Sustainable Outcomes for Children & Youth
SHAPING THE FUTURE FOR UGANDA’S CHILDREN AND YOUTH
The Sustainable Outcomes for Children and Youth (SOCY) is a five-year USAID funded program designed to improve the health, nutrition, education and psychosocial wellbeing of orphaned and vulnerable children, as well as reduce abuse, exploitation, and neglect among this population in 22 districts in central, south western, and western Uganda. The program is designed to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and youth by strengthening the systems that surround them.
TPO Uganda, Country Director  
A HUMAN CENTERED APPROACH, LESSONS ON GETTING IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME.

PATRICK ONYANGGO MANGEN

Children and young people are at the center of families, households and communities. As such, their lives are influenced and affected by diverse and often interlinked factors. If you look at the development trajectory of a child for example, they need access to education, nutrition, protection and care. The Sustainable Outcomes for Children and Youth (SOCY) project, funded by USAID, has allowed us the unique opportunity to identify household needs and design interventions that directly address these needs in a holistic and integrated manner.

The stories in this book are a rich compilation of the lived experiences of the youth, children and their families whose livelihoods have been transformed as a result of the SOCY project. Through the household needs assessments, we were able to identify and align household needs with appropriate responses. Our empowerment approach, aimed to leave households more self-reliant and able to fend for themselves. By deliberately encouraging community participation in the design and implementation of this project through Para Social Workers, the SOCY project has left behind cohorts of community helpers that are skilled in the care and protection of vulnerable children. The Sustainable Outcomes for Children and Youth (SOCY) project, funded by USAID has allowed us the unique opportunity to identify household needs and design interventions that directly address these needs in a holistic and integrated manner.

The SOCY project is a fresh reminder that communities have inherent strengths that projects should tap into. Combining this with a community systems strengthening approach was therefore quite efficacious and cost efficient. For example Para social workers were the foot soldiers of this project, our ears and eyes on the ground because they know the households in their village, understand the dynamics at work, the household needs and are seen as part of the community. Understanding the movers and shakers, gatekeepers and power holders was a tremendous contributor to success.

When we are long gone communities are able to go to their trusted persons for advice. In conclusion, the SOCY project adds to the invaluable experience TPO Uganda has acquired in trusted persons for advice. In conclusion, the SOCY project adds to the invaluable experience TPO Uganda has acquired in trusted persons for advice. In conclusion, the SOCY project adds to the invaluable experience TPO Uganda has acquired in trusted persons for advice. In conclusion, the SOCY project adds to the invaluable experience TPO Uganda has acquired in trusted persons for advice.

THE USAID SUSTAINABLE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROJECT

Community Based Partners  
3 IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

Holistic Progress  
JULIUS ATUHAIRWE, Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development, ACCORD

“Children and young people need to be equipped to succeed but they do not exist in a vacuum, therefore targeting parents and caregivers was a winning approach in the SOCY project. Children and youth were trained through apprenticeship, Aflateen curriculum that provides social and financial education for young people and farming. The parents got their own version that stressed financial literacy and saving like the Edufund scheme to save school fees and support their children to stay in school. Entire households were as such empowered to progress together.”

Mindset Shift  
BOSCO TURYAMUREBA, Integrated Community Based Initiatives, ICOBI

“My milestone moment in this project was witnessing mindset shift in action. As we worked with households to reflect on their situation and power to change, families began to utilize their own potential and resources to address their needs. SOCY has been a good intervention aimed at empowering the vulnerable to utilize their own resources. Mobilizing people to join village savings and lending groups was first and foremost an inspiring activity with almost immediate rewards that we saw push families to maximize their resources and increase earnings.”

