



Review of Vulnerability Assessment Methods for Reintegration and Prevention of Child Separation

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August 2016

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This publication was prepared by the FHI 360-managed SPIRES project. Find out more about SPIRES at <http://www.fhi360.org/projects/accelerating-strategies-practical-innovation-and-research-economic-strengthening-spires>. For comments or queries regarding this publication, please contact us at SPIRES@fhi360.org.

This report was produced under United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-LA-13-00001. The contents are the responsibility of FHI 360 and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

ACRONYMS

ACYF	Administration on Children, Youth and Families
ASPIRES	Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation in Research and Economic Strengthening
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CPA	Core Program Areas
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSI	Child Status Index
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSSP	Center for the Study of Social Policy
DCOF	Displaced Children and Orphans Fund
DOVCU	Deinstitutionalization of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Uganda
ES	Economic Strengthening
FSVI	Family Status Vulnerability Index
HHC	Hope and Homes for Children
HRI	Household Resiliency Index
HVAT	Household Vulnerability Assessment Tool
ISVP	Improved Services for Vulnerable Populations
NAT	Needs Assessment Tool
NCC	National Commission for Children
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief
PLHIV	People Living with HIV
PPI	Progress out of Poverty Index
PPP	LIFT's Provision, Protection, Promotion framework
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SCORE	Sustainable, COmprehensive REsponses for Vulnerable Children and their Families
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAT	Vulnerability Assessment Tool
VC	Vulnerable Children
VI	Vulnerability Index

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INTRODUCTION

Like many social problems, the unnecessary separation of children from their families is complex. Although practitioners working to prevent separation and reintegrate children into families have identified a number of factors that contribute to separation, no linear causal model exists, and the household situations of those affected by separation can vary drastically. Economic strengthening, which refers to a body of microeconomic interventions used to enhance household and community economic resilience, is of growing interest to actors concerned with family-child separation due to the pervasive role of poverty in the dynamic of separation. These actors typically come from the world of child protection and social work and identify limited experience and skills in economic analysis and programming as a gap in their capacity to address family-child separation (Kalyanpur & Chaffin 2014).

While acknowledging that poverty plays a role in family-child separation, however, practitioners generally do not view poverty as the sole or decisive driver of family-child separation, and indeed the vast majority of children living in poor families do not separate from them. What are the differences between families and children who are resilient to separation, and those who are particularly vulnerable? How do economic security and insecurity contribute to family stability and family-child separation? The process of cost-effectively targeting the delivery of interventions depends on our understanding of vulnerability to separation, including the roles of economic security and other drivers in contributing to family-child separation.

Just as there is no linear causal model or standardized vulnerability metric for family separation, there is no standardized measure of economic vulnerability. However, donors and practitioners in this field agree that there is a need for a better understanding of vulnerability and a standardized set of metrics that can be used to target the delivery and measure the impact of economic strengthening (ES) approaches and interventions on family separation (Mattingly 2015, p. 18).

In this report, which has been prepared to inform planning in the USAID-funded ASPIRES project,¹ we contribute to these efforts with a review of some of the existing tools used to assess vulnerability to either separation or negative child well-being outcomes with attention to economic security for the purposes of targeting households for program participation and matching them to appropriate interventions. ASPIRES is sharing this report as an information resource with the wider interested community given its relevance to other actors working in this area. The report begins with an overview of the concept of vulnerability, describing how it is used in the contexts of both child protection and economic strengthening programming. It goes on to propose a set of criteria for selecting and developing vulnerability measures for project targeting, drawing on existing standards of assessment in the fields of both child protection and economic strengthening. The report then discusses the vulnerability assessment approaches used by several organizations and programs working on issues related to child separation, followed by an analysis of the vulnerability assessment methods used according to the proposed evaluation criteria. It concludes with a discussion on the patterns identified in the analysis, as well as recommendations for future assessments and suggestions for future research on vulnerability assessment.

METHOD

This review seeks to better understand existing methods of assessing vulnerability in order to inform future interventions using ES as part of larger efforts to prevent child-family separation and promote integration of separated families. It was informed by reviews of the literature previously conducted by the ASPIRES project, including a literature review on child-family separation (Laumann 2015) and a review of vulnerability assessment methods for ES interventions (Moret 2014), as well as a scan of gray literature on child protection standards. This was followed by the selection of vulnerability assessment tools for critical review from seven programs. Four of these programs have an explicit focus on reintegration and prevention of separation. Three programs do not have this focus but were included because they share a common goal of reducing child vulnerability and improving well-being for those designated as orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in a context of high HIV prevalence. The tools were reviewed and interviews were conducted with program staff to better understand how they were used.

The seven organizations and programs included in this review are concerned with providing services to vulnerable children and use assessment tools for targeting services to households

¹ ASPIRES is funded by USAID and PEPFAR and supports evidence-based, gender-sensitive programming and learning to strengthen the economic capacities of vulnerable individuals, families and children. Under ASPIRES, a component supported by USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) aims to use rigorous evidence to inform the evidence base related to the ways in which household-level economic strengthening interventions can help prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families and reintegrate separated children in family care in low- and middle-income countries.

and individual children. They were selected based on suggestions from DCOF and availability of sources of program information. They include the following, with more details available in Appendix 1:

