

THE ROLE OF ADVOCACY, COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION, AND COMMUNICATION IN PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN COMMUNITY.

The experience of MACI, in Kawempe Division

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Key words: Advocacy, capacity development, communication, mobilization.

1.0 Introduction

The roles of advocacy, communication and community mobilization are becoming increasingly valued as a means of achieving higher standards of child violence prevention.

This paper illustrates how advocacy, capacity development, community mobilization, and effective communication can initiate and support prevention of violence against children (VAC) at a community level. The paper does not guarantee that the experience shared here will automatically work in other communities in preventing violence against (VAC) children, since many local factors are involved. However, it provides an example of how a community mapped out the most effective advocacy, capacity development and community mobilization, and communication strategies to suit their own circumstances.

Advocacy and communication activities need some form of media or channel of communication (McKee, 1992), such as mass media, community media, and interpersonal communication. While much of the communication effort on preventing violence against children (VAC) is concerned with transmitting a series of messages, it should be stressed that, to be effective, communication should be understood as a two-way process, with “participation” and “dialogue” as key elements. Program communication, advocacy, capacity development, and community mobilization originate from effective communication. Program communication is concerned with informing, and creating awareness among, the general public or particular communities about VAC prevention challenges, and empowering them to take action. Program communication also works to create an environment through which communities – particularly affected communities – can discuss debate, organize, and communicate their own perspectives about the problem. It is aimed at changing behavior and catalyzing social change.

It should be noted that any advocacy, capacity development and communication strategy designed to confront VAC should be focused on changes in both corporate and individual behavior. Action by a community is needed to overcome violence against children

1.2 Description of the project /activity

The project was implemented by Makerere 1 Community Initiative (MACI) with support from KIOS. The project was conducted in Kawempe Division, Kampala district. The motivation for this project was based on the need that, there is increased violence against children in Kawempe division. This has since been as a result of limited awareness on the causes, effects, and solutions to the vice as well as lack of action towards prevention of violence against children. Child violence continues to be perpetrated in schools and

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communities in such forms as, corporal punishments, denial for care and economic support, child sacrifice, child labor as well as general cases of child neglect. Such acts come up with physical, psychological, and economic effects that do not only affect the wellbeing of child victims but also affect development. The project was therefore a locally developed strategic response to child violence in communities.

The overall objective of the project was to create awareness and inspire action about preventing violence against children in Kawempe division. The specific objectives include;- engaging a broad-section of Kawempe division community in dialogue to prevent violence against children, inspiring community based response to cases of violence against children and inspiring institutions such as schools, police, probation offices in Kawempe division to include the issue of preventing violence against children on their priority development agenda.

2.0 Methods used in advocacy, mobilization, communication and capacity development

Communication, mobilization and motivation mechanisms were implemented at the community level by community facilitators, Volunteers, task force members, and local authorities, all supported by the use of appropriate local mass media.

2.1 Mapping exercise

The mapping exercise involved contacting local leaders, and mapping out assets. The project team contacted the local council² leaders in 4 selected parishes of Kawempe Division. The project activities were conducted in the parishes of Kanyanya, Makerere 1, Makerere 11 and Makerere 111. The activity included introducing the project to local leaders and securing written permission to implement the subsequent activities. Letters were drawn by the project team of MACI-KIOS project and delivered by volunteers to the chair persons, LC11, and Local LC 1. The Local council leaders obtained briefing about the project and its activities, scope of time and a description of their roles in the project and discussions were made. This was done in follow-up visits by volunteers and project team. This activity also included identifying a number of local institutions such as police stations, local councils, who were later involved in the project. In this activity we secured a map of Kawempe Division, contacting Kampala City Council Education department to obtain information about schools in Kawempe Division.

2.2 Mural Painting

This was composed of three stages. Namely; - Location of walls for mural painting, preparing the walls, as well as painting. Walls on which to paint murals with messages to prevent violence against children were located and made ready for mural painting. The walls were identified in an open and busy place for the viewers to see the murals. They were prepared and changed from initial rough cast to smoothen the surface. Skilled artists painted them using professionally designed templates. The walls were painted with messages on preventing violence against children.

2.3 Preparing Database

² In Uganda's local government system, in rural areas each village is administered by a local council 1, and in an Urban setting, the equivalent of a village is a zone.

This activity is a continuous process. The project co-coordinator initiated a system of filing, where important contact information of stakeholders in prevention of child violence was being kept. This information include: - physical addresses, telephone contacts, email addresses, occupation and views towards child violence prevention. For the sake of schools, teachers and leaders contacts, class lists were obtained. The information obtained from the previous activities such as “contacting local leaders” and “mapping out assets was also used to enrich the data base. The contacts were used through out the project in making referrals, calling people for assistance such as in urgent cases. All these lists with contacts have been organized and kept in both paper/hardcopies and electronic form.