Local Ownership  
MOSES BAJWAHA, Action for Community Development, ACODEV

“Intentional partnership with the Local Government structures was a game change in this project because once SOCY ends the Local Leaders continue to drive change. Through Technical Working Group meetings and joint action and monitoring activities with the ministries of Local Government (LG) and Gender Labour & Social Development (MOGLSD) we were able to monitor progress and adjust our strategies as needed. This resulted in OVC Indicators being included in the LG Inspection Checklist by MOGLSD, which will be used to monitor the performance of local government staff (mainly Community Development Officers) on OVC matters.”

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Towards Sustainable Development.

A conversation with the CRS leadership

Sasha Angelevski, Chief of Party and Olive D'Mello, Deputy Chief of Party for the USAID SOCY PROJECT

Sasha Angelevski, Chief of Party USAID SOCY Project.

Multi-faceted, dynamic, integrated and capacity building are some of the words used to describe the SOCY. What does this mean for you? Sasha: SOCY is indeed a multifaceted 5-year program with a lot of dynamics at play. For a number of years there had been OVC programming, but case management and the package of services was bolstered through SOCY. The project looked at the various needs and services needed by children and their families including education, health, safety, child protection, and household economic strengthening. The project enabled us to work with partners to provide wrap around and integrated relevant services which helped stabilize families to enable them pursue their dreams. Working with the right partners has continued to drive good outcomes in this project.

How have partnerships driven the SOCY project?

Sasha: The extent of change is we are moving towards children and youth cannot be achieved by a single organization. This required us to partner with other organizations to leverage and strengthen their expertise for effective case management. These institutions were already experts in their respective areas of OVC work, but needed organizational and technical capacity strengthening to achieve even greater outcomes for children. For example, psychosocial support and work with OVCs was not new for Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) but under SOCY we worked to build capacity on case management and integrating socioeconomics into service delivery.

Leveraging technology is a buzz word in development. How did this skilled work force use it to improve outcomes?

Sasha: We are very proud to have utilized Information Technology for Development (ICT4D) in the SOCY project. This platform is fully fledged and includes an app that social workers, using smart phones provided through the project, access pertinent information about home visits, such as location of households. The SOCY system and data is now all online.

The social workers are on a prepaid close user group along with the Community Development Officers for easy and affordable communication. The team are able to discuss cases and effectively complete referrals in real time. SOCY program strengthened the use of data for decision making at partner level and consortium level we are able to access program data on the MIS platform to inform planning. All program locations have GPS coordinates and data visualization is used to develop reports that are available on the system. Project progress and achievements are also available on the public project web page.

SOCY has been lauded of efforts in

the HIV response, how has the project contributed?

Sasha: When you think about all the efforts over the years in Uganda, initially the PEPFAR support was it about getting ARVs into the country and making sure people got treatment. Now as we work towards the UNAIDS 90 - 90 - 90 target the missing link is at community level to find the few who are lost to follow up and SOCY addressed this challenge. Working with clinical partners we have home based clients at household level who may have left treatment as well as support those referred from the health center for adherence support. In most of the project areas we have achieved 100% and that in itself is a milestone before 2020.

Olive D'Mello, Deputy Chief of Party USAID SOCY Project. 

Capacity building has also been referred to by many SOCY partners as an important cornerstone, how did this happen in practice?

Olive: The structure of the project was intentionally designed to drive both vertical and horizontal learning in real time, to ultimately ensure that local organizations would be equipped to sustain gains and continue their journey by their own. We used a mix of approaches depending on learning needs. We used workshop type seminars to discuss concepts and how they might work in the field, as well as rapid mentorship and coaching with program managers to allow for individualized skills improvement.

At the community level the same coaching was provided to the extent that staff would be accompanied to home visits for hands on support. However, before going to the field there would be ample time for role play. The implementing partners also provided rapid mentorship and coaching to civil society organizations and equipped them for quick turnaround in terms of implementation and reporting. At the same time TPO focused on strengthening Local Government capacity including LCOs, through advisory and advocacy roles. This has been crucial to providing much needed leadership and partnerships to bring capacity from the Districts to the Local Governments.

All these achievements are spectacular but how are Local Governments going to sustain operations at project close?

