



Yes! Children can

Impact of Child Led
initiatives in West Africa

2015





This booklet is dedicated to all **children** of **West Africa** and our prayer is for you to experience fulness of life at all times. May this booklet **inspire** you to bring about changes in your **family**, your school and in your **communities**



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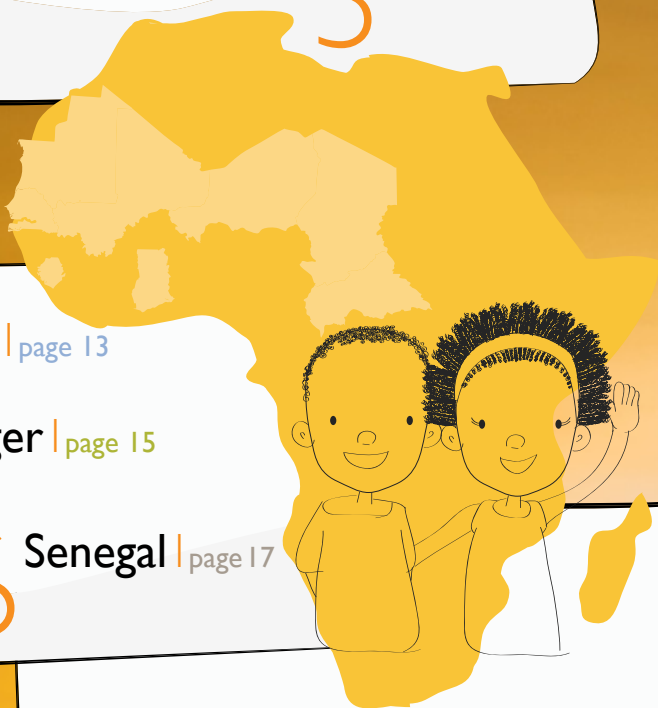
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In the Koumra Development Programme in Chad, children acting as peer educators and good news club members carry out actions in favour of children. The main problems they have been tackling are female genital mutilation, child-rural-urban migration, low school enrolment, exploitation of children as farm labour and poor social cohabitation.

After having been trained as HIV and Aids Peer Educators, 36 children aged 12 to 17 including 15 girls and 21 boys organized communication sessions for behavioural change in schools and outside of school among their peers to raise awareness on the devastating effect of HIV/AIDS.

The immediate result is that children now know the HIV transmission modes and how to protect themselves against this raging pandemic.

Ten (10) Children's Clubs in semi urban settings were provided with tools for awareness raising of community members on the Love of God and neighbour in order to encourage good social cohesion in the villages. As part of their interventions, children proposed denouncing the perpetrators of harmful practices by working with authorities to track, arrest and impose fines on parents who refuse to pay for the education of their children and leaders who are accomplices to excision.



The intervention of children led some parents to pay for the education of their children. Thus, some children were able to regain their smiles. Some traditional leaders sensitized by children, prohibit excision and child-rural-outmigration in their communities. More than 3,000 girls and boys have benefited from the intervention of their peers. In a community known for high school dropout rates, ninety (90) children enrolled in “second- chance-schools” expressed their intention to continue studies after the primary cycle. All this was made possible due to the awareness sessions held by children on school enrolment.

More than 500 children attending Sunday schools who were sensitized by the members of kids’ clubs confirmed that they live in peace with each other. In the bid to improve their well-being, children are confronted with opposition from traditional, local authorities as well as parents but they confided in local associations and NGOs working for children’s protection to cope with this situation. Armed with the impact of their actions, children will want to multiply their efforts in producing more results towards the protection of children in their community.

A girl is sensitizing her peers on HIV/AIDS



2 World Vision Ghana



Kunkuni Adam, Dawda and Dorcas Fuseini are young ambassadors who called on the chief and people of Jirapa and the Jirapa district assembly to protect children and improve services for the wellbeing of children during a stakeholder meeting chaired by the Deputy Coordinating Director of the Jirapa District Assembly. Also in attendance were traditional authorities, queen mothers, heads of departments (Ghana Health Service, Ghana Education Service, Committee on Human Rights and Justice, Department of Social Welfare and Births and Deaths Registry, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the national director of World Vision Ghana, assembly members and staff of Jirapa district assembly.



Young ambassadors request for improved services for the wellbeing of children in the Jirapa district .