Table 1. Summary of Organizations and Programs Reviewed

Organization	Project/Program	Focus	Country(ies)
ChildFund and partners	Deinstitutionalization of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Uganda (DOVCU)	Deinstitutionalization/ reintegration of children in family care and prevention of family-child separation	Uganda
Pact and partners	<i>Yekokeb Berhan</i>	Reducing vulnerability of OVC	Ethiopia
Retrak	Retrak Model	Reintegration of street-connected children in family care and prevention of family-child separation	Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia
Hope and Homes for Children	ACTIVE Family Support model	Deinstitutionalization/ reintegration of children in family care and prevention of separation	Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Sudan, Ukraine
Global Communities and partners	<i>Higa Ubeho</i>	Reducing vulnerability of households with PLHIV and OVC	Rwanda
AVSI Foundation	Sustainable Comprehensive Responses for Vulnerable Children and their families (SCORE)	Reducing vulnerability of VC households	Uganda
Kids Alive	Oasis Keeping Families Together	Reintegration of child victims of abuse	Guatemala

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF VULNERABILITY

The concept of vulnerability is used in a disparate array of disciplines, spanning from psychology to engineering. It is generally understood as the likelihood of experiencing a negative outcome based on risks faced and capacity to respond to and overcome those risks. Measurement of vulnerability therefore requires measuring the likelihood of risk and capacities that provide resilience. Risks include both sudden shocks and continuous stressors, and may affect large numbers or groups of people (covariate shocks) or individuals or households (idiosyncratic shocks). Risk measurement can be further broken down to both exposure to risk and sensitivity to risk, or how susceptible a unit is to the effects of a shock/adverse event (Woller 2011). Adaptive capacity or resilience can be understood, using the sustainable

livelihoods approach, as the assets that can help reduce sensitivity to risk and enhance the pursuit of sustainable livelihoods (Chambers & Conway 1991; Moser 1998). Note that vulnerability is, by definition, a forward-looking, predictive concept that can be used to predict outcomes based on identified risks (Moret 2014).

Hoddinott and Quisumbing (2003) pose five questions that a vulnerability assessment should answer:

- What is the extent of vulnerability?
- Who is vulnerable?
- What are the sources of vulnerability?
- How do households respond to shocks?
- What gaps exist between risks and risk management mechanisms? (p. 46)

Answering these questions can be highly relevant to program design. Additionally, vulnerability assessment can be used to target and monitor interventions and measure impact. For this review, we focus specifically on the role of vulnerability assessments in targeting households for programming related to preventing family separation, including matching households to appropriate ES interventions.

Risk and Resilience Factors in the Context of Family-Child Separation

Assessing vulnerability to family-child separation requires measuring both risks that contribute to the likelihood of separating and the assets that provide resilience against separation—also known as protective factors. There are many pathways to family separation, and as of yet there exists no standard, empirically-verified set of risks or protective factors to assess (Laumann 2015). Because these factors may be highly context-specific, it is unlikely that any standardized vulnerability measure will be relevant to all contexts. However, the literature on known risk and resilience factors related to family-child separation can provide insight for developing context-specific measures.

To assess vulnerability to separation, most programs reviewed draw on existing standards for assessing child protection and well-being. Since issues like abuse, neglect, and generally poor child well-being are associated with risk for separation, these standards can provide a useful starting point for identifying context-specific risk and resilience factors in the context of family-child separation. The Interagency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection define vulnerability as the “physical, social, economic and environmental factors that increase the susceptibility of a community or individuals to difficulties and hazards and that put them at risk as a result of loss, damage, insecurity, suffering and death” (Global Child Protection Working Group 2014, p. 7). It advises the use of two stages to target for programming involving case management for children who have been harmed or are at risk of harm. The first is the identification of children most in need of this support. This can be conducted through participatory exercises with community members, child protection committees, government agencies, self-referral, and other mechanisms. The next stage is assessment, including

assessment of each child's basic needs followed by a more comprehensive assessment at both the household and child levels that includes the child's development needs, parenting/caregiving capacity, economic factors, community and wider family influences, and social and cultural context (p. 56).

In addition to these general guidelines, organizations may use indicators of risk identified over time based on experience for prevention and reintegration programming. A robust set of drivers of separation have already been identified by practitioner organizations (Laumann 2015). Many of these line up with the literature on risk factors for abuse and neglect (Lamont & Price-Robertson 2013) as follows:

Table 2. Indicators of Risk

Drivers of Child Separation (Laumann 2015)	Risk Factors for Abuse and Neglect (Lamont & Price-Robertson 2013)
Violence, abuse, neglect of child/children in household, conflict in household	Family conflict or violence
	Poor parent-child interaction
	Use of corporal punishment
	Low warmth/harsh parenting style
Caregivers face challenges in managing children's behavior	High parental stress
Conflict and climate change, and natural disasters	
Abandonment	History of neglect
Child in conflict with the law	Involvement in criminal behavior
Incarcerated parent	
More than three children	Large family size
	Low level of parental education
	Low self-esteem
Elderly caregiver	Non-biological parent/s in the home
Death of parent(s)	
Disability of child or in household	Parental disability (physical/cognitive/emotional)
Parent abuse of drugs or alcohol	Parental substance abuse
	Physical health problems

Illness/mental illness in household, HIV/AIDS	Mental health problems
Reconstituted household (e.g., following divorce, remarriage/new partnership)	Separation/divorce
Single parent household	Single parent
Unwanted pregnancies, or/and pregnancy outside of marriage in settings where there is considerable stigma associated with this	Teenage/young parent(s)

Additional indicators of increased risk of separation identified by organizations working on prevention and reintegration include:

- Poverty
- Migrant parent(s)
- No kinship support available
- Children lack access to education, education available is of poor quality
- Children are affected by harmful traditional practices/stigma
- Being engaged in harmful forms of work
- Death of a child
- Death of breadwinner
- Inadequate shelter/insecure housing
- The lack of diversionary and non-custodial sentencing for children in contact with the law, which leads to children being placed in detention away from families (Delap 2013; Every Child 2009; as cited in Laumann 2015)

In addition to the above risks that might “push” a child toward separation, “pull” factors can also contribute. Local care centers may actively recruit children, or the mere presence of nearby institutions may exert a “pulling” effect that encourages separation. Other pull factors might include work opportunities or the availability of education or other services away from home.