Olive: With regards to funding, the Local Governments have traditionally been marginalized but through advocacy and lobbying by the implementing partners such as TPO, the Local Governments of Bushenyi and Ntungamo districts have worked to successfully mobilize funds from their local revenues. Even before project close, these districts are already mobilizing funds for OVC work in their community. In order to be sustained, the Local Governments were assessed in five areas at project inception and in the 3rd year of the project. These include planning and coordination, staffing, local revenue financing towards children, use of information technology and at the same time TPO have worked hard through well-organized advocacy and relationship building with local leaders and communities to bridge these gaps. For example, TPO worked with five districts to increase their staffing levels to 85%.

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**Project overview**

**Purpose:** To improve the health, nutrition, education and psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable children, as well as reduce abuse, exploitation and neglect to these children.

**Implementers:** Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Action for Community Development (ACODEV), African Network for the Prevention & Protection Against Child Abuse & Neglect (ANPPCAN), TPO Uganda

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**Key Objectives**

- Orphaned and vulnerable children, youth, and their caregivers economically empowered to effectively access core services
- Local government and CSOs increased availability and improved the quality of care services for orphaned and vulnerable children, youth, and their caregivers.
- Service providers have improved the coordination of community-based clinical and socioeconomic services for efficient and effective referrals along the continuum of care.

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**Key Results**

- **128,677** Beneficiaries reached with needs-based services: nutrition, psychosocial, health, child protection, HIV prevention and care, household economic strengthening, emergency care
- **5,653** HIV positive children on ARV
- **85%** supported to suppress the virus
- **5,525** children benefited from a scholastic fund
- **2,470** youth completed apprenticeship
- **65%** employed with monthly income of UGX 100,000
- **5,399** caregivers completed 18 parenting sessions
- **3,231** children assisted to acquire birth certificates
- **63%** of target districts met government OVC coordination mechanism functionality criteria

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"I had reached an age, where I felt education was not really important. I had a few friends who were married and somehow, I felt I was missing out. So, I decided to drop out of school and follow them."

- Goretti Nassejje, Mityana

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**GORETTI NASSEJJE**
Choosing new dreams

Growing up, things hadn’t been easy for Goretti. Abandoned by her parents as a child, Goretti was raised by Norah Najjemba, a caregiver who tried to keep Goretti in school.

“I knew that my Goretti was smart but when she didn’t want to go to school anymore I was very afraid because she had threatened to run away with a married man. I tried to talk to her but she wouldn’t listen,” says Norah.

When social workers learnt about Goretti’s situation from a concerned community leader, they tried to counsel her discussing the dangers of teenage pregnancies, child marriage, HIV/AIDS, and the benefits of finishing education before marriage. They shared stories of other girls who had decided to stay in school with promising futures.

Although Goretti initially resisted counseling from the social workers, eventually she decided to return to school. Today she is performing well at school and is getting ready to do her final high school exams. Her new dream is to become a midwife, so that she too, can help other people.

“I was not a daydreamer. I was very realistic but I didn’t have the self-confident, the self-esteem to say I can do this,” says Steven Mugume.

“From the training I learnt life skills, business management, saving and record keeping, which have all helped me plan better. Having made it this far despite being an orphan with many problems, I hope I can be an example in the community so that other young people know they can make it.”

- Steven Mugume, Isingiro

QUICK FACT

The USAID DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe) partnership is an ambitious public-private partnership to reduce rates of HIV among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in the highest HIV burden countries.

The SOCY project trained parasocial workers and Village Health Teams to make referrals to OVC and youth services. Para social workers, teachers, and religious leaders reinforced the good parenting skills by offering spiritual guidance, building OVC self esteem, and encouraging positive peer relationships.

