SECTION 3:
LEARNING (LNG) TOOLS

Section 3: Note to Users

Although there are many different ways of learning about communities, this section features ethnographic methods since they enable learning about children's lived experiences, bring forward the views of local people, and build the deeper levels of trust and respect that are needed for community-led work on child protection.

The tools were developed and used in Sierra Leone (with some modifications) but can be adapted to many different contexts. The Sierra Leone emphasis is presented here in order to show a contextually specific adaptation of learning tools.

Although this section focuses specifically on the early phase of learning about (and with) the community, the tools from previous sections are relevant as well. It can be useful to think through how the people who will be collecting information in communities might benefit from first using several tools related to empathy (FAC 4), asking probing questions (FAC 6), and enabling inclusive dialogue (TRN 7), among others.

LNG 1. Learning Phase:
Dos and Don’ts

DO	DON'T
Approach community people with humility.	Judge local people as the “expert” on child protection.
View community people as actors who already do much to protect children (even if they don’t describe it that way).	Regard people as beneficiaries, passive victims, or as having little ability to help themselves.
Following cultural scripts, meet with chiefs or senior leaders, explain your purpose in learning, and ask their approval for your learning activities.	Bypass leaders or fail to learn from them.
Dress appropriately and be with the people, without showing smart phones, etc.	Present oneself as wealthy and somehow “above” local people.
Speak the local language and use simple, local terminology, holding in the background your own terms and ideas.	Speak only in English or use only the language of international child protection, which positions you as the “expert.”
Engage in a slow, respectful process to learn more deeply than usual about communities.	Conduct a 2-day rapid assessment and assume one knows what the child protection issues are or how to address them.
Learn from different subgroups (e.g., girls, boys, women, men), including people who are marginalized.	Learn mainly from leaders or people who are in positions of power.
State your purpose as being one of “learning from the community.”	“Plant your flag” by focusing on your agency’s work and promise of intervention.
Learn through participatory methods that empower and give people a voice.	Ask mostly survey questions or structured interview questions that leave people feeling objectified.
Identify and learn about strengths or assets of the community and different subgroups.	Focus mainly on problems or deficits.

Consider having one or two staff members live with the affected people, doing participant observation and ongoing learning.	Visit only periodically and with a focus on “your” or “our” project that limits learning about the community and its people.
View the term “community” with a critical eye, recognizing there may be little sense of community.	Assume that local people who live as neighbors view themselves as a community.
Make learning about the community an ongoing process.	Take a one-off approach to learning, as communities and their situations are dynamic.
Feed what is learned back to the community, inviting them to reflect on what they could do.	Take an extractive approach of taking information from people without giving the information back.

LNG 2. Sample Workshop Agenda for Training Data Collectors

Ethnographic Phase of Action Research on
Strengthening Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms in Sierra Leone

January 17–28, 2011

Note: This workshop was used in 2011 to prepare data collectors for the learning phase of community-led work in Sierra Leone. This kind of workshop has been conducted in multiple countries in Africa and Asia, with adaptation to the local context. This workshop has a different focus, with more attention to ethnographic methods, and a different set of participants than did the previously presented training workshop for facilitators (TRN 11). However, there is some crossover in content, as both facilitators and learning phase data collectors need to learn how to enable inclusive dialogue in groups, manage conflicts that arise, and so on. There may also be crossover in regard to the participants if the facilitators had also served as data collectors during the learning phase. In adapting the trainings to your own context, it is useful to think in advance about how the trainings might connect, the sequencing, and the division of labor between them.

Purpose, Methodology, and Outcomes

Rationale and objectives

Community-based child protection is essential for the protection and well-being of children and also for the construction of effective national systems of child protection. An interagency study[4] that reviewed 160 evaluations of community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) indicated that too often, CBCPMs are initiated externally (for example by NGOs), without understanding or building on the mechanisms and processes that are already present in communities. As a result, these mechanisms have limited effectiveness and sustainability, and some have caused unintended harm.

[4] Wessells, M. (2009). *What are we learning about protecting children? An interagency review of the evidence on community-based child protection mechanisms in humanitarian and development settings.* London, UK: Save the Children.

To strengthen community-based child protection in Sierra Leone, interagency action research will document the functioning of existing CBCPMs and test whether and how CBCPMs can be made more effective by strengthening their linkages with other components of the national child protection system. The functioning of existing CBCPMs, whether indigenous or externally facilitated, will be documented through rapid ethnography and related qualitative research methods in February 2011.

The purpose of this workshop is to prepare the prospective national researchers to collect quality data in an ethical manner during the ethnographic phase of the research. The objectives are to: (1) build the capacities of prospective national researchers to collect quality data using rapid ethnographic and related tools; (2) increase the sensitivity of participants to issues of research ethics and child safeguarding and prepare them to conduct research in a safe, ethical manner that respects the participants' dignity and human rights; and (3) review collectively and finalize the methodological tools.

Key questions

The key questions to be answered through the research in the ethnographic phase are presented in Tool LNG 4.

Methodology

The workshop will use a participatory methodology designed to develop skills in using the various methods in appropriate, creative ways. The primary methods will be group discussion and problem-solving, observation and reflection, role-plays, scenario analyses, and practice using different tools, with coaching and mentoring. Working closely with the prospective national researchers will be key members of the Sierra Leone National Research Team—Dora King (Lead National Researcher) and David Lamin (Moyamba Research Team Leader)—and international researchers from the Columbia Group for Children in Adversity—Drs. Kathleen Kostenly, Lindsay Stark, and Mike Wessells.

Expected outcomes

By the end of the workshop, prospective researchers will:

- Understand the purpose, phases, key questions, and methodology of the action research
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of the researchers
- Demonstrate appropriate skill in using the various ethnographic and qualitative tools and in recording quality data to answer the key questions listed above
- Understand and be willing to adhere to the child safeguarding policy

- Be more aware of the ethical issues associated with this research and be prepared to make sound decisions in regard to these issues
- Have increased understanding of how the data will be analyzed
- Help to finalize the methodological tools

Working Schedule

Day 1: Monday, January 17—Foundations and Context

9:00–10:40	Introductions, Purpose of the Action Research and Workshop
10:40–11:00	Coffee break
11:00–12:30	What is child protection in the Sierra Leone context?
12:30–1:30	Lunch
1:30–3:10	Phase 1 findings on CBCPMs, ethical and practical issues, implications
3:10–3:30	Coffee break
3:30–5:30	Linking CBCPMs with national child protection systems

Day 2: Tuesday, January 18—Design and Methods

9:00–10:40	Design of the action research and key questions, methods
10:40–11:00	Coffee break
11:00–12:30	Ethnographic methods
12:30–1:30	Lunch
1:30–3:10	Participant observation
3:10–3:30	Coffee break
3:30–5:30	Participant observation

Day 3: Wednesday, January 19—Methods

9:00–10:40	In-depth interviewing
10:40–11:00	Coffee break
11:00–12:30	In-depth interviewing, key informant interviews
12:30–1:30	Lunch
1:30–3:10	Functional network analysis
3:10–3:30	Coffee break
3:30–5:30	Informed consent, note taking and record keeping

Day 4: Thursday, January 20—Ethics and Child Safeguarding

9:00–10:40	Child safeguarding policy
10:40–11:00	Coffee break
11:00–12:30	Child safeguarding policy implementation, and ethical considerations in the action research5
12:30–1:30	Lunch
1:30–5:30	Field learning: participant observation

Day 5: Friday, January 21—Methods and Gender Issues

9:00–10:40	Debriefing on field learning
10:40–11:00	Coffee break
11:00–12:30	Field learning discussion
12:30–1:30	Lunch

[5] Note that ethics issues will be discussed throughout the workshop.

1:30–3:10	Gender issues
3:10–3:30	Coffee break
3:30–5:30	Gender issues

Day 6: Monday, January 24—Methods

9:00–10:40	Learning about children's development
10:40–11:00	Coffee break
11:00–12:30	Timeline planning discussions
12:30–1:30	Lunch
1:30–3:10	Note taking
3:10–3:30	Coffee break
3:30–5:30	Data analysis

Day 7: Tuesday, January 25—Methods

9:00–10:40	Group discussions
10:40–11:00	Coffee break
11:00–12:30	Group discussions
12:30–1:30	Lunch
1:30–3:10	Note taking and record keeping
3:10–3:30	Coffee break
3:30–5:30	Note taking and record keeping

Day 8: Wednesday, January 26—Field Work

Morning	Field learning
Afternoon	Field learning and debriefing

Day 9: Thursday, January 27—Methods and Planning

9:00–10:40	Skills building
10:40–11:00	Coffee break
11:00–12:30	Skills building
12:30–1:30	Lunch
1:30–3:10	Skills building and planning
3:10–3:30	Coffee break
3:30–5:30	Skills building and planning

Day 10: Friday, January 30—To be decided and Wrap-up

9:00–10:40	Skills practice, open space for discussion
10:40–11:00	Coffee break
11:00–12:30	Skills practice, open space for discussion
12:30–1:30	Lunch
1:30–3:10	Skills practice, open space for discussion
3:10–3:30	Coffee break
3:30–5:30	Wrap-up and closing

LNG 3. Ethnographic Principles

- Build trust and learn in a slower, respectful manner about views of children, harms, pathways of response, prevention strategies, and connections with the formal system that does not judge local people.
- Using local language and idioms (avoiding imposition of international terms such as “child labor”), ask elicitive, open-ended questions that assume “we don’t know” and that invite learning about local categories and practices.
- Learn through direct observation about the risks to children and the ways in which families and communities seek to protect children.
- Learn from different subgroups, contrasting their views by gender and age (developmental stage), about their views of harms to children, the main responses to them, and how to prevent them.
- Learn about the power dynamics of the community and which people or groups are marginalized, and develop a way of learning from marginalized people that does not stigmatize them.
- Avoid ethical problems by managing expectations, protecting confidentiality, respecting informed consent, etc.

LNG 4. Ethnographic Research Tools, Sierra Leone[6]

Note: These tools are not intended to be used as semi-structured questionnaires but as topical guides and items one wishes to learn about in a respondent-driven discussion.

Contents

[6] These tools were developed by the Columbia Group team in Sierra Leone on behalf of the Interagency Learning Initiative.

Key Questions for Ethnographic/Qualitative Research in Sierra Leone, February 2011

The aim of the research to be conducted in Moyamba and Bombali Districts in February 2011 is to learn about existing community-based mechanisms of child protection and support for children. The task is to describe the mechanisms and support processes that currently exist, as they are understood by local people who occupy diverse positions in the social system. The research is not prescriptive in that it does not attempt to identify what communities ought to do to support children. To accomplish its descriptive task, the research will focus on ethnographic and related qualitative methods to answer the questions outlined below.