It is likely that families that separate are driven to do so by multiple risk factors. In its Bosnia and Herzegovina program, Hope and Homes for Children noted that the children it served experienced between one and twelve risk factors, with the largest number of children experiencing five to six risks (Sofovik et al. 2012).

In addition to risk, vulnerability assessments should account for sources of resilience. Several organizations interviewed for this review mentioned the importance of strength-based approaches to child protection programming, starting from the assessment phase (Retrak, AVSI, Hope and Homes for Children). Drawing from the child protection literature, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)'s Strengthening Families Approach to Protective Factors identifies the following protective factors against child abuse and maltreatment at the family level:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social-emotional competence of children (Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau/ACYF, & United States of America 2014, p. 2)

A recent symposium on reintegration and prevention of separation, hosted by CRS's 4Children project, identified the following resilience indicators that participants felt were supported by evidence:

- Access to education
- Availability of and access to material, psychosocial, childcare or other support from a friend or neighbor or within the community when needed to cope
- Availability of kinship care/succession planning
- Mental health/coping strategies
- Positive parenting
- Perceived ability to care for disabilities and chronic illness (e.g. HIV)
- Sense of belonging and community acceptance (4Children 2015, p. 14)

The possible combinations of key risks and protective factors contributing to separation are endless, and the tools used to assess vulnerability to family-child separation should be grounded in local context and include household-level and child-level information. In practice, programs and organizations working in the field have identified specific risk and protective factors affecting separation by reviewing case information related to separated or reunified children and their families (Hope and Homes for Children, EveryChild/Family for Every Child), participatory methods at the community level (an approach used in the ChildFund-led DOVCU project in Uganda), and positive deviance inquiry to understand characteristics and behaviors of families in which separation did not occur, despite the presence of common risk factors.² Finally, it should be noted that there are instances where it is in the child's best interest to be separated from their family. Any assessment of vulnerability to separation should be focused on the

² For more on positive deviance in the context of family-child separation, see: Durá, L., & Singhal, A. (2009). Utilizing a Positive Deviance Approach to Reduce Girls' Trafficking in Indonesia Asset-based Communicative Acts That Make a Difference. *Journal of Creative Communications*, 4(1), 1-17.

contextually-appropriate understanding of when separation is unnecessary, or not in the child's best interest.

A Vulnerability Assessment Framework for Economic Strengthening

The term “economic strengthening” finds its origins in HIV/AIDS programming from the late 1990s, where it was acknowledged that household economic status can have major effects on HIV outcomes, and that the effects of HIV significantly impact household economic stability and the well-being of children (Markel & Gettliffe). Since then, ES has become a dedicated feature of the President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) programs for OVC, but ES programs are not limited to contexts of high HIV prevalence. Broadly, ES programming involves integrating micro-level economic interventions into programs that address social problems, such as family separation, where poverty is a contributing factor that must be addressed. In contrast to stand-alone poverty reduction interventions, ES interventions are often combined with other interventions, where poverty reduction is a means to achieve a programmatic goal.

ES programming is focused on stabilizing or advancing a household's economic situation to avoid downward spirals into poverty that can trigger negative economic coping practices. The literature shows that family-child separation is an example of a behavior used to cope with economic stress. Other negative coping practices may have negative effects on child well-being that lead to separation. For ES interventions to be effective in helping to prevent separation, they must be based on an understanding of the mechanisms by which economic status affects vulnerability to separation.

Vulnerability, or susceptibility to shocks, is an important feature of economic status. Measures of vulnerability weigh the risks faced by an individual or household against their capacity to cope with those risks. Capacities to effectively respond to risk are usually measured in terms of assets, which are the context-specific financial, social, physical, and other resources and capacities a household can use to overcome shocks. Vulnerability is a useful construct in ES programming because, unlike poverty, which is usually a static measure, it is used to predict the future state of a household. Assessing the dynamics of vulnerability can provide insight on the kinds of interventions a household needs to prevent negative outcomes. There is no official definition for vulnerability in ES or standard approach for measuring it. For the purposes of this report, we will define economic vulnerability in terms of susceptibility to responding to shocks by engaging in negative economic coping behaviors.

Economic vulnerability assessments can be useful in the context of family-child separation by contributing to an overall metric of vulnerability to separation as well as serving as a means for matching ES interventions to households according to household needs and capacities. A common framework for matching appropriate ES intervention types to economic status is the economic strengthening pathway model discussed in PEPFAR's guidance for OVC projects (PEPFAR, 2012), which finds a close analogue in LIFT's Provision, Protection, Promotion (PPP) framework (Woller 2011). The principal concept behind both frameworks is that interventions should be tailored according to household economic status, whether it is at the lowest level of

economic security where cash and asset transfers are needed to promote stability, a middle category where interventions to smooth consumption are appropriate, or a more economically secure category where investments to grow household income are most likely to improve economic status. The capacity of households to obtain and use income and other assets at each of these economic status levels is relevant to understanding the vulnerability of families to shocks, because assets protect households from negative coping behaviors during a shock (Chen & Dunn, 1996; Donahue, Kabbucho, & Osinde, 2001), including those that hurt child well-being. The PEPFAR categories, shown in Table 3 below, provide a useful starting point for categorizing household vulnerability levels.