4,158 GIRLS HAVE BENEFITTED FROM THE EDU-FUND SCHOLASTIC MATERIALS SUPPORT

Brenda Butuuro (left), the project trained parasocial worker is proud of her work, counseling young girls like Goretti to stay in school.
Becoming a selfless millionaire

Hands-on marketable skills transform youth economics

When Steven Mugume lost both his parents, he felt his life was over. He dropped out of school and spent his days wandering around the town’s trading center, desperate and hopeless about the future.

“SOCY found me homeless. They helped me start a carpentry business which I never thought I would ever do. I soon realized that I just hadn’t discovered my gift for it. Now, I earn no less than 1 million shillings every month,” Steven says.

He adds that he chose to focus on carpentry due to the demand for furniture including repair and maintenance. Steven is now 24 years old, and a member of Bugongi Youth Saving Group, which has helped its members to save and invest effectively. Within a year Steven has trained 17 young people from his savings group and 30 others from his community who have started businesses in other parts of Isingiro District.

2,470 YOUTH COMPLETED THEIR APPRENTICESHIP

Based on a labour market study, the project linked high potential out-of-school youth, with vocational training centers and private sector internships and work opportunities.

“It feels like freedom, my life is much better now that I own a salon. I earn money and I can do what I want. This project opened everything for me”.

-Julie Nakate, Mityana
Boss Lady: Entrepreneurship and saving groups transform Julie’s life

Everyday after preparing breakfast for her family, Julie Nakate goes to the hair salon that she recently opened in Swabulongo village, Mityana District. But the 27-year old has not forgotten the time she was a single mother without a job, depending on her siblings for survival. It was in this dire situation that Julie heard about the SOCY project.

“I was at home with no job when one of the leaders in my community told me about a project registering people to do hands-on business. At first I ignored it, but later I decided to join as they didn’t need money to start. Since then, things have changed for the better,” says Julie.

Julie chose to learn business management and hairdressing. When she got married and graduated from her course, Julie got a job in a hair salon and began saving half of her income in a Saving and Internal Lending Community (SILC). With the support of her husband and her own savings, Julie was able to open up a salon where she earns a daily income of UGX 50,000.

65% OF YOUTH COMPLETING APPRENTICESHIP ARE ALREADY EMPLOYED

Saving and Internal Lending Community (SILC) groups were formed in communities to provide financial support to vulnerable households using a mentoring process to help them reach a less vulnerable state. Participants in SILC groups were trained using a curriculum that included goal-setting, budgeting, savings and borrowing options.

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“...I got pregnant when I was 15 years, and my parents forced me to get married to save them from shame in the community. But the man did not want to take responsibility. I had to suffer through it alone...”

Juliet Nabunya, Mityana
Next level caterers

The town of Zigote in Mityana District is popular for its thriving startups by young people. Perhaps the most unique of them all is the Mirembe Catering Business Group.

“We are a team of 25 that has taken catering services to a new level in Zigote. Every weekend we team up and provide services, earn cash which we save and or use to buy necessary inputs for our business,” says team leader Juliet Nabunya, who is also a young mother.

The SOCY project identified the business and all 25 team members were enrolled in the project to strengthen their skills. On average, the team earns UGX 500,000. Juliet earns close to UGX 60,000 per day.

“I used to earn only UGX 2,000 per day. With my increased income, I am able to take care of my baby properly,” says Juliet.

In order to increase their sources of income and improve on their earnings, Regina and Juliet opened up fruit and vegetable stalls at Zigote Trading Center to cater to customers in high traffic areas.

“The project gave us confidence. It is like my mother and father. My parents disowned me after I conceived, I was homeless until SOCY came to my rescue,” says Juliet.

“Some of us had tried saving alone and failed. Saving as an individual doesn’t really work, but being a part of a group brings commitment and focus.”

- Regina Najimu, one of the savings group members

13 MILLION
UGX SAVED BY YOUTH OF MIREMBE CATERING BUSINESS GROUP

The project identified in and out-of-school youth through household vulnerability assessment lists and encouraged them to join existing or form new youth clubs. The clubs enabled both in and out-of-school groups to form and join peer support groups aimed at empowering youth with coping skills.

