



Networking to Address Violence Against Children in East Africa: An Exploratory Study

Research Report

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Reference group profiles

This group was set up to provide advisory on and steer the research



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Kiiya JK is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of C-Sema. Kiiya JK has over 15 years of experience in this area of work. Over the years he has worked with teams to develop elaborate strategic plans aiming to give a voice to children through evidence generated data. He has been instrumental in building synergies important to advance children's agenda in Tanzania. He pioneered the formation of National Child Helpline in Tanzania, Tanzania Child Online Protection Taskforce and he's currently working to setup Missing Children Tanzania.

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Ms. Agnes Mutonyi Wasike is a social worker by Profession. She holds a bachelor's degree in social work and Social Administration from Makerere University, Uganda and a Master's degree in Development Management at the Open University UK. She currently holds the position of National Coordinator, Child Protection Working Group (CPWG), a national coordination mechanism on child protection that brings together national level state and non-state stakeholders in child protection in Uganda for linking, information sharing and learning. She has coordinated the CPWG since

2012 to date as a seconded officer to government under a Public-Private Partnership between TPO Uganda (NGO) and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development with funding support from the Oak Foundation.

She has 22 years practice experience in childcare and Protection and previously served in NGO Program management for the Forum for African Women Education Educationalists (FAWE) Uganda Chapter (10 years) and Share An opportunity Uganda (4 years).

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Katie Davies is Program Manager at Ignite Philanthropy: Inspiring the End to Violence Against Girls and Boys, where she leads the Strategic Networks initiative, which convenes and supports regional and global networks in the field to end sexual violence against children.

Katie holds an MA International Development and Planning and a BSc (Hons) Economics, both from the University of Sheffield, and is currently completing an MSc Grantmaking, Philanthropy and Social Investment from Bayes Business School (City University, London).

Prior to joining Ignite Philanthropy in 2018, she was the Asia-Pacific portfolio leader at Stars Foundation, playing a lead role in the evolution of its flagship grantmaking programme and managing a portfolio of national and regional-level partnerships, including grantee, referral and funding partners. Katie also brings experience working as Senior Consultant for philanthropy advisory firm Ten Years' Time, and started her career working in policy and advocacy at Oxfam Cymru, working on domestic policy issues including the educational rights of asylum seekers in Wales.

Krista Riddley

Krista is the Program Officer, Global Children's Rights Program, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund

Krista holds a Master's in International Affairs from Columbia University, BA from Iowa State University, and was a Rotary Foundation Scholar at the Université de Côte D'Ivoire

Krista has 25 years of experience in humanitarian, humanrights, socialjustice, and development organizations based in the US, and West and Southern Africa. She currently leads work on Wellspring's preventing violence against children portfolio. Previously Krista was the Senior Director for Gender and Humanitarian

Programs at the UN Foundation's Clean Cooking Alliance leading work to ensure access to cleaner cooking options for women and vulnerable populations. Prior to that, she served as a Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor at the U.S Agency for International Development, Director of Humanitarian Policy at Oxfam America and Advocacy Director for Africa and the Middle East at Amnesty International USA. Her responsibilities have included providing advisory support for the execution of US Policy on the global response to humanitarian crises, leading strategy, policy and advocacy work on humanitarian crises worldwide and addressing violence against women and girls in conflict situations.



Jacqueline Asiimwe

Jacqueline Asiimwe is the CEO of CivSource Africa. She is a Ugandan and USA trained lawyer with a successful record of accomplishments in leadership, management, law, and policy formulation, as well as advocacy and training. She possesses extensive experience in policy research and analysis, lobby and advocacy on human rights, governance, and democratization, as well as women's rights. She is a results-oriented, high-energy, hands-on professional and my work experience spans both civil society, government, and donor agencies. She has excellent communication, co-ordination, and networking skills.

Jacqueline has vast experience working with networks. From 2002 to 2004, Jacqueline was the Chief Executive of the Uganda Women's Network, one of the leading networks advancing women's rights in Uganda. While working as the Deputy Program Manager of the European Union, Civil Society Capacity Building Program, Jacqueline led and oversaw the organization's work with networks. Jacqueline also oversaw the program's support to district networks and led a team of Network Facilitators, whose main role was to provide capacity building on network self-understanding, leadership (both at board and management level), and better network management practices.

Jacqueline brings a unique understanding of the potential and challenges that networks represents. Jacqueline also brings her vast knowledge and experience working with and supporting a wide range of networks across various social justice issues – including women's rights, reproductive rights, disability rights, children's rights, and sexual minority rights.

Jacqueline now heads a network - the East Africa Philanthropy Network (As Board Chair).



Dr Lina Digolo

Dr Lina Digolo is a Senior Associate with the Prevention Collaborative. She has over 15 years' experience as a pediatrician, researcher, and public health specialist. Lina is passionate about fighting for gender equality and addressing social injustice, especially around matters relating to women and their children. Her current focus is on Violence against Women and their children (VAW/C) and, supporting programmes to work at the intersections. She is particularly interested in the practical links between research evidence and implementation. Lina has significant expertise in supporting national governments, civil society organizations, bilateral and philanthropic donors, and UN agencies to use evidence for policymaking and programme design in the Global South.

International experience

Her international experience spans in several fields i.e., Provided technical support to several organizations/ development partners, including WHO, PEPFAR, UN and Together for Girls by developing or reviewing GBV guidelines and policy documents.

She is a member of advisory/reference group for a global database on how violence against women is addressed in health policies and protocols and in multisectoral policies and plans of action (WHO, 2021)

Technical Advisor for the Ministry of Health and other relevant ministries in Kenya in adapting international policies and developing various policy documents, curricula tools and guidelines.





ACRONYMS

CBO	Community Based Organization
CoP	Community of Practice
CSA	CivSource Africa
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
VAC	Violence Against Children


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Networks have gained increasing recognition over time in development work with considerable focus on formal networks in a range of fields. In this study, we explored the functionality of diverse networks or coalitions that respond to violence against children (VAC). VAC is a global problem and is widespread in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. It takes on several forms including but not limited to sexual, physical, and emotional violence.

There are several interventions in place to respond to violence by a range of actors, including both public and private, and those intervening in solo programmes and those in joint programmes. This study sought to understand how a range of interconnected efforts function to respond to VAC. The guiding objectives were to describe the existing child rights networks in three East African Countries; to describe how networking happens in order to add value to the lives of children; to identify the tipping points for philanthropic support and to develop recommendations for child rights networking in the region.

In order to achieve these objectives, we adopted an exploratory qualitative research approach. We used a bottom-up selection of study participants, starting with duty bearers engaged in responding to VAC at the grassroots level who then informed the study on those actors at the district level and finally at the National level, including their donors and funders. A desk review of literature was conducted, and additional data was collected using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with grassroots actors, and interviews with network leads at the grassroots level, district level, national level and finally with donors/funders. The study was carried out in three East African countries—Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. In each country, data was collected from purposively selected locales.

We found out that although literature on networks normally illuminates the role of formal networks, networking takes different forms and is understood differently. Drawing on study findings, we argue that the starting and ending points of a network can be difficult to differentiate, often intertwined and messy. Therefore, we defined networking as an interconnected web of actors or resources pooled together to respond to a common goal for a specified or non-specified period. In this definition, networks are all forms of joint efforts that come together with a specific goal of responding to VAC. We broadly categorize networks as formal/structured and informal/unstructured, however, within each broad category there are diverse subcategories.



The discussions we had with study participants illustrate that networks cannot fit in neat categories due to their complex and fluid nature. However, our analysis of the generated data indicates that networks exhibit features that allow them to be classified as formal/structured and informal/unstructured. They may or may not be fully active. There are also formal networks which are inactive though they remain by name. On the other hand, informal networks lack most features formal ones have, however, they do consist of a known membership, a clear, established purpose for existence, and well demarcated operational areas.