The meeting which was convened by the district assembly was intended to cement relationship between the district assembly and partners. The young ambassadors, representing children in Ghana and Jirapa in particular applauded the government for initiatives being taken towards the realization of the rights of the child. They however had concerns about some harmful practices meted against children which ensure their rights are not fulfilled. The key issues mentioned included early marriage, child labour, withdrawal of children from school to sell pito (locally brewed alcohol), sexual abuse, malnutrition, low coverage of school feeding programme, low birth registration and many more. The major recommendations to the government were as follows:

- The Jirapa District Assembly as a matter of urgency should constitute a district child panel as well as partner with civil society to set up community child protection teams to ensure children are protected
- Called on the Paramount chief and people of Jirapa to evaluate the effect of early and forced marriages and other harmful traditional practices on the development of girls and take concrete steps to ensure such practices are prohibited
- Jirapa district assembly should scale up birth registration in the rural areas to ensure universal coverage and fulfilment of the rights of children.
- The Jirapa District Assembly should enforce the law, making it compulsory for all children to be in school.



- We also want to call on government to increase the capitation grant from the current GHC 4.5 per child upwards in the basic education sector
- Government should increase basic education sector budget that has experienced significant decline over the years and therefore affecting quality education service provision particularly to our brothers and sisters in least reached or hard to reach communities
- The Ghana School Feeding Program should be expanded to include the most remote rural, deprived schools
- The District Assemblies should provide adequate resources, health infrastructure for facilities as well as train qualified health personnel and post them to deprived areas to reduce under 5 deaths and improve maternal health

The Deputy Coordinating Director requested all decentralized departments to cooperate with World Vision to address the issues raised by the young ambassadors through monitoring and evaluation, reporting and providing technical support.



Child Advocacy –the case of Child Parliaments

Generally, the Kintampo South District is plagued with many child protection issues such as early, forced marriage, teenage pregnancy, child labour and removal of children from school. Poor Sanitation which contributes to the ill health of the children remains an issue in the district. Open defecation and non-observance of hand washing during critical times remains a challenge. The Kintampo South Child Parliament, a child led advocacy club made an assessment of the poor sanitation conditions in schools in the district and therefore engaged the District Assembly to find lasting solution to the problem. The Assembly acceded to their request. But the issue was which school to start from.

In view of the number of schools competing for the latrine at the time, the Kintampo South Child Parliament debated the issue and ruled that the toilet facility should be sited at Pramposo. Consequently, the District Assembly has provided a six Seater KVIP facility to Pramposo Junior High School. This has contributed to improved sanitation, hygiene and health for over 500 children in the Pramposo community.

The Child parliament in the Anyima Mansie Area Development Programme rescued a 16 year old girl being forced into marriage by her parents. The child parliament reported the incident to the Department of Social Welfare after persuasion of the father of the girl failed. The action by the child parliament has drastically reduced forced marriage cases and increased the enrolment and retention of girls in school in the community.



The child parliaments with support from World Vision have benefitted from various capacity building initiatives such as training in child rights, public speaking, advocacy as well as numerous exposure visits within and outside Ghana. Some members had the opportunity to meet with the UN secretary general in Geneva, the Vice President of the Republic of Ghana and cabinet ministers at the Flagstaff House in Ghana.

Mansie Girls Club helps reduce teenage pregnancy in school

The Mansie Girls Club is one of the active school- based clubs in the Anyima-Mansie ADP. The membership of the club is made up of upper primary pupils and JHS students. The main objective of the club is to promote the education of the Girl Child and help retain girls in school. This they do through awareness campaigns on issues that negatively affect the education of girls through drama, peer education and other engaging activities. One remarkable success recorded by the club is the reduction of teenage pregnancy and school dropouts in the school.



“There used to be a higher rate of school dropouts and teenage pregnancy in the school, but due to the introduction of the Girls Club, we have learnt a lot about the importance of girl child education, reproductive health issues, personal hygiene and the negative effects of premarital sex among other topics. We are now very informed and share this information with our peers through our activities. As a result of this, there hasn’t been any dropout and teenage pregnancy in the school the whole of last year «as opposed to the previous years”
– a member, Mansie Girls club, Anyima-Mansie ADP

Children from the Anyima-Mansie ADP Staged a drama on teenage pregnancy and other forms of child abuse.





World Vision Mali put in place three children's rights protection committees in the communities of Balla, Kondiobougou and Dotan. Each committee consists of boys and girls aged 10 to 17. These committees include children who were trained several times on the rights and duties of children. To enable them to properly perform their functions, these children identified the major issues of child protection in their areas including: forced labour, forced marriage, negligence, non-declaration of births, and exploitation of children.

They carried out awareness-raising sessions to cope with these problems. Parents were therefore sensitized on these issues and currently many children have their birth certificates. Exploitation of children is reduced in their communities and 80 children have benefited from the intervention of children.



Tiegnery Diarra made the following remark: "I am a farmer in Balla. I have known the child protection committee through their work. This committee contacted me to inform me about the importance of birth certificates. I had 3 children with no birth certificate. After their awareness, I understood the necessity of these birth certificates and managed to establish them for my 3 children. "Life itself is a learning process because you cannot know what you are not told." Children are determined to take action in the future to improve school attendance and acquisition of birth certificates.





