

## **Data Needs for Child Protection System Strengthening and Advocacy**

**International Child Welfare:  
Analyzing and Reforming Child Protection Systems  
April 1-5, 2019  
University of Central Lancashire**

**Prepared by:**

**David Tobis, Ph.D.,  
Maestral International**

This section identifies different kinds of data that are needed at various decision-points in the process of assessing and strengthening a child protection system. These decision-points include:

1. Defining goals and the process
2. Developing research methodologies
3. Identifying policies and programs to strengthen child protection systems
4. Developing advocacy and implementation strategies
5. Developing indicators for performance monitoring and program evaluation

### **1. Defining goals and the process<sup>1</sup>**

You need to think about and make explicit what are the goals you seek to accomplish. It is important to consider your goals for:

- **Inputs:** things needed to implement the project
- **Outputs:** immediate results of the project; what has been created
- **Outcomes:** longer term results of the project; benefits achieved
- **Impact:** long-term, improvement in lives of beneficiaries

**A key measure of a project's success should be its impact on beneficiaries. If people's lives are not improved, the utility of the activity is limited.**

Please keep in mind that donors have often excessively emphasize “numbers reached,” which is an output, not an impact. For example in one country a development agency reported that 300,000 children and women had been “reached” in an awareness raising campaign with information on Gender Based Violence and Child Protection. This has

---

<sup>1</sup> Monitoring and Evaluation Blog. Difference between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. June 10, 2013, accessed at: [evaluateblog.wordpress.com](http://evaluateblog.wordpress.com)

also been referred to as the numbers who have “benefitted from” the outreach. Numbers “reached” or numbers who have “benefitted from” are not outcome measures because they do not measure the impact of the awareness raising on people’s lives. They are an output measuring what has been produced not the impact on consumers. **You want to measure how people’s lives have been changed by your intervention, such as a decrease in the rate of abuse, increased food consumption, reduced rates of FGMC or a sense that one’s life is better.**

### **Process goals**

Often the process by which research is conducted (or reforms are implemented) is as important as the findings. If recommendations based on research are presented in a top down way to a government or to a community by outsiders, donors, external technical experts, the results, no matter how true, may sit on a shelf and gather dust.

Using a collaborative process may take longer and perhaps lead to less precise results. But reaching consensus through a collaborative process can help ensure that the results are owned by the government or community you are working with and that the report will actually be used to significantly shape policy, programs and funding.

Please keep in mind that there is a big difference between on the one hand:

- Top down collaboration in which an external donor, development agency or external stakeholder comes with an idea, “convinces” a local partner that it’s a good idea, and then gets confirmation from sympathetic stakeholders,

and on the other hand

- Bottom up collaboration in which local needs and priorities, particularly based on the needs of consumers of services—parents and young people—are identified by the participants **with their participation throughout the process—planning, research, the program itself, evaluation, and policy formation.**

In Nigeria, for example, Maestral was asked to map and assess the child protection system in six states. Rather than conduct the assessment ourselves, we trained local teams in each of the six states to conduct the assessment of the child protection system. They gathered the data, analyzed it and wrote the reports which we edited. It was a messy process which took longer than if external consultants had gathered the data and written the reports ourselves. But the collaborative, participatory process created local ownership and transferred skills to Nigerians.

**A primary goal for development agencies should be the transfer of knowledge and power.** External assistance to strengthen a child protection system should enable the

government to gain the expertise and resources it needs to carry out its child protection functions independently. In one country in which I worked a development agency had a superb internal program monitoring system but had not transferred that system or even an abridged version of that system to the government. As a result, the government was not able to adequately monitor its programs, contracts or cases served, and remained dependent on external expertise.

## **2. Developing research methodologies**

The research methodology you choose is a balancing act based on:

- The time and resources available
- The precision of the evidence you need to have, and
- The scale on which a policy will be implemented

### **Types of Research Methodologies**

Research often looks at the characteristics of a sample taken from a larger population and then generalizes from the sample to the population. The methods we use and the size of the sample affect the reliability that the sample reflects the population and the generalizations we make from the sample to the population accurately reflect the population.

