for child and family welfare, and it is these ministries whose capacity to lead the policy reform efforts must be strengthened. There is growing global consensus for such an approach; one of the leading global donors on work to support OVCs, for example, recently stated its commitment to strengthening leadership within ministries of social welfare to coordinate child protection endeavours and systems strengthening reform.[40]

These three potential entry points also do not come without risks. Efforts that are focused too rigidly on one set of beneficiaries risk crowding out scarce resources to the detriment of other vulnerable children and families. The distribution of cash transfers require heavy administrative skills and carry the risk of eroding social welfare ministries' capacity to deliver the 'plus' components of the 'cash plus' efforts – that is, the social welfare services. These risks can be mitigated if care is taken from early programming stages to ensure that they contribute to systems building and strengthening.

The other two mentioned entry points – strengthening the social welfare workforce capacity and creating integrated service delivery mechanisms at the local level – could either be included as components of the previously mentioned initiatives or taken as discrete approaches. The rationale behind a stand-alone approach would be that interventions targeting discrete components of the system or decentralized initiatives might demonstrate greater results for children and families and thus inspire higher-level leadership to engage with systems reform and transformation.

However, to properly consider these two examples as entry points for systems strengthening, it is necessary to mark a change with the way similar initiatives have been dealt with thus far. On one hand, such initiatives can become truly strategic entry points insofar as they bear the overall system in mind, understanding the direct and indirect impact

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[40] This development is especially heartening when considered in conjunction with the global OVC community's recognition that its categorization of children within an HIV and AIDS framework must be expanded to include all vulnerable children using more nuanced analyses of vulnerability.

of the innovations that they introduce on other system components – from the legal and regulatory framework to system resources and to the delivery of other services. Interventions affecting discrete components of the system should be planned with a clear, long-term understanding of their positioning, function within and interconnection with the other parts of the system.

In other words, early planning will need to consider the knock-on effects that these endeavours will have on the system's current equilibrium. Those considerations can only be articulated in the conceptualizing phase and not as an afterthought. In essence, these programmes must ensure that the entire system is enhanced and better able to address a wider sphere of issues of child and family welfare and justice beyond the specific beneficiaries of those programmes.

Finally, such entry points are only likely to bring the system to a limited level of change; they may increase capacity, resources and efficiency, but they will reach a plateau in terms of enhancing the populations' access to child protection services. Interventions that target such technical components of the system are likely to reach this plateau in terms of effectiveness and sustainability, which will not be overcome until more fundamental issues of these services' relevance to local populations and congruence with local beliefs are addressed.

Towards a relevant and appropriate child protection system

Working on discrete components of the system and seeking to reform from the margins by providing specific technical solutions might quickly show limitations; these limitations would suggest the need for more fundamental reform and transformation of a national child protection system. Such an initiative would reframe the scope and the contours of a given child protection system by conceptualizing it in a manner that is relevant and sensible in the national context, that is realistic in relation to the available resources and that offers some hope of sustainability.

The core structural change will be the reframing towards a culturally appropriate system that delivers child and family welfare services and, in particular, strengthening the core social welfare agency and its links with family and community practices.

Such a strategic policy development process might take different shapes and follow different strategies, depending on the national context. In light of the complexities of the systems discourse and the extent to which systems should be rooted in social, economic and cultural contexts, exclusively top-down or bottom-up approaches are likely to be too limiting. Inclusive and participatory approaches might be considered. Inclusiveness, participation and convergence seem to be essential.

The vision for that system needs to be developed through a collaborative process, for which functional coordinating mechanisms will be needed. Although no clear examples of this emerged during the research in the West Africa region, one example from sub-Saharan Africa emanates from Uganda. In 1992 and 1993, international and national NGOs worked with the Law Reform Commission to undertake national consultations for child protection and juvenile justice law reform.[41] While this process sought out societal views on child protection and juvenile justice, a clear coordination mechanism led the efforts to ensure

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[41] The resulting document was the Children's Act.

compliance with the CRC and the ACRWC. This process upheld a delicate balance that promoted commonly held beliefs across the country while ensuring that harmful community practices were addressed.[42]

Future policy development processes must be inclusive in nature, serving to strengthen and reinforce government ownership and ensure the sustainability of efforts. International agencies should no longer be primary decision-makers although they should support decision-making processes with expertise, competence, alternative points of view and an ethos of respect.