40,000 Children are better protected in the Arafat II commune

The Arafat II youth committee consists of 28 members including 17 girls and 11 boys, aged between 11 and 18. These 28 members are from Community Centres of Development (CDCs) put in place at the inception of the ADP. In order to increase their engagement in community action, the children carried out a survey to determine the major problems undermining their development and hindering their wellbeing. The children identified low levels of education, insalubrity in the districts, poor realisation of children's rights and protection issues as the main problems. They resorted to community level actions and advocacy to address these challenges. As a result, 40,000 children could benefit from these interventions.

"Our participation in the clubs is very beneficial to us because we have acquired knowledge in the protection of children. Moreover, we are now able to express our concerns to the appropriate authorities" said Khadijetou Mint EL Arby, member of the children's club.

Children are planning to work in a network in the future to guarantee child well-being, promote child participation in development activities, continue to sensitize communities to raise their awareness on children's rights, and promote education, especially of girls.



In the Tenmiya ADP, boys and girls of communities are members of groups advocating against all forms of abuses and exploitation of children including issues of education and early marriage. These children, especially those who are members of child clubs in these communities, have been trained on their role to defend their rights such as the rights to education, health and nutrition. Consequently, these children organized several sessions to raise awareness on strategies for dealing with these challenges. As a result, the number of early marriages has decreased and behaviours of parents have changed in the communities. 75 children benefited directly from these actions either by being saved from an early marriage or by being encouraged to return to school.

As expressed by a few children of the kids club: “The participation of children allows us to reveal our potential, and reveal our ability to fulfil our potential”. Children plan to continue the series of awareness sessions to change the behaviour of parents and other members of the community. They are planning to perform several theatrical presentations on children’s protection within the community.





At the Torodi ADP in Niger, communities are very conservative. Traditions such as early marriage, the abduction of girls before marriage, removing girls from school, still persist though they are harmful to the well-being of children. Additional problems relate to education, health, water and sanitation. In order to deal with these problems, children attending local schools organized themselves into “school governments”. The first actions resulted in clean schools, and improved behaviour changes in personal hygiene within families. A girl of the Makalondi central school made the following statement:

“I now always wash my hands with soap before eating at home since we were taught how to wash our hands properly and why we must wash our hands with soap.”



As members of the school government, “we will continue our actions for girls to be enrolled and to stay enrolled in school and thereby be protected from getting married at an early age. We wish to succeed in changing our community which is still very conservative.”





Koukane ADP

My name is Awa and I am 14 years old. I am in grade 3 of junior high school. My father had been threatening to give me in marriage since I was in grade 4 of primary school.

I refused the marriage with the support of my brother and mother. Now, my father has accepted the dowry and swears that I will join the young man to whom he gave my hand. Convinced that he was going to carry out his threats, I decided to talk about it with my community volunteer in charge of monitoring such cases, and then with the "Committee for Alert and Protection" known as "CAVE" in my village. I also met the deputy-prefect (local governmental authority) with the help of the lady in charge of children's protection. All organisations working for children's protection were mobilized. Finally, the marriage contract was dissolved with the support of the sub-prefect and the dowry paid back. From now on, I will continue my studies with complete peace of mind because I want to succeed and get my parents out of poverty. I thank all those people and World Vision which sponsored me and enlightened us on children's rights.

Paroumba ADP (Peer Monitoring of Registered Children)

Boubacar is a Registered Child in grade 4. His participation in sensitization activities on the protection and development of children completely changed his life as well as the one of those around him. His courage and commitment have earned him the opportunity to run for the Junior mayor's mandate in the city council of children and for the mandate of the president as the Captains of Registered Children in the Pakour Development programme.

A group of Captain RCs (children leading in the monitoring of their peers).



At age 14, he runs two childcare structures and enjoys the confidence of his peers. Through training and exchange visits in which he participated, Boubacar learned to communicate and persuade. He mobilizes and encourages his peers to participate alongside GUNESU (Child protection structure) & FDCs (field community volunteers) in the monitoring of children enrolled in the program. He also plays a big part in raising parents' awareness on the enrolment of young girls in primary school.

For two years, thanks to his position as Chairman of the Captains of RCs, he has been engaged in another battle. Thus, accompanied by his peers, they ensure the protection of RCs and oppose all forms of abuse to the children. Here is what he says about it:

“Every time we have information of early marriage, we mobilize ourselves to contact the parents of the concerned girl, asking them to give up their approach and allow the girl to continue her studies. If they refuse, I insist, otherwise I inform the FDC (field community volunteer) or the nearest GUNESU (Child Protection Structure) to work with World Vision to save the girl. »



Since taking office as President of the Captains of RCs, he and his comrades have already reported 6 cases of planned early marriages. These marriages were cancelled due to the intervention of the committee members i.e. World Vision, local and administrative authorities, the Commander of the Gendarmerie and some members of the community.