2.3 Friends of children club

This activity involved preparation of list of telephone contacts for the members of community who were deemed as friends of children. Consent was first sought from the members by telephone calls. The idea of forming a friends’ of children club was sold to them. This club which will remain coordinated by MACI and will enable information sharing about issues pertaining child rights. Every member of community who indicated interest to join the club would be added to the list of the club members. Currently friends of children club, has 300 members.

The project team initiated a campaign in which members of the friends of children club share messages about VAC on their telephone contacts. Friends of children list was put up, with full contact telephone numbers of individuals interested in receiving messages on VAC. The list was then transformed into an electronic data. VAC related short messages are created and sent in bulk to the members of the club using internet. Every member who receives the message is also requested to send it to any 5 of his best friends. The pyramid for the messages will become continuous and messages will be received by very many people who also keep forwarding. We are now planning to create an email list server for easy communication among members as well.

2.4 Production and distribution of IEC Materials

IEC materials were printed, and distributed through out the course of the 1st phase of the project. The project team analyzed the templates pre-tested copies of posters from Raising Voices. The team found them suitable for awareness work. More copies were printed. These materials were distributed on community events; follow up visits, trainings, and in schools through teachers and volunteers. The IEC materials included booklets, and posters.

2.5 Days of Activism

This activity involved locating venues for the events, securing permission from local authorities, and mobilization. We identified venues for the community events in 3 market areas of Bwaise, Kalerwe, and Kawempe. We wrote letters to the market leaders requesting for the venues and permission to hold events in the areas. We introduced the activity and informed the leaders of the proposed dates. Written permission was secured from the leaders. The project team embarked on mobilizing the community through radio announcements, and pinning simple posters about the event. Posters were pinned on communal areas where they could be read. Each event started with a match involving a man walking on stilts to attract people’s attention. The match was always led by local council leaders, traffic Police, MACI leaders and volunteers. These were dressed in T. Shirts printed with message against VAC and carrying a banner and placards.

Many community members were joining the march and by the time the group reaches the venue of the event it already big. The march in Kalelwe attracted about 400 participants, 250 were attracted in Bwaise and 600 were attracted in Kawempe market. At the venue other people would be waiting and all would converge to make the event colorful. On each event, a film was shown, drama staged, booklet clubs conducted, IEC materials distributed, getting contacts to enrich the database, and recruiting new members of friends of children club.

2.6 News paper articles

News paper articles were published in local and national newspapers. The articles were mainly exposing the status of violence against children in Kawempe Division and the dangers arising from the vice, as well as the role of community leaders and individuals in preventing violence against children. Some news articles were circulated in local news flyers and magazines such as “Kawempe news³”. The aim was to expose the problems so that VAC would be included on the development agenda for Kawempe Division.

2.7 Radio and television talk shows

Media advocacy included the use of television and radio. Live phone-in talk shows were conducted. The project team would ask for air time on television and radio especially during the times designated for human rights and children forums. After the talk show, the listeners were always allowed to phone in a ask questions or give their views.

2.8 Training Local Institutions

Local council seminars

The project team organized two training seminars for local leaders from the 4 parishes of Kanyanya, Makerere 1, Makerere 11, and Makerere 111. In each, the training took two ½ days and was run from 9:00 am to 1:00 Pm. The mobilization and other related support was done by MACI volunteers. The training sessions were participatory. They included: - facilitating sessions, sharing experiences and ideas about VAC using simple activities and discussions of way forward including commitments by local leaders towards working with MACI to prevent VAC. On every training, IEC materials were distributed, registration made in order to obtain contacts of the participants which were later fed into the database and friends of children clubs. The participants involved local council one Chairmen, Local Council 11 Chairmen, Secretaries for women and youth, and probation officers.

Seminars with Police

This targeted police officers from the Family and child protection Units, of police stations and police posts around Kawempe division. The units and stations involved include:- Kawempe Police Station, Wandegeya Police station, Kanyanya Police station, Kalerwe Police post, Universal Police post, Kikoni Police post, Mulago Police post and Makerere University Police post. The training covered topics such as: - Rights of children, types of violence against children, causes of violence against children, and the role of police in combating child violence. The mobilization was done by sending invitation letters which were delivered by MACI volunteers. The training session was participatory in nature and

³ Kawempe news is a news bulletin produced quarterly to inform and communicate to communities in Kawempe Division.

steered debate. During this training, IEC materials were distributed. The participants also registered on attendance lists and these were also used to enrich the database.

2.9 Support Visits to Institutions

These are courtesy telephone calls and referrals, courtesy visits. We used the telephone contacts from the database, telephone contact lists, and lists of the friends of children clubs, to call and make a follow up. We shared information on VAC and asked the stakeholders about the training and their experiences. Observations were made and these will be relied up on to improve further training. Members of the project team and volunteers visited some LC 1 offices and police stations, as part of monitoring and evaluation. They held discussions with policemen and local leaders about the project and reflected on the success of the project activities. Visits to police stations and local council 1 offices were later made.