The differing socio-political situations of the five countries suggest that context will matter in the creation of government-led policy processes. Some governments, such as in Ghana, have the potential to lead and foster interactive and inclusive policy development processes. In these instances, international agencies should support them and avoid undermining their authority by imposing their agenda or proposing foreign models, priorities and target groups. Some governments, such as those that are re-establishing themselves after decades of devastating conflict, may need support to reassume a clear leadership role, but the very recognition of their leadership status will be essential for systems strengthening efforts to take root.

In places where governments are currently experiencing leadership disputes, such as Senegal, clarification and consensus will be required. Donors and international agencies should establish donor coordination groups, avoid fuelling any competition while encouraging government clarity with a unified voice. In fragile states, donors, international agencies and local agencies have the responsibility to initiate a broad consultative process while continuously gauging the possibility for the government to gradually assume the leadership role. At the very least, these agencies must promote convergence among themselves; the fragility of these States cannot serve as an 'excuse' not to begin a visioning and consensus-building process among the available agencies and actors.

Concluding remarks

While substantial progress has been made in understanding and analysing child protection systems worldwide and more specifically West Africa, the additional dimension of considering community endogenous practices has exposed a reality that requires serious attention.

Discussions about the way forward for child protection systems appear to have reached a watershed moment in West Africa. The comparative analysis of the five countries where the research has taken place has brought to attention two main areas of work to be undertaken towards strengthening child protection systems in the region and beyond.

First, there is plenty of room for improving the efficiency challenges of the current systems and addressing some of the technical limitations that they present throughout the region. Similarly, there are a number of strategic entry points that can be leveraged to promote a wider systems reform and transformation, as discussed. Improving the bureaucracy and the structuring of the formal components of these systems could contribute to the increased credibility of the sector and improve system-specific efficiencies.

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[42] Personal communication with UNICEF Child Protection Adviser, 24 May 2011.

Second, on a more fundamental level, there exists an area of work that remains to be done that is less obvious and concrete but more theoretical and strategic: reframing the child protection system in order to bridge the gap with endogenous community practices and commonly held beliefs. This work will involve: reconsidering and verifying the very foundations of the system, such as the principles, beliefs and values that underpin the child protection system and redefining the aspects that the system aims to promote and transform. Such initiatives must seek to reframe the foundations of the system in a more coherent way and that strikes a balance between the international agenda, the State's aspirations, available resources and community practices.

That particular balance can inform the system so that it is built on locally relevant social and cultural concepts that resonate within the nation.

The two areas of work are connected and interdependent: any work on the technical aspects of the systems will have to grapple sooner or later with the more fundamental questions and choices, while the fundamental choices shall necessarily be translated in technical options.

There is tremendous momentum building for an approach that will focus on improving the relevance, congruence, efficiency and impact of systems for children and families in the region.

Current and upcoming efforts should be guided by an understanding of the various actors who are participating in these processes and the ways in which the power dynamics among them interact. Ideally, this movement towards a systemic approach to child protection will also represent an opportunity for more inclusive policy development processes that enhance the voices of children, families and communities in identifying the most relevant, effective and efficient ways to ensure child protection.

