

## RESEARCH PAPER

# Every Child Included and Protected

What have we achieved and how do we improve?

Research into World Vision's work with the most vulnerable children

DECEMBER 2014 World Vision UK



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EVERY CHILD FREE FROM FEAR

# Every Child included and protected

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## INTRODUCTION

WorldVision UK is committed to protecting children living in the world's hardest places, especially the most vulnerable. We define the most vulnerable children (MVC) as being children whose quality of life and abilities to fulfill their potential are negatively affected by extreme poverty and violations of their rights. They are children whose relationships are characterised by violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, discrimination and exclusion and are often living in catastrophic situations. Where progress has been made with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), these children are the most likely to be left behind and UNICEF's 2013 global survey on violence confirmed that "the most vulnerable children are those at greatest risk of violence."<sup>1</sup> They are also the least able to protect themselves which is why it is paramount to us that our child protection programming reaches and protects as many MVC as possible.

To find out how effective our MVC programming is, we commissioned participatory research led by Dr Philip Cook and Dr Mike Wessels<sup>2</sup> to assess the difference that three of our child protection projects make for MVC and to recommend what can be done to improve them.

Our consultants evaluated child protection projects set up with DFID PPA<sup>3</sup> funding in Cambodia, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Tanzania. This document highlights the research's main observations on impact and its recommendations for improving our programming to better include and benefit MVC.



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Girls in rural Cambodia use vulnerability mapping to identify where MVC live, work and play and the hazards that face them.

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The overall finding was that our child protection programming in these countries is making a positive difference. MVC involved in our protection projects are less vulnerable, better able to protect themselves and avoid risky situations. The research also found that our systems approach to child protection has enabled a range of local actors, including children themselves, to work individually and together to reduce the vulnerability of these children<sup>4</sup>. However, the research also found that our projects have been less successful in reaching those children most at risk.

### WHO ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN?

The most vulnerable children we reach in Cambodia, Eastern DRC and Tanzania include:

- Children affected by violence, abuse and rape
- Children with disabilities
- Children not in school and some in exploitative work situations
- Children without civil registration or abandoned by their carers
- Girls at risk from early marriage and/or female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)
- Former child soldiers and brothel workers

Our child protection programming involves bringing together a number of actors – including children, their peers and families as well as community members and groups - working both individually and collectively to reduce children's vulnerability. We have achieved this by:

- Helping MVC understand their rights and develop leadership and life skills – backed up with **support and encouragement from families and community groups** who have also learned about children's rights and how to uphold them.
- **Helping MVC, children, parents/caregivers and the community** identify vulnerable children at risk and know how and when to refer them to a local child protection group
- **Working with MVC, other children, parents/caregivers and the community** to recognise that some traditional practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM/C) and exploitative child labour are harmful to children.
- **Supporting individual children with counseling** where formal child protection systems are not available to overcome trauma and, where needed, support to rejoin home communities, who may have rejected them in the past but are now welcoming.



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Masai boys herding goats in Tanzania:  
Out of school and unable to access children's clubs

## REDUCING VULNERABILITY

Our research revealed that after taking part in protection projects, MVC and parents/caregivers have learned how to better protect themselves or their children. The table below shows how MVC and their parents/caregivers are making themselves or their children less vulnerable.

### MVC now know how to:

- Use risk reduction strategies to protect themselves and others
- Avoid dangerous places, people and risky activities and situations
- Safely clean up dirty and dangerous areas
- Say 'no' with confidence to unwanted, inappropriate sex or other abuse and exploitation
- Bring other MVC together with key adults who can help them
- Refer MVC who have experienced abuse to child protection committee

### Parents/caregivers now protect their children by:

- Caring for and meeting their basic needs
- Understanding and respecting their rights
- Encouraging them to go to school, where they will often be safer
- Teaching them how to avoid dangerous places, people and situations known to be risky.

### MVC and their parents/caregivers also use aspects of their culture to support children standing up for their rights and protecting themselves.

- In Cambodia, the Buddhist belief in collective unity (samaki) mobilises communities to support their MVC
- In Eastern DRC, popular music and drama promotes child protection messages
- In Tanzania, young people use the Masai concept of bravery to help them face challenges.

