

Shifting Power, Localizing, and Strengthening Ownership: Community-Led Child Protection

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Overview

- Localization
- Limits of Dominant Approaches
- Community-led approach
- Three case studies from action research in Sierra Leone, Kenya, and India
- Value of community agency, ownership, inclusive participation, leadership by young people and women
- Implications and recommendations for donors, policy leaders and practitioners

Localization

Concept

- Shift power to local people
- Progressively transfer funding to local actors
- Reduce pressure on international systems

Challenges

- Narrow emphasis on funding—expand to focus on autonomy, agency, responsibility-taking
 - The funding emphasis privileges registered organizations
 - Communities are often left out but are key for a social ecological approach
- Governments may reproduce expert-driven approaches

Expanding Child Protection Issues Affect Children in Zones of Armed Conflict and in More Stable Areas

- Structural violence: social exclusion, discrimination, oppression, pre-existing problems
- Chronic poverty, unemployment
- Family separation, displacement
- Sexual exploitation and abuse
- Living and working on the streets
- Multiple losses
- Disability
- Trafficking
- Recruitment or use by armed groups



Limits of Dominant, Expert-Driven Approaches

- Outsiders hold the decision-making power
- ‘West is best’ approaches
- Poor fit of programs with local context
- Local people regarded as victims or ‘beneficiaries’
- Little local agency and ownership—reduced effectiveness
- Poor sustainability
- Dependency

Community-Led Child Protection

- A localized approach in which the community holds the power, decides which harms to children to address, plans how to address those issues, takes collective action, & reflects, making adjustments as needed
- CLCP respects people's autonomy, agency, and dignity under difficult circumstances. It appreciates community understandings, problem-solving abilities, resources, and the value of contextual approaches
- Whole community approach, animated by collective caring, responsibility-taking, community agency and action, and internalized accountability
- Outsiders can play roles in nondirective facilitation, documentation, and knowledge dissemination