Table 3. PEPFAR Economic Strengthening Categories (PEPFAR 2012, p. 42).

FAMILY SITUATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING	
Families in destitution	
Characteristics Trouble providing/paying for basic necessities (like food) No discernible or predictable source of income but potentially a lot of debt they cannot pay Very few liquid assets (e.g., cash savings, livestock, food/crop stores, and personal belongings that could be sold or traded for money) Probably classified as extremely food-insecure <i>Take care to understand whether this situation is chronic, transient, or acute</i>	Resilience outcomes Recover assets and stabilize household consumption Purchasing power outcomes (Re)build short-term capacity to pay for basic necessities Evidence-based strategies Consumption support
Families struggling to make ends meet	
Characteristics Usually paying for basic needs (like food) but not regularly paying for other needs (like school fees), especially if they require lump-sum payments One or more predictable sources of income Some liquid assets (as described above), which may fluctuate throughout the year as they are accumulated and liquidated Seasonal fluctuations in income/expenses, especially due to agricultural calendar (i.e., they do well for one part of the year but poorly for another part of the year)	Resilience outcomes Build self-insurance mechanisms and protect key assets Expand income and consumption Purchasing power outcomes Strengthen family capacity to match income with expenses Evidence-based strategies Money management
Families prepared to grow	
Characteristics Usually paying for both basic needs (like food) and other needs (like schooling and basic health care) on a regular basis; possibly struggling, but usually managing, to make lump-sum payments Some liquid assets that fluctuate less throughout the year than for struggling families Seasonal fluctuations in income/expenses, but probably not as dramatic as for struggling families Probably classified as mildly food-insecure	Resilience outcomes Smooth income and promote asset growth Smooth consumption and manage cash flow Purchasing power outcomes Grow family income to enable more/larger investments Evidence-based strategies Income promotion

While the table above shows groups of characteristics that PEPFAR associates with different levels of economic vulnerability, these levels are somewhat fluid and there is no formal guidance on how to make clear distinctions among these categories when classifying individuals and households. However, the logic of ES rests on the idea that target households need certain external assistance in order to enhance the assets that help them avoid engaging in negative economic coping strategies. External assistance is only needed if households are unable to accumulate enough assets for resilience on their own, implying that a set of barriers prevents them from doing so, trapping them in poverty. One proposed framework for vulnerability assessment for ES involves identifying the asset threshold at which a poverty trap occurs.

The identification of a threshold for a poverty trap can serve as an empirical basis for determining which households can be considered economically vulnerable to using negative coping strategies. However, matching households to appropriate ES interventions requires additional understanding of different levels of vulnerability and the ES strategies more likely to be effective in a particular context. The ES pathway categories for a given context can be defined based on the asset thresholds required for stability and accumulation. This can provide a basis for measuring vulnerability and designing interventions to overcome the barriers that prevent asset accumulation for each group.

According to this proposed framework, vulnerability assessments can identify the barriers to asset protection and accumulation to inform project designs to overcome them. Defining asset thresholds requires acquiring data on how households cope with shocks, including the protective and productive assets that help them avoid negative coping behaviors. This can be done using qualitative research, such as life history interviews, to see how households in a given location have responded to shocks over time. Note that productive assets will vary according to livelihood strategy, so some analysis of livelihood patterns will also be required. For example, urban households relying on vending for income will require different productive assets than rural households that rely on agriculture.

In addition to household capacity to withstand shocks, vulnerability analysis should consider the likelihood of experiencing shocks identified as relevant to separation. In accordance with best practices in vulnerability assessment, data on idiosyncratic shocks likely to affect individual households should be accompanied with higher level data on covariate shocks that affect larger groups of households (Frankenberger et al. 2002), according to a program's geographical scope. Retrospective data collected by households that have already experienced separation can illuminate how different shocks affect households with different levels of access to assets.

ASSESSMENT METHODS USED IN PROGRAMMING RELATED TO UNNECESSARY FAMILY-CHILD SEPARATION

We have established some of the theoretical background on risk and resilience factors related to family-child separation, but how do implementers operationalize these concepts to measure vulnerability? This section reviews some of the research methods used by seven organizations and programs to assess vulnerability. These include participatory methods, rapid survey tools, statistical profiling, and government standards. Large-scale, population-based household surveys are not included, as they are not used by any of the programs reviewed. These types of surveys can be useful in vulnerability assessment because they can be used to collect important data for targeting programs to geographical areas where they are most needed and provide information about vulnerability dynamics in a particular context. However, they rely on statistical inference to make generalizations about a population and are therefore not useful for household-level targeting or matching individual households to a specific intervention.

Different organizations and programs are set up to tackle different problems related to family separation, which is reflected in the varying approaches used to assess vulnerability. Several of the programs reviewed in this paper work on preventing family separation and/or reintegrating separated children into families, with economic strengthening interventions serving to support one or both of those purposes. Others use ES to assist households with children who meet a programmatic definition of vulnerability without explicit reference to separation. Programmatic focus has implications for vulnerability assessment methods.