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Annex I: Matrix of features within each child protection system in the five countries

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
CONTEXT					
Population (2009)	21,075,000	23,837,000	15,290,000	12,534,000	5,696,000
Poverty % (1994-2008*)	23%	30%	66%	34%	53%
Status	Lower-middle income In crisis	Middle income	Low income	Lower-middle income	Low income
Human Development Index	149	130	167	144	158
Poverty reduction strategy	DSRP 2010-2014 (general reference to welfare)	Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda 2010-2013 (child protection as priority)	SDARP 2008-2012 (access to social services high priority; some reference to child protection, larger to social protection)	DSRP II 2006-2010 (no specific reference to child protection)	PRSP 2008-2012 (some reference to child protection)
Judicial system	Civil law	Pluralistic: common law and customary law	Pluralistic: civil law and customary law	Civil law	Pluralistic: civil law and customary law

Child and family welfare

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
SYSTEMS ORIGINS AND FOUNDATIONS					
Origin and inherited models	French model	British model	French model	French model	British model
	No substantial adaptations	No substantial adaptations	Embryonic stage	Some adaptations	Some substantial adaptations
	Paradigm and assumptions: French	Paradigm and assumptions: British	Paradigm and assumptions: French	Paradigm and assumptions: French	Paradigm and assumptions: British
Customary law, practice	Marginally recognized	Formally recognized but not codified	Partially recognized	Marginally recognized	Recognized
	Chiefs have an administrative role (some customary practices highly formalized)	Chiefs and Queen Mothers constitutionally recognized and play a significant role in communities, partially integrated in the system	Chiefs and religious structures play a significant role; recognized (marriage, divorce, guardianship, and inheritance)	Chiefs play a significant role	Chiefs with a formal role; recognized traditional *bare* gatherings
CURRENT PARAMETERS OF THE SYSTEMS					
Purpose, boundaries	Wide general welfare provisions, court driven	Statutory in response to maltreatment	Minimal welfare provision for children at risk; highly responsive to specific child protection issues	Co-existing welfare provision for children at risk and specific issues responses, court-driven	Statutory court-based response
Drivers	Mainly external actors	Government and external actors	Mainly external actors	Mainly external actors	Mainly external actors

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
CHARACTERISTICS OF FORMAL SYSTEMS COMPONENTS					
Child and family welfare regulatory framework	No overarching framework	One child protection law (Children's Act 1998	No overarching framework	No overarching framework	One child protection law (Child Rights Act 2007)
Law	No child protection specific law/policy	No clear national policy framework	No child protection specific law	No child protection specific law	National Policy on Child Well-Being , 2006 (family grounded, rights based)
Policy			National Child Protection Policy 2009	Several sector policies, no coherent framework	
Rules, procedures		Standards of care (institutions and foster care)	National guidelines for child care and protection (2010)	No rules, regulations and standards of services	Limited procedures and regulations
Strategic approach	Vertical issue-specific programmes[1]	Vertical issue-specific programmes (NPA[2])	Vertical issue-specific programmes/strategies[3]	Vertical issue-specific programmes[4]	Vertical issue-specific programmes
Threshold for intervention	No threshold for the state obligation to intervene with protection services articulated	Threshold for the state obligation to intervene with protection services where a child is "in need of protection" is defined in out-dated terms under the Children's Act	No threshold for the state obligation to intervene with protection services articulated	No threshold for the state obligation to intervene with protection services articulated	Threshold for the state obligation to intervene with protection services where a child is defined in out-dated terms under the Child Rights Act

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
Principles	Family as essential unit of society, paternalistic responsibility of the State	Primary responsibility of the parents	Family as essential unit of society, paternalistic responsibility of the State	Family as essential unit of society, paternalistic responsibility of the State	Parents and children have rights and responsibilities
	Child protection problems under wider social problems	Best interest of the child			Best interest of the child
Mandated agencies	Ministère de la Famille, de la Femme et des Affaires Sociales	Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare (MESW)	Ministère de la Population, de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de l'Enfant (MPPFPE)	Ministère de la Famille, des Groupements Féminins et de la Protection de l'Enfance (MFGFPE)	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA)
			Ministère de la Justice et de Droits de l'Homme: Programme de Protection Judiciaire Juvénile (ended)	Ministere de la Justice: Direction de l'Education Surveillée et de la Protection Sociale (DESPS)	
Secondary mandated agencies	Direction de la Mutualité et des œuvres Sociales en Milieu Scolaire (Ministry of Education)	Ministry of Women and Children (MWAC)		Ministère de l'Action Sociale et de la Solidarité Nationale (MASSN)	Ministry of Health and Sanitation
	Sous-direction pour la lutte contre le travail des enfants (Ministry of Civil Service and Employment)	Ministry of Health (parenting programmes, identification of child abuse)		Cellule d'Appui à la Protection de l'Enfance (CAPE)	