The challenges of networking that emerged include low prioritization of network activities by members, weak follow up of VAC cases, conflicts among network members, strict donor restrictions, limited financing for network activities, inadequate personnel commitment and membership competition, among others. We make recommendations for systems approach support, supporting communities of practice at grassroot, and fostering public-private partnerships, among others, as avenues to optimally utilize philanthropic funds. We further recommend synchronization of donor – local priorities, involvement of children in networking, strengthening of digital networking and funding networking the function more than the identity, among others.

INTRODUCTION

Background

There are varying definitions of networks that have been proposed by scholars. However, some elements are largely agreed upon. Many researchers suggest that networking includes a range of actors, such as organizations, institutions or individual actors, all of whom join forces to counter a common cause (Padron, 1991; Plucknett et al., 1993; Engel & van Zee, 2004). Additionally, Brinkerhoff (1999) describes networks as cross-sectoral collaborations whose purpose is to achieve convergent objectives through the combined efforts of both sets of actors, but where the respective roles and responsibilities of the actors involved remain distinct. The essential rationale is that these interactions generate synergistic effects; that is; more and or better outcomes are attained than if the network partners acted independently. (p.126)

Similarly, Younis (2017) defines networks as “[s]ocial arrangements made up of individuals and representatives of institutions based on establishing and building relationships, sharing tasks and working on mutual or joint activities, enabling new learning and mobilizing alternative action,” (p. 2). Whereas, Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001) use the concept of “coalition” which they define as a group of organizations whose members commit to an agreed purpose and shared decision making to influence external institutions while each member maintains their autonomy. Networks have also been viewed as institutionalized partnerships that exist between organizations, while the networks remain autonomous; they contribute their resources voluntarily, and share common vision, objectives, and rules and sometimes have a set of common activities (The Resource Centre for Development of the Skat Foundation, 2004).

However, the institutionalized view of networks fails to recognize the informal, non-registered networks and the individuals who collaborate to address a given social problem. Although these definitions highlight the aspect of shared goals, there is an underlying assumption that only formally registered organizations form such coalitions. In this study, we extended this discourse by exploring the functionality of networks or coalitions that respond to violence against children (VAC). We sought to understand a range of networks that extend beyond these limiting definitions, therefore, we included unstructured arrangements in our study. Ultimately, this research aimed to unveil the functionality of existing VAC networks and their corresponding impact to better support decision making on network granting.

Situation of VAC in East African Region

VAC is a global concern; prevalent in many countries, including those in the East African region- Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania.

A VAC survey conducted in Tanzania in 2011 revealed that the most prevalent form of VAC is sexual violence; with nearly one in three girls and one out of seven boys experiencing some form of sexual violence before the age of 18 (Ministry of labour, empowerment, elders, youth women and children, 2017). Most children do not report their VAC experiences, few seek services, and as a result even fewer receive care, treatment or support. Apart from sexual violence, the rate of physical violence among girls is 72% while for boys the figure is 71%. Emotional violence affects approximately one quarter of both boys and girls. In addition, corporal punishment is lawful in Tanzania and regarded by many as a normal means of disciplining children. Tanzania also has traditional practices that harm children such as early marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The latter affects 70.8% of the girls in some Tanzanian communities

(National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) [Tanzania] and ICF Macro, 2011). It is estimated that at least 7.9 million women and girls in Tanzania have undergone FGM (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2013).

In Uganda, VAC affects all children including those under the age of five. Results from the most recent VAC survey (2018) show that physical violence increases with age. Among children aged 13-17 years, 59% boys and 49% girls reported experiencing physical violence in the previous year. These proportions increased among those aged 18-24 years – males (68%) and females (59%). Additionally, 1 in 3 girls (35%) and 1 in 7 males (17%) have ever experienced sexual violence. The most common places sexual violence occur are at home, on the road and at school (Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development [MGLSD], 2018). Different forms of violence often overlap as many survivors have experienced more than one form of violence throughout their childhood.

Kenya conducted the most recent national survey in 2019 (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Kenya, 2019). 45.9% females and 56.1% males experienced childhood violence. The most common is physical violence experienced by 38.8% females and 51.9% males. Females are more likely to experience sexual violence and 44.4% experience their first incidence of childhood sexual violence from their intimate partners. Among those aged 18-24 years, nine out of 10 do not seek help after being sexually abused. Physical violence is mostly by parents and caretakers, while emotional violence is mainly by peers. The median age at first sex for both boys and girls is 17 and among those aged 18-24 years, the females are four times more likely to be married than males (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Kenya, 2019).

Consequences – VAC has social and health consequences for children, including mental distress, sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, injury, and absenteeism from school, among others. VAC also has consequences in adulthood. For example, the 2018 survey report in Uganda shows that 19-24 years old males who had a history of emotional violence had an increased likelihood of having multiple sexual partners; in Kenya, 12.5% of females who perpetrate physical violence are survivors of childhood violence.

Risk factors for VAC – These present at 4 levels¹ – 1) Individual level (e.g. low income, low literacy level, history of exposure to violence, sexual minority and excessive use of alcohol); 2) Close relationship (e.g. poor parenting, emotional disconnection, family dysfunction, and early force marriage); 3) Community level (e.g. poverty, high population density, easy access to alcohol, and low social cohesion and transient populations); and 4) Societal level (e.g. cultural norms that normalize violence, absent or inadequate social protection and weak regulatory environment).

1 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>

Child Protection Mechanisms in the Region

Considering the burden of VAC in the three countries, both state and non-state actors have made varied efforts to advance child protection. For example, all three States have ratified international doctrine on VAC including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Additionally, all the three countries have ratified the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, and ILO Convention 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour (www.ilo.org). They have put in place legal apparatus to domesticate these instruments and implement the provisions there in. For example, the National Constitutions of the three countries all provide for respect for, protection, and fulfilment of children's rights.

Research problem

In East Africa, current efforts addressing issues of children are often disconnected and discontinuous. Traditional grant making, supports one civil society organization to do one set of activities for a certain set of beneficiaries or policies for a specified period; most times the relationship is discontinuous. Additionally, current children's rights strategic approaches address only symptoms and not root causes of VAC. These approaches address violations in a piecemeal fashion, and they overly invest in outsider actors to direct change without adequate local ownership and leadership. In order to advance progress on implementing children's rights, there is a need for increased horizontal and vertical connectivity of children's rights actors.

Following this background, CivSource Africa (CSA) and partners commissioned a study to generate evidence on functionality of existing networks and their corresponding impact. We hypothesized that better connected, better coordinated and more sustained actions by children and duty bearers would result in an increased acknowledgement of children's rights. The overarching question that guided this study was, "How can children's rights networks collaborate better to prevent VAC in East Africa?" To address this question, the main objective was to understand functionality and connectivity of existing networks and their corresponding impact towards prevention and realization of child rights in East Africa.

1. STUDY OBJECTIVES

- a. To describe the existing child rights networks in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.
- b. To describe how networking happens in order to add value to the lives of children.
- c. To identify the tipping points for philanthropic support.
- d. To develop recommendations for child rights networking in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative approach. We chose qualitative methods as they would enable us to interact with the participants and generate in-depth perspectives around networking on VAC. Data were collected using a variety of methods, including Key Informant Interviews, Document Review and Focus Group Discussions.

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Research was carried out in three East African countries; Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. In Uganda, recent records from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development [MGLSD] (2019) show that cases of VAC in 2019 were highest in Kampala and considerably low in Gulu. Gulu was; therefore, purposively selected for having a reputation of least VAC cases in the country, while Kampala was selected for location in the Central region with the highest cases of VAC and for its high concentration of network national secretariats. The study covered two districts of Gulu (Paichwo Sub-county) and Kampala (Nsambya and Katwe).

