Livelihoods, Economic Strengthening and Child Protection in Western Uganda: Preliminary Findings from Evaluation Research
Summary

This report describes initial findings from an evaluation study aimed at identifying the relationships between household livelihoods and child protection outcomes (child labor, exposure to violence, being barred from schooling, etc.) and child well-being (nutrition, clothing, shelter, schooling, health, etc.) in western Uganda.

Livelihood strategies were measured by recent changes in productive household activity and investment strategy. Livelihood status was measured in terms of income and assets.

Preliminary analysis suggests that both household income and adoption of certain livelihood strategies predict outcomes in child protection and child wellbeing. Households in the project areas receiving economic strengthening and child protection services from community-based organizations were more likely to see improved outcomes in child protection and well-being.

Terminology

Livelihoods refers to the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living.*

Economic Strengthening refers to the actions taken by governments, donors and implementers to improve livelihoods.

Child Protection refers to activities or services to prevent and respond to harm and abuse of children—and to promote and safeguard child rights.

Child Well-being refers to a child’s overall standard of living, including physical, psychological, emotional, social, cognitive, and economic measures.

Psychosocial Support refers to community-based mechanisms to support a person’s emotional, psychological, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing.
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Background

In February 2008 in Kampala, Uganda, USAID’s Displaced Children and Orphans Fund sponsored a workshop convened by the Child Protection in Crisis (CPC) Network on the topic of livelihoods, economic strengthening and child protection. Practitioners agreed that economic strengthening interventions have the potential to “effectively address the physical survival and the developmental well-being of children and youth”, but that these notions had not been supported by evidence from the field.

In response to the need for better empirical evidence, the CPC Program Learning Group in Uganda agreed to pursue two questions:

- How can livelihoods programming be leveraged to improve the security and well-being of children and youth?
- Do these programs, however unintentionally, actually reduce the security and well-being of children?

With guidance from the Uganda CPC Learning Group, an evaluation research study was developed by the Program on Forced Migration and Health at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health in partnership with Women’s Refugee Commission, to focus on the relationships between household livelihood status and strategy, child protection risks and psychosocial well-being. The study looked at outcomes for children in communities served by the Western Uganda Bantwana Program (WUBP), the initiative of US-based NGO, World Education, Inc./Bantwana Initiative. WUBP builds the management and technical skills of community-based organizations to provide comprehensive services to orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC) and their families. The program invests in targeted technical, management, and customized follow-up support in three areas of community-identified needs: child protection, livelihoods, and psychosocial support.1

WUBP is focused on promoting child rights using a child-centered approach; providing livelihood opportunities to OVC households; psychosocial support and counseling at the household level; and rigorous monitoring and evaluation to influence OVC policy and practice. WEI/Bantwana works on the assumption that improving the financial security of households—delivered as part of a comprehensive, integrated package including child protection and psychosocial support interventions—can help to improve children’s overall

1 Bantwana Program Overview, http://bantwana.org/Work/uganda.htm
well-being. Evidence from the field demonstrates a relationship between poverty and children’s vulnerability to neglect and abuse and, conversely, the protective effects of economic security at the household level on the wellbeing of vulnerable children. To strengthen livelihoods at both the household and community level, WUBP provides targeted training and support supervision for income generating efforts to bring livelihoods beneficiaries higher up the value chain—specifically working with beneficiaries to form associations for collective marketing and value addition in volume and quality. WUBP’s household livelihood interventions are based on a vulnerability assessment of individual households, which contributes to a joint selection (between Bantwana and household members) of an income generating activity for caregiver(s) to pursue. WUBP also links households with the program’s other community-based economic strengthening initiatives, often including savings and loan groups, support from community-based organizations, and collective marketing schemes, among others.

WUBP works at the community level to mitigate the more structural and cultural factors associated with a lack of child protection resources and instances of abuse. WUBP increases advocacy for and awareness of child rights through establishment and support of: child-led child protection clubs, radio programs, development of resource materials and tools written for and by children, household-level sensitization and counseling about child protection by community volunteers, and close collaboration with school, community and district stakeholders. WUBP also works with community-based volunteers to provide psychosocial support to children and caregivers to build resiliency and the ability to cope and work through grief, trauma, sorrow and other stresses. WUBP volunteers also necessarily address physical, environmental, health, social, economic, legal and educational needs that, when not met, can negatively impact a person’s psychosocial wellbeing and productivity in society. Psychosocial support through WUBP ranges from HIV prevention, targeted livelihoods support, and advice on early childhood development and good nutrition.

