From “categories” of children to a “systems approach”
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- Backdrop of this presentation is the gradual move within humanitarian and development child protection actors away from addressing “categories” of children – to a more multi-disciplinary approach. Some argue this is a more “equitable” child protection system to support a range of children in need of protection.

- For UNICEF this shift has been expressed in our child protection strategy adopted by our executive board in June 2008. This strategy has two main pillars to approaching child protection 1) changing harmful social norms 2) strengthening national capacity for building comprehensive child protection systems.

- By drawing on experience in Northern Uganda, this presentation will try to illustrate how the case management system of a particular category of separated children served as entry point for developing more comprehensive child protection systems.

Brief overview of the impact of armed conflict in Northern Uganda:
- The conflict between the Uganda People’s Defense Force (UPDF) and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), has been ongoing in northern Uganda since 1987.
- In early 2002, the war that everyone thought was over revved up. The Government of Uganda pulled out of DRC and shortly thereafter signed an agreement with Sudan aimed at containing the LRA, which was active along the common border. The Ugandan Government attacked the LRA in Sudan, prompting counter attacks and escalating violence resulting in massive displacement of people in the northern areas of the country.
  - Approximately 1.7 million people, about 935,000 children, were displaced in over 200 camps. This is 90% of the population in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader.
  - Some estimate that 66,000 youth have been abducted for at least one day in the last 20 years, others say 25,000 have been abducted.
  - The camps resulted in a complete breakdown of service delivery, disrupted schools, access to food, water, education,, land/livelihoods was almost non-existent because of imposed military security zones around camps. Gender and ethnic discrimination were rife.
  - In this context, family and community dysfunction, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and child abuse are rampant.
  - The situation has calmed since August 2007, when the LRA and the Government of Uganda (GoU) signed a ceasefire.

Humanitarian child protection response:
- The conflict was a particular concern to UNICEF and other child protection actors due to the LRA’s systematic abduction and mistreatment of children.¹

• The UNICEF country program for 2001-2005 didn’t actually include a child protection program, but rather supported activities for Children in Armed Conflict. The Children in Armed Conflict program included some emergency response activities to specific categories of children such as support to the night commuters (seen in the “Invisible Children” film), as well as support for reception centers carrying out counselling, tracing, reunification and reintegration activities for children who had been abducted by the LRA.

• Hundreds of thousands of other children were effectively underserved.

• UNICEF and the child rights community realized that to a certain extent it was a victim of its own success: as a result of efforts to raise awareness about children abducted into the LRA and other militaries and to support their release and rehabilitation, the NGO, donors, media and the public had become focused solely on child soldiers and night commuters, resulting in funding and programming that was issue specific rather than looking at child protection more systemically.

Problems with this categorisation in the child protection community:

- **Inequity**: Abducted children were eligible for many services which their siblings and other vulnerable children were not. These children were also in a very difficult situation and faced other protection issues such as family violence, sexual exploitation within the camps, or lack of access to food, schools, water, health.

- **Inconsistency**: Organisations had become inconsistent and competitive as regards the children they were serving: when many children were released by the LRA, NGOs moved the children through the centers quite quickly; when few children were released they stayed longer periods in the centres.

- **Duplication**: Some community-based committees existed and were supported by different parent NGOs or organisations. These did not share common standards, sometimes overlapped in the same locations and remain unregulated.

Change:

• **Paradigm shift**: By 2004, a new Child Protection Team identified the singular focus on child soldiers at the expense of a systems approach to child protection as a huge problem. A first and crucial step involved the Child Protection team orchestrating a paradigm shift to convince other national and international actors of the value of a child protection system to protect all vulnerable children rather than just child soldiers.

“Engines” of change:

- Built bridges with the research community—including academics and PhD students doing research in country to bring them into the fold in recognizing the problems with the child soldier focus;

- **Dialogued** with national and international stakeholders to assess existing services for children to identify gaps and avoid duplication. Discussed with national and international NGOs to help them understand the situation, and particularly for national NGOs to help them envision how they could be part of a more comprehensive and systems approach to child protection over the long term;
Involved district authorities to get them on board in recognizing the limitations of a child soldier focus and to support a more coordinated and more holistic and systemic approach;

Persuaded donors to redirect their support away from reception centers for child soldiers and towards a more holistic systems approach to child protection.

Humanitarian reform context: In parallel to these changes, in 2005, humanitarian reform at the global level was rolled out and Uganda became one of the first countries to implement the cluster approach at country level. Child protection sub-clusters operated at the central and the district levels and were co-chaired by UNICEF together with staff from the Ministry of Social Welfare or District Department of Social Services Child Welfare Officers. This structure reviewed the role of the primary national child protection initiative Community Based Child Protection Committees (CB CPCs), which were supposed to provide front line protection—mainly in camp settings.

CB CPCs:
- CB CPCs, which were supported by the government as well as by national and international NGOs, were extremely inconsistent in their approach and their impact.
- Agreement to conduct a multi-agency consultancy to assess the performance of the community-based child protection committees, identify gaps and outline recommendations for improved consistency and performance. NGOs and the Ministry for Social Welfare developed the terms of reference for the consultancy together with UNICEF, which was able to fund the initiative.
- The study found huge capacity gaps in the CB CPCs. Community members lacked basic skills related to child protection. Most CB CPCs had received only minimal training, which was often skewed depending on the focus of the NGO that supported it, and was inappropriate for the often illiterate committee members.

CBCPC reform:
- Develop through a participatory and inclusive approach
- Creation of a Standardized CPC Monthly Reporting Format
- Development of an Inter-Agency document on Minimum Standards and Good Practice Principles for Community-Based Child Protection Structures
- Development of Inter-Agency Training Materials for Child Protection Community-Based Structures (Primary target: Child Protection Committees)
- A testing phase of the CPC monthly reporting form, the document on Minimum Standards and Good Practice Principles, and the Training Materials

Partnership: With Ministry, Departments, and NGOs.

Network approach: The Child Protection sub-cluster functioned as a network of organizations engaged in child protection. Coordination through the sub-cluster enabled an inter-agency approach involving the central and district government to identify capacity gaps in the child protection system.

Twinning of international and local NGOs: Twinning of local NGOs with international NGOs led to development of skills to support a shift towards a new way of operating.
ACHIEVEMENTS

- awareness and acknowledgement among government authorities at the central and
district levels that the singular reintegration of child soldiers focus needed to give
way to a broader systems approach to child protection.
- Joint efforts to assess the capacity gaps, identify the training needs of the CB CPCs
- The process of developing the child protection modules also enhanced the capacity of
those government authorities and local NGOs who were involved in the Child
Protection sub-cluster.

Challenge:
Although much progress has been made, the new Child Protection Network and
structures developed and supported by the sub-cluster members remain fragile and have
not yet resulted in consistent better care and protection for all children identified by the
system.

CP Systems:

UNICEF’s new Child Protection Strategy identifies the strengthening of child protection
systems as a key strategy for preventing and responding to separation from family and
harm. Such systems consist of the 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, to lower the risk of separation, violence and exploitation and to respond
appropriately and effectively when they occur. Such systems are part of social
protection, and also extend beyond it. The inter-connectedness of services, policies and
oversight constitute the core elements of a child protection system.3

2 The Strategy can be accessed by the following link: http://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/08-
5Rev1-child_protection-20_May_08-final_changes(3).pdf
3 UNICEF held a meeting in Bucharest, Romania in June 2008 with child protection, social policy and HIV
colleagues to help define the core elements of a child protection system, including the minimum benchmark
of services that must be in place in every country. Tools for assessing the child protection system and
identifying gaps are being developed as a follow-up to this meeting.