In Kenya, through purposive sampling, Nairobi and Kisumu counties were selected as the key study sites. Selection criteria was informed by logistical feasibility, blend of rural urban contexts, presence of state and non-state actors responding to VAC, existence of high cases of VAC, and a need for social cultural diversity. Nairobi county was specifically selected due to high cases of VAC with informal settlement dynamics (Onyango and Tpstn, 2015), a mix of national and county government responses, and multiple organizations responding to VAC. Nairobi is also a host to several network secretariats and donor communities. Kisumu county is characterized by a heavy burden of HIV and orphanhood, high cases of teenage pregnancies, rural and urban settings (Mulinge et al., 2019), and a heavy presence of Community Based Organizations (CBO) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) responding to VAC. Kisumu Central was specifically selected due to its both urban and informal settlement dynamics as well as Kisumu East which is predominantly rural.

In Tanzania, the study was carried out in Dar es Salaam region, in 3 districts and 8 wards. The process of identifying the study sites involved identification of most NGO headquarters as well as where most networking is done. The researchers developed a list of NGOs and Networks in consultation of the following; 1) The NGO directory 2015 prepared by Tawala za Mikoa na Serikali za Mitaa (TAMISEMI); 2) Directory prepared by Tanzania Association of Non-Governmental Organizations and 3) List of Network Organizations in Tanzania using google search. The researchers were able to identify at least 70% of the NGOs and networks in Dar es Salaam, thus selected the region to participate in the study. Most local NGOs and CBOs are based in Dar es Salaam, regardless of whether their activities are limited to Dar es Salaam only or cover other parts of the country. The districts that were selected include Kigamboni, Temeke and Ilala district. The study also purposively selected Kigamboni; a relatively new settlement with most traditional beliefs (Temeke) and administrative or planned settlements (Ilala).

Study Population

In each of the study areas, the population was comprised of leaders and individuals involved in VAC. The specific networks and individuals who participated in the research were identified during the document review process, discussions with CivSource Africa and through interactions with FGD participants.

At the grassroots level, the participants across the three countries included, local leaders, volunteers, community-based organizations, key community gate keepers, and local government officials. The FGDs held at the grassroots level informed the selection of participants at the district level. At the district level, we selected networks and organizations that had collaborative efforts with local level actors; both public and private actors. The national level participants were also selected following the discussions held at district levels, including both public and private actors, and were primarily national network leads who either acted as hosts or secretariats. Lastly, donors and funders were included; participants in this category were recruited by other network members, or were later selected from the results of document reviews.

Study Procedure

The study was undertaken following a step by step process as elaborated below:

- **Securing the Research permits:** Prior to the commencement of the study, ethical clearance was granted by the various ethical research boards. In Uganda, the research proposal was reviewed by the institutional Review Board of Uganda Christian University. Thereafter, a research permit was secured from Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. In Kenya, the proposal received ethical clearance from the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation. While in Tanzania the research clearance was acquired from Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) and after getting an ethical clearance it was taken to Tamisemi for a letter of approval which provided permission to carry out the research at the regional, and district level.
- **Desk review and mapping out participants:** A desk review on functionality of networks and networking was completed to help conceptualize study issues, identify literature gaps and identify existing networks. The document review allowed us to identify several existing networks in the region; further enabling us to map out organizations and individuals for research participation. These documents were gathered from various online sources or were physically obtained.
- **Designing the tools:** Upon completion of the document review, we designed the data collection tools. These were designed collaboratively for the three countries and confirmed with the reference group that was formed by CSA.
- **Data collection process:** Data was collected using FGDs and through in-depth interviews that were conducted in person, on the telephone or via follow up emails. We also collected secondary data during the document review phase All interviews were audio recorded for proper data interpretation, analysis and management. Initial impressions and interpretations based on the interview process were recorded by the interviewers as field notes which provided further cues during data analysis.

Data Collection Methods

Focus Group Discussions (FGD): FGDs were conducted at the grassroots level with individuals who are key community influencers and community leaders. For example, these included parish chiefs, child protection officers, religious leaders, local council representatives, head teachers and representatives of CBOs and associations. The FGDs were incorporated into the study process to generate qualitative data that would give deeper insight on VAC networking at grassroots levels and to identify the key VAC actors and networks at the district and national levels.

- **Interviews:** Interviews were used to collect opinions from participants and donors at district and national levels. The participants included network leads, hosts, and chairs at the district and national levels. The donors/funders consisted only of those who were currently or had previously funded VAC interventions of the participating networks.


Data Management and Analysis

All data was stored in a project Dropbox accessible only by members of the research team. After each interview or FGD the audio files were uploaded into the Dropbox. They were transcribed into typed text, cleaned, coded and categorized into emerging themes based on the study objectives. This was complimented by the use of the qualitative statistical package Nvivo (in Tanzania) and Atlas TI (in Kenya and Uganda); both instruments facilitated data management and storage and furthered our ability to achieve the set research objectives. Arguments were checked and supported with relevant literature on similar research.

Ethical considerations

Human participation in this study was limited to face-to-face and telephone interviews, emails, and FGDs. The information about the participants' experiences with VAC interventions, networking arrangements, grant making and grant use within networks were the primary areas of discussion, and were considered less sensitive. Therefore, ethical issues arising from the study were minimal. Qualitative researchers involved in Africa based studies have generally found participants to have monetary expectations for their participation in research. Therefore, we were careful to emphasize the importance of this research, and its intent to improve interventions, and prevent violence against children. We also emphasized the objectives of CSA; the organization that commissioned the research, who's objective is to understand how networks can better respond to VAC.

In order to manage expectations, participants were simply reimbursed transport and given a soft drink during the FGDs. Additionally, signed, informed consent was required from each of the participants. Participants were given an opportunity and the freedom to withdraw anytime from the research sessions. They were also free to decline questions they were uncomfortable answering. None of the participants withdrew from the interviews or the FGDs. All qualitative data was audio recorded for those who consented and was later transcribed into text. The typed transcripts were cleaned to remove all possible identifiers, including names of participants and their locations.



Finally, a reference group was set up to provide advisory on the research and ensure adherence to local laws. They were purposively selected due to their expertise in networks and networking, knowledge about child rights in the region, and vested interest in the research which will inform strategy development (see profiles above). The group provided advisory through technical meetings with researchers which were mainly conducted online, and convened by CivSource Africa. Documents were sent to the team prior to the meeting to allow them to prepare accordingly. Seven technical meetings were held with this team.

Study Limitations and Challenges

In Kenya, there was difficulty securing appointments with some research participants, particularly with the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, which commenced before data collection was complete. In addition, it was difficult to access the funding agencies, such as UNICEF (Kenya), which was mentioned as one of the key funders by various other research participants. Others included the UN Women who previously funded the National Gender Based Violence Technical Working Group, USAID who funded a project in Kisumu that has had notable impacts on CBOs like Jiu Pachi. Many of these organizations' officials had other commitments, particularly during the COVID 19 lockdown. These limitations were remedied by reviewing secondary data. For example, secondary data was reviewed and utilized to obtain donor perspectives in Kenya.

FINDINGS

Conceptualization of Networks and Networking

Analysis of the literature reviewed prior to field work revealed that the concept of networking is fluid and networks are often described using varying terminology; therefore, there is no universally accepted definition of networking or networks.

We consciously asked participants questions without stating the term 'networking' upfront. Drawing on the research findings, we argue that similar to a netted dwelling of an African bird, networking can be intertwined and messy. We discovered that not only are problems messy and entangled, but the network between organizations is also messy and entangled. One organization can belong to many networks, one network can have membership from various professional backgrounds, and some members may be individual actors while others are NGO's, CBO's, academic institutions, and Government bodies. Additionally, the way networks are initiated is varied. The research findings established that networking may be initiated by different kinds of stakeholders, including individuals, existing organization(s), donors/funders, and government bodies. The common characteristic of these 'networks' is the connection of members working towards a universal goal that ultimately aims to address a shared problem.

Therefore, we viewed networks as an interconnected web of actors or resources pooled together to respond to a common goal for a specified or non-specified period of time. This makes networks complex and contextual. Networks can be viewed as interconnected webs, we imply that a network involves multiple entities, hence it is not a solo endeavor. Interconnections can emerge organically and informally to address or respond to VAC.

Categories of Networks

The study found that networks can be categorized according to function and according to how they are structured, as elaborated below.

