

Technical Brief

Nigeria CUBS

Social Welfare System Strengthening: Improving OVC Support Systems in Nigeria

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TECHNICAL BRIEF: Community-Based Support for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CUBS) Social Welfare System Strengthening: Improving OVC Support Systems in Nigeria

Launched in 2009, and funded by the President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Community-Based Support for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CUBS) project was designed to support the Government of Nigeria's National Priority Agenda for a coordinated approach to address the needs of orphans and vulnerable children. Implemented by Management Sciences for Health (MSH) in partnership with Africare, the five-year project worked in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) and its corresponding state ministries in 11 states: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Ekiti, Enugu, Gombe, Imo, Kebbi, Rivers, Sokoto, and Taraba. The overall goal of the project was to ensure sustainable access to care and support services for orphans and vulnerable children.



Photo by Jessica Charles

CUBS has reached more than 53,100 OVC with care and support services since the project began in 2009.

This technical brief highlights six social welfare strengthening practices introduced and supported by the CUBS project: technical working groups (TWGs) to coordinate efforts for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), customized state priority agendas, simplified standard operating procedures (SOPs), capacity building for using data collection tools under the national M&E plan, state assessments, and training on the Child Rights Act.

Linking Community and State Leaders through the Technical Working Group Bridge

Nigeria is home to 17.5 million OVC. Although civil society organizations (CSOs) and child protection committees (CPCs) provide support at the community level, and ministries of social women affairs and social development (SMWASD) oversee state-level interventions, coordination is often a problem. Insufficient communication and collaboration between the two levels have often left state-level leaders with a poor understanding of the causes and conditions of vulnerability among children in their states, and community leaders with inadequate resources and support from their state-level counterparts.



To improve collaboration between communities and states, CUBS identified influential leaders from both levels to form OVC technical working groups (TWGs). The TWGs serve as a “bridge” to facilitate the exchange of information and promotion of coherent and greater coordination and harmonization among stakeholders for the implementation of OVC programming.



In addition to traditional stakeholders such as state leaders, social workers, CSO directors, and CPC chairmen, CUBS recruited representatives from health facilities, donor agencies, religious bodies, law enforcement agencies, and local government areas (LGAs) to serve on the TWGs. By 2011, CUBS had formed 46 TWGs in 11 states and trained hundreds of members on OVC care and advocacy, fund raising, referrals, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Technical Working Groups' Achievements

As of 2014, the 46 TWGs have more than 1,000 members. These groups have improved support for vulnerable children in their states through various interventions, including the following:

- Advocated for SMWASDs to increase budget allocation for OVC service delivery
- Established and enforced laws to prevent street roaming and hawking during school hours
- Supported the rescue and rehabilitation of abused and abandoned children
- Advocated for enforcement of the Child Rights Act
- Worked with government leaders to waive tuition fees for OVC
- Provided laptops, trainings, and supervision to support OVC program data collection and coordination
- Worked with the International Federation of Women Lawyers and other partners to help OVC gain access their rightful inheritances
- Raised funding for OVC service delivery, tuition, and school materials
- Supported the formation of child protection networks at LGA level
- Helped CSOs with OVC support programs become formally registered in their respective LGAs
- Supported OVC caregiver trainings and psychosocial support activities for vulnerable children.

To ensure that OVC needs stay in the states' spotlights, CUBS helped the TWGs to strengthen the legal framework around OVC support. Over the course of the project, these efforts inspired the following OVC policy and protocol improvements:

National Priority Agenda on OVC

Nigeria's *National Priority Agenda on OVC* outlines plans, strategies, and targets for OVC programming. Although this national framework has been a useful guide for the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD), state-level stakeholders have needed specific plans to address their unique OVC demographics, support structures, and social and cultural realities. Without these, the state-level OVC response has been prone to poor coordination and redundancies. In response, CUBS helped 10 SMWASDs develop customized state priority agendas. These documents have enabled ministry staff, CSOs, and implementing partners to better coordinate and monitor their OVC activities. Stakeholders report that the agendas have helped them collect and use OVC data to inform program planning and improvements, prevent duplication, and hold one another accountable. The SMWASD staff also report that the agendas allow more partners to participate in OVC initiatives so there is a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for state-level OVC activities and outcomes.

"My capacity has been built so much since CUBS came to Enugu State. CUBS trained me on leadership, capacity building, the right way to monitor and coordinate CSOs, proposal writing, and work plan preparation. With this training, we have been able to attract donors to assist OVC. CUBS' also inaugurated the TWG at state and communities levels and supports our quarterly meetings. A lot of children have been identified and enrolled into school... I am bold, I have the courage to stand before any audience and talk because they have made me to know my rights. In fact, I cannot over emphasize CUBS' contributions in Enugu State."