Study Design and Methods

The contribution of sustainable livelihoods to child protection and well-being is central to the WUBP approach, but the global evidence-base concerning the linkages between livelihoods programming and child outcomes is lacking. This study was designed to examine these connections, both to inform future WUBP service delivery and the global conversation around livelihoods, child protection and well-being.

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2 WUBP Child Protection Case Study Results, October 2010
3 WUBP supported households have reported using livelihoods income to cover costs of school fees, scholastic materials, home improvement, additional livelihoods inputs, medical bills, and future savings.
The evaluation research was designed to specifically answer the following questions:

- Does a household’s livelihood status (measured in income and assets) predict the likelihood of protection from risks and/or the well-being of children from within that household?

- Do certain household livelihood strategies (measured in terms of recent adjustments to household economic activity) predict child protection and well-being outcomes as well?

- Does receipt of any services (inputs from WUBP or other programs active in the area) at the household level predict any of these child outcomes?

A household survey addressing assets, income, livelihood strategies, caregiver attitudes and perceptions of child protection and well-being (including basic needs and psychosocial well-being) was administered in villages served by WUBP’s CBO partners, Toil and Promote Agriculture (TAPA) and Rwenzori Development and Research Centre (REDROC). Indicators for child well-being were developed in stages, incorporating Uganda-specific research prior to field work; meetings of the CPC Program Learning Group that includes government, NGOs and academics; and a collaborative process with the CBO survey enumerators during the research training and survey piloting. Child protection indicators measured caregiver attitudes toward child protection and caregiver perceptions of risks to children. The survey also gathered information on the level and types of support each household was receiving. In-depth caregiver interviews and child focus groups utilizing participatory ranking methodology were conducted in order to provide greater depth and a contextual lens through which to view the linkages between household livelihood activities and child outcomes.

The sample population consisted of 246 households from two districts in western Uganda, Kyegegwa and Kasese. 130 households from Kasese district and 116 from Kyegegwa were surveyed in total. 142 households had already received at least one year of program support from Bantwana and the remaining 104 households were short-listed for recruitment in the next phase of WUBP. Primary caregivers from each household were identified by local CBO staff as survey respondents.

By collecting information from a primary caregiver at the household level, the design ensured consistency among respondents and relevance concerning programs implemented at the household level. The research team decided that one survey covering a range of issues including income, livelihood activities, child well-being indicators and child
protection knowledge would be the most effective design tool in order to capture the wide variety of information desired for analysis.

There were several limitations of this study. Because survey answers were self-reported by caregivers, child protection measurements were limited to caregiver attitudes toward child protection concepts and interventions and caregiver perceptions of risks to children and were not able to measure actual instances of abuse within the home. Along the same lines, there are limitations inherent in the measures of children’s psychosocial and emotional well-being, as these are also caregiver-reported. In addition, the Bantwana program is comprehensive in design, thus it is important to note that households receiving livelihoods and economic strengthening support services are also receiving psychosocial support services and benefitting from child protection interventions. Given the program’s integrated nature, it is difficult to distinguish the effects of one specific service versus another.

**Descriptive Analysis**

**Livelihoods**

The most valuable assets owned by households in both districts were livestock, while the greatest source of household income came from crop sales. The most prevalent crops harvested for both districts were maize, beans and groundnut, in that order. Kyegegwa households reported using 59% of total land owned for growing crops, while Kasese respondents reported using 64% of land for crops.