The main questions this research seeks to answer are: When children have been harmed by child protection issues (abuse, exploitation, violence, neglect) whom do they go to for help, and what are the processes and perceived outcomes?

The more specific key questions to be addressed in the ethnographic phase are:

- How do local people understand:
    - What is childhood and children's development?
    - What are girls' and boys' normal activities, roles, and responsibilities?
    - What are the main child protection risks or sources of harm to children?
    - What processes or mechanisms are used by families or communities to support children who have been affected by various protection threats? What are the outcomes of those mechanisms, and how satisfactory are the outcomes in the eyes of different stakeholders?
- How do child protection risks vary by gender?
- Whom do girls or boys turn to for help when protection threat X arises?
- Who are the natural helpers and what networks do they have?
- What are the indigenous, "traditional" mechanisms of protection and how are they regarded by different groups?
- Apart from indigenous mechanisms, what groups or structures (e.g., Child Welfare Committees or CBCPMs facilitated by NGOs) exist in communities and/or chiefdoms? How are they perceived by local people? What are their roles, responsibilities, and functionalities?
- How are very sensitive/complex issues addressed?
- Who has or does not have access to existing protection mechanisms (e.g., do the poorest of the poor or people not related to the chief have access)?

- What do government and NGO actors see as their main roles and responsibilities in regard to CBCPMs?

- What are the linkages of community mechanisms with the national child protection system? How do communities perceive government mechanisms such as Family Support Units?

- What are the gaps in those linkages?

Participant Observation

Purpose

To make first-hand and detailed observations of the various contexts in which children interact with peers, family, school, work, community life, and religious practice. As a participant observer, you will go into these contexts to observe, make notes when necessary without being intrusive, and compose detailed field notes soon after the observation. The aim is to observe and describe, without judging whether people's activities, practices, norms, or values are good or bad or whether their beliefs are accurate or inaccurate.

Participants

The national researcher; the members of a household, classroom, mosque or church; participants in a community gathering; the traders and customers in a marketplace; officials in a traditional or local court; police stations; any other contexts in which children interact.

Materials

- A small notebook where you can jot down your observations

- A larger notebook for field notes to be written at the end of the day

- A log book to plan and keep track of your activities

- A pen

- A tape recorder

Length of activity

Participant observation lasts as long as the activity you are observing. You may want to stay and ask the participants questions after the activity is over or linger to capture more details.

What is participant observation?

> *"The final goal ... is to grasp the [informant's] point of view, his or [her] relation to life, to realize his [or her] vision of his [or her] world."* Bronislaw Malinowski
>
> *"Participant observation involves establishing rapport in a new community, learning to act so that people go about their business as usual when you show up, and removing yourself every day from cultural immersion so you can intellectualize what you've learned, put it into perspective and write about it convincingly."* H. Russell Barnard

Participant observation involves two main components: (a) participation in the culture and life of a community, and (b) observation of its members' behavior, language, and material culture, that is, the objects and artifacts they use to conduct their lives.

What will you do as a participant observer? You will:

- Pay attention to everything you see, hear, and observe about children.
    - Listen to what is said to, and about, children. What do adults say to children about what they should and should not do, and how is it taught and enforced in the classroom or in the home? Do they say or expect the same things from boys and girls? Are these things enforced and taught in a gender-neutral manner?
    - Document the objects that pertain to children's lives in each setting you are in. What objects do men, women, and children use in the home, in the marketplace, at the river?
    - Listen to what children say to each other. Listen to what adults say to children. What happens during moments of tension or conflict between adults and children, between children and their peers? What do they say? What do they do? Pay attention to gender.
    - Observe the activities that adults and children engage in together during the course of the day. What are their respective roles?
    - How and why are children punished? Pay attention to gender in terms of forms of punishment and who (male or female head) has the authority to administer what forms of punishment.
- Immerse yourself in the day-to-day lives of the people in your village as they cook, play, go to the market, sit outside in the evening, or go to the local court.
    - It is helpful to act in ways that make you a part of the setting. You can participate in activities by helping out a seller at the market. Accompany him or her to set up the stall or prepare the soap they will sell. Ideally, the people you are observing will go about their daily lives as if you are not a stranger. Understand the gender dynamics of participating. Some villagers may welcome and encourage your full

participation, while others may not. Be aware of class, religious and ideological differences.

  - Have casual conversations as often as you can. It will be helpful to do so before you have more formal interviews. Casual conversations will lead to helpful insights and establish rapport.

  - Before you go to a local court, meet the officials involved in the case. If you can, meet the people involved in the case. Introduce yourself and the purpose of the research you are conducting. Be careful to maintain neutrality while you show empathy.

- Have casual conversations with individuals and groups. Always stay focused on the questions about children and how they are protected from harm, abuse or exploitation.

  - These will be done in the compounds of households, at the market, at family meetings and other settings.

  - Listen closely to what is said so that you can remember what you hear.

- Take good notes

  - Jot down what you see and hear using key words and phrases. They will jog your memory later as you write up your notes.

  - Make mental notes when you cannot write immediately. You can devise your own system to help you recall the observations you made earlier in the day. When you return to your room in the evening, make detailed notes about what you've seen, heard, and observed.

<u>Indigenous ethnography</u>

You are what is referred to as an indigenous ethnographer because you have some familiarity with the way of life of the people you are going to be working with. This means that you can speak the language, you may behave in similar ways, and will have facility with the objects used in the village.

So, how do you study something you believe you already know?

- Approach what you are observing as if you have encountered it for the first time. This is your role as an indigenous ethnographer.

- Distance yourself from your cultural know-how. Become naïve. Assume that you do not know how things will unfold or what people mean. Distancing will help you listen more closely and observe more carefully. Distancing is especially important in relation to gender, because depending on the context, male researchers could be expected to know, lead and give opinions, while female researchers will not be expected to do any of these things. Or there could actually be a backlash against what is perceived as an articulate and "pushy" female researcher.

- Become a student of your informers. Let them teach you about childhood in Bombali or Moyamba District.

- Ethnography studies the point of view of a community. When you listen to group discussions in the compound or during a community meeting, set aside your own ideas and opinions. Be completely attentive to what is unfolding.

The stages of participant observation

These are the four stages of participant observation. It is not a rigid prescription, nor is it exhaustive. Use it as a guide when you enter your field site or when you arrive to observe an activity. It is a process that has been used successfully by many ethnographers.

Stage I. **Entering the field** It is helpful to introduce yourself to the people who are in authority in a community or a home when you start fieldwork, such as, the chief, the headman, the women's leader/section chief, or the district chief. Introduce your project and get the necessary permission to do research in the village. It will ease your ability to live and work in the community.

Stage II **Establishing rapport** Rapport means the presence of trust between researcher and informant. In order for your informants to trust you and share information with you, they should not feel judged, put down, or discriminated against. How can you build trust? Here are four techniques:

- Become a student. *A good ethnographer approaches his or her informants with the openness of a student. Whether they are young or old, poor or rich, male or female, disabled or abled, your informants are always your teachers. You are there to learn their stories, their views, their experience.*

- Do not judge your informants' lives or opinions. *A good ethnographer is not judgmental of the people he or she is studying. S/he works to make them feel safe and respected, no matter what they think or believe or do. This will give them the confidence to answer your questions and to share information that may be sensitive.*

- Become aware of your own biases and your own cultural assumptions. Pay particular attention to your own cultural and ideological assumptions about masculinity and femininity, or maleness and femaleness. *This is called reflexivity. Reflect on your own views and cultural assumptions about childhood and how children should be protected. Then put some distance between your views and the views of your informants about what is right or wrong, what is moral or immoral, what is just or unjust, what is normal or abnormal*.

- Practice neutrality. *A good ethnographer will endeavor to stay neutral when there is conflict between people in the community they are studying.*

Note: It can be highly challenging for any person to adopt a non-judgmental, neutral stance. These challenges are increased for people who are activists or child protection workers who are trained to make rapid assessments, identify violations against children, and take urgent action. Time, mentoring, and patience are needed to develop this orientation, which can be a useful complement to the more rapid, judgmental approach that is widespread in child protection work.

Stage III. **<u>Mapping</u>** Once you begin to visit schools or markets or community discussions to observe the risks to children and their protection, make social and physical maps of the settings.

- Physical mapping: What is the layout of the market or local court or school? If you have difficulty drawing this, describe it in your fieldnotes.

- Social mapping: Who sits next to whom in the local court? Where do children who are traders sit or stand or walk in the market? What is the physical location of children in other social contexts? Are these physical locations gender-specific, and do they provide special forms of protection?

- Transect walks: When you enter a setting, for example, a market, pick a path that you will walk as you make observations. You can take a census of this circumscribed path. How many children and adults trade on this path? What are the physical attributes of the transect? The people in this transect can become your informants. Which gender uses this path the most and why? There could be issues of safety, cultural taboos and superstitions.

Stage IV **<u>Immersion</u>** At this stage, you should already have a sense of the layout of your village, and the people who you are studying. You will immerse yourself in the culture of your village by participating and observing events, activities, and interactions that will answer your research questions about childhood and children's protection from harms. Immersion requires repetition. For example, you will visit the same market several days in a row. You will observe the same classroom several days in a row. When you spend the night in the village you will sleep in the same household each night. This gives you access to detail and helps build your memory.

Note taking

Writing notes is the most important and time intensive aspect of ethnographic practice and require consistency.

Field notes happen in stages, every day.

1. <u>Jottings:</u> While you are out in the field, jot down what you hear and see. Keep a pen and a small notebook with you always. Record key phrases, key words, the stages of a proceeding, major actors and parts of an event.

2. Detailed notes: At the end of the day, you will make detailed notes. These include

   i. Descriptions of scenes, including characters, actions, and conversations.

   ii. Descriptions of activities, including the plot and the actions of the participants. How did the proceeding begin? How did it end? What happened in between? What was said?

3. Log: Use your log to keep track of your activities and to plan follow-up activities. Start off the first day filling up the right-hand side with what you saw, who you met, and what you did. Repeat for the second day. On the third day, fill out the left-hand side of the log with the people you would like to talk to again, others you may want to approach, or events you want to attend.

Helpful tips on conducting participant observation

The following settings are examples of contexts where you will practice participant observation. Use the four stages of participant observation outlined in the previous section to guide your research. These steps suggested here are provisional and not prescriptive. Ethnographic research requires flexibility and the willingness to respond to the situation as it unfolds.

