Alliance for the Protection of Children Project

Child Protection: A Search for Locally Led Positive Deviance

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Introduction

Project Overview

The Alliance for the Protection of Children (APC) is a 3-year U.S. Agency for International Development-supported project implemented by American Institutes for Research (AIR) with a goal to leverage local assets and strengthen the protection of children exposed to all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence. Lumos Foundation is a resource partner to the project leading efforts that mitigate abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence in residential care institutions. The APC will support strategic objectives on the part of U.S. Agency for International Development and the government of Haiti to strengthen the protection of vulnerable children. The APC will ensure that its work aligns with the National Child Protection Strategy and contributes to Objectives 3, 4, and 5, as well as to existing laws governing the protection of children in Haiti. We will work in partnership with the Institut du Bien-Être Social et de Recherches (IBESR), Université d'Etat d'Haiti, Zanmi Lasante, Combite pour la paix et le développement, and Restavek Freedom/OPREH in Year 1 to establish a rigorous evidence base on which to build Year 2 and 3 pilot interventions.

The APC will collaborate with other government agencies, ministries, strategic United Nations agencies such as UNICEF and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as community-based and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Haiti. We will prioritize child protection through this program; specifically, we will pilot evidence-based interventions that reduce violence against children; mitigate the trafficking and forced labor of children; protect unaccompanied and separated migrant, stateless, and displaced children; integrate street children into safer learning and care spaces; prevent the separation of children from their families; and explore alternative care and protection services. The APC has four distinct phases: (1) research, (2) design of pilot interventions, (3) implementation of pilot interventions, and (4) evaluation and learning for scale-up. The Year 1 project plan covers the first and second phases.

Report Summary

This report summarizes the findings from key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted as part of a study of community-led child monitoring in the Northeast and Southeast departments of Haiti using a positive deviance approach. Positive deviance theory holds that community transformation around seemingly intractable challenges can be realized by discovering innovations and wisdom that already exist within a community or country.[1] Positive deviants are individuals who live and work under the same constraints as everyone else, yet they find a way to become an observable exception and or achieve positive results.[2] These outliers have "paid attention differently" and "cultivated a skepticism" about who, what, and how, which often

[1] Lapping, K., Marsh, D. R., Rosenbaum, J., Swedberg, E., Sternin, J., Sternin, M., & Schroeder, D. G. (2002). The positive deviance approach: Challenges and opportunities for the future. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, *23*(4 suppl2), 128–135.

[2] Pascale, R., Sternin, J., & Sternin, M. (2010). *The power of positive deviance*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

challenges an existing fatalism about the status quo. If valued, the individual difference then can become a community resource, helping others adapt attitudes, behaviors, and practices over time through scaling up (challenging the innovation or wisdom to greater complexity and variation) and scaling out (distilling select elements of complexity from the solution so that the innovation can be replicated in a variety of settings).[3] Scaling up or scaling out positive deviance is both technical and adaptive, which means that practical tools and strategies *must be* accompanied by behavior change; the latter is the most difficult and requires local awareness, local ownership, and local leadership.

The APC project is focused on the design of evidence-based pilot interventions that will leverage local assets and strengthen child protection efforts in Haiti. To do this, we committed to investigate the problem of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children using several different research methods; a positive deviance approach is one of several unique lenses for data collection that highlights local innovation and wisdom. We understood from the outset that Haitian communities were weary of research, and rightly so as there have been a multitude of academic studies on Haiti's unique historical, cultural, social, and economic challenges. However, one cannot examine the reported degree of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children in Haiti without questioning the existing evidence base or questioning the selection and application of this evidence in designing child protection interventions.

This report describes the results from the KIIs conducted with community leaders, community members, and child protection entities in the aforementioned two departments. The goal of the research was to better understand the problem (what), understand those affected by the problem from various perspectives (who), and then examine how the problem is being addressed by different actors in these communities (how) to determine whether we could identify outliers or observable exceptions that challenged the status quo.

After briefly discussing the methods used to collect the data, this report presents the findings related to (1) perspectives on the problem, roles, and responsibilities related to the defined problem; (2) identification of children and the lack thereof as the root cause of sustained patterns of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence; (3) an example of positive deviance and fledgling results.