**Sources of Income**

- **Livestock Sales**: 17%
- **Income from Crops**: 67%
- **Other Cash Income (monthly)**: 11%
- **Other Cash Income**: 5%
- **Asset Disposal**: 5%

**Crops By Household**

- Maize: 72%
- Groundnut: 42.3%
- Beans: 50.8%
- Cassava: 6.1%
- Millet: 4.5%
- Sweet Potatoes: 6.9%
- Irish Potatoes: 4.9%
Child Well-being: Basic Needs

Basic needs of girls and boys were represented with indicators of nutrition, clothing, and bedding. Respondents have difficulty meeting their children’s basic needs; only 52% of households reported that children had eaten fish, meat, chicken or eggs in the previous week, and only 51% reported that all children had a mattress to sleep on inside the home. 87% reported that all household children had at least 2 sets of clothes. These measures of physical well-being and basic needs, and their impact on psychosocial well-being and child protection outcomes will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Child Well-being: Social and Emotional Well-being

These dimensions of well-being were measured using indicators of hours of play per week, frequency of showing signs of anger/sadness, and caregiver attitudes and perceptions of child protection risks. Caregivers reported that 28% of boys over age 6 had at least one hour per day of play, 33% had a few hours per week, and approximately 28% of boys had no hours of play in the past week. 28% of caregivers reported girls having at least one hour per day, 33% reported a few hours per week while 39% reported that girls had no hours of play per week.

### Social well-being, measured in hours of play per week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Households</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few hrs/wk</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>Few hrs/wk</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 1/day</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>At least 1/day</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (Households)</strong></td>
<td><strong>184</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total (Households)</strong></td>
<td><strong>201</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of emotional well-being, caregivers were asked if children in their household above the age of 6 cried or showed signs of anger often. Approximately 30% reported that there were children who exhibited these behaviors often while 70% said there were not.

**Caregiver Attitudes & Perceptions of Child Protection Risks**
Caregivers were asked whether children from their household were safer from risks of abuse now as compared to the previous year. Their responses are captured below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety from risks of abuse</th>
<th>Frequency (households)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More Safe</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same as Before</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Safe</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>244</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common reasons (in order of prevalence) given for ‘more safe’ were:
1) Children sensitized/gained knowledge
2) Legal structures in place/punishment enforced
3) Caregiver more responsible/strict

**Findings**

**Livelihood Strategies and Child Outcomes**
The preliminary analysis of caregiver responses suggests several important associations between outcomes for children and various livelihood strategies.

**Livelihood Strategies and Well-being**
- A positive association exists between the number of working hours of adults in a household and the adequate provision of children’s basic needs. In households reporting an increase in adult working hours over the past year, children were more likely to have eaten protein in the past week, to own at least two sets of clothing, and to sleep on mattresses. An increase in working hours was also associated with children showing fewer signs of emotional distress.
- Improved bedding and protein intake were positively associated with increased hiring of labor by households during the year. An increase in hired labor most likely results from more land being cultivated, which suggests an increase in household income.
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- Owning, purchasing and selling livestock is associated with increased protein and improved bedding (mattresses) for children. While animals like chickens and pigs generate income on a regular basis, goats and cattle are thought of as longer-term investments. Preliminary qualitative findings suggest that households often value livestock as a status symbol or a contingency asset for use in leaner times. Further analysis will explore the value attached to owning, purchasing and selling livestock and whether livestock is used primarily to glean supplemental income over the course of a year. Further understanding of how livestock affects sustainable livelihood activities and vulnerable children will be crucial in designing effective livelihood and child protection programs going forward.

Livelihood Strategies and Child Protection

- An increase in working hours is associated with children being safer from risks of abuse in the community. Some stakeholders were concerned that an increased caregiver workload resulting from livelihoods interventions might have detrimental effects on child protection and emotional well-being (i.e. caregivers having less time to care for children). This was not seen in the survey results, perhaps as the effects of decreased time for child-caring were offset by the positive effects of increased income or assets.

Income and Child Outcomes

Livelihood status was measured based on self-reported assets and income at the household level. Initial findings suggest that in these Ugandan communities, income levels predict the following child outcomes:

Income and Well-being

- Households with lower incomes\(^4\) are likely to have more frequent shortages in food, less protein in children’s diets and more difficulty in the provision of basic needs.