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
	Sous-direction de la lutte contre le trafic d'enfant et la délinquance juvénile (police- Ministry of Interior)	District Social Welfare and Community Development Departments	Cellule de lutte contre le travail des enfants (Ministère de la Fonction Publique et du Travail)	Partenariat pour le retrait et la réinsertion des enfants des rues (PARRER)	
		District Assemblies (in process of decentralization)			
		Family Tribunal (protection orders)	Tribunal des Mineurs	Tribunal pour Enfants	
		Police (Domestic Violence and Victim Support Units)	Brigade de Mineurs	Brigade Spéciale pour la Protection des Mineurs	Police / Family Support Unit of the SL Police
SERVICES					
Orientation	Mainly responsive, emphasis: law enforcement	Primary focus: reactive intervention (mostly driven by law enforcement)	Mainly responsive according to specific issues	Mainly preventative, emphasis: advocacy, training and sensitization	Primary focus: law enforcement
	Mainly punctual according to specific issues		Embryonic prevention services: mainly sensitizing	Mainly punctual responsive services according to specific issues	
	Prevention: largely limited to CRC promotion	Prevention: largely limited to CRC promotion and sensitizing on specific child protection issues	Progressive approach to address wide range of vulnerabilities (Services Educatifs, Préventifs et Judiciaires, or SEJUP centres)	Progressive approach in the Ministry of Justice to address vulnerable children as a whole	Prevention: largely limited to CRC and Child Rights Act promotion
			Assistance in kind		

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
Types	47 Centre Social	750 social welfare offices	27 SEJUP centres (officers)	28 Action Educative en Milieu Ouvert (AEMO)	40 Family Support Units, (joint police-social worker)
	25 Complexe Socio-Educatif	Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) in regional capitals and 75 districts	1 government centre for children in difficult circumstances	4 Centres de Sauvegardes	Family case work (SWD), mainly in Freetown
	20 Centre Education Specialize	Anti-trafficking Unit in Accra and 4 regions		4 Centres Polyvalents	Peripheral Health Units (free health care for sexual abuse victims)
		Numerous child protection team/committees at community level (mainly on specific issues)		14 Community Development regional offices	260 Child Welfare Committees (dual prevention/response mandate at community-level)
				33 Social Action regional offices – coverage of départements: 61%	
				46 Centres de Promotion et Reinsertion Sociale (MASSN)	
Residential services/out of home care	8 Pouponnieres	3 government children's homes	24 NGO centres for children	1 rehabilitation centre	48 residential home; out of home care: place of safety, fit person, foster care,* adoption*)
	4 orphanages (state-run)	110 private orphanages		4 private children's homes	
		1 shelter for abuse victims			
		1 shelter for trafficking victims			
		70 foster families			

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
Non-government	36 NGOs (only 6 offer direct services)		104 child-focused NGOs (not all working on child protection), independent and unregulated by government	43 NGOs at least	
Coverage, access	Coverage mainly limited to urban areas Coverage: 46% of total départements Centre de Protection de la Petite Enfance (CPPE): access below 6%	Coverage mainly limited to urban areas Uneven distribution	Coverage mainly limited to urban areas	Coverage mainly limited to urban areas AEMO coverage of départements: 50% Community Development Services coverage of départements: 86% Social Action Services coverage of départements: 61% Centres de Promotion et Reinsertion Sociale (MASSN) coverage of départements: 52%	Coverage mainly limited to urban areas Family Support Units, average 2 per district
	NGOs mostly in the West and capital region	NGOS mostly in the capital region and northern province	NGOs mostly concentrated in 3 regions	NGOs mostly in capital and surrounding region, little rural coverage	Presence of NGO services mainly in capital and district towns