2.10 Responding to urgent action cases

This involved helping victims of violence in crisis situations, to move forward and get assistance. It involved providing legal aid and advice, providing financial support for medical examination, transport, emergency accommodation etc. From the cases reported at MACI office, issues of child violence were brought out and advice given before referral. Most cases are referred to other stakeholders like police, CEDOVIP, Local council Administration, and Administrator general.

3.0 Stakeholders participation

The participation of stakeholders was ensured through recruitment of more volunteers from the communities. These volunteers represented the rest of the community in planning the activities of the project. In other activities like drama, the beneficiaries got involved directly by watching drama, film and submitted their telephone contacts for future activities.

Other stakeholders like police, community leaders, got very much involved in handling the referred cases of victims of child violence under the urgent action. They also helped in mobilization of community events. NGO's doing related work notably Raising Voices, took interest and supported the work of MACI through provision of technical support, art work templates for murals, IEC materials etc. The church leaders in the community have also expressed interest to work with MACI to prevent violence against children.

4.0 An analysis of Achievements and Challenges

(a) Specific Achievements

- Through the community events, the local community, stakeholders and teachers were informed about the rights of children and how to relate with them. The communities have known the dangers of violence to children. This awareness campaign is believed to be a key factor in the prevention of VAC stemming from domestic violence because it works against ignorance of children's rights. This has helped to prevent things like corporal punishment, bullying and sexual violence in the school context, families and the community at large.
- As a result of the project, the victims of child violence and the members of the community can easily report cases of child abuse to authorities and police.

- The local institutions such police, local councils, Schools have started to streamline their offices to prioritize child violence issues. For example:- our follow up support visits to police have found out that the Family and Child Protection Units have been strengthened by involving social workers and counselors to manage violence against children.
- As a result of the project, the messages and campaign against child violence continues to increase through an expanded SMS base that continues to circulate. This has not stopped since it is a pyramid. The messages against VAC are expected to continue circulating even at the end of the project.
- The project has also increased our capacity as an organization. We have gained skills in various disciplines such as activity planning, monitoring and evaluation training, reporting, as well as financial management skills. This is because the project helped us to put in place appropriate planning, monitoring tools, reporting, and financial management systems.
- The friends of children club was one of the achievements of the project. This is made up of the stakeholders and community representatives who have increased concern for the rights of children. The club is in operation and is attracting more members. This club is in the process of forming a list serve to enable quick circulation of VAC information.
- The project has also created popularity for the organization. Unlike before, MACI's office has become popular and the cases of VAC reported and handled continue to increase. The organization is working closely with Uganda police and local Council, to appropriately handle cases of violence against children.
- The Project has also made MACI gain popularity through the radio talk shows on VAC in collaboration with Raising Voices. Various issues have been aired out on many radio stations in the country about VAC.

(b) The challenge

Although there are a number of logistical and capacity challenges, the main challenge was:-

- Negative attitudes of community members about VAC campaign. In the first days of the campaign some community members expressed disappointments that CBOs and NGOs are spoiling their children by over emphasizing their rights. They argued that children have become stubborn in homes and rarely help their parents. This however was overcome with massive sensitization that followed suit.

5.0 Lessons learned

- The most important lesson from this project is that advocacy, capacity development, communication and social mobilization strategies are most effective when their design is formed by and appropriate to local processes and experiences.
- Capacity development, advocacy and community mobilization are most effective when they have broad involvement and participation, including government institutions, nongovernmental organizations, communities and households, as well as other sectors of society such as private enterprises and the media. Isolated efforts cannot have the same impact as collective ones.
- Political will is fundamental to the achieving of a positive impact. Appropriate funding for advocacy, communication and social mobilization depends on the strength of political commitment at both national and local levels.
- Children learn quickly through drama and booklets compared to the adults because most of them could read and write. Children learn quickly through drama because it is not only educative but also entertaining as compared to booklet reading since not all of them can read English well.
- The volunteers, staff members, teachers, local leaders and stakeholders require basic training/orientation on the project before implementation. This equips them with knowledge and also leads to effective implementation of these activities.
- It was noted that awareness raising/sensitization plays a major role in informing a wider community. We learnt that violence against children was against their rights and that people were doing it out of ignorance.
- Involving children to take part in identifying their problems and allowing them to suggest solutions is a very good participatory approach that empowers children and leads to sustainability.
- For proper and effective implementation of the project activities, teamwork is a key factor for success to ensure proper coordination among the project team. Planning for activities and evaluation at the end of every activity are important factors for effective implementation of the project activities.

6.0 Conclusion

Strategies for enhancing prevention of violence against children (VAC) exist and include advocacy, capacity development and community mobilization. Such strategies have, however, not been prioritized by a number of stakeholders at local, national and international levels either in terms of strategic emphasis or in developing the capacity required to implement them.

Whilst many effective and proven communication and social mobilization strategies exist, they are neither a magic wand nor a simple template that can be applied universally. Although these strategies are recommended, they must be developed from within communities or countries according to the specific realities of each country.

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