Because you are working on a focused, short-term project, always keep the key questions in mind when you enter a research site, and as you make mental and written notes. (For the full set of key questions, refer to the Workshop agenda [LNG 2]).

Marketplaces

Marketplaces are ideal settings to conduct ethnographic research on child protection. It is possible to observe children at work and interactions between adults and children in a natural setting that can demonstrate implicit beliefs about childhood and children's exposure to risk. Find out the types of markets villagers frequent: daily markets, once-a-month markets, small or large markets, with different activities:

- Visit the market 3–4 days in a row each week.
- Using a transect walk, identify a section of the market and the sellers you will study.
    - Choose either a child, a group of children, or adults and children who work together.
- Introduce yourself and explain what you are doing in the village.
- Begin a casual conversation. These traders will become your informants.
- Offer to help the traders with small tasks, for example, looking for change or adding items to the stall. Let them show you what they need done. Remember that you are their student.

- After a day or two of going to the market to sit with the children or adults at work, you can begin to ask probing questions about their experience and their views.

- If you find that a particular child or adult answers your questions with a lot of information, you can choose to spend a lot of time with them. They could become your primary informants.

- When you make your notes at the end of the day, map out the scene. Describe the interactions you observed, the items that were being sold, the conversations that you witnessed, and any threats and responses to children's safety.

Classrooms and schools

- Request to meet some teachers in the village. Introduce yourself and the project.

- Is there a particular teacher with whom you developed good rapport? He or she might make a good informant for your questions about child protection.

- Choose one of the teachers as a primary informant. You will visit their classroom multiple times during your stay. Attempt to visit a male-led and a female-led classroom. Students may respond to a teacher's "discipline," "empowerment," etc., differently, based on gender.

- As you observe the classroom make detailed notes during and after the class on the interactions between teachers and students and between students. How is the physical space arranged? Are classrooms safe environments for children and youth? What occurs inside and outside of class that compromise the dignity of students, or that makes it difficult for them to learn without fear?

- Pay attention to what is done and said. How do actions and words change based on the gender or age of the person?

- Observe the wider school environment and how children travel to school. What protection and safety concerns might arise on the way to school, outside the school, or between classes? How do these concerns differ for girls and boys?

- Observe the sanitary conditions—latrines/toilets—whether separate for boys and girls. (This has been found to affect the attendance of girls, especially those who have started their menses.)

Local courts

- Request permission from the appropriate officials to sit in on the proceedings of a court case if there is a case going on or that will go on while you are in the village.

- Request permission from the people involved in the case.

- Establish trust using some of the suggestions made earlier. For example, communicate your neutrality in verbal and non-verbal ways. You could say to court officials and to families involved in the case: “I am interested in learning how the court system functions in an effort to protect children from violence. For my research to be valid and so that we can strengthen the systems we have now, it is important to hear the views of everyone involved in a case like this.” Non-verbal cues of neutrality could be choosing where you sit in a room, or showing the same level of courtesy to everyone.

- Do social and physical mapping of the room where the case is being heard.

- Follow the proceedings from its beginning to its resolution, or as your time in the field permits.

- As you make your notes, use your log well. A court setting is a rich social field with multiple actors, various plot lines, and a combination of traditional and civil rules and processes. It can yield a lot of data and suggest possible avenues for follow-up research with individuals or events.

Dealing with the anxieties of fieldwork

Fieldwork can be an anxiety-inducing experience. It is common to feel overwhelmed by the social demands of research, and to worry about whether you are getting enough or the right data. There are two helpful responses to these anxieties.

- **Make detailed notes**. This cannot be overemphasized: write all the time and write everything down.

    - Do not let time elapse between an event or an activity and when you make your fieldnotes. <u>Never</u> leave the writing of your fieldnotes for the next day.

- **Use the support of the research team**. Talk to the lead researcher and your other team members about the research process. Ask questions when you are not sure what to do.

Ethical issues

Participant observation as a field research method raises basic ethical questions about conducting research. Unethical research is research that causes harm to the people with whom researchers are working. How can researchers ensure the wellbeing and the rights of the people they are observing? There are many ways, including the following:

- **By always striving to not cause harm.** As ethnographic researchers, we are bound by the code of conduct of our profession to not cause harm to any of our informants or the people we are observing as a result of our research.

    - It means being aware at all times of the possible impact and meaning of what you are doing as a researcher. Always strive to not cause harm. For example, when dealing with sensitive issues, how do you balance your need for information and the potential negative impact it may cause your informant? Your first obligation is to the welfare of your informant.

- **Respecting people's dignity**. One of the ways we show respect for the dignity of the communities and individuals who we work with is to disclose our research agenda. A researcher must always request permission to enter a community from relevant officials. Without doing so, we compromise the legitimacy of our work and of our profession and jeopardize the ability of other researchers to conduct research or realize their long-term projects.

- **Respecting all persons equally** regardless of their age, social class, gender, religion or other identity. Strive to build good relationships by showing respect and always communicating your intentions.

(Please refer to the tool (MGM 8) on Thinking Through Facilitators' Ethical Responsibilities for more discussion on ethical questions associated with community-led work.)

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In-depth Interviews on Local CBCPMs in Bombali and Moyamba Districts

Purpose

To have open-ended, in-depth interviews with youth and adults about their views of childhood, the threats to children's wellbeing and the responses to those threats in their village or town; to use good listening and probing skills as you speak with adults and youth about how they respond to and prevent threats to children's safety.

Participants

A national researcher and individual members of a village, community group, local government or non-governmental organization.

Materials

- Notebook
- Pen
- Voice recorder

Length of activity

The length of an in-depth interview should last long enough to answer the key questions of the research project. It is important to stop an interview if the interviewee is tired.

What is an in-depth interview?

An in-depth interview is an intensive exploration of an individual's perspective or experience of the key questions of a research project. It should give you detailed information about an individual's perception of childhood, children's safety, and the responses to threats to children's wellbeing that they are aware of.

What are the characteristics of an in-depth interview?

- **It is unstructured:** This means it is guided by a set of questions, but it is not administered as a questionnaire. It is more flexible than the formal, structured format of the questionnaire. The questions are there to guide the conversation and to gather the information relevant to the purpose of the research. Translate the key questions to make them understandable while keeping them intact.

- **<u>It is controlled by the participant:</u>** It follows the lead of the participant. Allow the interviewee to determine how he or she will respond, while you pay attention to the key questions of the research project. The goal is to give the participants a lot of room to express themselves and go into depth about their views, perceptions, and knowledge. Make use of good interviewing techniques to arrive at your answers, like listening actively, using prompts, and asking interviewees to tell you more about a response.

- **<u>The interviewee's responses have depth:</u>** Simple yes or no answers are not adequate in an in-depth interview. Ask your questions in such a way that the respondent offers rich, complex answers. This can be achieved by asking good open-ended questions. A closed question only has a yes or no answer, whereas an open-ended question gives the respondent the opportunity to fill in the content of his or her answer. Probes should be used as much as possible to clarify issues, to understand more and elicit adequate answers from respondents, and to help structure and direct the interview and reduce irrelevant and ambiguous answers.

What are the key questions of the research project?

The key questions of this research project are listed below and should guide your interviews. Read them as often as you can so that they inform what you look for as you do participant observation, what you listen for as you conduct interviews, and what you write down as you make notes.

The questions are **<u>not</u>** a questionnaire and should not be administered as such. Phrase the questions in the best way possible for your interviewees to understand them and be able to offer details.

- How do local people understand:
    - What is childhood and children's development? Researchers should be aware that a response could, to a certain extent, focus mainly on boys. They should therefore try to probe deeper by asking what childhood is for boys as opposed to girls and how they develop differently. For example, some communities may not see menstruating girls as children and could have a different set of expectations and rules for this group. The same can happen for a well-developed 12-year-old boy.

  - What are girls’ and boys’ normal activities, roles, and responsibilities? What can, and cannot, boys and girls do? What are the taboos? Do boys and girls start working at the same age? Are the time and location for recreation the same?

  - What are the main child protection risks or sources of harm to children?

  - What processes or mechanisms are used by families or communities to support children who have been affected by various protection threats? What are the outcomes of those mechanisms, and how satisfactory are the outcomes in the eyes of different stakeholders?

- How do child protection risks vary by gender?

- Whom do girls or boys turn to for help when protection threat X arises?

- Who are the natural helpers and what networks do they have? Attention needs to be paid to the make-up of these natural helpers. Are they mainly men or women? How did they come to occupy such a position in the community? How many women are in the decision-making structures in the community?

- What are the indigenous, “traditional” mechanisms of protection and how are they regarded by different groups?

- Apart from indigenous mechanisms, what groups or structures (e.g., Child Welfare Committees or CBCPMs facilitated by NGOs) exist in communities and/or chiefdoms? How are they perceived by local people? What are their roles, responsibilities, and functionalities? Be aware that the gender of the service provider could affect how they are perceived in the community and even how they provide services to boys and girls.

- How are very sensitive/complex issues addressed?

  - Who has or does not have access to existing protection mechanisms (e.g., do the poorest of the poor or orphans or people not related to the chief have access?) Also look out for women stigmatized as “witches,” “free women,” and those with “bad luck.” Their children may be protected differently.

- What do government and NGO actors see as their main roles and responsibilities in regard to CBCPMs?

- What are the linkages of community mechanisms with the national child protection system? How do communities perceive government mechanisms such as FSUs?

- What are the gaps in those linkages?

- How should those gaps be bridged, and by who?

Planning for and carrying out an in-depth interview

The following sections will give you some tips and tools on carrying out an in-depth interview. It is structured as a “before,” “during,” and “after” guide.

Before the interview

It is recommended that you spend the first week in your assigned village doing participant observation, facilitating group sessions, doing body mapping, and constructing timelines, and the second week conducting interviews and functional network analyses.

During your first week of participant observation, you will meet the people of the village in different settings. Begin to think about and schedule your in-depth interviews.

- While you are conducting participant observation, you will have plenty of casual and open conversations with your informants. Pay attention to those children, youths and adults who will be good candidates for in-depth interviews. Choose them so that you will have a range of perspectives from different social groups: men, women, boys, girls, officials, traders, school teachers, etc. They may be members of community groups or they may be grandmothers or grandfathers who are knowledgeable about the goings-on in the village.

- Schedule your interview. Explain the purpose of the interview to the interviewee and why you have chosen to speak with them. Tell them approximately how long the interview will last.

- Also pay attention to work schedules for both men and women in the community and work around their schedules. Since a majority of women work around the clock, go to the farm, and then come back home to prepare the evening meal, it will be useful to observe when they are a bit relaxed and to enquire about what they see as free time.