A) Types of networks by function

We established 3 categories of networks according to their functions.

- i) **Policy Networks:** These are mainly state level and include invited membership, state officials and major international organizations. These networks typically focus on supporting policy formulation. These networks can be found at the national level and the county devolved governance structure.
- ii) **Advocacy Networks:** These include networks whose dominant role or purpose of coming together is to influence a policy action for adoption or implementation, or to lobby for accessible service delivery. This category also includes networks that lobby communities to uphold the rights of children. Additionally, including networks that comprise of registered and vetted organizations to provide insights into policy action and advocacy; networks that allow both registered organizations, and individual members to join them and organize around a particular advocacy issues; and activist Community Based Organizations (CBOs) formed by community members for advocacy on issues related to VAC in the community. These membership based networks organize community messages, engage duty bearers, and link up with national networks to advocate for the rights of children. Most of the networks that we explored at this level are networked around addressing sexual violence while others focus on children rights in general.

- iii) **Service Delivery Networks:** Service Delivery Networks: These consist of organizations that deliver VAC services like legal, health, psycho-social support, and shelter among others. These networks come together to deliver a mandated legislated function; mainly state based. They exist in varying heights from the National level to the county and sub county levels. These networks may also include state and non-state actors with clear ideas of membership. Their key role is to improve service delivery on VAC and beyond, through better coordination and enhanced referral.

Within their different functions, we note that these networks can be long-term or short-term (Temporary) networks. Additionally, the networks may take the form of Public-private networking; which are organizations that agree to form a combined network in pursuit of specific agendas. These groups might join forces to address something like legal reforms on VAC, however, they remain independent organizations. Some of these networks will form strategic coalitions with the government to achieve an agenda; often if they intend to address a complex policy issue, such as sexuality education or legal reforms.

B) Types of networks by structure

i) **Formal networks:** Consisting of 3 categories

- **Formal and fully active networks:** We have conceptualized this category as networks that are formally established and registered in accordance with government regulations and laws. Formal networks are characterized by having a legal status; meaning they are registered with the government, have proper management structures, established secretariat, constitution, a memorandum of understanding, strategic plans, and criteria for identifying or registering members. They may have all of these characteristics or they might just meet most of these requirements. These networks sometimes engage in joint resource mobilization and implement joint projects. Much of their efforts are usually directed at lobbying government where there are needs for policy reforms. Member organizations or individuals are expected to fulfil certain obligations, such as attending meetings and participating in network activities. These members are comprised of state actors as well as non-state actors and individuals. Such networks engage in regular activities such as meetings and events, however, different members who belong to these networks have independent programs and offices, and only have convergence points from time to time.
- **Formal and intermittently active networks:** These networks are formally established and registered. They operate efficiently under certain circumstances and become silent when conditions are not conducive for them. For example, these collaborative networks will go into hibernation once their project is complete and there are no remaining, active projects to work on. Other networks collaborate very well on joint VAC agendas when they are funded, and their secretariats can function. In circumstances where the funding runs out and the network is unable to meet the costs of maintaining the secretariat, networking between member organizations comes to a standstill.
- **Formal and inactive networks:** These networks are formally established and registered but at the time of collecting the data were not doing active networking. One of the networks that was referred to several times is a membership organization comprised of individuals and organizations interested in child protection. However, during our research, it had no secretariat despite being a formally registered network. We discovered that even when such formal networks remain inactive for long periods, they often remain in existence by name; acknowledged as networks, yet are in reality, nets-not-working.

ii) **Informal networks:** Consisting of 3 categories

- **Informal and fully active networks:** Informal collaborations may not be registered, lack managerial structures, have no established secretariat, no constitution, and no strategic plan but may have an informal managerial structure. However, they do have a known membership, a clear purpose for existence, well demarcated operational areas and have partners like local leaders and religious leaders. We note that there are some elements of formality in informal networking and registration status does not entirely define formality or informality.
- **Informal loosely Structured networks:** These lack most of the qualities of formal networks but are clearly organized. These exist from the grassroots to national levels, with networking cutting across the private to public actors. These groups are not formally established as a network and they do not describe themselves as such. They may not operate through formally established structures or have a secretariat but have a clear purpose for relating with each other. The members are well versed with their child protection mandate and VAC is addressed as a structured manner. For example, whereas the working relationship between government child protection bodies, CBO's, NGO's and individual activists may not be formalized; the working structure is relatively clear and structured. Their connectivity is not formal, but they have a structured form of networking.
- **Unstructured active networks:** These are comprised of individuals who coincidentally collaborate to prevent and address VAC. They do not have any formal arrangement, but they network anyway. Such an informal network is difficult to categorize because it operates spontaneously in an impromptu and somewhat random manner.

Critical Reflections on Unstructured/Informal Networks

The study established that actors responding to VAC are interdependent and rely on each other to fulfill their mandates. The child protection space has attracted a multiplicity of actors, particularly in the non-state sector as evidenced in the mapping. The state is the key duty bearer in enhancing protection for children, it became evident that the extent of non-state actors' impact is largely dependent on how the state delivers on its mandate and the environment it creates. Thus, non-state actors/networks response to VAC can be inhibited or enhanced by the nature of state operations.

Study findings also indicate that structured network members have membership in several other networks which perform similar functions. The motivation behind this could be due to funding conditions, and the overall attractiveness of functional networking to donors. These networks are; therefore, donor induced networks, formed as a result of requirements by specific donors.

Findings also indicate that networking is not expressly stated in job descriptions, particularly for non-state actors and even for those who chair networks. The chairpersons or hosts have other duties they carry out and they run the networks mainly as a personal motivation. This means that organizational demands come first before network demands. This affects the coordination and follow up mechanism within the network. This is because such leaders may not uphold the networks shared vision.

From our mapping, it was also evident that network members do not have clearly stipulated roles within both structured and unstructured networks, thus their operations can still be considered loose. While such 'looseness' gives the network its identity and enables the individual members to maintain their distinctiveness, the support and resources members give to the network are largely seen as benevolence. This is mainly because network activities are not always budgeted for in organizational projects nor are they a funding priority for some donors.

Critical Reflections on Unstructured/Informal Networks

The study established that these actors are closest to and typically part of the community they serve; therefore, carrying the weight of being first responders for VAC cases. These actors presented child protection as a calling and; therefore, they draw intrinsic benefits from volunteer work. Their activities also seem to draw on the community norms of collective support, and from the local and community-based bulwark of support through collective pooling of resources, time in care and prevention of VAC.

Structured networks seem to rely on these unstructured networks to identify and follow up with these cases. They work together as a way of including the community endogenous process in child protection and draw on their ways of child protection and prevention of VAC. The actors receive training from different organizations on issues of VAC, which has created a wealth of community knowledge on child protection. There are many reasons why structured networks are working with these unstructured networks. It may be based on the perspective that coordination between community mechanisms and the wider system potentially lead to greater effectiveness in preventing and addressing violence against children. Such a perspective of working together is guided by a need for ensuring accountability of resources and for ensuring community ownership and sustainability.

However, it emerged that these unstructured networks are often not provided with any resources to carry out these activities, yet they themselves come from resource deprived context. A majority of these networks also run small holder businesses as their means of livelihood, with their main source of activity funding coming from membership fees. The argument of sustainability and community ownership is problematically used to justify the limited resources they receive from state institutions and NGOs. While these community mechanisms are resilient, the cumulative resources needed to effectively respond to and follow up with VAC cases, are diverse and substantial. As such, without replenishing and supporting this community mechanism many VAC cases fall through the cracks.

The study revealed that these unstructured networks might work for one or for several organizations at any given time. It was also evident that because of the loose networks and overall accessibility, these networks possess community acceptance and trust. However, it can be difficult for communities to hold VAC actors accountable as it might be unclear who different actors work for, additionally, reporting mechanisms are not always distinctly known by community members. There was also reported power differential between formal and informal actors, with the latter reporting a lack of voice and a feeling that their networks were being used by the NGOs or INGOs. Finally, while proximity to the community is seen as an asset, there were also reported down sides; with some volunteers reporting that they have been victimized by the perpetrators of VAC in the community.