Methods and Sampling

The research team was composed of two representatives each from Université d'Etat d'Haiti, Zanmi Lasante, Combite pour la Paix et le Développement, and Restavek Freedom. We conducted research in two departments in our project's geographic scope that were selected due to known cases of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence as well as proximity to the border, which allows a comparison between communities facing similar constraints. The Northeast department (specifically, Ouanaminthe) and the Southeast department (specifically, Anse a Pitre) were chosen to compare behaviors and practices associated with the identification and

[3] McClure, D., & Gray, I. (2015). *Managing the journey to scale up innovation in the humanitarian and development sector*. Submitted for the Transformation through Innovation Theme for the World Humanitarian Summit.

monitoring of children in the area, as well as the coordination of those organizations and personnel perceived as responsible for child protection.

Data were collected through 28 KIIs: 14 in Northeast and 14 in Southeast. Key informants were recruited to represent three broad categories:

1. Public service entities (e.g., teacher, Conseil d'Administration de la Section Communale (CASEC), Brigade de Protection des Mineurs (BPM), IBESR, nurse, and lawyer)
2. International organizations and NGOs (e.g., International Organisation for Migration (IOM, UNHCR, Groupe d'Appui au Rapatriés et Refugiés (GARR), Jésuites, Solidarité Frontalière, Jeannot Succès)
3. Community-based organizations and public opinion leaders (e.g., shop owners, religious leaders, women's association leaders, and community leaders)

Interviews were conducted after the research team underwent an intensive AIR-led workshop to learn about positive deviance theory and develop data collection protocols. The protocols were reviewed by AIR's independent Institutional Review Board to ensure the protection of human subjects. The protocols for this study were exempted based on generalizable data being collected by informants who did not meet the definition of increased vulnerability through exposure to this particular research method or its findings.

Each KII lasted 60–90 minutes. One researcher conducted the interview while a second researcher took detailed notes. Interviews were conducted in either French or Creole, and notes were taken in French. Interview questions were designed to capture explicit thoughts about the problem, those affected or responding to the problem, and how the problem was being addressed, if at all in a particular community.

Researchers typed their interview notes and observations at the end of every day. The notes were then analyzed by AIR staff to uncover patterns in responses and feedback from a variety of actors in the two different research sites, some of whom are engaged in child protection activities, others of whom are key observers of routine social and cultural life within a community. Next, we synthesize the interviews conducted in May 2017 as part of our data collection.

Defining the Problem

The AIR team worked closely with a diversity of national, international, and local stakeholders to identify

- at least one common problem in child protection efforts,
- at least one community in the project's geographic scope where local innovation or wisdom was challenging the status quo, or
- at least one community in the project's geographic scope where better outcomes for child protection seem to be taking root.

First, in keeping with positive deviance theory, we identified common problems in child protection and deeply examined the who, what, and how of these challenges. From our discussions with Haitian government representatives, international organizations, Haitian anthropologists, and ethnographic researchers, as well as local NGO and community-based organizations, we realized that two challenges were expressed more often than others:

1. **Unrestricted mobility of children.** New children who enter a zone from the outside and children born into a zone who then exit it without return represent an unmonitored element of community life.
2. **Lack of coordination.** Children often are not referred to the appropriate people and places for help and there is no interconnected system of understanding roles, responsibilities, and the interstices of these. As such, when children become "invisible" in this way (i.e., not easily identifiable with a particular place or legitimate caregiver, tracked to that place or person, monitored in terms of relevant movements, or referred to the appropriate people or authorities for help), it increases their vulnerability to different forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation in the form of domestic labor (restavek) or trafficking, as well as other forms of violence.

This basic sensitivity to identifying and monitoring children within a defined area and coordination of actors responsible for the protection of children was considered by stakeholders as fundamental to the success of child protection efforts. Communities that created a system of identification, documentation, and monitoring of children were rare, but a few outliers did exist. In most settings, this basic exercise seemed to be an important step in an improved child protection process.