The following is a list of research methods that you can consider using to have data to make policy decisions. The methods range at the top of the list from those that are easiest to use, least expensive, and the least accurate in generalizing to a population. The methods at the bottom of the list are the most time consuming, most costly but are the most reliable to generalize to the population.

### **To Identify Characteristics of a Population**

#### **Illustrative sampling**

**Key informant interviews**

**Focus groups**

**Profiles of illustrative individuals or programs**

#### **Non-probability sampling (not random)**

**Convenience:** a sample that you can easy get

**Consecutive:** everyone who meets the criteria is selected

**Purposive:** people who meet a criteria, e.g. department heads

**Quota:** sample has same proportion of individuals as the population

**Snowball:** subjects identify future subjects to interview

#### **Probability sampling (random)**

**Cluster (MICS, Multi Indicator Cluster Survey):** only selected clusters are sampled; to reduce costs

**Stratified:** random sample from each strata

**Random:** each item has equal probability of being selected

## Not Just Data

It is not just data and information that can convince a social welfare ministry, the Treasury, donors or the general public that a particular reform is necessary. There are many other techniques and approaches that can be used that can be more persuasive than data, depending on the audience and the problem. These include:

- **Case studies:** In Nigeria, we used case studies of individual children going through the child protection system to create a consensus understanding of where the systemic problems were.
- **Study tours:** Rwanda's deinstitutionalization program has been a site for study tours for other countries to see that deinstitutionalization is possible and how it can be done right. In Tabasco, Mexico, the director of the social welfare agency was opposed to foster care until she visited Spain's foster care program.
- **Cost Estimates:** Providing cost estimates for a specific reform or estimates of the cost of inaction vs. the cost of the reform helped convince governments throughout Central and Eastern Europe to close institutions and create foster care.
- **Graphics:** In Lebanon, an NGO ABAAD organized a campaign to end law that exonerated a man if he married the woman he raped. A series of graphics played a major role in removing the law. Here's a link to a graphic that helped eliminate the law: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/22/world/middleeast/marry-your-rapist-laws-middle-east.html>

## Ethical Considerations

Another issue in developing your methodology and throughout your work to strengthen child protection systems are ethical considerations.

Attention to ethical issues is of paramount importance in the collection, storage, and use of information. Obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality of sensitive information that could potentially harm children, parents or organizations who provided information is a high priority.

Frequently seen problems include:

- Raised expectations through data collection
- Collecting information and not feeding it back to the community
- Reliance solely on non-participatory methods that objectify children and parents and fail to support their participation rights

- Use of aggressive methods that heighten children’s feelings of vulnerability
- Not providing psychosocial support in data collection situations in which it is likely to be needed such as when a child or parent is at risk.

Ethical issues arise also in connection with the use of comparison groups, which are necessary in trying to identify whether a particular intervention caused changes in children’s protection and well-being. Particularly contentious has been the use of randomized controlled trials that assign on a random basis some children to receive an intervention, and some children to a ‘control’ group in which they do not receive the intervention. An analysis of these issues is beyond the scope of these notes. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the use of approaches such as a wait-list methodology or a sequenced intervention enables comparisons across conditions in an ethical manner.

It is also essential to have a procedure to ensure that when risk situations are identified during research, that a safe and immediate procedure exists to provide needed and desired help to the vulnerable individuals.

Analysis and reflection on the unintended negative consequences of evaluation work puts one in a better position to avoid causing harm.

UNICEF has extensive guidelines on ethical considerations for research which is included in the annotated bibliography. It should be carefully reviewed.<sup>2</sup>

### **3. Identifying policies and programs to strengthen a child protection system**

Often we have identified a problem and need to find a model or program that will effectively address the problem. The evidence base for programs in child welfare is thin.