Although these impact findings are positive, there is still more to do as the research revealed that our child protection programming has been more successful in reaching children with moderate vulnerability levels rather than those most at risk. The rest of this report highlights the research recommendations that will help us reach and better protect more MVC.



## PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

### **We need to better identify and target MVC**

To help us reach more MVC, we need to be able to identify them. We can do this by working with children and other community members who can help us find and reach more hidden MVC and also help us understand the local issues that may have contributed to their vulnerability. After identifying MVC, we need to adapt our protection projects and target our activities to meet their specific needs.

### **BARRIERS FACED BY MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN (MVC)**

Our research showed that many MVC are just not able to come to our child protection projects, including youth clubs and child rights groups. In many communities, MVC are not in school, where they may be safest. Some MVC are homeless, living on the streets. Many are working – tending animals, working in factories, as domestic servants or even working in brothels. Many MVC and their parents/caregivers feel their economic situation is so desperate that they must prioritise earning money for the family rather than spend time at our youth clubs or child rights groups.

*“I have been working in a brick factory since I was four. I go to school as well as work. I save the money from my work to take extra tutoring. I was invited to join the World Vision youth club but my education is more important so I don’t go.” Boy<sup>5</sup> aged 14, Cambodia.*

Other MVC believe that the activities at World Vision youth clubs are too young for them. For example, in Eastern DRC former child soldiers and girls working in brothels – children who have been forced too early into the adult world – described youth clubs’ activities as ‘childish’. Street children were worried about being stigmatised or rejected by other children at the clubs or groups.

#### **We need to do more to reduce these barriers**

To make coming to youth clubs and child rights groups easier for MVC we need to:

- Reconsider the times that our programmes run – are they convenient, do they clash with other priorities, including household livelihoods?
- Think about where projects are located – would more MVC come if we situated them somewhere else or helped organise transport?
- Make our activities more age-sensitive – for both younger children as well as adolescents
- Make our environment welcoming enough for highly stigmatised children and help ensure less vulnerable children don’t make stigmatised children feel unwelcome
- Consider if we need to identify suitable social protection to compensate for children’s lost earnings?

### **We need to involve MVC more in designing, monitoring and evaluating our projects**

We need to include MVC more in the design, monitoring and evaluation of our projects and use more innovative and participatory tools to assist with this. We should encourage and support MVC’s involvement in our programmes – interventions that their creativity, insights and experiences should be guiding. The contribution of MVC will help ensure our programming runs more effectively and responds to their needs

### **We need to maintain and build upon our long-term approach**

In Tanzania and Cambodia our research has shown clearly that child protection programmes were more effective when run alongside other projects – in health, education and income generation and in areas where multi-sectoral development has been supported for many years. World Vision’s long-term multi-sectoral approach seems to build respect and trust which prepares communities to respond to challenging child protection programmes.

## **We need to work with more parents and caregivers**

Parents and caregivers are, of course, extremely and uniquely important in children's lives. Our research demonstrated that where parents/caregivers encourage and support their children's involvement in youth clubs and child rights groups, MVC were much more likely to get involved and stick with activities that make them less vulnerable and more protected. Where parents/caregivers were not supportive, the opposite was true.

## **We need more children and young people to become empowered**

In all three of the case study countries where we conducted our research, we found that MVC who learned about their rights and how to protect themselves experienced a personal change that made them more confident, less vulnerable and better able to find support. They were also able to help other MVC reduce their vulnerability. Many vulnerable young people supported these findings, stating that learning about their rights and developing life skills in youth groups made them safer and better able to protect themselves. Parents recognised this too, noting consistently that when their children learned how to protect themselves they were much less likely to play in dangerous places, such as mined areas in Cambodia.

World Vision's 'Peace Road' project Lifeskills curriculum<sup>6</sup> was successfully used in Cambodia, Eastern DRC and Tanzania to increase children's ability to engage in their own development and empowerment. The recently updated 'Peace Road' is recommended for use and adaptation by all Children's and Youth groups wanting to strengthen their lifeskills.

## **We need to adapt programming for MVC not involved in our existing projects**

Some MVC may face psychosocial issues and have difficulties trusting adults. They could be children affected by drug use, by being directly involved in conflict and war or by being sexually exploited. To reach and support these especially vulnerable children, we need to adapt existing programming – creating activities that meet their specific needs and are run by trained and specialist staff. For many such MVC we need to first rebuild their trust in both adults and other children before they can comfortably take part in more mainstream projects.