Findings

Unrestricted Mobility

In this section, we describe the underlying assumptions that government representatives, international organizations and NGOs, community leaders, and community members made with regard to the challenge of unrestricted mobility of children.

For **government representatives** in both Ouanaminthe and Anse a Pitre, the vulnerabilities associated with children moving unaccompanied between communities and across the border squarely rested on the "irresponsibility" of parents. Only one government informant stated that this mobility of children driven by abandonment or exploitation was a failure of both the state and parents. The identification and monitoring of children, according to the overwhelming number of respondents, was the responsibility of parents. The assumption was that "good children" went to school and "bad children" were left to their own devices by parents who had too many children to take care of, had abandoned their children completely, or had left the area to seek work, either permanently or temporarily.

International organizations and NGOs discussed the challenge of mobility by focusing on extreme poverty or a lack of proper and accessible education and health services to stabilize communities, reinforce families, and protect households. They discussed competing priorities and demands that took attention away from a focus on healthy child rearing or development.

In turn, **community leaders and members** pointed to the weakness of the state, citing the lack of services for families and children as a key driver for a lack of monitoring. They also criticized themselves, mentioning the failings of parents and communities in assisting restavek or children in the street. Some respondents reflected a certain acceptance and normalization around the unrestricted mobility of children. A nurse stated simply, "*I don't ask new children about their families. I ask if they are living with a parent and leave it at that.*" A shop owner explained that people tended to stay out of one another's "business," because of mistrust or fear of "witchcraft" befalling them if they meddled. Indeed, a perceptible acceptance of the status quo and a fatalism about improving the situation muted respondents' drive to ask deeper questions about who was coming and going in their communities, even in the cases of seemingly unmonitored children who "*looked extremely thin, were dirty, and had no shoes on their feet*."

Lack of Coordination

Respondents identified a secondary challenge. They asserted that despite the saturation of organizations and entities working on child protection, there is a striking lack of coordination among these actors. Interview responses emphasize a lack of cross-sector and community-level communication, as well as a lack of information sharing, transparency, and sensitization to community needs and realities. Some clear lines of communication did emerge. The data indicate that international organizations would share information and coordinate with other international organizations and NGOs. This was true for IOM, UNHCR, and UNICEF in the Northeast and Southeast, as well as among organizations such as GARR, SJM, Solidarité Frontalière, and Réseaux Frontalière Jeannot Succès. In addition, IBESR and BPM stated that they communicate with UNHCR and IOM.

There was less interaction, however, between state agencies and communities, according to community informants. Indeed, state agencies did not mention working closely with community leaders. A few government respondents mentioned that community leaders "don't do anything." This communication gap included interactions between levels of government. For example, the mayor's office and local elected officials, including CASECs and Assemblées des Sections Communales (ASECs), did not reference IBESR or BPM when asked with whom they coordinate on cases of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or violence, or when identifying and monitoring children who enter or leave their communities. In addition, community leaders and members could not list any state agencies or organizations that had solicited their help or input related to child protection. One community leader from Ouanaminthe stated that he knew NGOs were prolific in the area:

> *NGOs are mostly responsible for the increase in child protection problems. In my opinion, I don't believe NGOs are acting in good faith. It is inexcusable what they are doing—coming with their own agendas and their own interventions. All they produce is increased misery. The state should be controlling this and they do not.*

A second community member echoed this sentiment saying that there has been "a lot of ego at play" that has been left unchecked by those working in the sector. Two additional informants stated that the inability to protect children in Haiti is about a "lack of moral conscience," and there is "enough blame" to be spread around.

To explore this lack of coordination, Figure 1 illustrates patterns in how key informants described (a) who is responsible for child protection or the mitigation of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, (b) who should be responsible, and (c) who is most critical for the protection of children. Key informants were not asked these direct questions, but in almost every interview these lines were clearly drawn. The number of Xs in each cell indicate the number of respondents who shared this viewpoint.