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
COORDINATION AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS					
Central level	No overarching coordination mechanism	1 national child protection committee	No overarching coordination mechanism	No overarching coordination mechanism	1 national child protection committee
	7 coordination mechanisms, issue based (weak)	11 coordination mechanisms, issue based (satisfactory)	6 general coordination mechanisms (weak to very weak)	7 coordination mechanisms, issue based (satisfactory to weak)	5 coordination mechanisms, issue based (weak)
			3 coordination mechanisms, issue based (weak to very weak)		Weak inter-sector collaboration
Decentralized level	Different platforms according to issues, strong information sharing (plateformes, réseaux, centres d'écoute)	Some regional/district child protection committees	Child protection regional networks (RRPE, MPPFPE), (satisfactory to weak)	Different platforms according to issues (weak participation)	District child protection committees (satisfactory)
Referral mechanisms	Referral mechanism largely informal	Referral mechanism largely informal	Local Committees (Children's Judge)/Comités rélais, for case management (satisfactory)	Referral mechanism largely informal	Referral protocol for sexual abuses in place
Information management systems	No national information management system	No national information management system	No national information management system	No national information management system	None
	1 database limited to one issue		Some database functioning per issues	Some database functioning per issues among few agencies	
	Government agencies' reporting not standardized	Government agencies reporting not standardized	Some government data mechanisms not systematically aggregated	Government agencies reporting not standardized	

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
RESOURCES AND CAPACITIES					
Human resources	Limited human resources	Limited human resources	Extremely limited human resources	Very limited human resources	Extremely limited human resources
Government child/social welfare workforce	629	750	91	352	80 (estimated)
Ratio population per 1 government workforce	1:33,505	1:31,782	1:168,021	1:35,607	1:71,200
Non-government child protection workforce	404	281	309	592	201
Declared use of volunteers	157	1,517	1,146	1,135	26
Government workforce	629 specialized social workers	750 social welfare officers	77 staff dealing with child protection MPPFPE (27 are SEJUP); 77% are cadres; 65% based in capital city	119, 25% of total staff of MFGFPE decentralized level	
			14 specialized professional (3 in capital, 11 for the rest of the country)	223 specialized social workers at service level (90% of total) DESPS	
	Unbalanced distribution (capital city mostly)	Uneven distribution (some districts only 1 welfare officer)	Unbalanced distribution of extremely limited human resources	Heavily unbalanced distribution of human resources (mostly capital and surrounding areas)	Unbalanced distribution (mostly capital city and district head quarter towns)

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
Capacities	6.8 specialized personnel per service on average Institut National de Formation Sociale, higher social work education, in decline	Ghana University, higher education for social work	Higher education in social work at public health school (ENSP), generalist	Higher education on social work (ENTSS)	No school of social work; National Training Centre (SWD): weak
Financial resources *% of national budget to social welfare for families and children*	-	-	1% (women and child protection)	0,8% (allocated to MFGFPA)	0.29% (allocated to MSWGCA)
Other available indicators	0.2% of the social sector spending for child protection	-	-	0.2% of GDP allocated to social protection in 2009	-
Overall child protection budget estimate (2008) US$	8,200,000	2,843,000 (only non-government)	2,921,000	19,000,000	3,233,000 (only non-government)
% of government contribution to overall budget, estimate (2008)	63%	-	-	-	-
Budget release /expenditure (government)	53%	25%	-	-	25%
Additional information		1.9% of MESW budget is spent on services	Increasing government budget in welfare		