### **MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN SPEAKING UP FOR OTHERS WHO ARE VULNERABLE**

**Having learned about their own rights, many MVC now help other vulnerable children stand up for their rights too.**

*"When I became pregnant at 15, I was made to give up school. With World Vision's help I was able to start studying again. I help other girls in the same situation learn that as young mothers they still have the right to an education and can stay in school" – girl<sup>7</sup> aged 17, Tanzania*

In Eastern DRC, a teenage girl with a physical disability reported how after learning about children's rights in the WV Children's Club, she had persuaded her neighbour to allow his son to return to school rather than working all day in the marketplace.

*"I have been a member of the World Vision children's parliament for two years. This year I helped a young girl called Sabrina. She was pregnant and wanted to keep her baby and carry on with her studies. I put Sabrina in touch with World Vision to help her do this" – girl aged 12, Tanzania*



Child Protection Committees, government and World Vision work together in Eastern DRC to protect MVC  
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### **We need to encourage younger MVC to get involved**

We need to identify and reach MVC at an earlier age. The sooner we are able to support them the better protected their childhoods will be. We can do this by engaging with young MVC by using activities that are more age appropriate and better suited to their needs.

### **We need to encourage MVC and adults to work together**

To help challenge traditional harmful traditions such as FGM and child marriage, we need to bring MVC and adults together so together they can identify and minimise practices that harm children, and also identify and enhance traditional practices that protect children. For example, child marriages were prevented in Tanzania and community care structures strengthened in Eastern DRC.

### **We need to work with others involved in protecting children**

Our research showed that by working with other interested bodies – including schools, community groups and other faith-based organisations – we are better at challenging and reducing social norms and beliefs that harm children; and harnessing the systems that already protect children. By tackling the root causes of what harms children, we can help prevent harm from happening in the first place.

#### **Programming approaches needed to achieve this change:**

- Build on our project models that are already changing harmful traditional practices, such as World Vision's 'Community Change'<sup>8</sup>. By facilitating community dialogue about the harm that negative traditional beliefs can cause, working from the 'bottom up' can effect lasting change
- Use faith-based interventions, like World Vision's Channels of Hope<sup>9</sup> to engage and mobilise faith leaders and their communities around local child protection concerns.
- Support informal local practices that already protect children, including those that encourage compassion towards and social integration of MVC by protecting them using locally generated formal policies and bylaws
- Continue to link community child protection committees and groups to formal child protection systems, strengthening them at local, district and national level – by these means, in Beni, Eastern DRC, the number of girls in brothels was reduced by 42% over 2 years

## Working together to better protect MVC

Research in the three case study countries found that child protection committees were being used and were helping to protect MVC - reliable records from both MVC and adults showed it was now more likely that cases of harm to children would be reported to and followed up by local child protection committees. After abuse has been reported, communities, their leaders and child protection committee members now visit affected families to educate them about the risks they may be exposing their children to, and also offer practical advice about avoiding further abuse. If the abuse continues, child protection committee members now refer the case to the police or a social worker who will take further, more formal, action.

Our research has shown that this type of 'layered' non-formal and formal approach has reduced violence against MVC.

However, in fragile and conflict-affected areas it can be very difficult for child protection committees to refer MVC to formal protection systems – quite simply because in situations of weak governance, these formal systems may barely exist. For example in Eastern DRC, where the impact of widespread conflict is one of the key causes of vulnerability and formal protection systems have broken down, community child protection committees struggle. A dual impact approach is needed in such places. This needs to include dual level advocacy (for example with government bodies and UN-MONUSCO<sup>10</sup> in Eastern DRC) to help re-establish and strengthen formal provincial and national child protection systems.