Figure 1. Opinions of Individuals or Groups Responsible for Child Protection, According to Key Informants

Individual or Entity	Is Responsible	Should be Responsible	Most Critical to Child Protection
Parents	X	XXXXX	
State	X	XXXXXXXXX	XX
Mayor	XXXX	XXXXX	
School leaders		XXXX	
Church (specifically)		XXX	X
Judiciary	XX	XXX	
Police (BPM included)	XXXXXXXXXX	XX	
IBESR	XXXXXXXXXXXX	XX	
Community leaders (including local elected officials, religious leaders, CASEC, ASEC)	XX	XXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXX
Community members (not specifically parents or leaders)	X	XXXXXXXX	XX
Local or international NGOs	XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXX	XXXXX	
Media		X	
United Nations agencies	XXXXXXXXX		

Note. The number of Xs will not add up to 28 as KIIs provided multiple answers, sometimes for each category.

As shown in Figure 1, responses varied with regard to who is responsible for child protection. Many respondents said that BPM and IBESR were responsible, knowing that those organizations were mandated to take care of street children and restavek. It was clear that respondents assumed local and international organizations were responsible, although in reality most of the community leaders and members could not name the specific organizations working on child protection. Interestingly, only one informant said that parents were responsible for protecting children. Respondents stated that the children who had parents were most often in school, but restavek and street children were not considered the responsibility of their parents or community members.

With regard to which actors should be responsible for child protection, it is worth noting that United Nations agencies were never cited as having an obligation to protect children; a large responsibility was attributed to community leaders, the state, and parents.

Finally, the starkest contrast to perspectives on child protection are found when examining how informants identified those most critical to success, even if there was acknowledgement that

success had not yet been achieved. Many respondents reported that community leaders are the most critical to effective and impactful child protection—not parents, IBESR, the police or the judiciary, or local and international organizations. Yet, as described, community leaders and members expressed that they were almost never approached or integrated into strategic child protection interventions. Some respondents stated that they were asked by the United Nations or by government representatives (IBESR or BPM) about specific cases, but that they did not feel that they were viewed as having a critical role to play in the prevention of the abuse or exploitation of children.

Identification of Children

Respondents in both Northeast and Southeast departments demonstrated a basic level of awareness of the types of vulnerable children who were in their communities. Community leaders and members provided richer detail about the day and night activities of those supposedly "invisible" children. There was little significant difference between the vulnerabilities described in Ouanaminthe and Anse a Pitre. Children were described in both settings as those who "*live with their parents and [thus] are in school during the day*" and "*those without parents or whose parents have left them to go work on the other side of the border*" who are in the street or are restaveks. Some respondents explained that the number of street children had increased over the years, and other respondents explained that identifying children as street children or restavek was difficult, partly because restavek are not visible outside households. If restavek came out of the homes during the night, which several respondents discussed, they often slept in the street or engaged in risky behaviors to find food, thus interacting with and being identified as street children. Many respondents emphasized that they knew little of what happened in the street at night. A few informants described children not in school as "mandan papa, zokiki, or bòdègèt," in other words, young girls with "sugar daddies" or children engaged in night clubs and bars under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

In Anse a Pitre, several respondents talked about the mobility of children back and forth across the border; the border itself especially in the uncontrolled areas was their "street base." In Ouanaminthe, two unique issues were mentioned related to children: Kidnapping of children was described as "frequent," and one informant mentioned that the sale of children's organs occurred there. In both geographic areas, informants stressed the need to be able to better identify children, although they often described the importance of this in terms of decreasing street crime or delinquency rather than protecting those children themselves.

A UNHCR representative interviewed in the Northeast department stated, "*L'identification est la porte d'entrée de la protection des enfants.*" The UNHCR informant indicated that the ability to know which children are from a community, which children are new in a community, and which children have left a community is a critical challenge that often goes unaddressed. The same respondent emphasized that community leaders were essential to identifying and monitoring children in this way. Another respondent in Ouanaminthe stated that to monitor children successfully, community leaders would need to be part of the solution as they are aware of everything that happens locally, who enters and leaves a community, and what the story is behind the mobility. This research suggests that key informants explicitly agree and demonstrate through their answers that community leaders and members could be critical collaborators in the identification and monitoring of children in these areas.