Reintegration work usually involves a multi-step process of identifying children that are already separated, often living in institutions or on the streets; tracing families; understanding what children and their families want to do; assessing the children individually and then assessing the families to determine appropriateness of and readiness for reunification; preparing children, their families and their communities for reunification; and providing follow-up support for an extended period as children reintegrate (Wedge 2013). Vulnerability assessment in the context of reintegration effectively means assessing likelihood for re-separation.

Assessing vulnerability to family-child separation for prevention programming is more challenging, since the causal mechanisms for separation are diverse and separation is statistically rare. Activities intended to help prevent separation may try to tackle covariate shocks or stresses with community-level interventions in locations where high numbers of children are separated from their families. For example, Hope and Homes for Children assists in the development of community hubs to enhance access to social services to reduce household vulnerability. Prevention activities may also target specific households with support because they are determined to be particularly vulnerable.

Overall, in the context of programming related to unnecessary family-child separation, household-level vulnerability assessments can be designed to serve the programmatic function desired by the implementer.

Some functions include:

- 1) Identifying households with children at risk of separation for inclusion in preventive programming;
- 2) Assessing the ES needs of households that have already experienced separation;
- 3) Assessing child protection and well-being needs; and
- 4) Assessing overall readiness for reunification by examining risk for re-separation.

Participatory Targeting Methods

Participatory, community-based methods can be used according to pre-defined targeting criteria, or to get input from community members to define the criteria themselves. Participatory methods, often collectively referred to as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), can be defined as a “family of participatory approaches and methods which emphasize local knowledge and enable local people to do their own appraisal, analysis, and planning. PRA uses group animation and exercises to facilitate information sharing, analysis, and action among stakeholders” (World Bank 1995, p. 175). There are several benefits to using PRA for targeting: it can bring in more information from the community, compared to external criteria (Alderman 2002, cited in Stoeffler 2014); it can generate community buy-in around program participation; and it offers transparency on how people are selected to receive program benefits. However, community-based methods are not appropriate for all contexts, and they should only be used in environments where there are high levels of trust among community members and there is low potential for being hijacked by elites (Stoeffler 2014).

Participatory targeting is a very common method among the organizations reviewed, and is/was used by: SCORE, *Higa Ubeho*, ChildFund, Hope and Homes for Children, and Retrak to identify program participants. Of these, only ChildFund shared a systematized method of PRA for this review, including a tool outlining specific exercises to be used to identify households vulnerable to family-child separation, as well as a defined ranking system for specifying relative vulnerability across households. Practitioners from ChildFund underscored the importance of high quality facilitation of PRA, otherwise, this kind of exercise can easily veer off-track. Failure to maintain clarity about the purpose of the activity and the concept of vulnerability in use can hurt replicability across communities and result in biased results.

Rapid Survey Tools to Classify Households and Monitor Change

Rapid quantitative tools are a simple, systematic way to gather information in order to classify households into different categories of vulnerability and monitor change over time. In this approach, each household in a defined area is visited by a program staff person and asked a structured set of questions designed to measure various facets of vulnerability. Indicators included on these surveys may be selected and weighted using participative methods, expert consultation, data-driven statistical methods, or a combination of these. Indicators may be informed by formative primary research to identify the context-specific risk and protective factors related to separation. These tools are widely used across the programs reviewed, and typically

use very similar domains. These tools are not always validated, which may result in misclassification of household vulnerability levels. Also, most use somewhat arbitrary systems for matching scores to vulnerability categories, usually placing equal weights on each domain rather than drawing a distinction from an empirical basis such as that determined by statistical processes or external validation methods. Many use indicators that are subjective in nature, hurting their reliability, and/or are subject to potential response bias on the part of the household participant.

Statistical Profiling of Separated Children to Identify Patterns and Geographic Hot Spots

Risk factors leading to separation can be identified retrospectively by collecting data from children who have already been separated from their families. Retrak and Hope and Homes for Children both use this strategy to develop statistical profiles and identify patterns among separated children. This can help identify geographical “hot spots,” where location-specific drivers of separation can be investigated further. The families of separated children can be traced, permitting the collection of additional information to identify household-level risk factors which can be used to inform targeting methods.

Using Government Data and Standards to Identify Beneficiary Households

In many countries, addressing the needs of highly vulnerable children (and, to a lesser extent, unnecessary family separation) is increasingly included in the specific remit of evolving government social support systems, and NGOs working in the space must adhere to government guidelines and procedures. In the case of Rwanda and Uganda, these systems are fairly developed, and guidelines have been created for identifying vulnerable households and children. In Rwanda, Global Communities has integrated the government’s poverty classification scheme, known as *ubudehe*, into its assessment criteria. In Uganda, AVSI and ChildFund integrated the government’s OVC Vulnerability Index in program beneficiary targeting approaches.

Global Communities’ *Higa Ubeho* project in Rwanda, which concluded in early 2015, did not have an explicit mandate to reintegrate or prevent family separation. Rather, its goal was to promote household resiliency to health and economic shocks in a broader sense. *Higa Ubeho* used a tool called the Household Resiliency Index (HRI) to measure household vulnerability. The HRI is a very brief rapid survey tool based on the three PEPFAR ES categories (PEPFAR 2012) and designed to target households to ES interventions based on their status on the ES pathway. In addition, these categories are designed to line up with several of the six *ubudehe* categories of poverty.