Young people in Cambodia using the 'river of life' tool to explain how and when the project impacted on their lives

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## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To help ensure that we reach and support all MVC and every child is included and protected, World Vision UK proposes the following policy recommendations:

- Provide further support to programmes that address harmful social norms as these frequently impact MVCs and also reinforce positive practices
- Government supported social protection and economic programmes and strategies need to be linked to child protection systems - they should be targeted at MVC and use community-owned, participatory methods to ensure all MVC are included.<sup>11</sup>
- Policies, practice and funding need to recognize the importance of informal mechanisms in providing local child protection services and strengthen the crucial interface with formal government child protection services - investing in a systemic approach increases government and civil society capacity to prevent and respond to harm against children
- As education generally provides a more protective environment, ensure education services are expanded and adapted to be more accessible to MVC<sup>12</sup>
- Where MVC are unable to access academic education because of age or social barriers (for example working children and former child soldiers) vocational training or non formal education is required
- Training in life skills reduces vulnerability and needs to be provided for all children more widely, not just for less vulnerable, easy to reach children in schools
- Faith leaders and their communities have a crucial role in protecting MVC and need further recognition and support to enable them to be more effective
- More research and more robust monitoring and evaluation is needed to ensure that programming and policy for MVC is as effective and impactful as possible.

## CONCLUSION

It's heartening to see that in three extremely tough contexts in Cambodia, Eastern DRC and Tanzania, we are making a difference to some of the most vulnerable children living there. They are more confident to stand up for themselves and others, know how to protect themselves and are living less vulnerable lives.

But it's not all children. Our research has shown us there are still highly vulnerable, unprotected children we need to reach. Children living on the streets, former child soldiers, children forced to work in factories and in brothels and girls at risk of FGM/C and early marriage are all at risk of being left behind as others move on, enabled to make the most of their lives.

Although it's clear there is work to do, our research has shown us how we can reach and support all MVC, including the most gravely exploited, the most fragile and the hardest to reach. The recommendations outlined in this document are all realistic and achievable. They can be developed, monitored and evaluated. And correctly executed they can help ensure that no child, however vulnerable, is denied their childhood and a life free from fear.



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Participants in Eastern DRC form the 'Unity Circle' during the research workshops.