Income and Protection

- Caregiver responses also suggest that children in lower-income households were less safe from risks of abuse such as defilement and beatings, and were more likely to exhibit some form of emotional distress. Caregivers attributed this decrease in safety to child disobedience, school dropout, caregiver challenges such as having too many

\(^4\) All households within 1\(^{st}\) and 2\(^{nd}\) quartiles of total income
children or being a single parent, and poverty related reasons. The variance in qualitative information supports the notion that there is no single protective factor for children at risk in the sampled communities.

- Higher income households appear more likely to respond that knowledge of child rights is important in protecting children in the community. This relationship will be investigated further to determine whether higher income or greater exposure to child rights messaging influenced caregivers on questions regarding child rights awareness.

**Bantwana Services: Livelihood Support and Child Outcomes**

**Livelihood Interventions**

Bantwana’s support includes a range of interventions that improve livelihoods; offer psychosocial support (PSS) to children and caregivers; and promote child protection in the home and the community. These include livestock and seed provision, garden training, collective marketing training, training PSS volunteers, and establishment of child rights clubs and child protection referral pathways, among other interventions. The design of livelihood interventions is based on a vulnerability assessment of the household, and income-generating activities are chosen by the household, with support and advice from Bantwana. In most cases, adult caregivers are the primary beneficiaries of the economic strengthening programs, allowing them to provide for the household as a whole, while encouraging children to maintain a focus on school. While all households receive a package of three services, the package may vary depending on the type of income generating activity chosen, the level of involvement of their community volunteer, and the household’s engagement with community-level services and activities. Initial findings support a positive association between enrollment in the Bantwana program and reporting higher income during the preceding year, which we will attempt to unpack further to understand the particular services and activities that were most effective.

Three livelihood strategies were found to be more prevalent among households who had been receiving Bantwana support for at least one year prior to data collection, versus those that had not yet received Bantwana support:

1) **Turning to alternate sources of income**

   Households already receiving support from Bantwana to improve financial security were more likely to earn income from at least one alternative source in addition to crop sales: livestock, day labor, driving, etc.
2) Increasing livestock activity
   Over the past year households with support from Bantwana earned more money
   from selling livestock than those that had not yet received support.

3) Hiring of labor
   Households with previous support from Bantwana reported hiring more labor over
   the previous year as compared to the future support cohort.

These findings suggest that households working with Bantwana have sought to diversify
their livelihood activities, not solely relying on high crop yields for seasonal income flows.
By adding new income streams, households are able to mitigate the damaging effects of
drought and other yield inhibitors. In addition, these particular sorts of livelihood strategies
are often considered higher-risk activities than crop cultivation alone (and tend to bring in a
higher-return for households).

This respondent received seeds, livestock, and trainings in gardening and collective
marketing from WUBP:
   "I am a farmer and I rear livestock too. When [I make] profit from his yield, I save some and am
able to meet my family’s needs. I have a banana plantation and goats to ensure [I] always have
money to pay children’s fees and meet their other needs. I have a cassava garden so that I always
have enough food. In-depth interview, Kyegegwa."

Child Well-being Outcomes
While we have yet to disaggregate the effects by the specific types of intervention, our
preliminary analysis appears to show that household exposure to the Bantwana program
results in better outcomes for children in such categories as caregiver impression of
emotional state of child and social well-being (measured in hours of play).

- Households with previous support from Bantwana reported children having more
  protein in their diet and sleeping on improved bedding as compared to those from
  households who had not yet received support.
- Caregivers in households with previous support from Bantwana reported more
  hours of play time per week for both girls and boys as compared to new households
  who have not yet been supported.
- Preliminary analysis suggests that Bantwana beneficiaries who received seeds and
  livestock and attended trainings in collective marketing, gardening and farming were
  more likely to provide protein and improved bedding for children in their care.
Caregiver Perceptions of Child Protection
Preliminary findings linking specific livelihood interventions to child protection outcomes (as measured by caregiver perceptions and attitudes) were weak. While the survey data did not produce strong associations, qualitative information gathered from interviews illustrated the pathway from improved livelihood strategies and status to positive child well-being outcomes to increased protection from risks. These linkages are highlighted in the discussion section below and further qualitative analysis will bring out the child protection outcomes associated with different livelihood interventions and strategies.

