



Livelihoods, economic strengthening, child protection and well-being in Western Uganda



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ABSTRACT

This paper reports findings from a cross-sectional analysis measuring the relationship between household livelihoods and children's well-being and protection in two districts of western Uganda. 246 households completed a household questionnaire measuring income, assets, livelihood activities, and various child outcomes. Multivariate analysis indicated that household asset level and livelihood activity were both positively associated with improved child physical well-being. Households with greater assets reported fewer child protection risks. Findings suggest that although economic strengthening activities may improve the physical well-being of children, there remains a need to integrate psychosocial support to households to complement such provisions in securing child protection and well-being.

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1. Introduction

To speed recovery and tackle intergenerational cycles of poverty, governments and development agencies are increasingly looking for scalable ways to ensure children's well-being and protection from harm. As they move toward more holistic models of service delivery, some are seeking to better integrate their work in child protection with community-level economic strengthening interventions. Evidence has begun to emerge regarding associations between income, assets, livelihood activity and child well-being (CIDA, 2007; Ssewamala, Han, & Neilands, 2009), but less attention has been given to examining such relationships in more unstable contexts. As economic approaches gain favor among child protection actors in these crisis settings, the need for documented evidence on program impact in such contexts increases.

1.1. Impacts on children of economic strengthening

Evaluations looking at child-level impact from ES programming have focused primarily on large-scale government-funded cash transfers (either conditional or unconditional), and to a lesser extent,

micro-credit. Outcomes of interest in these studies have mostly included the provision of basic needs like education, nutrition and health, and rates of child labor. The type of ES intervention with the strongest evidence base relating to children's outcomes is conditional cash transfers, which have been shown to increase child height and weight measures, reduce HIV infection rates and psychological distress, and reduce incidence of low birth weight (Aguero, Carter, & Ingrid Woolard, 2010; Akee, Copeland, Keller, Angold, & Costello, 2010; Amarante, Manacorda, Miguel, & Vigorito, 2011; Baird, de Hoop, & Ozler, 2012; Baird et al., 2012; Cunha, 2010; Fernald & Hidrobo, 2011; Macours, Schady, & Vakis, 2012; Paxson & Schady, 2007). A few evaluation studies have looked at children's outcomes from unconditional cash transfer programs, and these have been shown to increase schooling and to decrease incidence of child labor (Baird, McIntosh, & Ozler, 2011; Edmonds, 2006; Edmonds & Schady, 2013). In the case of microcredit, studies of programs in Africa, some of them incorporating health education, showed better nutritional status among participants' children, compared to control groups (van Rooyen, Stewart, & de Wet, 2012), and multi-country research has found micro-credit leading to increases in spending in education and healthcare (CIDA, 2007; Jarrell, Gray, Gash, & Dunford, 2011).

Still there remains a lack of child-level impact evidence from multi-sectoral interventions that include economic strengthening as part of a wider effort to improve child protection and well-being, a common NGO approach which has historically encompassed some combination of skills training, support to income-generating activities (IGA), and

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agricultural inputs/training, delivered alongside non-economic interventions such as dialogs around violence or child-rearing, and health or psychosocial services. One study by the International Rescue Committee in Burundi found that including family-based discussion sessions on child protection and wellbeing as part of a group savings intervention decreased physical and verbal discipline by caregivers, (Annan et al., 2013.) but to our knowledge no other evaluation studies have looked at multi-sectoral ES program effects on children's psychosocial well-being and vulnerability to risks of abuse.

Few evaluation studies of ES programs have focused on the effects on all individuals within a household, much less on their emotional and social well-being. Donors, policymakers and implementers have assumed that an increase in financial stability of one household member benefits the rest of the household, and rarely consider the intra-household dynamics that might mediate the flow of benefits within the home or exactly how each child might gain or lose from additional resources (Sebstad & Chen, 1996).

There also remains a gap in the literature with regard to the potential negative effects on children from certain types of ES programming. Microfinance interventions are known to increase the demand for child labor in some cases, with negative consequences for school attendance (Burns & Suji, 2007; Maldonado & Gonzalez-Vega, 2008), which would warrant investigation of these and other potentially negative impacts on children from other classes of ES interventions. Changes in time-use patterns for caregivers and children themselves, which result from new economic activities and incentives, can reduce the time a child spends under adult supervision and can increase the time that children need to spend caring for younger siblings (CPC, 2011). The effect on girls and boys can be disproportional, with either girls or boys more negatively impacted (CPC, 2011).