## Footnotes

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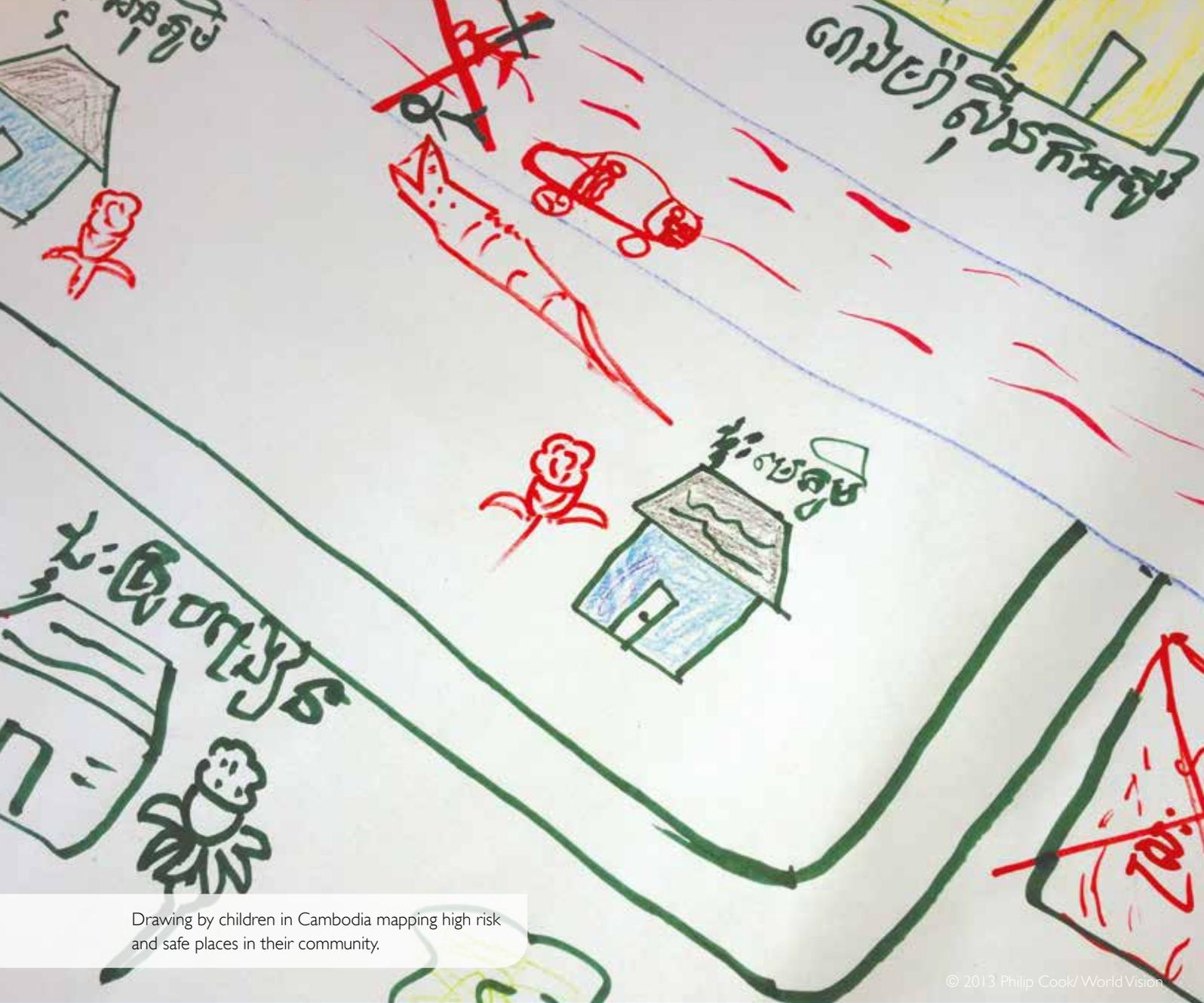
- <sup>1</sup> UNICEF (2013) 'Toward a World Free From Violence: Global Survey on Violence Against Children': New York Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, UNICEF p 19.
- <sup>2</sup> Most Vulnerable Children: WV UK Programme Inclusion and Impact – Summary literature Review, Key Points and Short Case Studies from Cambodia/Tanzania/Eastern DRC. Compiled by Dr. Philip Cook (IICRD, Royal Roads University, Canada), Rebecca Nelems (IICRD) and Dr. Mike Wessells (Programme for Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University, NY), June 2014
- <sup>3</sup> Partnership Programme Agreements (PPAs) are long-term funding agreements set up with the Department for International Development (DFID) to help develop communities around the world.
- <sup>4</sup> A systems approach to child protection focuses on strengthening the protective nature of the environment around children and the children themselves, in order to protect them from all forms of violence. (WVI, 2011)
- <sup>5</sup> The name of this child has been removed to protect his identity.
- <sup>6</sup> The 'Peace Road' is a gender and peace curriculum designed to support children as advocates for their rights. The curriculum enables children to develop key life skills and resilience to negotiate risks and adversity faced in childhood and adolescence.
- <sup>7</sup> The names of these girls have been removed to protect their identity.
- <sup>8</sup> Community Change project model is a facilitated change process based on theories and experience of how social change processes can transform harmful values, attitudes and practices.
- <sup>9</sup> Channels of Hope is an approach that harnesses the potential of faith leaders to catalyse attitudinal and behavioural change to challenge harmful traditional practices and protect the most vulnerable children within communities, on spiritual grounds.
- <sup>10</sup> United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- <sup>11</sup> The United Republic of Tanzania National Costed Plan of Action for Most Vulnerable Children 2007 – 2010, is a good example: (<http://www.kiota.org/sites/default/files/NCPA%20%20%282007-11%29.pdf>)
- <sup>12</sup> For example, apply learning from DFID's innovative Girls' Education Challenge programme which World Vision is implementing in Zimbabwe.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Report researched by Philip Cook, Mike Wessells, Andrew Ware and Rebecca Nelems; written by Sara Evans with support from Tracy Shields, Eugene Kibukila, Nim Kol, Besinati Mpepo, Philippa Lei, Aimyleen Gabriel, Rhoda Kasimbu, Kristine Mikhailidi, Bill Forbes, Paul Stephenson, Stuart Kean and Judi Cumberland. We are particularly grateful to World Vision staff in Cambodia, Eastern DRC and Tanzania who supported this project and most of all to over 70 children, their carers and community members who participated in the research.

Published by World Vision UK

**Cover image:** Children in World Vision's Makindube Area Development Programme, Tanzania



Drawing by children in Cambodia mapping high risk and safe places in their community.

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