The *ubudehe* system involves a community-based process of classifying households by poverty level that occurs every five years. Categories are defined by the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency, and the system has received acclaim and the UN Public Service Award for its engagement of communities in anti-poverty initiatives (Niringiye & Ayebale 2012). With

regard to its validity for the purposes of identifying households at risk for separation, the major challenge with the *ubudehe* categories is how infrequently they are assigned. There have been significant problems identified with the *ubudehe* classification process done by the government, including very high error rates and high dissatisfaction among beneficiaries (Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2015). There may also be problems with the categories themselves and their utility in distinguishing between poor and non-poor groups, given the changing nature of poverty in Rwanda since they were developed. However, the categories are sufficiently broad that mapping them onto HRI/PEPFAR categories is a relatively straight-forward means of integrating government standards into *Higa Ubeho*'s efforts to refer participants to other available social services.

In Uganda, the government has developed explicit guidelines for targeting vulnerable children (Republic of Uganda Ministry of Gender 2013).³ These guidelines have been incorporated into the Sustainable, COmprehensive REsponses for Vulnerable Children and their Families (SCORE) project, led by AVSI. The Deinstitutionalization of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Uganda (DOVCU) project led by ChildFund, which includes both reintegration and prevention of separation components, has also used an adapted version of the guidelines. The guidelines include three assessments or tools: the "three-factor criteria," the Uganda OVC Vulnerability Index (VI), and the Child Status Index (CSI). The government guidelines recommend applying the three-factor criteria as a first stage of targeting. Based on statistical analysis of the 2002 Uganda National Census, the three child-level factors of being an orphan, being out of school, or having a disability reportedly identify 92.9% of vulnerable children in targeted communities (Republic of Uganda Ministry of Gender 2013). Assessment of these easily-identifiable, objectively verifiable factors is meant to be incorporated into a community targeting process.

Identifying Vulnerability Factors Using Large Datasets

Similar to the three-factor criteria, UNICEF published a document proposing four indicators derived using statistical analysis of census data to identify children made vulnerable in the HIV context at a global level. These include children who "live in a household ranked in the bottom two wealth quintiles and who are: (1) not living with either parent; or (2) have lost one or both parents; or (3) living in a household with adults with no education" (UNICEF, 2014, p. 4).

Statistical analysis of rich datasets at the country level can help yield key indicators for rapid identification of vulnerable populations, but it should be clear from the outset which indicators were used to define vulnerability before applying them for targeting purposes.

³ Uganda's approach continues to evolve; the process announced in January-February 2016, after the document review described in this paper, involves having village-level officials identify families for screening using a set of criteria, then having program implementation staff apply a brief screening tool at the household level to determine whether they are eligible for program inclusion, and then assessing households selected into the program using a more detailed household vulnerability assessment tool.

The next step proposed by the Uganda guidelines is to use the VI in households with children identified using the three-factor criteria. The VI is a 30-item questionnaire that looks at six of seven Core Program Areas (CPAs) that directly affect a child, including: socio-economic security; food and nutrition security; health, water, sanitation and shelter; education; psychosocial support and basic care; and child protection and legal support. It assesses both household and individual child levels and was based on statistical modeling and expert input. The USAID-funded MEASURE Evaluation project did an evaluation of the tool in 2014, acknowledging it as a standardized and comprehensive tool, but also posing questions about its validity (MEASURE Evaluation 2014a). In particular, the report noted that some of the assets listed as criteria for economic security, such as livestock, were not relevant in urban areas. Due to the weighting of CPAs, the tool was also not found to be sensitive enough to capture the most vulnerable households, as households may have indicated high levels of deprivation on several key indicators while still scoring in the “slightly vulnerable” category (p. 29).

Finally, the Uganda government recommends using the Child Status Index (CSI), developed by MEASURE Evaluation, for case management purposes. The CSI is a brief tool that can help practitioners “assess the current needs of a child, monitor improvements in dimensions of child well-being, and identify areas of concern that can [be] served by program interventions” (O'Donnell et al. 2014, p. 6). It is used to monitor several domains of child well-being. The tool itself is used by several of the organizations reviewed, and is discussed in greater detail in the section below.

Although adhering to government standards is important for programs engaging with government ministries, additional targeting criteria may be applied to enhance the validity of existing measures. Because the VI was used as the basis for ChildFund's Family Vulnerability Status Index and was developed based on SCORE's Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT), its validity issues have important implications for the quality of targeting used in those two programs, which will be discussed below.

ANALYSIS OF TOOLS

This section provides an analysis of specific tools used by the seven organizations and programs selected for this review to assess vulnerability for the purposes of programming related to family-child separation or reducing child vulnerability. The purpose of this analysis is to better understand existing practices in vulnerability assessment for this type of programming, compare tools, and inform the development of future tools.