Our analysis shows that there is a continuum of activity that differs from the continuum of network structure. Some formally structured networks are not actively addressing and preventing VAC in the community. Other formal networks are fully active, but are not directly in touch with community members; therefore, their work is likely to address VAC from a more theoretical perspective. The unstructured and informal networks that are not formally registered or established as networks were found to be directly in touch with community members at the grassroots level. These networks are respond to VAC cases in a more grounded or practical manner. Generally, unstructured networks working directly with children to build their resilience, reported better results in prevention of VAC. However, we emphasize that whether formal or informal, networks are heterogeneous entities, and working with either of these network structures requires a case by case assessment on how to engage appropriately. Figures 1 and 2 present the differences between the continuum of structure and the continuum of activity

Understanding Networking

In addition to conceptualizing networks, we also examined how networking was understood. The findings show that networking was generally understood in two ways: i) Coordinating and collaborating ii) Formation of allies or partnerships. The understanding of networking was not considerably different at grassroots and national levels.

- i) **Coordinating and collaborating:** Our analysis shows that networking is a process of ensuring that different actors work together to achieve a common goal. Informal networks at the grassroots level comprise of different groups of actors with specific interests who collaborate to fulfill VAC prevention mandates, such as reporting cases, referring cases, and supporting survivors and their families to seek justice and recover from trauma. Individual actors receive information from the community members about VAC cases, the actors then consider how best to handle the case. For example, VAC issues can also be handled at family level where family elders discuss and decide the best way to solve the dispute. Thereafter, they take the necessary steps in reporting these cases to authorities or giving support to the survivors.
- ii) **Formation of alliances:** Analysis of the data shows that networking can be described as a process of formation of alliances that work together for a common cause. Alliances are formed when two or more actors come together to leverage their resources in order to secure common goals. Both formal and informal networks demonstrate this understanding of networks.

In essence, networking is an action that involves an organization or individual making connections with others, and a state or non-state actor(s) to seek and/or provide support. These connections seem to be founded on implicit ideals and expectations of mutual reciprocity and trust. Networking is also seen as a natural way of working towards successful outcomes in VAC.

Networking Philosophy

In responding to VAC, we note the importance of keeping the thread tightly knitted to ensure that no incidences of violence against children are lost. The discussions with research participants from varying levels demonstrate a seamless pathway for responding to and managing sexual violence. This pathway unfolds in the following order; 1) Community member identifies and reports abuse to a community worker or local leader, 2) Local leader reports the case to police for examination, 3) Police hands case over to health workers to test for HIV/AIDS, pregnancy and management, such as Post-exposure Prophylaxis (PEP), or contraceptive if child is above 12 years, 4) Depending on child's circumstances, the process could involve getting temporary shelter for the child, and 5) The legal process for seeking justice commences. This implies that networking is an implementation tool to achieve goals of implementers.

Besides the process of handling VAC which requires a range of actors at different levels, addressing VAC needs a range of competences which one single organization might not have. For example, one organization may have strengths in handling sexual abuse, while others have strengths in providing psychosocial services. Therefore, how different actors are connected is vital for responding to VAC, this implies that networking results in collaborative advantage.

We also noted that some networks may exist but in reality, are not actually working, they are "nets-not-working." Such forms of collaborations are what Savage et al. (2010) associates with collaborative inertia, the authors argue that collaborative inertia is a state of lack of progress among partners. Yet, even when such networks become inactive, they usually do not officially declare that the net has been dismantled, rather partners move on and join other nets that are making progress.

Additionally, within the different countries we found that there is a form of networking between Government bodies like LCs, police, probation officers, churches, child rights focal persons, local leaders, family heads and village group heads. They do most of the VAC groundwork for the benefit of children in families and communities, but technically they do not exist as a network. Such unstructured networks are comprised of actors who collaborate routinely to respond and prevent VAC. They have functionality but lack formal existence.

Our analysis shows that there is a disparity between networks as a function and networks as a form of existence. Formal registration or formal existence does not in any way guarantee active operation. In any case, informal and unstructured networks appear to be more visible on the ground compared with formal networks. This visibility of informal and unstructured networks seems to grow continually over time. Nevertheless, formal networks with big memberships achieve visibility at the national level which might be of interest to them and to their network funders. The findings of this research suggest that funders may want to consider prioritizing networks' capacity to create the desired impact on the wellbeing of children instead of their visibility at the national level.

Connections Among Different Actors

We note that the reason for networking for the different stakeholders who participated in this study is the welfare of children; therefore, the child is a source of connection for partners. Community structures are very important in networking because of the supportive role they play in a child's ecology.

Similarly, we found that networking occurs at different levels between actors of various kinds. There exists a network of connections between actors within formal, informal, and unstructured networks. Additionally, actors who are members of formal networks are also interconnected with those who network informally.

Children's Involvement

It is evident that children are the main reason these actors network. The analysis was keen to identify the level of children's involvement in network events and activities against VAC. We found that although the networks were almost exclusively focused on children's issues relating to violence, direct involvement of children in networking events and activities was quite minimal.

How Networking Happens

The second objective of the study was to describe how networking happens. We sought to establish how different organizations, institutions, donors, communities, and individuals, including children collaborate to respond to VAC.

Collaborative Processes

- **Joint project implementation:** We established that in some cases, networks engage in joint project implementation. They write a funding proposal collaboratively and implement it jointly. Each partner takes on a function based on their core competencies and personal niche.
- **Resource sharing:** Our data reveals that organizations, institutions, and individuals whether they are members of a similar network or not, will sometimes work together to benefit from a joint resource. For example, some networks have shared platforms which they use to address issues affecting children.
- **Collaboration with members within and out of the network:** Efforts to respond to VAC

take different forms. Some work with partners within their formal networks, others with actors outside their formal networks, yet some network organizations implement VAC programs directly with beneficiaries. We note that most of the networks regularly collaborate with partners in a non-structured networking manner but through structured processes.

- **One-off collaborations:** Global and national events are opportunities where different organizations, individuals and a range of networks collaborate. During commemoration of events, actors might pool resources together to celebrate such events, this collaboration is meant to achieve a one-off objective.
- **Network to network collaborations:** This is where one network makes collaborative efforts with a network that has a different geographical working area or difference in ideology, but are brought together by belief/values or ideology.
- **Joint resource mobilization:** In order to improve the wellbeing of children, stakeholders need resources for different activities, for example, mobilization, sensitization and advocacy. We found that many networks engage in this form of collaboration processes.
- **Mutual dependence:** We explored how individual entities supported networks and how they in turn received support back. We also examined how dependence on networks accelerated achievement of the individual members' agenda to fight VAC and other complementary efforts of mutual support. Our findings reveal that many organizations benefit from building synergies with others, for instance, they utilize the relationships that their partners have already established with the government, donors, development partners and even communities. In addition, with members being strategically positioned, they have a strong influence on government which others can leverage in order to advance their agendas. Mutual dependence is also illustrated in Collaborative advocacy: An important aspect where organizations will join forces to strengthen their advocacy efforts. When these networks collaborate, they have stronger voices, and are better positioned to negotiate; not only because of powerful or influential organizations but also because of the national visibility that comes with larger groups.
- **Evidence into practice:** Organizations that belong to a given network will sometimes undertake research studies together.

Financing Networks

We found that networks receive financial as well as non-financial support in order to function.

Most of the network activities are supported by member organizations which are also donor dependent. However, members also make in-kind contributions which may be as simple as providing stationery or meeting rooms.

Informal networks on the other hand, are dependent on financial and logistical support from government departments or local NGOs. Actors that have been categorized as part of formal networks sometimes have their own independent donors who support their various programs of which VAC is addressed. There are also individuals and community

groups that are self-funded from individual or group initiatives.