Robust programmatic evidence of any significant relationship between income, assets and livelihoods and child outcomes requires that positive outputs in financial and economic gains be first achieved. A successful project that leads to improved livelihood capabilities and strategies like increased access to credit or improved agricultural skills ensures that a sample population has undergone recent changes to income, assets or livelihoods, so that in turn, they can be analyzed to show potential effects on children. With this premise, the following research questions were developed for the current study: Does a household's livelihood status (measured in income and assets) predict the likelihood of protection from risks and/or the well-being of children? Do household livelihood strategies (measured in terms of recent adjustments to household economic activity) predict child protection and well-being outcomes? Does receipt of any services (economic strengthening interventions) at the household level predict any of these child outcomes?

The next section of the paper provides the study context in which these research questions were addressed, briefly describing the state of child protection in Uganda and the livelihood interventions being evaluated. Section 3 describes the methods used to collect data and the variables used to assess household livelihood status and child outcomes. The empirical results are presented in Section 4 while Sections 5 and 6 discuss the findings and identify programmatic implications.

2. Child protection in Uganda

2.1. Ugandan context

Uganda is one of Africa's fastest growing countries, with a current population estimated at 34.5 million, growing at an annual rate of 3.1% (UNFPA, 2011). With over half the population below the age of 16 and a total fertility rate of 5.9 (per woman aged 15–49), Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world (PRB, 2011). This population includes two to three million orphans, approximately 15% of the under-18 population. Overall eight million children (51% of under 18s)

are listed as moderately or critically vulnerable (MGLSD, 2010).¹ Many factors contribute to children's vulnerability in Uganda, including poverty, HIV/AIDS, child labor, inadequacy of child protection services, insecurity and disease (MGLSD, 2010).

A national household survey conducted in 2006 found that 7.5 million children were living in poverty, with the highest proportion in rural areas (UBOS, 2006). Although agriculture as a share of total national employment has grown in the last several years, overall productivity has declined, representing a major concern for rural households dependent on farming as both a major source of income and food (UBOS, 2011). The combination of high population growth and declining agricultural productivity leads to increased poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, thereby magnifying the vulnerabilities children face.

2.2. Western Uganda

While children's vulnerability is widespread in all regions of the country, a recent situational analysis showed that after the northern region, where the highest levels are primarily attributable to violent conflict, the western region has the second highest percentage of 'critically vulnerable' children. There, the declining productivity and dependence on agriculture in rural areas is of particular concern (UBOS, 2011). Child labor has been noted as a primary concern by local officials, due to the demand for cheap labor at the region's tea plantations and lime processing and quarry sites.² Displacement and migration due to the civil strife in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and rebel activity along the Western Ugandan border over the past two decades have only exacerbated problems affecting young people. A government mission in 2008 found lower school attendance and higher rates of teenage pregnancy and defilement in regions still affected by the fighting between Uganda's military and the rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (MGLSD, 2010).

While Uganda has developed a national framework to respond to the immense needs faced by orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) throughout the country, a lack of resources and mixed priorities at the district and local levels has left a gap. Local and international NGOs have stepped in to deliver varying combinations of child protection and other community development services.

2.3. Western Uganda Bantwana Program (WUBP)

Active in the western region since 2008, WUBP, a project of World Education's Bantwana Initiative, builds the management and technical skills of 9 community based organizations (CBOs) in four underserved districts in Western Uganda to provide an integrated package of community-identified critical services to OVC and their families. These services focus on child protection, livelihoods, and psychosocial support. WUBP promotes child rights using a child-centered approach that equips children with knowledge of rights and responsibilities; builds a ring of adult support around children at both school and community levels; and, strengthens cooperation and referral linkages between schools, communities and local probation officers to ensure that cases of abuse are reported on and followed up; provides livelihood opportunities to OVC households; and provides psychosocial support and counseling at the household level by Bantwana-trained community volunteers. Bantwana works on the assumption that improving the financial security of households—delivered as part of a comprehensive, integrated package including child protection and psychosocial support

¹ The criteria used in the Ugandan OVC analysis' definition of vulnerability include (but are not limited to) orphanhood, child marriage, being affected by HIV or other diseases, living in an area under conflict, living in a child-headed household, and lacking in access to basic services such as schooling. OVC Situation Analysis Final Report, March 2010.

² Bantwana Initiative Staff Interview with Senior Development and Labour Officer for Kyenjojo District Community Based Services Department, Bantwana Report, July 2007.

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