In 2011 U.S. Government convened an Evidence Summit on Protecting Children Outside of Family Care. The Summit brought together leading researchers and technical experts to assess the evidence available to inform policies, strategies, and programs relevant to protecting children outside of family care in low and middle income countries and identify evidence gaps to shape the future research agenda. One result was the United States Government Action Plan on Children in Adversity: A Framework for U.S. Government International Assistance: 2012-2017.

The Evidence Summit also began the process of assembling the evidence but found that there is a weak evidence basis for establishing policy and practice guidelines. The

---

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF PROCEDURE FOR ETHICAL STANDARDS IN RESEARCH, EVALUATION, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS, Document Number: CF/PD/DRP/2015-001, Effective Date: 01 April 2015, Issued by: Director, Division of Data, Research and Policy (DRP)

Evidence Summit findings underscore the dearth of rigorous and sensitive studies to complement information gleaned from practitioner experience, agency reports, case studies, and anecdotal evidence.

One conclusion of the summit was that additional funds should be allocated to research and to evaluate the impact of various interventions. One rule of thumb is that an evaluation should cost about 5% of the cost of the intervention though different types of evaluations could cost far more or far less.

In spite of the limited evidence available, there are places to go to assess whether a program is evidence-based and how strong that evidence is. In reviewing those sources, keep in mind that there are different levels or strengths of evidence used to define a program as evidence-based. The U.S. National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (2005) published a 6-level system for assessing evidence based practice:<sup>3</sup>

- 1) well supported, efficacious practice,
- 2) supported and probably efficacious practice,
- 3) supported and acceptable practice,
- 4) promising and acceptable practice,
- 5) innovative or novel practice, and
- 6) concerning practice

When describing a program as evidence-based, you should be clear about the strength of the evidence that is being used to assess the program. There are at least two places to go to find if a child protection program is evidence-based and the strength of the evidence.

- **The California Evidence Based Clearing House for Child Welfare**, located at <http://www.cebc4cw.org>. The information can be accessed by topic area or program name. This is a useful resource of evidence-based practice. It is listed in the annotated bibliography.
- **The Better Care Network** is also a resource for evidence-based practice in alternative care, family supports and child protection, including case management and Standard Operating Procedures, located at [www.BetterCareNetwork.org](http://www.BetterCareNetwork.org)

---

<sup>3</sup> Robert Balster, Virginia Commonwealth University and U.S. Agency for International Development Neil Boothby, Columbia University, James Garbarino, Loyola University, Philip Goldman, Maestral International, Gillian Huebner, U.S. Agency for International Development/Public Health Institute Michael Wessells, Columbia University, Charles Zeanah, Tulane University Using Evidence to Support Practice, U.S. Government Evidence Summit: Protecting Children Outside of Family Care, December 12-13, 2011, Pavilion II, Ronald Reagan Building, Washington, DC.

#### 4. Developing advocacy and implementation strategies to reform child protection systems

Most child protection system strengthening supported by bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors and development agencies in low and middle income countries is **top down**. An outside organization works with a national or local government to identify needed changes—of course getting input from a wide range of stakeholders, including people at the grassroots level, but the initiatives are driven by the top. This can be an effective approach but it has pros and cons. There are different strategies for reform that we often do not seriously consider and should consider.

One framework for describing different approaches to reform child welfare systems has been developed by Michael Wessells (2015).<sup>4</sup> He describes three categories of reform strategies: top down, bottom up and middle-out. As Wessells writes:

“**Top-down** approaches help to ensure that governments have the laws, policies, and capacities that are essential in protecting vulnerable children. [These reforms are initiated and implemented by the leadership of executive branch agencies or by external donors or advisors to government agency leaders.]

**Bottom-up** approaches work from grassroots level upward, feature community action, build on existing community strengths, and stimulate community-government collaboration.