Financing Realities of networks

Shrinking funding space, short funding cycles, and rigid and low prioritization to fund networks: This has affected the functioning of networks. The lifecycle of many networks follows the funding cycles. When there is funding for a network activity through an organization, the network is vibrant and active. When the cycle ends, network activities are reduced, until the next funding cycle. This makes their activities unsustainable and affects the cases they oversee. It is evident from the study that referral activities and network coordination function are not a funding priority. Donors prefer to support time and target project activities. Donors also have an affinity towards funding specific child protection issues compared to those that focus on integrated and structural issues in prevention of violence. This leaves coordination function at the mercy of a single interested network member who works with limited resources. In addition, donor funding comes with conditions that limit flexibility in order to adapt to the fluid VAC context. Rigid funding mechanisms leave network actors with limited leeway to respond to emerging VAC issues.

Mismatch between country priorities and donor priorities and approaches: Often, as noted by one of the state officials, funders set their funding agendas without consultations with the county/local governments. They work directly with a particular organization, yet the implementation, supervision and enforcement of a particular project will be carried out by the state officials, such as children officers. This scenario leads to many organizations remaining invisible to the county and local governments, which can result in the duplication of projects. This ultimately leads to fragmented efforts in responding to VAC. Additionally, the reporting mechanisms of these organizations only share progress reports with funders, leaving the county, local governments and line ministries with a fundamental lack of information. This has led to resource wastage and duplications in network activities, formations, and CBOS.

Non-transparent fundraising practices: Several individuals and smaller CBOs have raised concerns about questionable fundraising practices that are periodically employed by various network members, particularly by larger NGOs (van Stapele et al., 2019). The chances of successfully fundraising are increased if one demonstrates that they will engage the community mechanism. These practices create mistrust and a feeling of “being used and dumped” between network actors which diminishes morale and increases volunteer turnover. To remedy this, some volunteers in the FGD proposed to appoint a program coordinator to represent them in the larger organizations’ fundraising process so that they are aware of what is going on.

Benefits Associated with Networks

- a. **Pooling resources:** It emerged that one of the major reasons why networks are formed is to pool resources between organizations with the intent of protecting children’s rights.
- b. **Visibility and impact:** Past studies have demonstrated that networks exist out of the need to build or establish relationships in order to achieve better outcomes (Brinkerhoff, 1999; Mizrahi & Rosenthal, 2001; Younis, 2017). Analysis of the primary data about the reasons why different organizations network reflects similar views.
- c. **Enforcing government accountability and responses:** The findings reveal that networking is one of the tools that civil society organizations employ to hold the government responsible.
- d. **Keeping alive the national violence agenda:** The study findings revealed that networks are formed with an aim of influencing government processes by positively changing child rights, policies, and strategies.
- e. **Ease government oversight and support:** The government as a key duty bearer will

- periodically receive reports from a range of implementing partners in different fields. The government has also tested tools and Information Education and communication materials that have potential to be shared with supporting partners. This is easier if organizations are not fragmented. Receiving government support, monitoring and supervision is; therefore, easier done through networks.
- f. **Maximizing technical expertise:** Child rights organizations share the goal of protecting children and improving children's wellbeing, whereas different organizations are strategically positioned to achieve specific objectives. Members of a network partnering on a project may undertake specialized activities based on their expertise.
 - g. **Linkages with donors:** Analysis of the study findings shows that one of the reasons for networking is to gain linkages with donors. Networking with 'like-minded' organizations enables partners to expand both their networks and their visibility. Organizations that are part of a network can benefit from joint fundraising. Membership to a network helps them to stand on a higher platform where their voices are amplified for easy identification by donors.
 - h. **Knowledge sharing and refined interventions:** One of the purposes of networking is to share knowledge of promising practices. Members also benefit from exposure visits and the occasional participation in national level engagements
 - i. **Strategy to mobilize resources/fundraising:** We found that smaller organizations are more inclined to develop formal collaborations; ultimately gaining better access to critical resources. This implies that the specific organization drives the agenda to network because of the anticipated benefit. However, we also established that there are donors and funders whose funding criteria may be tied to networked organizations because of anticipated benefits.
 - j. **Increased performance:** Members aim to leverage their influence on collaborative networks. This is because collaboration is assumed to represent a powerful approach in solving pressing issues, particularly in terms of advocacy where more members might equate to a stronger voice. Joint voices have the ability to hold powerful social actors to account as compared to single or scattered voices.
 - k. **Achievement of goals:** The data analyzed revealed that many organizations join networks because it is an easier way to achieve their goal. According to our study, networking is commonly seen as a cost-effective means to share information and spread knowledge about grassroots' needs, solutions, and best practices. Additionally, networking is believed to strengthen NGO's ability to speak with one voice and to significantly increase their impact as policy negotiators and advocating agencies.
 - l. **Peer mentoring and cross learning:** Through varying knowledge and skill capacities network members are able to exchange ideas through direct training from members and experiential learning.
 - m. **Enriched decision making:** A key activity carried out by the network members during meetings or on the WhatsApp platform is case presentation. This is followed by a deliberation between members on the best way forward.
 - n. **Self-development:** Network members report developing new skills through participation in network activities, such as planning, presentation, documentation, and reporting skills.
 - o. **Funding collaborations:** Within networks, members can develop a joint proposal between two bilateral organizations. Funding agencies might notice the work of network members and decide to collaborate on a project.
 - p. **Protection of network members and their organizations:** Responding to VAC cases can put organizations or individuals at risk, specifically when dealing with perpetrators of VAC. Belonging to networks and allowing the networks to speak for particular cases rather than acting as a lone organization or individual, is a protective measure for members. However, individuals who are not represented by a network, and are living in the same region of an ongoing VAC case could be at risk of reprisal from their community or the perpetrator.

- q. **Minimize emotional impact arising from responding to VAC cases:** The multidimensional impacts of VAC on survivors can cause psychological distress for those who respond. In order to minimize this distress, network members can debrief and receive emotional support from each other.
- r. **Improved organizational image and legitimacy:** Organizations that belong to active networks were reportedly perceived as being more serious. This improves the visibility of organizations to funding agencies and can open them up to other opportunities.
- s. **Organizational development:** Participation in networks has helped several unregistered CBOs learn how to register and obtain legal identity status for their organization. This helped these organizations comply with government requirements and they are now able to explore more rewarding collaborations and have larger impacts on VAC. However, we observed some potential tradeoffs in this perspective. Ensuring registration and accountability to the state or other large organizations could result in these networks losing their informality, including the trust of their community, which is one of their accountability mechanisms and biggest strengths.
- t. **Enhanced rapid referral of VAC cases:** Networking enhances the referral mechanisms because organizations and individuals become aware of who does what and where. This minimizes the resource wastage because the pathways are clear. Rapid and effective referral is an important element in VAC response so as to prevent further harm.
- u. **Amplifies advocacy efforts:** When organizations come together to campaign on a particular VAC issue their voices are heard better, and the reach is wider. This is because it enhances momentum while simultaneously reducing fragmentation and “silo” mentalities where organizations work in isolation.
- v. **Wider and faster dissemination of information:** Network members report relying on networks to disseminate information, particularly at the grassroots level.
- w. **Reviving of unresolved VAC court cases:** At times, VAC cases remain unresolved and some files go missing. This delays and denies justice for the affected children. As a result, CLSK formed the Pro Bono Committee in Kisumu, which used the network to revive unresolved cases.
- x. **Participatory policy formulation and enhanced civic engagement:** Networks allow the children policy formulation process to be more participatory because of the multiple actors engaged in the process. This promotes community ownership and the potential for developing contextualized policies. This also bridges the barriers between policy makers and practitioners because they can identify and address each other’s needs.

In conclusion, we noted that networking is a strategic decision that stakeholders undertake. The coalitions are based on suitability of contributions, and the level of importance their collaboration offers.