TARASISIO TWINOMUJUNI

“After completing his Primary Seven in 2004, I could not continue my education because there was no school fees and nobody could look after me and my six siblings.”

TARASISIO TWINOMUJUNI, Isingiro
The exquisite barber

Throughout his childhood Tarasisio had always admired barbers; he wanted to cut hair like they did. When he joined SOCY he was enrolled into the apprenticeship program of hairstyling. After graduating from the program, Tarasisio was employed by his mentor and paid according to the barbershop’s daily returns. Tarasisio also began saving his earnings with Bugongi Youth Group, something he had learned during SOCY trainings.

“The first cycle of saving gave me UGX1.5 million while the second gave me UGX900,000. I bought two banana (matooke) plantations,” the twenty-year-old Tarasisio says proudly.

From his small scale businesses Tarasisio is able to take care of his five siblings. At just 20 years old, Tarasisio owns two plots of land with banana plantations, a hair salon, a piggy project and he also plans to buy a motorcycle.

“If I was not saving, I could never have got all these. I am thankful for SOCY’s project.”

Life skills training opportunities for youth were introduced by SOCY to reduce household vulnerability, including in child-headed homes.

SANYU AIDA

“I used to go back home in despair, now I can boast that I am a landowner, and I am paying school fees for my children, whom I had failed to look after.”

Sanyu Aida, Mbarara
Becoming a land owner

“I have always wanted to own my own property,” says Sanyu Aida. I could not wait to leave my rural village for the nearby town because for 30 years in the village I had not achieved my dream.”

However, moving to the town was not easy; Sanyu first worked in a hotel where she earned a meagre daily salary.

“I was earning only UGX2000 daily. At the end of each work day, I would go back home in despair because the cost of living in town was too high. When I was approached by the social workers to join the program I agreed willingly, since I had no other solutions.”

Sanyu underwent a 6-month cottage skills training where she learnt how to make soap, candles, and reusable sanitary pads, in addition to saving and business management skills.

She also joined a 25 member savings group where she raised UGX200,000 which she used to start a motel business. In addition, Sanyu sells beverages to students from the nearby university.

The earnings from these businesses have enabled Sanyu to buy a piece of land worth UGX500,000.

“I am especially grateful for the training in savings and business management because I used to have difficulty saving. However, since we were taught, it is no longer a challenge,” says Sanyu.

Social orphans: Strengthening local governments to implement alternative care

More than two-thirds of the 40,000–50,000 children living in residential care facilities have at least one living parent or a contactable relative. Many of the children living in residential care represent “social orphans”—children who are victims of abuse, violence and exploitation, or whose living parents are unable to care for them.


Investments in evidence-based interventions, such as strengthening household economy and preventing violence within and outside households, are associated with reduced mortality, improved physical growth, higher IQ scores, increased school completion, and higher earning potential.

QUICK FACT
Alternative Care for Children (2016/17–2020/21) was developed to provide a coherent framework for delivering and facilitating access to appropriate alternative care services for the growing number of children deprived of parental care. In addition, guidance is provided to strengthen and support families to care for children and prevent unnecessary family-child separations, and to strengthen systems to ensure quality alternative family-based care.

DOMINIC MUKIZA
For the last three years, Dominic Mukiza has served as the Senior Probation and Social Welfare Officer in Ibanda District.

Dominic says his work protecting and safeguarding children’s rights has been streamlined through the project interventions. Dominic and his colleagues were trained on the government recommended Alternative Care Framework, which emphasizes community-based care in safe families for OVC.

"For the first time, every orphaned and vulnerable child in a child care institution has a care order and a case plan, which highlights details such as their aftercare, adoption or domestic kinship."

SECURED LEGAL CARE ORDERS FOR OVER 5,000 CHILDREN
"SOCY ensured that childcare institutions in our district operate above the minimum standards set by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. We were also able to secure legal care orders for over 5000 children in all our child care institutions and they were all assessed to ensure they are safe."