Criteria for Analyzing Vulnerability Assessment Tools

In comparing and assessing existing vulnerability assessment tools used to identify families at high risk of family-child separation, it is useful to establish criteria for evaluating them. This report subjects the tools reviewed to a set of criteria to assess validity of content according to existing standards of vulnerability analysis as well as child protection standards. Proposed

criteria follow:

Table 4. Criteria for Analyzing Vulnerability Assessment Tools

Criterion	Explanation	Source
Do indicators address existing standards for risk assessment related to child well-being and protection, including domains of child's developmental needs, parenting/caregiving capacity, economic factors, community and wider family influences and social and cultural context?	Identified as best practice in child protection	Interagency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection, Global Child Protection Working Group 2014, p. 54-56
Do indicators address known drivers of separation?	Identified as best practice in vulnerability assessment	Laumann 2015, p. 62
Do indicators assess risk, including shocks and stressors, as well as resilience?	Identified as best practice in vulnerability assessment	Alwang & Jorgenson 2001
Does the tool address issues at both child-level and household-level?	Identified as best practice in child protection	Interagency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection, Global Child Protection Working Group 2014, pp. 54-59
Do indicators align with national strategies?	Identified as best practice in child protection program delivery, integrating existing social work systems	Laumann 2015, p. 64-65
Does the tool place households in valid categories for ES targeting?	Categories defined in PEPFAR ES guidance	PEPFAR 2012, p. 42
Does the tool identify key assets that protect against separation or indicate readiness for reunification?	Identified as best practice in vulnerability assessment and family separation/reintegration literature	Laumann 2015; Moret 2014

AVSI's SCORE Project: Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) and Needs Assessment Tool (NAT)

Like *Higa Ubeho*, SCORE was not designed with a specific mandate to prevent family separation, but a broader goal of increasing resilience among vulnerable households.

Its four objectives are:

1. To improve the socio-economic status of...households [with vulnerable children (VC)];
2. To improve the food security and nutrition status of VC and their household members;
3. To increase availability of protection and legal services for VC and their household members; and
4. To increase capacity of vulnerable women and children and their households to access, acquire or provide critical services. (AVSI 2015)

SCORE uses community-determined vulnerability criteria, developed using participatory methods, as part of an initial vulnerability screening. Its sister project, SUNRISE, conducted some initial vulnerability mapping that generated preliminary lists of vulnerable community members for SCORE. In program areas where these lists have not been available SCORE does the mapping together with the community leaders or collects lists developed and referred to them by CBOs, CSOs, and other institutions. After the initial screening/mapping, identified households are given a rapid survey called the Vulnerability Assessment using the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT), which was adapted by the government of Uganda into the OVC VI, and later the OVC Household Vulnerability Assessment tool (HVAT). SCORE reports that approximately 70% of the households identified by the community as vulnerable are enrolled in the program based on their VAT scores. The VAT scores indicate the key areas of household needs, for which interventions are then targeted using a more open-ended Needs Assessment Tool (NAT). The NAT is not a quantitative tool, but rather a case management tool designed to facilitate dialogue between families and case managers, to identify the real needs of the families, what their contributions are towards addressing the needs, and what interventions the program can offer to address the needs. The information generated from the needs assessment is used to match families to interventions that they feel best address their needs and come up with the household development plans that form the basis for implementation of activities within the households.

In addition to targeting interventions, the VAT is used for monitoring and evaluation purposes to check whether the program is meeting its goal of decreasing vulnerability of the critically vulnerable and moderately vulnerable families, as well as, graduating households out of vulnerability. MEASURE Evaluation tested the reliability of the tool, with positive findings (MEASURE Evaluation 2014b). As explained by a representative from SCORE, the accuracy of the tool depends on rapport between households and data collectors; these data collectors are service providers with ongoing relationships with households (Walugembe et al. 2014).

Although not intended specifically to measure risk of separation, the indicators used in the VAT line up with key domains of risk factors for family-child separation. Domains include: food security, protection, economic strengthening, and family strengthening/critical services. All domains were assigned an equal weight of 30 points, with the data collector's subjective impression contributing up to ten points to the overall score, and 40 points is considered the cut-off for program enrollment. Below, SCORE's targeting tools are analyzed for their usefulness in

projects related to separation and reintegration, using the criteria outlined earlier.

Table 5. Analysis of VAT and NAT Tools, SCORE

Criterion	Observations / Assessment / Comments
Do indicators address existing standards for risk assessment related to child well-being and protection, including domains of child's development needs, parenting/caregiving capacity, economic factors, community and wider family influences and social and cultural context?	These domains are addressed in the VAT and explored further in the NAT.
Do indicators address known drivers of separation?	Yes.
Do indicators assess risk, including shocks and stressors, as well as resilience?	Shocks are not addressed, although indicators related to risk, resilience, and stressors are included.
Does the tool address issues at both child level and household level?	Yes. Most questions focus on the household level, although key questions about child protection and food security are asked at the child level.
Do indicators align with national strategies?	Yes, in alignment with Uganda's OVC VI and later Household Vulnerability Assessment Tool (HVAT).
Does the tool place households in valid categories for ES targeting?	Unclear. Uses pathway approach to classifying household economic vulnerability, but uses subjective needs assessment criteria to match households to interventions.
Does the tool identify key assets that protect against separation or indicate readiness for reunification?	No. Only three questions on economic strengthening included in the survey, and they are all related to income, which can be difficult to estimate. Otherwise, there is limited assessment of assets, which are a better metric of capability to withstand shocks.

Overall, the VAT is a simple tool that covers some key child protection and economic concerns related to separation. It is useful for assessing key indicators related to SCORE's success, including tracking household economic status over time according to the PEPFAR categories. Because it is used in tandem with participatory targeting methods, it may be useful for identifying vulnerable households with relative accuracy. The process by which households are referred to the program, via participatory methods, is standardized, which allows SCORE to leverage community knowledge in a replicable way. The NAT's individualized, case management approach is likely also useful for matching households to interventions that will be

useful for them. However, both tools require a certain level of subjectivity. The cut-off points for the VAT categories are based on a system of equal weights rather than empirical differences between households in each category, and there are no objective guidelines for matching households to interventions using the NAT. Finally, the VAT's assessment of household economic status is based on a few indicators related to income, which is often a poor indicator of economic vulnerability in resource-poor settings, where income may be difficult to quantify and where assets may be more indicative of economic well-being (Carter and Barrett 2006). Although the resulting ES classification could be used to monitor change over time, it may not be very useful for matching ES interventions to households, a process for which SCORE relied on the NAT.