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES					
Perceptions	Factors contributing to well-being: good family, education, economic means	Factors contributing to well-being: good family, education, police	Factors contributing to well-being: access to education, good family, heath/satisfaction of basic needs	Factors contributing to well-being: satisfaction of basic needs, economic means, good family	Factors contributing to well-being: good family, basic needs, education/health
	Child protection issues: maltreatment, sexual violence, poverty	Child protection issues: family breakdown and bad parenting, sexual abuse/ exploitation, labour	Child protection issues: exploitation, health/ parental support/ family breakdown/ food insecurity	Child protection issues: lack of schooling, poverty, maltreatment	Child protection issues: poor parenting /family problems, lack of basic needs, lack of access to education
Practices	Endogenous community practices largely preferred	Endogenous community practices largely preferred	Endogenous community practices largely preferred	Endogenous community practices largely preferred	Endogenous community practices largely preferred
	Reluctance to involve formal system	Reluctance to involve formal system	Formal system not perceived negatively but not accessed	Reluctance to involve formal system	
Principles	Community harmony and cohesion	Community harmony and cohesion	Community harmony and cohesion	Community harmony and cohesion	Community harmony and cohesion
	Chiefs as gatekeeper of formal system	Chiefs as gatekeeper of formal system		Chiefs as gatekeeper of formal system	Children a shared responsibility

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
SYSTEM CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES					
Legal and regulatory framework	Legal framework not aligned with local customs and practices	Legal framework not aligned with local customs and practices	Legal framework not aligned with local customs and practices	Legal framework not aligned with local customs and practices	Legal framework largely based on British provisions, not aligned with local customs and practices
	Lack of coherent legal, policy and strategic frameworks		Lack of coherent legal, policy and strategic framework	Lack of coherent legal, policy and strategic framework	
		Disconnect between law and practice			Disconnect between law and practice
					Incomplete procedural, regulatory framework
Strategic approach	Vertical programming	Vertical programming	Vertical programming	Vertical programming	Vertical programming
Mandates and responsibilities	Fragmentation of responsibilities according to issues	Fragmentation of responsibilities according to issues	Fragmentation of responsibilities	Fragmentation of responsibilities according to issues	
	Overlapping and stratifications of mandates	Overlapping and stratifications of mandates	Ineffective coordination	Overlapping and stratifications of mandates	
	Competing strategies of implementation and services reform			Competing strategies of implementation and services approaches	
Services		No clear structure for service delivery at local level		Services not clearly identified	Services not clearly identified
	Services not aligned to the actual needs	Services not aligned to the actual needs	Services not aligned to the actual needs	Services not aligned to the actual needs	

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
(Services)	No family strengthening services	No family strengthening services (beyond poverty alleviation)	No family strengthening services	No family strengthening services (beyond some economic support)	No family strengthening services
Operational links with communities	No operational links with community endogenous practices	No operational links with community endogenous practices	No operational links with community endogenous practices	No operational links with community endogenous practices	No operational links with community endogenous practices
Access	Very limited access to protection services	Uneven presence of services, challenges in access	Extremely limited access to protection services	Very limited access to protection services	Very limited access to protection services
Coverage	Partial coverage, mainly urban	Partial coverage, mainly urban	Partial coverage, mainly urban	Partial coverage, mainly urban	Partial coverage, mainly urban
Distribution on national territory	Skewed distribution of resources (human, financial)			Heavily unbalanced distribution of resources (human, financial)	Inefficient distribution of resources (human, financial)
Other challenges		Risk of cash transfer programmes absorbing most of the capacity of MESW	Extremely limited resources (human, financial)		Extremely limited resources (human, financial)
			Heavy reliance on volunteers (government and NGOs)	Heavy reliance on volunteers (government and NGOs)	
			Very limited use of social work professionals	Lack of leadership, competition among actors	
			SEJUP not institutionalized		
			Absence of specialized education opportunities		