SCOVIA AMUTUHEIRE
"I grew up thinking I was abnormal and different from the others because that is what everyone in my community said, and my father told me the same before abandoning us."

-Scovia Amutuheire, Bushenyi
Taking back their power: One family’s stand against albinism prejudice

In Bushenyi district, Western Uganda, 18-year-old Scovia Amutuheire, lives with her mother and six siblings. Scovia and one of her siblings lives with albinism which is considered a curse in the community. Eventually, their father abandoned the home. Scovia and her siblings went without food for days as their mother was unable to provide for them by herself.

“I was so used to rejection in my life that by the time SOCY came to me, I did not believe that their interventions were real. So I first rejected their offer,” says Scovia.

When she finally agreed to enrol in the project, Scovia spent more than a year undergoing entrepreneurship training, where she was taught budgeting, planning, business management, and craft making which was her favourite. After the training, Scovia was officially employed by her mentor and she also joined a savings group.

When her savings accumulated, Scovia opened up her own crafts business, making bags from recycled plastic, which supports her family. Here she earns an average of UGX 50,000 every week. Scovia’s next goal is to expand her business from her small home, to a rented space.

FAUNA NVIRA

“When I remember the dark times we went through before the project, I have no words to say thank you it’s like a heavy burden was taken off my life.”

Fauna Nvira, Kiruhura
When grandmothers raise nations

Fauna Nvira from Kiruhura District is a grandmother of three children. Like many Ugandan grandmothers who have become caregivers to children orphaned by HIV, Fauna was desperate. She barely had enough food for the children surviving solely on subsistence farming. When the project started, community members were the first to identify the family as one of the most vulnerable with three orphans, one of them living with HIV/AIDS and another pregnant from sexual assault.

"The project counseled and supported us. My two daughters were enrolled in apprenticeships to learn hairdressing and tailoring. As soon as they completed their training the girls started earning money which is now supporting the household."

Fauna was also encouraged to join a saving group, the Edu fund, which supports OVC with scholastic support. She uses these savings to take care of her grandchildren's school fees and school supplies.

"At the beginning of every term, I am sure that my saving can cater for my grandson's fees. It is no longer a worry in my heart."

Strengthening systems at the district level focused on ensuring access to and expanding the quality of comprehensive protection services for OVC, youth, and their caregivers.

For example, out-of-school youth were linked to organizations that can train and support them to start and manage their own self-sustaining businesses in their communities.

Fauna's family was assigned a parasocial worker (left) who was familiar with the circumstances of the home.

The SOCY project empowered the community based services department to lobby for an increase in budget allocations for child care institutions and the recruitment of additional critical human resource for OVC work.

-existing and new parasocial workers and VHTs were trained to collect household data using both the Vulnerability Assessment Tool, and the Household Assessment Tool under the guidance and supervision of the CSO social worker. This information is received by the district coordinator from the CSO social worker, service delivery points, and CDOs at sub-counties and is shared at district and regional levels. This strengthens district planning and resource allocation for OVC and their households.

Joint efforts to fight child labor pay off

Prossy Grace Lwanga a parasocial worker in Mityana District depends on community watchdogs to identify and report cases of child neglect and abuse. She learnt about Gladys and Kevin, both 11 years old, not attending school and kept in a home as housekeepers. Their parents were tricked into letting them travel from Lira District to Mityana, with the promise of a good education in Mityana.

The couple that was keeping the two children was counseled and warned to return the children to school, which they resisted. The parasocial worker engaged the Local council court and the Community Development Officer to compel the couple to return the children to school or to their home.

"It is a shame that teachers could keep children in child labour and deny them education. I am so glad that I was able to support the process of saving the little ones."

"The PSW training through SOCY equipped me with the skills and confidence to deal with child abuse cases."