Challenges Faced in Networking

- **Low prioritization of network activities by network members:** Networking activities are often not the core function of network members. Many organizations join networks to better deliver their core organizational duties. The motivation is not always to support or grow network activities. This affects their commitment and the extent to which they support the network because their priority is to fulfill their organizational mandate. In this regard, the study reveals that networking though beneficial to members, is still treated as an external role in terms of time commitment and engagement.
- **Unreliable and ineffective network members:** For networking activities to work effectively in the context of VAC, all actors need to contribute. Corrupt practices and misuse of power affects the delivery of services, and endangers the life of children.
- **Weak follow up for VAC cases and documentation:** This was reported by numerous actors because network activities follow funding cycles, meaning there is low interest to follow up with cases once the funding cycle ends. In other situations, cases that are followed up with are those that are highly publicized.

- **Conflict among network members:** Networks are not conflict free harmonious spaces. Diverse interests, hierarchical power arrangements and different priorities contribute to network conflict, which affects network efficiency.
- **Strict donor requirements:** The participants noted that when networking is donor led, the strict funding rules do not provide a good environment for addressing structural issues involved with VAC. Such strict deadlines do not allow enough room for innovation on how best to address VAC. Therefore, we recommend that depending on the context of the VAC issue at hand, tradeoffs between innovation and functionality can be made or balanced.
- **Financing network activities:** Confronted with immense needs that require direct and more strategic support, the research revealed that many donors are reticent on funding networking activities. Most prefer to fund interventions with a direct benefit to the target beneficiaries. It becomes difficult to justify a need for a network activity budget because it is difficult to show the results, particularly for network leads whose only job is to coordinate organizations. Most donors may not be interested in funding overhead costs of networking.
- **Inadequate personnel commitment:** Activities of networking are usually managed on a voluntary basis because of the limited finances they typically attract. This is coupled with the challenge of dwindling donor interest to fund networking activities. Some networks depend on member subscription fees, which are minimal and as member participation can be sporadic.
- **Network focus:** Our results indicate that networks that are successful are those that have a clear mission, vision, and objectives. While it is important to have room to strategically evolve, having clear direction is equally pivotal.
- **Membership competition:** Results indicate that members under the same network sometimes face competition with each other, especially when it comes to resources. This is because they share the goal of child protection and have the same funding sources. We found that some organizations may be hesitant to share knowledge of successful models in order to avoid saturation of their niches. This limits the collective achievement of the desired child protection gains.

Lessons and Suggestions for Better Networking

We were interested in identifying the lessons learnt from networking experiences regarding VAC. The participants provided various lessons from networking and collaborating with others in the fight against VAC. They further indicated how these lessons shaped/informed programming and influenced the management of network activities for effectiveness and efficiency. These are outlined below:

- Having a niche is important. The findings show that it is particularly important for a network to identify a niche and act on it in order to be relevant in society. Among other things, this will attract philanthropic support.
- Strong leadership is vital. Another lesson shared was that networks should have strong leadership in order to achieve their goals and resist diversionary agendas of some donors. One study participant mentioned that there are donors who have secret agendas, such as child trafficking through supporting institutionalisation of children. Such 'donors' are looking for networks through which to infiltrate the young people and

if the network leaders are not strong and focused, they are liable to collaborate with wrong funders.

- Having clear rules of engagement for all partners or formal MoUs is an important agreement to establish at the beginning. This will enable the network to take off smoothly and avoid unnecessary disagreement between members.
- Aligning network goals and objectives to government plans or strategies, and the overall involvement of government is crucial for success.
- Collective responsibility and accountability should be maintained by each network member.
- Advocacy and communication plan and all relevant strategies should be put in place upfront in order to have a harmonious working relationship between network members.


Tipping Points for Philanthropic Support

Based on our analysis of participants' perspectives, we explore the tipping points for philanthropic support of VAC networking below.

Holistic and Systems approach to support: VAC is a multi-dimensional issue. Therefore, addressing VAC requires a systems integrated approach that responds to these multiple issues and brings together different actors. Funding for VAC might be more successful if collaboration involved actors with diverse competencies, and also acknowledged the indivisibility of the rights of children, including the right to protection against violence. Fragmented approaches can be diminished through intentional partner recruiting, with a focus on involving individuals whose competencies align with the intervention at hand. Most funders are mainly concerned with the ability of networks to implement projects and not with their ability to build capacity of network partners. However, we note that in order to ensure sustainability, it may be important for donors to invest in building capacities of network partners. A systems approach addresses both structural and immediate issues in VAC prevention and response landscapes in an integrated manner, including funding advocacy for social justice in children issues. One potential route to enhancing a systems approach is to fund innovative networks that incorporate diverse aspects.

Funding and supporting communities of practice at the grassroots level: Each of the implementing partners, NGO's, international partners, and networks work with the community-based structures at the grassroots level to reach the beneficiaries. We observe that it does not matter how remote a community is or how complex an intervention is; community volunteering networks remain the most effective resource for reaching beneficiaries and their communities. These grassroots networks form organically and act both spontaneously and effectively. Although the grassroots networks are resourceful and impactful, they miss the leverage that formal network actors gain from each other. Thus, it is necessary for grassroots actors to form communities of practice that can be supported to enhance their synergetic benefits. Therefore, funding VAC CoPs rather than individual grassroots actors enhances the possibilities of effective returns on the investment, through capacity enhancement, coordinated efforts and positioning these CoPs to collaborate with networks at the national level. This would increase their effectiveness in VAC work while taking care not to disrupt their organic formation, spontaneous action and networking.

Fostering public-private partnerships: We noted the existence of collaborations between government and NGO's in VAC-related work. However, government and donors support from an elevated space, where grant seekers must comply with government and donor requirements with limited room for input from VAC network actors. It emerged that better approaches to networking need to be cognizant of the fluid realities that face the diverse contexts of children.



Networking hub: Discussions of networking hubs illuminated the need for a common governing management, and monitoring units that oversee the management of network activities and networks themselves. In other words, networks are registered with one body and coordinated from one source, ideally leaving room for creativity and innovation.

Networking suitability: Throughout all of the discussions, we found that networking is appreciated as an important work ethic, particularly among the actors who participate in formal networks. Further analysis of participant responses show that the best actors to be networked are those who appreciate the vision and mission of the network or the donor.

The level of relevance: According to the research findings, goal setting is an important aspect of networking. Formal networks tend to occupy a good entry space for receiving philanthropic support because they are well positioned to satisfy the demands, such as strategic plans, and audited accounts. They are also well positioned to lobby government ministries and departments to influence VAC-related policy and programming. However,

for formal networks to create impact, their presence and influence needs be felt at the grassroots levels, hence the need to network with grassroots actors.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All networks work with Government bodies and institutions at national and lower levels to prevent and respond to VAC. The position and role of government in networking is important in terms of providing the necessary leadership, support and requisite policy environment for successful child protection interventions. However, this is ideally not conceptually recognized as networking.

- a. **Virtual/Digital networking is not yet a formally recognized form of networking.** However, existing networks connect through WhatsApp groups, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms. Digital networking could be an affordable and quick way to form and sustain VAC networks, particularly for actors who have access to internet connectivity. Therefore, we recommend it as a form of networking that should be encouraged.
- b. **Synchronization of donor and local priorities:** There is a disconnect between local priorities and donor priorities. This sometimes interferes with the formation of networks that target specific grants. Consequently, when networks assemble to implement a specific project it often leads to periods of inactivity when the project is complete. This happens when the network formation is motivated by donor conditions as opposed to contextually relevant priorities. We recommend synchronization of donor priorities with those of the intended beneficiary communities, through opportunities to have dialogues.
- c. **Funding networking as a function:** We noted various challenges faced by different networks but one that stood out was inadequate financing for network activities. The limited nature of grant opportunities for network-related activities directly impacts the level of connectedness between the network actors, and breeds somewhat unhealthy competition among network members. This is a vacuum that can be filled by philanthropic efforts. In order for networks to be functional at district and lower levels, there is a need for logistical support for transport, meeting spaces, secretariat, stationery, and much more. More importantly, there is a discrepancy between the notion of networks as a function and networks as a form of existence. For example, networks that are registered formally and are well structured are not necessarily the ones with the most functionality, particularly at the grassroots level. Some networks exist formally but their formality does not necessarily translate into regular functioning. For Philanthropic purposes, it is necessary for funders to intentionally fund networking as a function rather than a form of existence. This can be achieved through conducting institutional assessments to determine their commitment to VAC work and support them as necessary.
- d. **Nurturing supportive families and communities to build societal norms of complete VAC intolerance.** This goal can be achieved through strengthening informal grassroots networks. We recommend networking that leads to shifts in power differentials and ultimately empowers communities to feel that they are in control of protecting their children. Leveraging community and cultural competencies should be implemented in such a way that the nature of these actors and beneficiaries are not stifled (Okwany and Ngutuku, 2018). It is imperative that donors focus their

activities on more structural issues as opposed to short term actions. It also implies a need to build the capacity of the local, community-based workforce in child protection. Indeed, networks that have an agenda for social change, should have better funding opportunities.