What to bring to an interview

- **Recorder**
    - Before you arrive for your interview, always check your digital or tape recorder to make sure that the batteries are charged. You do not want to run out of power during a very interesting or important conversation.
    - Check the recorder to be sure it is functional. If it is being reused, make sure you have finished writing the notes from the previous recorded interview.

- **Notebook and pen**
    - Take running notes during your interview. Write down your interviewees’ responses verbatim as much as you can. The recording will help you fill in the

blanks later. Running notes will save you time as you write up the transcript from the interview.

- Do not let time elapse between the time of the interview and the write up of the notes or transcript.

Beginning the interview

- **Find a comfortable place to talk** Make sure that you and your interviewee are in a quiet place, or in an environment in which you are both comfortable and can speak without fear or hesitation. Avoid secluded places.

The first tasks of an interviewer are ethical. Following the ethical protocol will help to build trust between you and the interviewee.

- **Informed consent:** Inform the interviewee about the purpose of the research. Ensure that the interviewee understands the aims and limits of the project. Get oral or written consent from the interviewee to participate in the research.

- **Confidentiality:** Inform the interviewee that anything shared during the conversation will be kept confidential and be used only to meet the goals of the research project.

- **Permission to record:** Some interviewees may be uncomfortable about being recorded. This is not common in Sierra Leone but nevertheless ask the interviewee's permission to record the interview.

During the Interview

You will be able to have successful in-depth interviews if you use good and effective interviewing techniques.

The most effective techniques are **active listening skills** and **knowing how to ask good questions,** particularly the use of probing questions.

- **Active listening skills** An active listener is an alert and engaged listener who communicates interest in and respect for what an interviewee has to say. Active listening also communicates empathy for the interviewee and builds a relationship of trust.

    - Be attentive and alert—While the participant is speaking, use verbal and non-verbal expressions of attention that are appropriate for the setting. In krio, you can intermittently say "yes" or "ehn henh"; use what is linguistically and culturally appropriate. Non-verbal cues often use body-language. This could be expressed by nodding your head, having an open facial expression and not crossing your arms.

- Use silence to listen effectively—Do not overdo the expressions of attention. Silence can allow space into the communication and give the interviewees room to hear themselves and think more clearly. While being silent, remain engaged and attentive by using open and friendly facial expressions and body language.

- Do not interrupt the flow of your interviewee's responses—Allow the speaker to get to the end of his or her sentence. Jot down an interesting or important question and ask it later.

- Keep your opinions and personal stories to yourself—Sharing your personal opinions takes the focus from the research project and the goals of ethnographic enquiry, which are the views and opinions of the people who live in Bombali and Moyamba on childhood and the threats to children's safety.

- **Asking good questions**

  - Ask open-ended questions—Open-ended questions do not have yes or no answers. An example of a closed question is: "Are girls more likely to work in the kitchen than boys?" The answer here is yes. An open-ended question would be: "How do the responsibilities of girls and boys differ in the home?"

  - Do not ask leading questions—Leading questions contain the answers in the question and do not give the respondent a choice in the answer. For example, a leading question would ask: "Is child-beating one of the ways in which children's well-being is threatened in the village?" A non-leading question would be: "Tell me about one of main child protection risks in this village?"

  - Ask probing or exploratory questions—Probing questions are useful when you are looking for information that has been left out of a respondent's answer. For example, you can say "Tell me more about that", "Anything else?", or "What do you mean?"

  - Use prompts—They can communicate that you are listening, like the non-verbal "enh henh" or a more verbal prompt like "Really?" They can also help the interviewee to continue their train of thought and deepen it. What are the prompts of the language you will be using?

  - Use repetition as a form of feedback—Repeat the last word or phrase of interviewee's answer. This can encourage them to say more, and it indicates that you are listening.

  - Don't editorialize—Do not add comments to the key questions that express your opinion about them. For example, an editorial question would say: "It must be very difficult for children in foster care who are regularly punished. Is foster care a child protection risk?" This is also a leading question.

  - Ask naive questions—Naïve questions allow you to set aside your prior assumptions about the subject you are researching. They are basic questions that can lead to in-depth answers with information you may not get otherwise. For example, a naive question is: “What makes someone a child?”

Working with difficult informers

- Be patient—The most effective response to difficult interviewees is patience. Be patient and communicate empathy.
- Show respect for their time and opinions even if you disagree with them.
- What are their concerns?—If their concerns are about the project itself, give them some room to discuss their concerns about the research project. It could be helpful information.
- If an interviewee is resistant or unresponsive—Ask them questions about their lives or about another topic that is easier to talk about. Then return to the research questions.

Other things to consider

- When women/girls or men/boys cannot speak freely in front of the other group, arrange for separate interviews and, if necessary, arrange for each group to be interviewed by a researcher of the same sex/gender.
- Be sensitive to other factors that may influence gender relations in the families and communities—lack of services, migration, politics, etc.
- Be aware of the power dynamics between researcher and participant, even if of the same gender and ethnic group.

Concluding the interview

- Thank your interviewee for their time
- Ask them if you can follow up with them if you need to make clarifications.

Discussion Guide on Protection Risks and Functional Responses[7]

Purpose

To identify the main protection risks to children, the networks that support affected children, the outcomes of various channels of help and action, and the level of satisfaction with the networks and outcomes by children, parents, community.

Participants

Multiple groups of seven to ten participants for each group with attention to diversity (for example, different economic status, including the poorest of the poor; different social status, those living in difficult circumstances, etc**.**

Separate groups are needed for each of the following categories, ideally with women interviewing women and men interviewing men:

- Adult men
- Adult women
- Young women (14–19 years old)
- Young men (14–19 years old)

Time: 2 hours

- Introduction: (15 minutes)
- Activity 1: (45 minutes)
- Break, (10 minutes)

[7] With permission, this discussion guide draws extensively on a guide developed by Child Frontiers as part of their research on mapping national child protection systems in West Africa.

- Activity 2: (45 minutes)
- Wrap-up and thank group: (5 minutes)

Materials

- 1 facilitator
- 1 note taker with notepad and pens
- Voice recorder (test battery beforehand)
- Spare battery for voice recorder
- 10 different items (stone, stick, cup, etc.)

I. Introduction (by David Lamin, facilitator of the group discussion):

Note: It can be useful to pause briefly during the introduction to check that participants understand what is being said.

Good morning. I am very happy to see all of you. Your attendance shows how much you care about your children. And, as I had said earlier, this meeting is about children's welfare, and we'll be discussing your children—not other children, but your children.

My name is David Lamin. I am a researcher, and I work for the Columbia Group. The full name of the group is The Columbia Group for Children in Adversity. This organization works on behalf of children who are in situations that pose a threat to their wellbeing and safety. But Columbia Group itself is conducting this research on behalf of an interagency group made up of other NGOs and UN organizations that work on behalf of children. They collaborated to form the interagency group, which does research to learn which interventions can best help children, because without the right information it is not possible to address someone's need. It's like going to the doctor. If you just say to your doctor, "I am sick," he or she will not know which medicine to use to treat you. He or she first needs to know the precise nature of your illness to be able to give you the right medication. Working for children's safety is the same. If we do not have the right knowledge, we will not know what to do.

So, as I said before, my name is David Lamin and I am a researcher with the Columbia Group. We work on children's issues and want to learn how communities, how villages and towns, ensure their children's wellbeing, what they do when their children are in trouble, how they support their children's development. This is the goal of our research. The research is not limited only to your village. It is being carried out in three countries, and Sierra Leone was chosen as one of the countries to conduct this research. And in Sierra Leone, the Group chose two districts: Moyamba District in the South and Bombali District in the North. Here in Bombali District, we chose two chiefdoms: Magbaiamba Ndowahun and Libeisaygahun. We also chose *two chiefdoms in Moyamba. We chose Dasse and Kongbora. Within the chiefdoms, we also chose three villages, because we cannot go everywhere. And your village was one of the villages we chose for the research.*

But before we begin the research itself and begin to talk to you about how you care for your children, first, I want to tell you something very important. I want to request your permission to talk to you, to ask you questions, and record your answers. If there is anyone here who would prefer to not take part in this discussion, you are free to say that you would not like to participate. And you are free to leave.

In addition, everything that we will say to each other is confidential and will stay between us. We are not going to take anything that is said here and share it with anyone else. The people who will get a report of our discussions are the ones who will pick it apart and tell us what is good, what is helpful, or will tell us this is what happened, and that is what happened. In English, they are called analysts. And when we have collected information that will tell us how to better help children, we will not identify the speakers in our report and say Mr. Joe said this, or Mr. Y said that, whether we use it to teach or to inform others. The report will be about Sierra Leone and how people respond when things go wrong or when the wellbeing of children is at risk; these are the ways that people respond. This is the kind of research we do. It is confidential. So, I'm going to ask each of you for permission before we continue with our discussion. So, Mr. George, what do you say? Okay, Mr. George has agreed. Mr. Sesay has agreed. Everyone has agreed. So, we can now continue with our discussion because everyone has given their consent.

But again, before we start, it will be good for us to get to know each other. We cannot be here for an hour or an hour-and-a-half, and we don't get to know each other, because we are one in this work on behalf of children. So, as I told you before, my name is Mr. David Lamin. Please introduce yourselves so I can get to know you. Okay, everyone has now introduced themselves. Thank you.

Now, we are going to begin the discussion we came here for about children and their wellbeing. Now, we all know that how you see it here may perhaps be different from how it is seen in Freetown. That is why, today, we are going to discuss what happens here, in your village, where we are now. Not what someone from Freetown may have seen, but what happens here that we know, that we see. That is what we want to discuss. We want to talk about the things that hurt children; we want to talk about the things that hurt their development. We want to talk about the things that happen to children that make them unhappy, that they do not like to experience. We want to discuss the things that happen to children that make even you. their mothers, unhappy. We want to talk about the things that make you as a community come together to discuss what you want for your children. So, all of those things that are not good for your children, that make you unhappy, that make your children unhappy, these are the things we want to discuss today.