Prossy Grace Lwanga a parasocial worker, Mityana

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Quick Fact

The SILC group intervention also supports district coordination as community issues especially those concerning vulnerable households are identified and discussed for resolution. SILC groups, such as Omukanara Tukore SILC group, Isingiro District (right) support highly vulnerable households for a 12-month period using a mentoring process to reduce vulnerability.

Quick Fact

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Children were transitioned into family care

Children were transitioned into family care
District OVC coordination mechanisms at work

When cases of defilement, and early marriages rose in Kiruhura district, the District OVC committees revived through the SOCY project decided to take action. There was consensus that the situation was partly exacerbated by the high cost of accessing medical and legal services for survivors. Following a community dialogue and an assessment exercise, the DOVCC committee tasked their executive council through the chairperson, to intervene to stop the negative practice of early marriage as well as place a waiver for medical examinations for victims of sexual abuse. The executive agreed and a circular was passed to all religious leaders and elders to campaign against early marriages. The health-in-charges were also required to carry out free medical examinations for victims of sexual abuse.

The DOVCC committees are strategic because they are legally established, as a Ministry of Gender and Social Development structure and have the power to implement policy changes, resource allocation at the district level.

Omukanara Tukore SILC group, Isingiro District

Turyomurugyendo Vanis and her children were enrolled in a SILC group to support them to gain incomes and build up savings.

Turyomurugyendo Vanis, Isingiro
When you visit Vanis at her vibrant market stand, she is more than happy to narrate her victory over poverty. People had told Vanis and her husband Fred to save money before, but she Vanis could not fathom the possibility. There were many competing needs and she like other women in rural areas would not think of ever stepping into a financial institution of any sort for financial advice.

Vanis was also not trusting of these institutions or saving money with a friend as some had suggested. A Savings and Lending agent linked to the SOCY project convinced her otherwise. The social worker told Vanis about joining a savings and lending group which was governed by rules that would allow her to start at a manageable amount. But first, Vanis was invited to a financial literacy class which further convinced her the group was legitimate. Vanis started with a box of silver fish, sold it in the market and made her first savings. She borrowed money to increase her produce, returned it and saved. After several cycles her money increased and each time the group shared their profit. Vanis invested in her business, paid school fees and made home improvements.

Today Vanis, Fred and the children are almost unrecognizable. They built a new house with a water tank and a strong roof and started a backyard garden for nutritious vegetables. She learnt about a balanced diet at the group as well. Vanis’ children are doing well and have all their school needs met. The family are using everything they have to increase earnings including selling water from their tank to neighbors during droughts. As for her market business, its net worth has more than doubled. For example, Vanis started with 50kg of mud-fish and a box of tomatoes worth 60,000sh per week, today she earns up to 200,000sh every week.

Implementation in the eyes of the community

Households look at a project as one entity, yet for a project the size of SOCY multiple civil society partners engaged households for various activities. In one day, a household might receive several visits with multiple instructions and information requests which was overwhelming, considering the vulnerability of these homes. Streamlining project activities is key for more sustainable household improvements.

Changes in donor funding also affected this process. For example when social workers would initiate households and commit to work with them for a period, this time frame was sometimes cut short due to funding shifts. Households and local leadership (district and sub county) were negatively affected and their trust in the project was threatened. Managing expectations early on in the project can support communities to have realistic perspectives and understand the operating environment of project activities.

Reviewing strategy

Working closely with CSOs in re-aligning work plans, developing annual reports and actual implementation of activities strengthened collaboration between CSOs and IPs. Allocating clear targets to CSOs per District and Sub-county made the enrollment exercise smooth.
Change up reviews
Technical Working Groups in consortiums to review achievements are not uncommon. However Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the lead partner in the USAID SOCY project was intentional in setting them up as learning and sharing platforms. These were based on progressive targeting and reviews agreed on by the team. Each quarter the promising methods were discussed and adapted while failing ones were halted or altered.