*~ Esther Mba, OVC Desk Officer
Enugu SMWASD*



National Guidelines for OVC Programming

Nigeria's national standard operating procedures (SOPs) for OVC programming provide detailed program strategy and implementation guidelines that help improve the quality of OVC services and standardize activities across states, projects, partners, and communities. Although the national SOPs have existed for years, most implementers have not had a copy, and those that do – especially community-level implementers – have found the SOPs highly technical and



difficult to understand. To improve SOP use, CUBS revised them with simple, user-friendly language and disseminated 1,000 copies to state, LGA, and community-level stakeholders. CUBS also taught them how to use the SOPs and established quality improvement teams to ensure staff were implementing the guidelines correctly and consistently. Stakeholders report that the SOPs have contributed to improved OVC service quality and helped to ensure a consistent technical approach across the 11 project-supported states.

National M&E Plan for OVC

CUBS worked closely with the FMWASD, state ministries, LGAs, CSOs, and other stakeholders to develop and implement the *National M&E Plan for OVC*. The 38 CSOs and the 11 OVC desk officers in the CUBS-supported states now use the nationally-approved data collection tools included in this plan to record and report all OVC service delivery data. This improvement has allowed for more regular, consistent, and high-quality data collection to inform OVC programming. To expand this progress, the FMWASD invited CUBS to train M&E officers from numerous agencies and partner organizations to use the data collection tool.

State Assessments Inform OVC Programming

With 160 million citizens, Nigeria is not only the most populous African nation, but is also one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse. This diversity and density impact all aspects of its citizens' lives including cultural norms, religion, gender roles, leadership structures, and community practices. To be effective, OVC stakeholders must identify the unique social conditions and cultural norms of those they serve and develop programs and activities that respond to these. As a first step, CUBS worked with SMWASD leaders to conduct state-level OVC assessments. Ekiti's SMWASD was particularly responsive to this initiative and, by 2013, CUBS had helped this agency to conduct a thorough OVC assessment and develop a 70-page report of the findings. The report includes OVC population estimates for each LGA as well as a description of the state's OVC needs, services, service delivery gaps, and recommendations for service delivery improvements. Ekiti State's leaders now use this report to guide the allocation and distribution of resources for OVC programming. Impressed by the utility of this resource, many SMWASD agencies have initiated similar OVC assessments.



Child Rights Act (CRA)

The CRA includes a series of laws designed to support children’s right to life, education, health, and protection from abuse, stigma, and discrimination. It also calls on leaders and stakeholders to prioritize the prevention and elimination of child abuse and violence and outlines the responsibilities that children have to their families and communities. Although the Government of Nigeria passed the CRA in 2003, for many years the provisions set forth in the act were not enforced and most state-level leaders were not focusing on the rights of children. To operationalize the CRA, CUBS worked with seven OVC TWGs to identify the unique realities that impact children’s health and safety in each of their states. CUBS then helped the TWGs implement the CRA by establishing culturally-appropriate laws that address state-level religious and societal norms; family courts where children can receive legal support without being exposed, stigmatized, or discriminated against; parliaments where children can participate in decisions and activities that concern them; and LGA-level social welfare units and community-level CPCs where children’s rights and needs can be identified and addressed.

CUBS also trained more than 300 police and security officers to understand the CRA and enforce its statutes. These efforts are bringing child abuse, rape, domestic violence, and other sensitive issues to the forefront of state-level OVC discussions and inspiring advocacy and policy improvements to enhance child protection efforts. Community members, stakeholders, and the children themselves now have access to forums where they can discuss child safety concerns and legal structures through which they can enforce protective laws and apply punitive measures to those who violate the CRA. State-level leaders report that more cases of child abuse have been reported and more perpetrators have been fined and imprisoned since CUBS helped them enforce the CRA.

Maintaining Momentum

Between 2009 and 2014, CUBS established 46 OVC TWGs across 11 states and worked with these groups to strengthen OVC data, policies, guidelines, and M&E systems. These TWGs now have more than 1,000 members who meet regularly and are committed and equipped to developing tailored OVC support programs and strategies. Other states are learning from CUBS’ example and starting to develop their own OVC TWGs and conduct assessments and surveys to better understand the OVC situation in their states. Social welfare system leaders in the 11 states now see OVC as a priority and have the motivation and capacity to identify and address the needs of these children.

“People are now able to talk about children and their issues...once we talk about it we’re putting pressure on people to take responsibility.”

*~ Ugboaga Adaji
CUBS OVC Services Advisor*



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