- e. **Communities of Practice at the grassroots level:** Community structures are very important in networking because of the supportive role they play in childcare ecology. We found that grassroots networking evolves organically and happens spontaneously, while the formation of formal networks is strategically planned. Although the connections between VAC actors crisscross intricately, there is limited direct networking between actors in formal networks and those in unstructured networks. It is not only important to illuminate the work done by grassroots networks, but also to strengthen the linkages between formal and informal networks in order for them to achieve synergetic benefits and leverage their strengths.
- f. **Networking hubs:** Participants suggested that it is necessary to establish a common management and monitoring unit that oversees the governance of network activities and networks themselves.

Moreover, the concept of networks and networking is fluid, where the fluidity is more obvious among formal networks. Actors form new connections that evolve gradually. Additionally, the connections and the level of activity varies since they often connect and disconnect. However, members maintain their membership despite the uncertainty surrounding their activity and connectedness. We recommend funding that would strengthen the connectedness between existing networks. We suggest that the best way to achieve this is through the formation of networking hubs at different levels while taking advantage of existing structures, rather than creating a parallel one. We propose a structure that is comprised of thematic clusters, CoPs, sub-national hubs, national hubs, and regional hubs as outlined below:

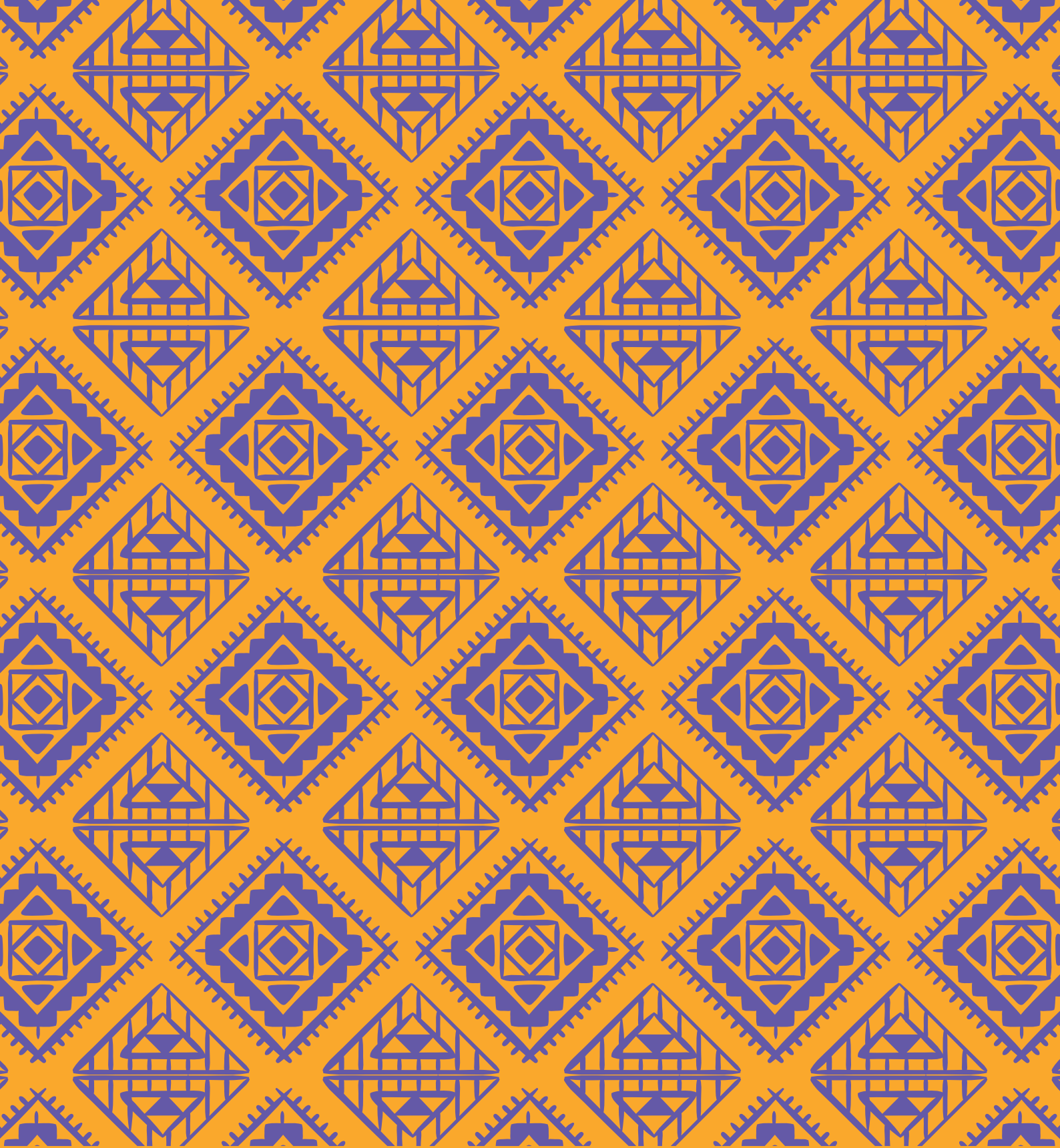
- **Thematic Clusters of support:** This would be for network members who are in a designated geographical location, interested in specific VAC themes to maintain regular connections, share locally relevant lessons for the benefit of children and families in their locations and network thematically. VAC themes may include sexual violence, physical violence, emotional violence and more. Members would be encouraged to share experiences and lessons with the intent of enhancing their impact.
- **Communities of Practice** include all local grassroots actors in a designated area, regardless of the thematic interest, as described earlier.
- **Sub-national hubs** put together networks operating within a specific district. These would be supported to work with CoPs and thematic clusters within their respective areas of jurisdiction.
- **National hubs** connect all hubs at the district level in a specific country. At the national level, it is important to systematically embed enablers of government technocrats to work with civil society to build a strong hub of VAC networks. The remaining question is how do we create an ecosystem where civil society and government structures work hand in hand for the sustenance of networking

- hubs?
- Regional hub is the umbrella for national network hubs in the East African region. This is an idea we propose for further discussion by the reference group members.
- g. Direct involvement of children in networking activities is currently minimal, despite the sustained discourse that questions limited children's voices and physical involvement in networking activities. Even where children are involved, the agenda is adult-led. The absence of children's voices and participation is one of the weakest links in resolving the injustices related to VAC. Therefore, we need to question ourselves on whether the best way to nurture families and communities that outlaw VAC and effectively prevent and respond to violence is through centering or de-centering children in networking.
- h. Capacity building for grassroots actors: The existing child protection committees at the grassroots level could benefit from capacity building. This could enhance their overall knowledge on VAC response mechanisms and improve the efficiency of protocols for handling VAC. Existence of child helplines is good but not all VAC cases are reported, and it is unclear whether community members have a strong understanding of VAC. However, before VAC can be reported, a common understanding must be reached by all community members. We recommend that individual actors at the village level should be equipped with knowledge about what constitutes as violence from the child protection perspective. Additionally, the grassroots actors should be informed on the available justice seeking mechanisms.

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