Discussion

Our findings support the premise that effective livelihood programs that strengthen household economic output and exposure of households to PSS and child protection services may predict an improvement in a child’s well-being. Children from households that earned money from multiple sources, worked harder and generated more income were more likely to benefit in the forms of improved well-being and basic needs being met.

What does the provision of basic needs tell us about child well-being and protection?

Survey data, in-depth interviews and child focus groups all emphasized school costs, provision of basic household items, health care, and food as key concerns for a child’s basic wellbeing. These concerns thus provide a framework to evaluate the linkages between livelihood activity and child outcomes.

Respondents were asked to recall times in the last year when they had extra income, and identified the ways in which they spent that money. The chart below reflects the items cited most often as expenditures during these times. The most frequently cited expenditure in times when families have available income is children’s school fees, indicating that if household income were to increase, the ability of many children to attend school regularly might also increase.
The effects of inadequate resources to fulfill basic needs at the household level can lead to long-term effects on children’s psychosocial well-being and exposure to protection risks. Looking at one caregiver’s testimony, we see a confluence of negative outcomes, where lack of basic needs leads to poor nutrition and health, emotional pain, and even a protection risk in the form of increased work for children:

*My children don’t get enough food. Even getting treatment when sick is very difficult. I have to run up and down to borrow money from people and later work to pay back. My children feel sad and hurt when they see me run up and down to let us survive. The older children are concerned about my health and having to work so hard so that’s why they also join me so that we work, especially during the holidays. But I also feel disappointed sometimes because I have failed to support my children and they have nowhere else to run…*

Other interviewees pointed to school drop-out, family separation, early marriage and child labor as consequences of their lack of adequate income:

*My daughter dropped out of school in primary six and is a house maid in Fort Portal now. She dropped out because she could not meet school requirements and I was sick.*
The following statement highlights the relationship between lack of money for health care and long-term impact on psychosocial well-being:

*We have that child who got malaria at 3 years and affected her brain. Up to now she keeps on getting attacks...we tried to get her some tablets but after some years the drugs got finished. Now she is 20 years but she can’t do anything, even eating...not even bathing herself. Generally the brothers and sisters don’t associate with her...*

The testimonies demonstrate the risks that make children more vulnerable in the western Ugandan context and help illustrate the complex pathway connecting livelihoods and economic status with child well-being and protection outcomes.

**How does income impact access to child protection services?**

Asked about available child protection services in the community, most respondents mentioned the Local Council Chairperson (LC1) and the police, but few spoke of the other structures with child protection responsibilities that exist at the district level, such as the community development or probation officer. In cases of child abuse by community members, a prevalent attitude observed in conversations with CBO staff and stakeholders is that many families lack sufficient financial resources to involve police and other legal structures. Instead, they resort to cash settlements with the perpetrators. While families gain financially as a result of this transaction, the abuser does not face any legal action and the child fails to receive any additional support or treatment.

The qualitative data depict a concerning link between income and access to child protection services. Within this context, if a household does not have the resources necessary to investigate and seek legal retribution, and a community does not have alternative protective measures established, children are not provided with adequate support. Income is not the only factor that affects a household’s ability to access and utilize legal avenues for child protection; cultural concerns and corruption also play a large role. Due to financial constraints of police and government, child protection mechanisms at the district level do not sufficiently address the needs of vulnerable children at the village level. Bantwana is also working at the community and district levels to address these constraints, by engaging district officers, holding joint meetings, setting up improved referrals systems, and mobilizing communities to increase awareness and utilization of child protection services and resources.
Next Steps

- Further analysis is needed to determine whether households showing better outcomes for girls and boys from exposure to Bantwana programming have benefitted due to the child protection and psychosocial support interventions (psychosocial support visits from community volunteers, participation in child rights clubs, etc.), as a result of the economic interventions, or some combination of the two.
- Future analysis of this dataset will attempt to disaggregate by the types of services received, in an attempt to ascertain the effectiveness of particular interventions.
- Household exposure to the Bantwana program appears to result in better outcomes for children, however future analysis will attempt to disaggregate these effects by sex and age of the child.
CPC Network
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