But before we begin our discussion, I want you to know a couple of things. Everyone here is free to express themselves, and whatever anyone says it right. No one here is wrong, anything anyone says is right. That is the first thing. We should respect the views of everyone here because everyone is right, no one is wrong. Secondly, as I said, it is a good thing for everyone to express themselves. But if we all talk at the same time, my colleague who is taking notes here will not be able to write everything down. He will miss some of what you say. I myself will not be able to *listen to all of you, and I will miss what you say. So please, as we speak, let us speak through the chairperson. Let us ask the chairperson, who is me, and we will call on who wants to speak. That way, the discussion will go well, and everyone will have a chance to speak, and everyone will get a chance to hear what their neighbor is saying. Please, don't be shy, I want all of us to be comfortable, and for all of us to speak freely. Whatever we say here will remain here.*

II. Activity One: Listing and ranking of child protection risks (45 minutes)

Steps:

1. To provide a framework for the discussion, provide an explanation such as that below about the first part of the discussion. Note that this is not a script to be read—it is best to use a conversational approach:

So let's begin. The things that make children unhappy, that affects their development, that ruin their ability to be successful, that make us, their mothers, unhappy on their behalf. We don't want to talk about poverty, because poverty affects all of us. And we can talk about it today, or even for a month, and we can go on talking. So, let us put poverty aside for now. And the problems with health care and hospitals, we know that that is a problem everywhere. We, in fact, know that there aren't enough hospitals for all the areas that need them. So, please let us put that issue aside for now. There are other things, like the okadas (motorcycle taxis) that hit children, we know that happens. So, let us put that one aside, as well. Let us not discuss it, because those things are things that are out of our control. Those are things that people who do not live in this village are responsible for. They have not done what they should do. But let us look at our children, at the things that we do and that we do not do that make them unhappy, that affects their development. Those are the things we want to discuss. So, who wants to start? Who wants to be the first person to tell us about one of the problems?

2. Ask participants: *What makes children feel unsafe or insecure*?

3. Ask participants: *Are there additional problems that children experience:*

- *At home?*
- *At school?*
- *In the community?*

4. Continue until at least five risks have been identified. Let the process continue up to ten if the group is very energetic and then explain that we need to close this discussion now and decide which are the biggest or most important risks to children in their village/area.

5. Identify objects: with the list of problems/threats/risks in hand, have the group identify for each problem an object that represents the problem (for example, a stick might represent a problem such as severe physical punishment). Place it on the floor/ground so that all can see it. As risks are named and objects identified, be sure that the objects are spread out to allow room

for the subsequent voting/ranking process. The notetaker should record which object goes with which problem.

6. Ranking: explain to the participants that they will be using pebbles to rank the objects/issues in order of importance. Remind everyone what risk each item represents.

Give each participant one pebble (or a locally available item such as a seed) and ask them to place the pebble in the basket (or circle) by the object they think is **most** important. The recorder should record how many pebbles have been placed in each basket or circle. If participants talk with each other or speak out loud, it is useful to record what they say since it can be revealing.

Identify the issue with the most votes, and report this to the participants. Then set the object representing the top ranked issue aside, and return all the pebbles to the participants (one per person). As this occurs, be sure to listen to (and record) what participants say, since some will likely make useful statements about why they see a particular issue as most important. You can also probe by asking out of curiosity why some people voted for a particular issue/object.

Ask participants to repeat the process at least two more times, with each person placing their pebble beside the remaining objects/issues that they think is most important. Continue to record how many pebbles have been placed in each basket for each object.

7. Announce the outcomes for the top-ranked issue, the second ranked issue, the third ranked issue, etc. At the end, there should be at least three issues ranked as most important/biggest problem, second most important and third most important. If ties occur in voting, there should be another vote which involves only the tied items.

Short break (optional): icebreaker and small refreshment (if available). Note that although participants are not asked to talk about child protection issues during the break, they may do so spontaneously. It is valuable to listen and capture through notes what people say.

III. Activity Two (45 minutes)

This activity provides a broad, preliminary mapping of the functional networks for support/action/services available to children and the outcomes and levels of perceived satisfaction associated with each line of support/action/service. For each of the three top-ranked child protection threats identified in Activity 1 above:

The focus will be on:

- which steps would be taken;
- the people who would be involved in making the decision;
- the likely outcomes of the response;
- the level of satisfaction of different stakeholders with those outcomes;

- which other alternatives might have been available and why they were not utilized;
- recommendations for improvement of supports for children exposed to the three top-ranked child protection threats that had been identified in Activity 1 above.

Steps:

1. Tell participants: *I'd like to ask you what would happen if a child were affected by one of the three main risks/sources of harm you identified. Let's take your first ranked item, which was—[NAME the top ranked item]. Suppose this had happened to an 8-year-old girl in your village.* (Or if the risk is specifically related to a boy, the example would be a boy).

2. Ask the group the following questions:

> *Q: Who can a child who has been affected by this issue go to for help? Who is told about the issue?*

Make a list of all the people and places that may be told about the issue or that may respond. Ask which of these is MOST TYPICAL, and explore this one by asking the following questions:

> *Q: What are the key steps?*
>
> Probes:
>
> - Describe what would happen step by step.
> - Who would the child go to for help?
> - What would the family do?
> - What would the community do?
> - Who would be involved?
> - What supports would actually be provided for the child and family?
>
> *Q: Who would be the key decision-makers about what would happen?*
>
> Probes:
>
> - Who would be involved?
> - What role would be played by people/services outside the community?
> - Who makes the decision?

Q: What would be the likely outcomes of the responses to the problem?

Probes:

- What would likely happen to the child?
- What would likely happen to the family?
- What would likely happen to the perpetrator?

Q: How satisfied with this outcome would various stakeholders (child, family, community, people outside the community) be with this outcome? Why?

On the same problem issue, repeat for one other person or place in order to trade out a second pathway, repeating the questions above.

Then also ask:

Q: What other options did the child/family have?

Probes:

- Describe what would happen step by step.
- Who would the child go to for help?
- What would the family do?
- What would the community do? Who would be involved?
- Who would be the key decision-makers about what would happen?
- What role would be played by people/services outside the community?

Q: Why wouldn't other named options be used?

Probes:

- Would children, families, community leaders know about this option?
- Why or why not?

- Would it be viewed as less safe? Less appropriate? Less effective? Please explain why.

Q: Is there a legal responsibility related to this problem?

Probes:

- Who would it be reported to? (For example, Police? Family Support Unit? Social workers?)
- Who would report this problem?
- What would be the response of the agency/person it was reported to?
- If not reported, why not?

Q: What recommendations would you make to better ensure that the child is protected from harm and that the risks of the harm re-occurring are minimized?

Probes:

- What might have made it easier for the child to seek or access help?
- How could the help/services that the child received have been made better?
- Who else should have been involved in the process? What could be changed so that they become involved in the future?
- Is the risk that the harm will re-occur still present? If so, what could be done to minimize this risk?

3. Repeat the process, focusing on the second-ranked item (if there is time and participants seem engaged).

4. Repeat the process, focusing on the third-ranked item (if there is time and participants seem engaged).

Don't worry if you run out of time since other risks and responses can be explored in the in-depth interviews.

5. **Conclude** by thanking the participants for their time.

Working Guide on Learning About the "Typical" Childhood Development of Girls and Boys in Sierra Leone

NOTE: This tool focuses on "typical" child development as a first step towards understanding childhood in Sierra Leone. However, it would be useful to apply this tool multiple times, asking about different children such as children with disabilities, children from very poor families, etc. This could provide a richer, more differentiated view of childhood as it pertains to children who are positioned in very different ways.

Purpose

In order to learn about community-based child protection mechanisms, it is essential to gain an understanding of how people understand children and childhood, the usual course of children's development, and children's activities and roles at different stages. Rather than impose outsiders' views on these issues, it is useful to take an approach that elicits local understandings of childhood and child development.

The purpose of this timeline method is:

- To understand the "typical course of development" for boys and girls by learning at what age, and in what order stages of development and markers of development usually occur
- To understand when childhood ends and what marks the transition to adulthood
- To understand the typical roles and activities of children at different stages of development

The method uses a narrative methodology that invites informants to tell the life story of a fictitious girl or boy in their village and sets the stage for discussion and probing questions. It also includes more directed questions that aim to learn about age- and gender-appropriate activities and roles.

Participants

This activity can be conducted with a range of key informants including girls, boys, elders, teachers, religious and community leaders, etc. It is important is to solicit this information from a diverse range of informants—young, old, male, female, leaders, community members, those particularly knowledgeable about children, etc.

There is no clear sample size for this activity, which should be conducted until saturation is reached, that is, until the stories and discussions do not elicit any new information.

Materials

- A notebook and pen to record the time line and the respondent's narrative.
- Recommended: a piece of paper and markers to draw an actual timeline with the respondent. These items are listed as recommended because in some cases a respondent may feel more comfortable telling the story of typical childhood development verbally, and in other cases respondents may enjoy having a physical, tangible timeline to chart the development of the child whose story they are telling. The interviewer should monitor whether the material aids are helpful to the participant and decide whether to use narration plus visual timeline or narrative methods only.

Length of activity

Approximately 45–60 minutes.

Process

This activity is conducted with individual respondents, and it occurs in two parts. The first part involves learning about the normal life and development of a typical girl, and the second part involves learning about the normal life and development of a typical boy. In each part, you will initially work with respondents to develop a timeline and then ask questions about the activities of roles of a typical girl or boy at different ages.

Explain to the respondent that you are interested in learning about the childhood and life development of a normal girl and a normal boy from that village. Explain to them that they are going to tell you the story of "Isatu" and "Ibrahim," a made-up girl and a made-up boy, respectively, from their village.

A. Girls' Development

Child development and timeline. Begin with Isatu. Explain that you are interested in knowing about Isatu's life from the time she is born until the time she becomes a woman (i.e., an adult). You are interested in knowing what her life is like, what important events happen along the way, what good things happen to her and what bad things happen to her. Explain to the respondent that they can think of real girls from their village and use parts of their stories to tell the story of Isatu. The real girls that they think about should be neither the very best-off nor the very worst-off girls in the village, but should be "typical" girls.

If you are using the visual timeline to help tell the story of Isatu, take out a piece of paper and draw a long line on the paper. At the left-hand side of the paper, draw a figure and explain that this is the baby Isatu, who has just been born. Or, invite the participant to draw a figure of the baby. Now ask the respondent to tell you the story of baby Isatu.

The respondent may need a bit of help to get started with the story. If the respondent appears confused or does not know where to begin, ask probing questions such as:

- "How is life for this baby when she is first born?"
- "Where does she sleep?"
- "Who takes care of her? *How* does that person/do those people take care of her?"
- "What does she eat?"
- "What is the first important thing that happens in this baby's life?"

You may also make clear that baby Isatu has not yet been named when she is first born, and probe about how she will acquire her name. This will normally lead respondents to discuss a naming ceremony. If the respondent starts discussing the naming ceremony, it is appropriate to say that these are the types of important events and markers of childhood that we are interested in knowing about.

As the respondent identifies important events—events such as a naming ceremony, going to school, initiation, etc.—ask probing questions about why these are important. This will increase understanding of how local people think of the process of child development.