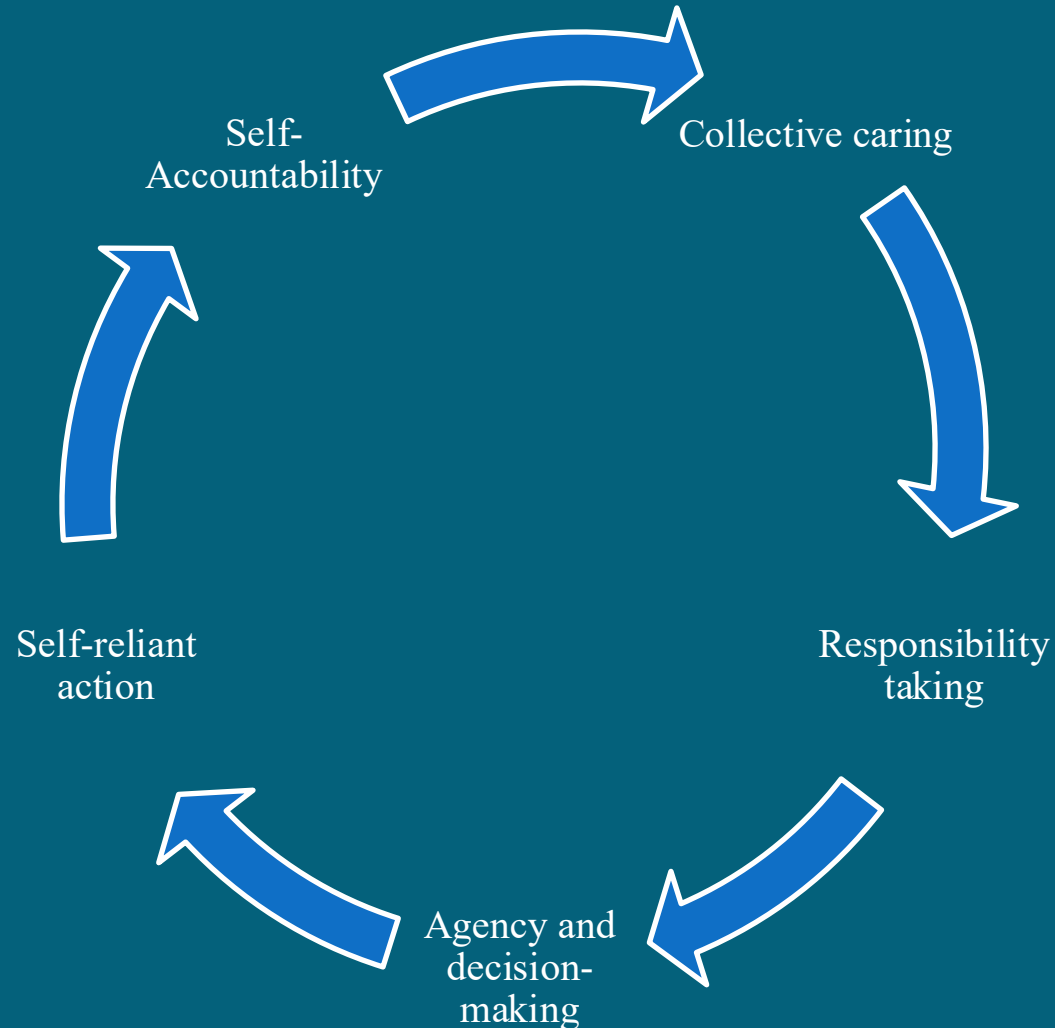
Action Research to Test Effectiveness

- Quasi-experimental design
- Mixed methods applied at baseline and endline
- National researchers
- Stages
 - Building trust
 - Learning phase via rapid ethnography
 - Community decides which issues to address
 - Community action planning
 - Community action
 - Community reflection, planning, & adjustment

Kenya Case Study

- Kilifi County, Coast area (2013-2019; spread to 2023)
- Two intervention communities decided to focus on ‘early sex’ (early sexual debut) linked with ‘idling’, food insecurity, men demanding sex in exchange for food, sanitary pads, or transportation
- Community action included football (girls’ and boys’ teams), life skills (through discussions, theater, etc.), and parenting skills development, plus livelihood elements
- Girls and boys exercised leadership
- Outcomes: reduced ‘early sex’, increased education participation, improved parent-child relations, spread of the community-led action, high levels of ownership
- Input from Ken Ondoro

The Ownership Cycle



Three Country Findings

Process

- Communities used a slow process of inclusive dialogue and decision-making, with attention to root causes
- Community mobilization around children's well-being
- Communities led their own planning, contextually relevant action, and reflection followed by adjustments

Outcomes

- Sierra Leone: reduced teenage pregnancy out of wedlock
- Kenya: reduced 'early sex'
- India: reduce early marriage and school dropout
- High levels of ownership, social cohesion, and satisfaction, with evidence for scalability

Lessons Learned

- Providing space for local agency is crucial
- Inclusivity enables the voice and leadership of girls, boys, women, and people who are often invisible
- Non-directive facilitation requires quality backstopping and ongoing learning
- Helpful to focus on local terminology and idioms
- Capacity strengthening should be oriented toward co-learning and driven by the community.
- Importance of collaboration between CLCP and Government processes
- Value of integrating economic supports with child protection
- CLCP may be scaled up horizontally or vertically

Limitations

- Not a ‘one size fits all’ approach
 - Acute crises and need for expert-led work
 - Settings in which there is no ‘community’
 - Severe violations warrant specialized support
- Longer time frame and need for adaptation to humanitarian settings
- Concerns about ‘harmful traditional practices’
- Short-term funding with demand for immediate results and control over timetables, interventions, & desired outcomes
- Structural and systemic problems such as North-South power asymmetry

Recommendations for Donors

- Shift power by prioritizing community ownership, agency and autonomy.
- Support CLCP using flexible, longer-term funding for community action.
- Simplify and lighten the requirements on communities for grant administration, management, monitoring, accountability, and reporting.
- Shift power by supporting greater knowledge flow and learning from the global South.

Recommendations for Practice

- Prioritize the use of CLCP as a means of shifting power to local people and enabling high levels of ownership.
- Use an initial learning process that brings forward children's voices and lived experiences, lays the foundation for community ownership, and enables understanding of community power dynamics.
- Create greater space for community agency, action, and accountability on issues of child protection.
- In adapting CLCP to diverse settings, including humanitarian settings, use a flexible, holistic, community-owned approach that adheres to CLCP principles, with attention to documentation and pilot testing.

Full report:

<http://childprotectionforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Shifting-Power-Localizing-Ownership-and-CLCP.pdf>

Additional resources and information:

<http://childprotectionforum.org>