Focus on the custodians
On the ground, the Community Development Officer (CDO) is mandated to handle child protection and welfare at the lowest level. Rather than introduce the project and invite the CDO to review progress, the project engaged CDOs at project inception and included them in developing work plans, implementation, as well as learning and adapting processes. In the OVC coordination activities and case conferences, CDOs facilitate these meetings, which has led to a deepening of their knowledge and commitment to OVC protection issues in their community. In Mbarara District this experience led CDOs to request for an additional budget item specifically for OVC coordination and education support. It is now part of the district budget and will enable the CDOs continue to build on their current achievements.

Multi-disciplinary team work
Joint home visits by DPC, Social Workers, Parasocial workers and HES team has promoted layering of services and built capacity of the staff to do their work effectively.

Investing in capacity strengthening
Central Level Training on Case management is key in inspiring creativity through learning and sharing. The project was also able to identify a pool of trainers to foster a cascade of national level trainings in their districts such as the Journeys, a child protection initiative. Rolling out of new child protection initiatives is done effectively and quickly since there are trainers at every level.

Parasocial workers as an invaluable support workforce
OVC programming especially in rural communities requires significant human resource to address multiple issues and cases arising from vulnerability. At project design however, the number of parasocial workers required was underestimated which led to shortfalls in project activities. For example, a single parasocial worker was tasked to serve 40 households, including weekly visits to assess and review the household improvement plans. Mentorship Sessions are very key in inspiring the Social Workers to deliver effectively on their duties in line with the home visitations.

Working with youth
Agriculture and savings initiatives for the youth worked better as groups, rather than individual services. Groups provide moral support and if well-managed, allow for healthy competition, quick adoption of practices, and joint creativity. For example, through the SILC groups, youth saved enough money to start wholesale businesses supplying household essentials. They are currently running a full stock list from Mukwano Industries, one of the largest suppliers of household goods in the country. Further, formalization of youth groups through registration has increased their chances of benefiting from youth led programs (YLP) in government. Exposure visits for learning and inspiration also help young people aspire and believe change is possible thus increasing commitment to project initiatives.

Skilling for better futures
Apprenticeship provides significant hands on experience, as well employment opportunities. For instance in Kiyuga and Isingiro districts, 90% of 186 youth that completed training are already working and supporting their families. However, it is important that when apprentices complete training, an assessment of their skills should be conducted and they be encouraged to start businesses within their community.
Looking Forward: Leverage Partnerships to Ignite Potential and Sustain Gains

MONDO KYATEKA
Commissioner Youth and Children Affairs at the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD).

People have the potential to change their lives but we often need a spark to drive us into action. This is what the USAID SOCY project did in our communities. The project pushed us to stop being development tourists; telling people what to do but rather ask, what is it you think you can do? This ignited thinking and creative solutions by the people themselves. After all, they face the problems and are as such able to design the right solutions. SOCY challenged gender and leadership roles in the home to teach and equip both men and women on good nutrition, child care, and land utilisation to result into better health such as backyard gardening. Families realised their ability to complement their abilities to strengthen their wellbeing. I recall a community which was empowered through savings, they started saving each week; one thousand shillings up to five thousand subsequently. When I went back, some had goats, cocks among other economic activities. The people chose the activities best suited for their circumstances and this is commendable.

Every lesson from the community and project implementers was a gem because it enhanced community structures and responders to do better for children and families. SOCY for example trained and leveraged para social workers through hands on learning and a curriculum tailored to address psychosocial and economic transformation in their communities. Para social workers are important in closing the human resource gap in social development.

As government, we fill our strength lies in partnerships and public private collaborations like the USAID SOCY project. Our efforts are geared towards finding new friends to address the issues that hinder children and women from thriving. SOCY has worked within the National Development Plan(II) and the Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs). Mahatma Gandhi narrated that poverty is the worst form of violence to which SOCY's contribution to reduce it cannot be under-rated.

Regional project partners

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