As the respondent continues telling the story of Isatu, the respondent can continue identifying events and life skills on the timeline. This can be done using pictures or words, and every time an activity or event is described, the interviewer should probe to understand Isatu's age at the time of the event or activity. This age information should also be included on the timeline.

If the respondent is still having trouble identifying the kinds of information of interest, it may be helpful to stop the narrative and first have the respondent generate a list of events (both good and bad) that happens to most girls in the village (e.g. naming ceremony, begins taking solid foods, begins or helps with household chores, starts school, initiation into *Bondo*, menstruation, etc.). After the list has been generated, the respondent can go back with the interviewer's help, and place all of the events on the timeline.

When the narrative has been completed, the interviewer should review the timeline with the respondent, checking for any information that has been left out. To identify clearly the transition to adulthood, you should ask the respondent at what point along this timeline Isatu is considered an adult. The respondent may associate this moment with age, or with a certain event such as initiation to *Bondo* or marriage. The interviewer should make sure to record this marker of "end of childhood," either in the written narrative, or on the timeline itself.

Age-appropriate activities and responsibilities. The next step is to learn about age-appropriate activities, recognizing that people may be uncertain about the actual age of children. Explain that you would now like to learn about Isatu's normal activities and responsibilities at three different times.

Ask:

(1) Just before Isatu became of age to go to school (around age 5 years), what were her usual activities each day?

- What did she do after waking up?
- What did she do later in the morning?
- What did she do in the afternoon?
- What did she do in the evening?
- What were Isatu's responsibilities? For example, what did her family expect her to do?

(2) When Isatu had gone to school for three years (around age 9 years), what were her usual activities each day?

- What did she do after waking up?
- What did she do later in the morning?
- What did she do in the afternoon?
- What did she do in the evening?
- What were Isatu's responsibilities? For example, what did her family expect her to do?

(3) Before initiation, after Isatu had begun menstruating (around age 12–13 years), what were her usual activities each day?

- What did she do after waking up?
- What did she do later in the morning?
- What did she do in the afternoon?
- What did she do in the evening?
- What were Isatu's responsibilities? For example, what did her family expect her to do?

B. Boys' Development

Child development and timeline. When Isatu's story is complete, repeat the process, this time asking about Ibrahim. The interviewer may preface this by saying something along the lines of:

> "We know that boys and girls have some similar experiences and some different experiences growing up. Now that you have told us the life story of Isatu, I would like you to tell me about Ibrahim, a typical boy in this village. I would like to understand his life story, and to know what is the same about his childhood and life, and what is different compared with Isatu's."

Repeat the process, collecting details about typical child development for boys in the village until the timeline and/or narrative is complete.

Age-appropriate activities and responsibilities. The next step is to learn about age-appropriate activities, recognizing that people may be uncertain about the actual age of children. Explain that you would now like to learn about Ibrahim's normal activities and responsibilities at three different times.

Ask:

(1) Just before Ibrahim became of age to go to school (around age 5 years), what were his usual activities each day?

- What did he do after waking up?
- What did he do later in the morning?
- What did he do in the afternoon?
- What did he do in the evening?
- What were Ibrahim's responsibilities? For example, what did his family expect him to do?

(2) When Ibrahim had gone to school for three years (around age 9 years), what were his usual activities each day?

- What did he do after waking up?
- What did he do later in the morning?
- What did he do in the afternoon?
- What did he do in the evening?
- What were Ibrahim's responsibilities? For example, what did his family expect him to do?

(3) Before initiation (around age 12–13 years), what were Ibrahim's usual activities each day?

- What did he do after waking up?

- What did he do later in the morning?
- What did he do in the afternoon?
- What did he do in the evening?
- What were Ibrahim's responsibilities? For example, what did his family expect him to do?

Thank the respondent for their time, and make sure to collect and save any timelines that have been created during this process.

Optional: Elders

If there is time and interest, this method can be adapted for elders. Instead of asking an elder key informant to talk about a girl (Isatu) and a boy (Ibrahim), the interviewer may choose to ask about *two* girls or *two* boys—one who is growing up in current times, and one who grew up when the elder was young.

So for example, the interviewer might begin the activity by asking a female elder about Isatu, as usual. Once the respondent completed Isatu's story, the interviewer would now explain that she would like the elder to now tell her the story of Aminata, a typical girl who had grown up before the war (when the respondent was a girl). The interviewer can explain that she is interested in hearing how things were the same or different for Aminata compared with Isatu. Did they experience the same events, stages, etc. and did they have similar responsibilities? Did these events and stages happen at the same age for Isatu and Aminata?

Analysis (for reference only)

When it comes time to analyze the results of the timeline data that has been collected (the analysis is often done by people other than the data collectors), it may be useful to think of the following "types" of data:

- EVENTS, STAGES or CATEGORIES of child development as defined by the community.
- FREQUENCY of times these events, stages, and categories are mentioned by different respondents.
- The AVERAGE AGE at which these events, stages, and categories occur.
- Vivid STATEMENTS that clarify the MEANING of these events, and that justify and contextualize the importance of these events, stages, and categories.

EVENTS, STAGES or CATEGORIES

Make a list of all the events, stages, or categories identified by respondents. Some respondents may have used exactly the same words for events and stages, others may be slightly different, but basically saying the same thing. These can be grouped together. In other cases it will be harder to decide if stages or categories should be grouped together or listed separately. Discussions amongst those who conducted the interviews will be helpful to decide which categories should be put together, and which should kept separate. If the additional optional element is included where a respondent is asked to tell the story of a child pre-war and post-war, it will be important to identify whether events, stages, and categories differ and, if so, how they differ.

FREQUENCY

After you have established the events, stages, events and categories, count the number of times each one was mentioned across all interviews. Using the same categories, you can compare the frequency by different groupings in the same community. For example, do females and males discuss the same events and stages and with the same frequency? Do elders identify certain stages that are not discussed by children? This indicates whether there are similar understandings of childhood development across all members of the community, or whether certain groups have particular insights or particular concerns about certain stages of development. If the optional element is included, frequency of events pre-war and post-war should be examined.

AVERAGE AGE

Similarly, after you have established the events, stages, and categories, you can calculate an average age to understand when these events typically happen in a child's life. As with the frequency, you can analyze whether the average age for certain life events is estimated to be the same when reported by children versus adults, males versus females, etc. If the optional element is included, age of events pre-war and post-war should be examined.

STATEMENTS CLARIFYING MEANING

Arguably the most important part of the analysis, key descriptive statements are both a key source to illustrate the themes identified and prioritized by respondents, and also provide greater insight into the experience and meaning of childhood events and stages. Vivid quotations can "give voice" to the experiences being described and can be used to "tell the story" of child development in Sierra Leone. If the optional element is included, special attention should be paid to how respondents discuss pre-war childhood development and post-war development. Do respondents use different words, phrases or ideas to describe these two time-frames? What is similar about pre and post-war development? What is different?

Key Informant Interview Questions—Chief

Note: A useful way of beginning the interview is to ask, "How is the well-being of children in the community?" This focus on positives can warm up the conversation and also avoids a deficits focus.

Child Protection Issues

- What are the main sources of harm to children in this village/town?
- Are the sources of harm the same or different for girls and boys? Please explain.
- Are the sources of harm the same or different for children of different ages? Please explain.

Child Protection Mechanisms

Traditional mechanisms

- What are the traditional mechanisms/processes for responding to the harms to children you have identified? (Probe in regard to other harms not mentioned.)
- What is your role in the process? What guides your decisions and whom do you consult with?
- How effective are the traditional mechanisms/processes? Please explain or give examples (without names or identifying particular individuals).
- When do you make referrals (what kinds of cases) and to whom (e.g., Family Support Units, FSUs)?

Child Welfare Committee (CWC)

- Does your village/town (or chiefdom) have a Child Welfare Committee?
- Who are the members and how were they selected?
- What are their roles and responsibilities? How are they intended to work?
- What is your involvement with cases handled by the CWCs?
- How well do the CWCs work at present? What challenges do they face?

NGO-facilitated child protection processes, mechanisms, or initiatives

- Are there any international NGOs that work on child protection in your village/town?
- What are their child protection activities?
- If the NGO(s) facilitate child protection mechanisms not called CWCs, ask as above about who participates, roles and responsibilities, the chief's involvement, and effectiveness and challenges.

Government processes or mechanisms and social workers

- How well or poorly enforced are the national laws regarding children's well-being in this village or town?
- Do you and your village/town have access to a government child protection mechanism (e.g., an FSU)? If so, ask:
    - What kinds of cases are referred to them and how (e.g., via referral from the chief, direct contact by the family, etc.)?
    - What are their roles and responsibilities? How are they intended to work?
    - What are your roles and responsibilities with respect to the mechanism?
    - How well does the mechanism actually work? What challenges does it face?
- Does your village have access to a government-trained or employed social worker? If so, ask:
    - How often are they in your village/town?
    - What are their roles and responsibilities, activities?
    - What is your involvement with them?
    - How well do they accomplish their goals? What challenges do they face?

Relations between government and traditional mechanisms of child protection

- At present, what is good about relations between government employed people or mechanisms of child protection and traditional mechanisms and leaders on child protection?
- What gaps or problems are there in the relations or connections between the two?
- As Chief, do you feel well respected and supported by the Government (e.g., by District officers in the Ministry of Social Welfare, by police, by Magistrates)? Please explain.

- What should be done to improve the linkages between traditional mechanisms and government mechanisms of child protection and well-being?

Key Informant Interview Questions—Community Social Worker[8]

Note: A useful way of beginning the interview is to ask, "How is the well-being of children in the community?" This focus on positives can warm up the conversation and also avoids a deficits focus.

Child Protection Issues

- What are the main sources of harm to children in this village/town?
- Are there any harmful traditional practices in the community, including elements of traditional protection and justice mechanisms?
- Are the sources of harm the same or different for girls and boys? Please explain.
- Are the sources of harm the same or different for children of different ages? Please explain.

Social Worker

- What are your main roles and responsibilities as a social worker?
- How have you been trained?
- If you do case management, please describe the process, including referrals.
- How do you connect with or coordinate with community-based child protection mechanisms such as indigenous processes, CWCs, or committees facilitated by external NGOs?

[8] This is not necessarily a government employee since many people who are called social workers at community level have been trained by NGOs and are not employed by the government.