Initial Evidence of Positive Deviance

The data collected for this study build upon additional data from the rapid qualitative assessment and cultural models research conducted under Year 1 project activities. Across these multiple research methods, particular attitudes and practices in Anse a Pitre showed that different efforts were underway in a few communities related to increasing ownership of child protection at the local level.

Within Anse a Pitre, community leaders reported that in response to the overwhelming challenge of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence of children in their zones, coupled with the decreased activities of GARR and state actors in recent years, they have engaged in a problem-solving process to change the status quo. More specifically, within the rural municipality of Bony, near the southern coast of Haiti and its border with the Dominican Republic, key informants reported that the most vulnerable children consist of stateless children moving back and forth across the border, street children, and restavek. KIIs detailed high levels of domestic violence, sexual violence, community trauma, and extreme poverty in the community and surrounding communities. These same informants described enormous constraints in funding for organized activities in the area, including even a reduction in support for education and health services as compared with years prior.

According to community leaders and members in Bony, they organized a ‘human rights’ committee. The committee tried to include in its representation local authorities like the CASEC, as well as teachers and nurses, business leaders, religious leaders, and members of the women’s associations as well as at least one representative from each zone. The committee decided that first they needed to identify the children living in their community so they could understand what the vulnerabilities were as well as observe changes in the make-up of this subset of the population over time. The committee devised a registration process for all children in their community with a method for regular updating. These leaders in Bony realized that the process would be stronger if communities in geographic proximity were also identifying and monitoring children, so that information could be shared when children moved between zones, and an interconnected system could be created to track both movements and needs of children across a wider landscape. The Bony human rights committee reached out to the neighboring communities of Thiotte and Grand Gosier. and, as such, the committee has increased its geographic reach and representation. Through this system of identification, Bony, Thiotte, and Grand Gosier have records of children who have died in their communities and know exactly what children have come into or left their communities. As a result, the committee has been able to react more quickly to children moving out of their communities and going across the border (whether of their own will or as a result of force) to try and bring them back or to inform the authorities.

A longer, more detailed study is needed to evaluate the real impact of this local innovation in identifying and monitoring children. The committee and community members reported that this local leadership has made everyone more aware of children. It has increased information sharing between communities about missing children or unaccompanied children, and it has created an observable reduction in the abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence experienced by children in those areas.

In many ways, the approach matches the problem described in the KIIs—the lack of coordination, the absence of information on monitoring, and not enough involvement by local community members and leaders. This committee positively answers those problems by coordinating information among those most involved locally. And it is of note that it does so seemingly without coordination with any state child protection agency, international or local NGO, or United Nations agency supporting this positive deviance approach.

Despite constraints similar to other geographic areas, initial evidence illustrates that Bony municipality and the communities of Thiotte and Grand Gosier are applying local wisdom and innovation to one of the greatest impediments to mitigating abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children: real-time identification and monitoring of children in their communities. In addition, the scale-up of an innovation in Bony to other communities indicates a distinct level of coordination. Bony municipal leaders as well as community members reported a decrease in violence against children as a result of this positive deviance.

Positive deviance theory assumes that a useful and effective innovation will replicate and solve existing challenges because it is locally owned and led. Change, according to positive deviance experts, is effective when mutations in behavior are incremental and rewarded by small successes. Adaptation occurs more naturally when it is not the intended objective but a result of new understandings born of locally rooted experience.[4] Positive deviation in Bony may seem simple at first, but it is rife with variables that have been considered and learned from when expanding to other communities such as Thiotte and Grand Gosier. If we were to build upon positive deviance practices in Bony, we would need to work closely with local communities to reflect upon the details of the existing approach, as well as what adaptations, if any, occurred when implementing this approach in Thiotte and Grand Gosier. Thus, ensuring scale-up or replication in other communities and departments could happen in a way that would best serve the local context.

Conclusions

Conclusions of all Year 1 research studies will be provided after the July Advisory Committee meeting and co-interpretation[SM] process so as not to bias the dialogue.

[4] Pascale, R., Sternin, J., $ Sternin, M. (2010). *The power of positive deviance*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

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