**Middle-out** approaches, which emanate from actors such as city councils that are situated between the national and grass-roots levels, embed the child protection agenda in regional centers of power.”

Wessells wrote another paper, “A guide for community-led child protection processes,” which describes the pros and cons of top down and bottom up approaches. It can be found in Google Docs under background reading.<sup>5</sup>

For Bottom up strategies, there are different ways to engage communities, and for communities to be a meaningful force to press government to implement reforms or to support reform initiatives. The approaches vary depending on the level of community “ownership” or “community control.” One typology, developed with the support of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Wessells, M. G. (2015). Bottom-up approaches to strengthening child protection systems: Placing children, families, and communities at the center. *Child abuse & neglect*, 43, 8-21.

<sup>5</sup> Wessells, M. G. (2018). *A guide for supporting community-led child protection processes*. New York: Child Resilience Alliance.

Displaced Children's and Orphans Fund (DCOF), identifies 4 ways for an external agency to engage with communities<sup>6</sup>:

1. Direct implementation by the external agency
2. Community involvement in the agency's initiative
3. Community owned and managed activities mobilized by external agency
4. Community owned and managed activities initiated from within the community

The greater the community ownership of an issue, the greater the impact in shaping programs and policy and the greater the likelihood of sustainability.

### **5. Developing indicators and data for performance monitoring and program evaluation**

As you implement a model or a way to strengthen elements of a child protection system, you need to create an ongoing monitoring system and evaluate the impact of what you've done.

The follow is a list of different ways to evaluate the effectiveness of a program, again ranging from the simplest and least expensive though least reliable (at the top of the list), to the most effective and most expensive (at the bottom of the list).

#### **Evaluation of a Program or an Intervention**

##### **Formative Assessment** (description and process)

- Rapid Assessments: conducted soon after an incident
- Needs assessments: focus on requirements and recommendations
- Situation analysis: review of the external and internal environments
- SWOT analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
- Self-assessments: conducted by an individual or an organization themselves.

##### **Summative evaluation** (outcome)

- Expost: conducted after the intervention
- Expost with comparison: conducted after an intervention with a comparison group

---

<sup>6</sup> Behnam, N. 2008. Agencies, communities, and children: A report of the interagency learning initiative: Engaging communities for children's well-being. Washington, DC: USAID Displaced Children and Orphans Fund. Available online: [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/humanitarian\\_assistance/the\\_funds/pubs/comaction.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/the_funds/pubs/comaction.html), as cited in Michael Wessells (2009). What are we learning about protecting children in community? Save the Children.



- Pre-Post no comparison: conducted before and after an intervention to identify the difference
- Pre-Post with comparison

As mentioned previously, it's important **to evaluate impact not just numbers reached**. Governments and development agencies are at times reluctant to gather this type of data because it may show that the impact is far less than what is needed. But is it important to know what has been the impact to be able to make changes if they are needed.

Second, when reporting numbers of people reached or numbers of people actually benefitting, it is important to also present what is the level of need—how many people **need to be reached** so that the gap in services can be clear and progress toward meeting the gap can be measured. Systems are reluctant to record that type of information because it shows not just what is being done, but what is NOT being done and needs to be addressed. It is essentially the type of monitoring that is being done with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is the type of information that should be included in an Annual Social Assistance Report or and Annual Child Protection Report

Third, it is important to involve beneficiaries in determining what is important to them and to measure it. In one study of parents whose children were in out-of-home care, parents were asked what was most important to them in the help they received from service providers. The study found that parents cared most about being respected and treated with dignity, more important than the actual assistance they received. Parent satisfaction is an important indicator to measure a system's effectiveness.

Fourth, only evaluate what an intervention for a strengthened system is designed to do. If the strengthening is designed to increase number of children who go to school, that's what you should assess, not whether their families are better off, or even whether the children feel better. If you evaluate whether children feel better, the intervention should focus not just on getting children to school but to providing other assistance with the goal of assuring the children are better off.