

# Building a community-led Violence Against Children (VAC) Prevention service workforce: Experiences from rural post-conflict Northern Uganda



Creating a safe world for children requires evidence to understand the magnitude, trends, and critical gaps that must be filled. With its [Violence Against Children Survey \(VACS\) Report \(2018\)](#), Uganda is one of the countries steering steps towards this evidence-based programming for VAC prevention and response.

[TPO Uganda](#) is one of the national level organizations working with the Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development to support dissemination, uptake and programming based on the VACS findings.

In 2016, we embarked on a community-based dissemination process entailing systematic mobilization of community-level actors in Lira district, one of the VACS sampled sites in Northern Uganda covering two sub-counties. Through the case of one of the targeted sub-counties, TPO Uganda in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), sought to identify and establish a community-led service workforce to champion VAC prevention and response post the national survey. We conducted a comprehensive mapping exercise to identify actors and structures that interact with children at village, parish, sub-county and district levels. In collaboration with the sub-county leadership, we utilized the mapping outcomes to establish a robust Violence Against Children (VAC) Community Reference Group. Rather than establish an entirely new structure, the sub-county built on its Orphans and Vulnerable Children's (OVC) Coordination Committee to include representatives from selected informal structures in the community where included.

The product is the sub-county OVC coordination committee coupled with informal actors who shape religious and sociocultural constructs as well as lead child-based interventions in the community. These are para-social workers, parish chiefs, women league representatives, clan leaders, religious leaders, children's parliament representatives, youth leaders, fathers' and mothers' union representatives and child protection committee

members. It is a richly robust composition structure that covers first, intermediate and end point coordination essential for VAC prevention and response.

At this point, we also concurrently worked with the Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development's VACS Focal Person to conduct a Lira district level dissemination workshop for the national VACS findings. This provided the first layer of buy-in for district-level policy, services units, planners and administrators to internalize the findings and utilize regional specific findings to articulate their own district implications. It preceded a sub-county level VACS dissemination workshop through which the Community Reference Group members had an opportunity to interface with the national and regional findings. Using participatory approaches that sought to simplify findings, participants were supported to identify key implications for their engagement, map out actors and structures to engage, and align the implications to the seven INSPIRE strategies recommended by the Ministry of Gender.

In addition, we undertook an Institutional Review Board approved formative qualitative study in the selected sub-county aimed at generating community led context specific conceptualization of drivers and prevention and response actions to corroborate the national VACS findings. In so doing, the community members and the established service workforce was able to relate violence against children within their social, cultural, emotional and economic constructs, understanding and conceptualization. Using a combination of the national VACS findings, Lira community-based VAC qualitative findings through a robust community-level service taskforce, we have jointly conceptualized and visioned a scalable VAC prevention and response program to be implemented in Lira district over the next three years.

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For us at TPO Uganda and ICRW, realizing the leave no one behind agenda means engaging the community level child protection service workforce through a systematic process that ensures inclusion of often left behind actors to reach the most left behind children. Its these actors that still require information on existing evidence, interventions to challenge negative socio-norm constructs that approve of VAC and perpetrate normalization and a culture of impunity and capacity strengthening for them to deliver improved quality of prevention services to children, caregivers and effectively lead engagement for policy and law enforcement for a better world for children by 2030.