Today, Boubacar and his friends are very much involved in the development of their communities and hope to see a better future for all the children in their communities, especially girls with the help of World Vision and other partners.





Kids Club members reduce child abuse and violence against the children of Sao Chiefdom

A group of Kids Club members, comprising of boys and girls from various schools and age groups were trained in Advocacy, Human Rights and PFA (Psychosocial First Aid) in the Sao Chiefdom, Kainkordu Community in the Kono District. The children identified child protection issues such as severe physical abuse (beating of children in their community), children that are not being sent to school even though they were of the accepted age to start school.

Having learnt of the various reasons given by parents for keeping their children out of school, the kids club members passionately explained to the parents the benefits of sending their children to school. They explained the personal and communal benefit of education and how they stand to gain if they invest in their children's education.

After such meetings, most of the parents were obliged to send their children to school and as a way of commitment, they vowed to the child advocates solemnly that they would send their children to school which they did.

With regards to the issue of physical abuse of children, the kids' club members visited homes of children that were physically abused by their parents or care givers. They sensitized the parents and care givers about the ills of physically abusing their children. They explained the social, physical, psychological and other effects of physical abuse on children. Majority of the parents were touched by the kids' club passion to stop physical abuse of children in their communities.

Some parents promised to mend their ways and stop abusing their children but they did not fulfil their promises to the kids' club members as they revert to the same practices again. In some of the homes the children visited, they were treated with hostility. In such cases, they were driven and shamed by elders. Most parents and caregivers refused to have audience with the kids' clubs members saying that kids would not tell them how to train and bring up their own children. The CWC members aided the children in accessing most homes and families that were previously hostile to them.

The children however were very determined to succeed in their fight against physical abuse and illiteracy in their community. Therefore they were relentless in their pursuit. In homes where they were rejected previously, they consistently visited those homes until they were given audience to express their concern about the issues arising.



They also engaged the elders in the community especially the Child Welfare Committee members. The children who were previously left at home to roam aimlessly and do domestic chores are now being sent to school and given equal opportunities to education, growth and development.

The kids clubs intervention has impacted about 20 children in the Kainkordu Community, of which 12 are now going to school and 8 are now enjoying a peaceful life without any physical abuse.

The kids club members efforts has been a success story in the Soa Chiefdom. This has resulted in the decline in physical abuse of children in their community. Because of the kids' club activities, the community elders passed a law that anyone who physically abuses their children will be fined a huge sum of money or subjected to other sanctions. Some children have indicated the following:

“I no longer fear my step dad... we are very close now... he even teaches me”

“I am now able to go to school like my friends”

“I now know that I was missing a lot when I was not going to school”.

“My aunt no longer beats me...I am now feeling relaxed and happy”

The kids club members are planning to stage a play on Child Rights to sensitize members of their community.

“The children in this community are really brave... They have really brought changes with regards to child protection in this community and I am proud of them” Chief Emmanuel T. Foyoh. Soa. “Kids club members have done well in protecting other kid, especially with regards to corporal punishment that has drastically declined” Dennis Manyeh – Kids Club Facilitator.

Kids club
members in
Sierra Leone.





Jasan, a former 14-year old combatant

During a follow-up mission to Yaloke, about 250 km away from Bangui, I met a former child soldier I will nickname Jasan. Here is the story he told us: “During the 2014 crisis, armed groups came here in Yaloke and killed my big brother and my maternal uncle right in front of me. My mother and father had to flee to Gaga, which is about twenty kilometres away from Yaloke. I could no longer bear the loss of two loved ones and decided to join the a rival armed group to avenge their death.

Then, we went down to Yaloke to confront an armed group and dislodge them from there. The fight was bitter because they were well in place and the city was divided along religious lines and a number of lives were lost in the Yaloke battle.

Finally the Sangharis “French troops” arrived and were able to root out an armed group and a certain peace was restored in the city. I then decided to join my mother at Gaga who was looking for me because my parents did not know where I was. I was told that my mother kept on crying and wanted me to come back to her. I could no longer bear the idea that mum was suffering because of my departure. Subsequently, we went back to Yaloke and I decided myself to go back to school. When I

am not at school, I ride motorcycles to provide for the needs of mum because my father also finally died during the crisis. I will no longer assault or kill someone. I just want to live in peace with my mother’.

I asked the mum how she experienced this entire situation. She testified as follows: “Now that he is back to school, I am more at ease and your presence among us here comforts us and brings us hope.” What innocence and childhood are there left in this 14-year old child who saw death in the most dreadful way—He has turned his back to violence and is turning a new page due to the psycho social support he is receiving rying to provide him as a humanitarian organisation.







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