Child Protection Mechanisms

- Please describe the community system or mechanisms of child protection. Ask probing questions about what happens when issue X occurs—who does a child go to for help, what happens next, what are the perceived outcomes, and who is happy or not happy with the outcomes.
- What do you see as the main strengths and weaknesses of the traditional community mechanisms for protecting children?
- What NGO-facilitated or other externally facilitated or supported child protection mechanisms are there in the community? For each, ask:
    - Who are the members and how were they selected?
    - What kind of training or capacity building have the members received?
    - What are their roles and responsibilities? How are they intended to work?
    - When does the Committee or mechanism make referrals and to whom? Please describe the process.
    - What are the strengths and weaknesses of this mechanism? How effective is the mechanism and what challenges does it face?
- How does coordination occur across the various community mechanisms for child protection?
- What are the main gaps in the community system of child protection?
- What should be done to strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms?

Linkages with the National System

- Does this community have access to any government mechanisms/services (e.g., FSUs) that are active on child protection? If so, ask:
    - What kinds of cases are referred to them and how (e.g., via referral from the chief, direct contact by the family, etc.)?
    - What are their roles and responsibilities?
    - How are they intended to work?
    - How do they relate or connect with them?
    - How are they viewed by community members?

- How effective are the mechanisms? What challenges do they face?
- How would you describe the relationship and connections between community-based child protection mechanisms and aspects of the national child protection system such as district workers or services?
- What should be done to strengthen the linkages between community-based child protection mechanisms and the national child protection system?

Key Informant Interview Questions—CWC Member

Child Protection Issues

- What are the main sources of harm to children in this village/town?
- Are the sources of harm the same or different for girls and boys? Please explain.
- Are the sources of harm the same or different for children of different ages? Please explain.

Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and Linkages

- Who are the members and how were they selected?
- What kind of training or capacity building have the members received?
- What are their roles and responsibilities? How are they intended to work?
- When does the CWC make referrals and to whom? Please describe the process.
- How do the CWCs link and coordinate with the chief and traditional mechanisms?
- Are there any international NGOs that work on child protection in your village/town? If so, ask who participates, what are their roles and responsibilities, how are they linked with or involved in the work of the CWC, how effective are they, and what challenges do they face?
- Do people in your village/town have access to any government employees (e.g., Social Workers) or mechanisms (e.g., FSUs) that are active on child protection? If so, ask:
    - What kinds of cases are referred to them and how (e.g., via referral from the chief, direct contact by the family, etc.)?
    - What are their roles and responsibilities?
    - How are they intended to work?
    - What are your roles and responsibilities with respect to the mechanism or worker?
- How effective is the mechanism or worker? What challenges do they face?

Effectiveness and Recommendations

- How well do the CWCs work at present? What challenges do they face?
- What should be done to strengthen them?

Key Informant Interview Questions—NGO Child Protection Workers

Child Protection Issues

- What are the main sources of harm to children in this village/town?
- Are there any harmful traditional practices in the community, including elements of traditional protection and justice mechanisms?
- Are the sources of harm the same or different for girls and boys? Please explain.
- Are the sources of harm the same or different for children of different ages? Please explain.

Child Protection Mechanisms

- Please describe the community system or mechanisms of child protection.
- What do you see as the main strengths and weaknesses of the traditional community mechanisms for protecting children?
- What NGO or other externally facilitated or supported child protection mechanisms are there in the community? For each, ask:
  - Who are the members and how were they selected?
  - What kind of training or capacity building have the members received?
  - What are their roles and responsibilities? How are they intended to work?
  - When does the Committee or mechanism make referrals and to whom? Please describe the process.
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses of this mechanism? How effective is the mechanism and what challenges does it face?
- How does coordination occur across the various community mechanisms for child protection?
- What are the main gaps in the community system of child protection?
  - What should be done to strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms?

Linkages with the National System

- Does this community have access to any government employees (e.g., Social Workers) or mechanisms/services (e.g., FSUs) that are active on child protection? If so, ask:
    - What kinds of cases are referred to them and how (e.g., via referral from the chief, direct contact by the family, etc.)?
    - What are their roles and responsibilities?
    - How are they intended to work?
    - How are they viewed by community members?
    - How effective are they?
- How effective is the mechanism or worker? What challenges do they face?
- How would you describe the relationship and connections between community-based child protection mechanisms and aspects of the national child protection system such as district workers or services?
- What should be done to strengthen the linkages between community-based child protection mechanisms and the national child protection system?

Note-taking Tips and Strategies

In order to take good notes, practice active listening.

Take notes during interviews and group discussions using one of the following strategies:

1. Running notes or a close-to-verbatim record of what has been said
2. Jottings of key words and phrases as the interviewee states them
3. Categories, e.g., (a) main points, (b) related points, (c) examples

What you should listen for:

- **The main points:** When an interviewee responds to a question, what are the main points he or she makes?
- **Key words and phrases:** What are the key words and phrases that express these points?
- **Elaboration:** How does s/he elaborate on those points?
- **Examples:** Does s/he give examples? Does s/he explain what s/he means?
- **Repetition:** Does s/he repeat words? Repeated words and phrases are important.
- **Non-verbal cues:** What is the body language of the respondent? What does his or her body language express?

Verbatim transcript

The document you are expected to prepare for each in-depth interview or group discussion is a verbatim transcript. Use the voice recorder to fill in omissions from your jottings and other notes, checking that you have used the exact terms used by the respondent.

Don'ts

- Don't rephrase the respondent's words in your own words.
- Don't describe the interview.
- Don't omit vivid, concrete statements.

Dos

- Do use the respondent's own words.
- Do use verbatim quotations.
- Do make running notes.
- Do use abbreviations to speed up your writing.

Full Verbatim Transcript Example

I: Mary, I understand that you told me that you had spent time with the RUF in the bush, and that now you're back home in your village of origin. I'd like to learn a little bit more about your situation. What can you tell me about your situation and the kinds of challenges you face?

R: It has been so hard since I came back. I came back, I did not even have a piece of cloth to cover myself, and when I came back, the people they treated me like dogs. My baby is sick, he has malaria, and how can I get the medicine? The health post is far, and I don't even have 10 Leones. How can I take him to the health post? How can I get him to be well? My parents, they reject me and they reject my baby. They call him rebel child. They do not even call him by his name. And then his father, he does not help, he has gone back to the bush, but he comes around and he want me to come with him and to have sex with him. And what can I do, I do not want to be with him. He raped me. He has treated me badly and has beaten me. But what can I do, I need something. Sometimes he has given me money but most times he gives me nothing, he just abuses me. He says bad words. He beats me. There was a man I met on my way back when coming to Freetown, he took me into his house and he gave me food and let me sleep on his bed, but now he went out and one day he was cutting a tree and it fell on him and now he's dead and I have nothing. And I come back and my parents won't even let me eat off the same plate, they throw me in the corner like dogs. They're afraid of me, and what have I done. They say that I'm contaminated... But what have I done, I'm a child, I'm only 16.

I: What does this mean, you cannot eat off the same plate? What does that mean to you?

R: They've rejected me. When they eat, they eat all the best parts and they just throw me in the corner like a dog.

Jottings—an example

- Understand. Time. RUF. Bush. Family. Challenges.
- So hard. Cloth cover. Treat like dog. Baby sick malaria. Health post. 10 Leones. Parents reject me. Baby rebel child. Father wants me sex. Treated badly raped. Sometimes

money. Beats me. Abuses me. Man took me in. house. Food. Sleep in his bed. Man dead. Tree fell. Parents afraid of me. Throw me in corner. Eat off the same plate. Afraid of me. What have I done? I'm a child. Only 16.

- Mean? Same plate
- Rejected me. Throw in corner like a dog.

Below is an unacceptable transcript.

Unacceptable transcript

The interviewer said to the respondent that he understood that she spent time in the bush with the RUF. He asked her, "What are the challenges of your situation?" She said her life has been difficult and she doesn't even have a blanket to cover herself and her baby at night. She looked angry and traumatized. She said she was treated like a dog and her baby was sick with malaria. She could not even take him to the hospital. The respondent said she had been rejected and disowned by her parents and her baby was called a rebel child. The father of her baby was a rebel man and he came around sometimes but he only came to have sex and he treated her badly. She came back to her parents but they said they were afraid she would bring them bad luck. They threw her food in a corner and gave her leftovers. She was treated like a dog. She has been rejected by her parents.

What is wrong with this reconstruction? Identify the following:

- What words are not the respondent's words?
- What important points did the interviewer leave out?
- What facts have been altered?
- What statements are inferences and reflect the analysis of the interviewer?

Body-Mapping Tool

Purpose

To understand the perspectives of children, including younger children, with regard to their likes and dislikes, as well as sources of harm and support for them.

Parents' permission

Before beginning the body mapping activity, get informed consent from the child's parent/guardian before talking with the children. Explain to the parents that you will be playing a game with children that asks them what they like and don't like, to understand children's sources of well-being and distress.

Materials

- Sheet of paper, approximately 1 meter by 1.5 meters (poster paper can be taped together)
- 1 box of crayons

Participants

Approximately ten to twelve children aged 7–12, with separate groups for boys and girls and for younger children (7–9 years) and older children (10–12 years).

Before beginning, get informed consent from the children.

Procedure:

1. Gather the group of children
2. Ask for one child to volunteer to have their body traced
3. Ask for a child to volunteer to trace the outline of the child as s/he lies on the paper
4. Ask the children to color the drawing (give each child one crayon)
5. Ask the children to make up a name for the figure that was drawn

6. Ask the following questions and write all the answers on a separate sheet of paper. Encourage all children to provide an answer. Tally the number of children who reported each answer.

Questions (for each question, point to the part of the body that the question is asking about):

- What do eyes like?
- What do eyes not like?
- What do ears like?
- What do ears not like?
- What do noses like?
- What do noses not like?
- What do mouths like?
- What do mouths not like?
- What does the head like?
- What does the head not like?
- What does the heart like?
- What does the heart not like?
- What does the stomach like?
- What does the stomach not like?
- What do hands like?
- What do hands not like?
- What do feet like?
- What do feet not like?

Thank the children for talking with you!

LIKE	**DISLIKE**
Eyes	
What do the Eyes like (also record no. of participants who agree)	What do the Eyes dislike? (also record no. of participants who agree)
____________	____________
____________	____________
____________	____________
____________	____________
____________	____________
Ears	
____________	____________
____________	____________
____________	____________
____________	____________
____________	____________
Nose	
____________	____________
____________	____________
____________	____________
____________	____________
____________	____________
Mouth	
____________	____________

Head

Heart

Stomach

Hands

Feet

Functional Network Matrix

Note: This is developed by a skilled data analyst. There will be one matrix per protection risk, and by the end of the research, the top ranked main protection risks should have been covered.