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
Opportunities	Recognition of the need for a coherent system	Recognition of the need for a coherent system	Recognition of the need for a coherent system	Recognition of importance of coordination	Recognition of the need for a coherent system
			Recognition of he importance of coordination	Interest and commitment of actors	Interest and commitment of actors
Services	Large spectrum of services available (even if not over the entire country)	Commitment to welfare services (development agenda)	Progressive approach of services of SEJUP	Progressive approach of services of Ministry of Justice	
Resources	Some resources available (human, financial)	Infrastructure for social welfare services fairly well established		Some resources available (human, financial)	
	Good contribution of government budget	Some good child protection teams/committees (community level)			
Workforce	Recognition of the role of social work	Recognition of the role of social work			
	Good social work capacity and experience	Good social work capacity and experience		Good social work capacity and experience	
Communities	Functioning endogenous community practices	Some positive involvement of chiefs and Queen Mothers	Some positive involvement of chiefs	Functioning endogenous community practices	Functioning endogenous community practices; interest of the chiefs to be part of the solution
Other opportunities		Decentralization in progress			

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Child justice

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
Legal, policy framework	[not mapped]	Juvenile Justice Act, 2003	No dedicated separate legislation (Penal Code) Ordonnance 99-11	No dedicated separate legislation (Penal Code)	[not mapped]
		Best interests of the child are paramount			
		Separate and distinct approach for handling children in conflict with the law based on a welfare approach	Separate and distinct approach for handling children in conflict with the law	Separate and distinct approach for handling children in conflict with the law	
		No explicit statement of the principles of proportionality or deprivation of liberty as a last resort	Special provisions for children at risk (in danger) and children in conflict with the law	Special provisions for children at risk (en danger) and children in conflict with the law	
		Customary arbitration formally recognized			Emphasis on strengthening semi-formal and informal justice systems at the community level
Structures and services		Juvenile court (authority to divert)	Procureur de la Republique (authority to divert)	Procureur de la Republique (authority to divert)	Family courts; magistrate courts (witness, victims and children in conflict with the law)

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
(structures and services)			11 Full time Child Judges; 33 Child Judges (part time in 30 Tribunaux d'Instance)	11 Child Tribunal (not present in 3 regions)	
		The police (may use informal or formal cautions as an alternative to arrest)	41 brigades des mineurs officers	Gendarmerie (not mandated but uses informal mediation); police (not mandated but sometimes uses informal mediation)	
		70 district Child Panels (mediate and resolve minor offences through a community guidance order, apology, and restitution). But most not functioning		28 Action Educative en Milieu Ouvert (AEMO) - coverage of départements: 50%	
		10 remand homes (3 currently functioning)	6 detention centres with juvenile wing (male)	4 Centres de Sauvegarde	
		3 junior correction centres (boys)	1 reintegration centre	2 Centres d'Adaptiation Sociale	
		1 junior correction centres (girls)		4 Centres Polyvalents	
		1 senior correction centre for boys		1 junior correction centre (boys)	
		10 Probation Committees have recently been re-established (all regional capitals)			

Features	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Niger	Sénégal	Sierra Leone
		3 NGOs (legal aid)	4 NGOs (legal aid)	4 NGOs (legal aid)	
		127 welfare officers have been designated as probation officers	6 social workers (Niamey Tribunal)		
Capacities		Judicial Training Institute	Only 2 weeks training on juvenile justice	Centre de Formation Judiciaire (although limited training on juvenile justice)	
Information management system			Data mechanisms not systematically aggregated	Fragmented information management system	
Community practices and perceptions		Endogenous community practices largely preferred	Endogenous community practices largely preferred	Endogenous community practices largely preferred	
		Harsh community attitudes and behaviour	Harsh community attitudes and behaviour	Harsh community attitudes and behaviour	
Perceptions		Common crimes: theft, fighting, drugs	Common crimes: drugs, theft, fighting	Common crimes: theft, drugs, fighting	
		Most serious crimes: theft	Most serious crimes: infanticide/abandonment of children, drugs, theft	Most serious crimes: drugs, homicide, infanticide	

[1] Orphans and other vulnerable children, gender-based violence, trafficking and exploitation
[2] Orphans and other vulnerable children, child labour, trafficking and early childhood care and development
[3] Trafficking, child labour and orphans and other vulnerable children
[4] Child labour-trafficking, street children, talibé, female genital mutilation