Protection Risk	**Questions**
Name of risk: Victim/survivor (e.g., girls)	*(1) If the child lived in your community, what do you think might happen to him or her?* Please describe what would happen step by step. Who could the child go to for help? What would the family do? What would the community do? Who would be involved? What supports would actually be provided for the child and family? Who would be the key decision-makers about what would happen? What role would be played by people/services outside the community?
Definition: (as understood by participants)	*(2) What would be the likely outcomes of the responses to the problem?* What would likely happen to the child/perpetrator/family? How satisfied with this outcome would various stakeholders (child, family, community, people outside the community) be with this outcome? Why?
Brief description or example:	*(3) What other option did the child/family have?* [Use same probes as in question (1) above.] Why wouldn't this second (or third) option be used? Would children, families, community leaders know about this option? Why or why not? Would it be viewed as less safe? Less appropriate? Less effective? Please explain why. **Note:** If they have not been mentioned already, ask whether the child/family could have gone to the police, a social worker, or a Child Welfare Committee?

Context information: (e.g., did participants vary in the definition of this risk; was it gender specific, when and where did it tend to occur, who was the likely perpetrator [e.g., teacher, parent, community member, etc.])	*(4) What recommendations would you make for better ensuring that the child is protected from harm and that the risks of the harm re-occurring are minimized?* What might have made it easier for the child to seek or access help? How could the help/services that the child received have been made better? Who else should have been involved in the process? What could be changed so that they become involved in the future? Is the risk that the harm will re-occur still present? If so, what could be done to minimize this risk?

LNG 5. Feeding Back to Communities the Key Findings from the Learning Phase

Introduction

Rationale

Feeding back to communities information from the learning phase is a priority for reasons having to do with ethics, research accuracy, and practice. The process of feeding back helps to avoid the ethical problems associated with a strictly extractive approach. Demonstrating respect and gratitude to the people of the participating communities, it is part of the learners' accountability to the communities. In addition, the feedback process provides a validation check, as it gives the participants the opportunity to identify possible inaccuracies in the findings or to offer clarifications. By including opportunity for collective reflection, the provision of feedback becomes part of the process of communities taking steps to strengthen child protection.

Objectives

The objectives of the feedback process are to:

- enable communities to learn from the key findings from the learning phase,
- check overall accuracy by asking whether these findings resonate or are inaccurate in particular respects, and
- invite reflection by community people on steps that they could take, without external support, to address harms to children and strengthen support for vulnerable children.

Methodology

The methodology will need to be adapted to the context and one's wider purpose. Also, it may need to be refined on the basis of what is learned in the initial one or two feedback sessions. Overall, though, there are three key steps:

(1) Preparation for the feedback meeting

(2) Presenting the key findings in a participatory manner, with discussion of whether they resonate

(3) Collective reflection on the implications of the findings

Preparation

The first step in preparing to feed back is to meet with the top civil society leaders in the area, thank them for their support during the learning phase, explain the purpose of feeding the information back, and ask their support in doing so. In explaining the purpose of the meeting, it is important to recognize the challenges that children and families face, and affirm how important it is to learn together through dialogue about how to strengthen child protection mechanisms and processes. In this context, feeding information back and discussing the findings is part of the process of learning together what the community can do to strengthen its supports for vulnerable children.

It is important to avoid raising expectations by keeping the focus on what communities are already doing and what additional things they could do themselves to improve community child protection mechanisms and processes. However, if the Chief or community leader says that they would like help in addressing harms to children and one is receptive to helping, it is important to say so and to emphasize that the emphasis should be on what communities themselves do, noting that the role of the outsiders is to facilitate. One could add that this topic deserves further discussion and ask to have a follow-up meeting after the feedback to pursue this topic further.

In this meeting with the Chief or top leaders, it is useful to ask about when and where the meeting should be held and also about what arrangements could be made for food. This is respectful because it helps to schedule the meeting at a time and place where many people can participate. Typically, the Chief or other leaders can identify and offer without charge the space where the meeting should take place. To reciprocate, it can be useful to plan to provide food for the meeting, especially since participants may have to take time off from their business or farming in order to participate in the meeting. Usually, the Chief or the community organizes the food, with the outsiders paying the food costs and helping to pay the travel costs of people who will need external transport in order to participate in the meeting. This reciprocal arrangement helps to build a sense of local ownership without overburdening the community.

A full community meeting can be useful. However, it can also be useful to have a somewhat smaller meeting to allow greater discussion. In some contexts, it can be helpful to cap the meeting at under 50 participants and make sure that the invitees include people who are positioned in very different ways and with attention to issues such as gender, age, religious orientation, etc. It is critical to avoid a situation in which the participants are mainly the family and friends of the Chief.

At community level, the participants would include a mixture of leaders (e.g., Chief, elders, women's group leader, religious leader, teachers, youth group leader, leaders of important committees, etc., and everyday people, including girls, boys, women, and men. Ideally, it will include also people who are not part of the community elite and who may be marginalized in important respects (e.g., out-of-school children). Particularly if one's aim is to help strengthen the wider child protection system, it is valuable to invite formal stakeholders. These could include district- or province-level social workers, health or education workers, Child Welfare Committee members, NGO child protection workers in the area, and city-level staff who help to oversee child protection.

Feeding back on the key findings

Typically, the meeting begins with prayers as are appropriate to the local context. Following a welcome and greeting by the Chief or leader, the facilitator (or mentor) greets people and puts them at their ease by saying that this is a "family meeting" and that "everyone should speak—man, woman, big, small." Out of respect, the facilitator may add that "You know more than we do about children. You are grandmothers, aunties, mothers, sisters; you know more since you live with children." This opening is consistent with the spirit of the learning, namely, that we had come to the community as students who seek to learn from local people. Also, this opening signals that the focus of this meeting is the community, not the outside learners.

The facilitator then thanks the Chief and the people for coming, thanking also all the people who had taken time to teach us about the good things the community does for its children. The facilitator also reminds everyone that "we are a community" and can speak openly with each other, and everyone's view is welcome. The facilitator then tells everyone that he wants to hear people's views about children again today and will then share what the full community had taught us during the learning. The facilitator could add that it is always useful to check to make sure that we heard you correctly and our findings in fact reflect local people's views.

To feed findings back in a participatory manner, the facilitator then asks the group some of the same questions that had been asked during the learning session, such as: "Who is a child?", "What are some of the main harms to children here?", and "What happens when those harms occur?" If participants say things or ask questions that do not relate to these questions, the facilitator respectfully puts them on the "parking lot," recording them so people can discuss them later. Most participants see this as a respectful way of keeping on subject and not digressing onto topics such as farming, recent government actions, or other topics that do not relate directly to children and the learning phase results.

The skilled facilitator works through each question fully before moving to the next, asking probing questions as they go. For example, if in response to the question, "Who is a child", someone says "A child is someone who cannot do things for himself—he depends on parents",

the facilitator could ask "What do others think—is that what a child is?" If several people affirm this view, the facilitator could add that "This too is what the full community told us in the learning—the child is someone who is dependent." The facilitator could then ask "What other things tell you someone is a child?" Other aspects such as age or doing children's things, not engaged in sex, etc. might come up. For each of these, the facilitator probes and then describes the relevant result from the learning. Conducted in a lively back-and-forth exchange with a chant-like rhythm, this approach is highly engaging.

The facilitator also probes in regard to how similar are the learning findings with what the meeting participants just said, and any discrepancies could be discussed. Of course, some divergence could occur owing to the fact that the learning engaged with the full community, whereas only a subset of people, including people who are trained in international child protection, are in the meeting. Nevertheless, it is possible that something new such as "child selling" will come up even though it did not come up during the learning phase. This becomes an opportunity for asking probing questions aimed at learning more about when, where, how, and why this happens, how widespread it is, what people do when they learn a child has been sold, etc. This information could be added to an addendum of the learning report or, better yet, could trigger some focused learning following the meeting in order to learn more fully about the issue.

Reflection on the implications of the findings

The meeting is also intended to be a reflective space that enables village people to explore what steps they could take on their own to help prevent or respond to particular harms to children. To some extent, this collective reflection might arise spontaneously, without prompting by the facilitator. For example, in the discussion of harms to children, people sometimes become impassioned about a particular issue and ask emphatically "What are *we* going to do about this problem?" This can be something of a magic moment that stirs the fires of collective empowerment and dialogue that could lead to community action. The skilled facilitator would likely let this discussion run long enough to help it gain traction and to affirm its importance. At the same time, the facilitator would likely point out that this question is so important that later in the meeting, we will have time to explore that question fully. The facilitator would likely add that it will be useful to reflect on what we should do when we have all the issues before us. Following the discussion of all the issues, the facilitator can then help the group to revisit its question: "What can we do?" to address the harms to children that have been raised. It is important to add that this is the first part of a longer discussion and that there is no need today to rush into final decisions, as there is a need to have a fuller discussion with the entire community.

The second way for the discussion to turn toward what communities could do to address the harms to children is for the facilitator to ask a question such as: "In regard to any of the harms that you just discussed, are there steps that the community could take, without outside help, to help address those needs? How could this be done?" Here, too, it is important to remind the participants that this is only the beginning of a longer discussion. To avoid raising expectations respectively, it is crucial to focus the discussion on what people can do without the support of outside agencies.

However the discussion about implications begins, the facilitator should promote an inclusive discussion by encouraging different people, including children, to speak. Also, the facilitator should ask questions that invite thinking about different options or ways of possibly addressing a particular harm to children. The discussion should close with a sincere thanks to the participants and by expressing one's hope that these discussions will continue with the entire community.

If the question arises whether the learning group or the facilitator will continue working with the community, it is best to answer honestly but in a way that keeps the focus on the community and does not raise expectations too much. For example, one could say that we will be discussing some possible collaboration with the Chief in the days ahead. One could add that if the community wants us to stay involved, we would likely have a small role since the focus is on what communities themselves can do. It will not be like a large, international NGO coming in with lots of money. It would be more like us helping the community to do more of the thing it already does a lot on—caring for its vulnerable children.

Do No Harm considerations

Various Do No Harm issues should be managed as part of this feeding back process. Beyond the issue of raised expectations that was discussed above, there may be breaches of confidentiality that are harmful in themselves and that can stimulate gossip. During the discussions, if someone said "Yes, that problem happens here as just yesterday Ibrahim over there beat his son," it would be crucial to intervene and explain that we are not here to discuss particular cases or individuals but want to learn and discuss wider practices in this area. It may also be useful to encourage people to engage in a dialogue process among themselves about how they can work collectively, without blaming or accusation, to care more effectively for their children. This problem-solving orientation should inform the discussions throughout.