Global Communities' *Higa Ubeho* Project: Household Resiliency Index (HRI)

To assess household vulnerability, the *Higa Ubeho* project in Rwanda used the Household Resiliency Index (HRI), a very streamlined rapid assessment tool based on the PEPFAR categories of economic vulnerability: Families in Destitution (aligned to *Ubudehe* levels 1 and 2), Families Struggling to Make Ends Meet (aligned to *Ubudehe* level 3), and Families Ready to Grow (aligned to *Ubudehe* level 4). Households were identified from an initial list of potential beneficiary households provided by the government from its list of OVC. Additional recruitment of families was through lists provided by National Commission for Children (NCC) based on Global Fund beneficiaries who were not receiving ES support and lists of most vulnerable families obtained through local government officials. Because the program was intended to promote household resiliency to health and economic shocks, the domains of the tool focus on those domains rather than a broader set of child well-being and protection domains. The purpose of the tool is to track changes in household economic status over time. Domains contain three to four indicators each, and include: assets and income, expenses, and health outcomes. The first two domains are weighted 35 points, and the latter is weighted 30. Scores of 0-30 classify households as Destitute, 31-60 as Struggling to Make Ends Meet, and 61-100 as Ready to Grow (*Higa Ubeho* 2014).

Despite the appealing simplicity of the tool, Global Communities has noted that the HRI is somewhat rigid and is working to update it for a new project, Improved Services for Vulnerable Populations (ISVP), to include a broader set of non-economic indicators. One of the challenges noted was urban/rural discrepancies, as indicators such as "livestock owned" and "food production" will have highly different connotations depending on context. Another issue with the tool is that some questions are subjective or difficult to answer. One indicator is "ability to pay for basic needs," with three response options: "very difficult," "manageable," or "easy." Basic needs are not clearly defined or measured in any objective way.

Table 6. Analysis of Household Resiliency Index

Criterion	Observations / Assessment / Comments
Do indicators address existing standards for risk assessment related to child well-being and protection, including domains of child's development needs, parenting/caregiving capacity, economic factors, community and wider family influences and social and cultural context?	Limited. This tool is focused on household economic vulnerability rather than child well-being, but economic, health, and education indicators are relevant.
Do indicators address known drivers of separation?	Partially. Only focused on economic and health vulnerability.
Do indicators assess risk, including shocks and stressors, as well as resilience?	Shocks are not addressed, very few indicators of risk.
Does the tool address issues at both child level and household level?	No, household level only.
Do indicators align with national strategies?	Yes, partially aligned with <i>ubudehe</i> system.
Does the tool place households in valid categories for ES targeting?	Not clear. Categories are based on arbitrary weighting system, and households were not matched to interventions based on scores. All households received the same ES intervention: savings groups.
Does the tool identify key assets that protect against separation or indicate readiness for reunification?	Very few. Capabilities are assessed, but the only assets assessed are monthly savings, which is difficult to estimate, and livestock, which may not apply in urban settings.

Pact's Yekokeb Berhan Project, ChildFund, and Retrak: Child Status Index

The Child Status Index (CSI), developed by MEASURE Evaluation in 2009, is the most commonly-used tool by organizations and programs reviewed. The CSI was designed to assess individual child well-being; its main purpose is case management and it can also be used for monitoring and program planning. As a monitoring tool, the CSI highlights the domains where intervention is needed. The tool consists of six domains of child well-being, including: education and skills training, food and nutrition, shelter and care, health, psychosocial well-being, and child protection. The tool does not come with an official questionnaire, and must always be adapted to local context. Adaptations make sense from a programmatic perspective, but should include efforts at validation alongside implementation.

A study comparing the CSI to the VI and VAT showed that the CSI can result in inconsistent

classifications (Walugembe et al. 2014). Another study tried to compare the CSI to the tools measuring the same domains using validated indicators in age-specific Comprehensive Child Welfare surveys (Sabin et al. 2011), and found that the CSI was not valid compared to these measures.

Many of the shortcomings of the CSI can be attributed to improper use. In light of early evaluation findings, MEASURE published guidelines clarifying the proper use of the tool, including that it is not intended for targeting or impact assessment, and that scores should not be aggregated into a single index score. Adapting it into an aggregate index would make it a new type of tool that would generate a score meant to speak to a concept of vulnerability for which the tool was not designed. Instead, scores across domains should be considered separately for case management purposes. However, despite these clarifications regarding the characteristics and limitations of the tool, its simplicity and alignment with common child protection indicators have made it attractive to use as an index for targeting and impact assessment, and a number of programs have done so.

ChildFund, a child-focused international NGO, and Retrak, an international NGO that provides services to street children, have reported using the CSI for monitoring purposes, according to its intended design. Retrak uses the CSI in prevention initiatives, including monitoring the children of self-selected participants in self-help groups in high-risk areas. Retrak has also used the tool to monitor progress during reintegration, and has published a report on findings with the suggestion that the CSI could be used for impact assessment (Corcoran & Wakia 2013). However, Retrak acknowledges that using the tool to assess program impact is outside of its designated purpose. It also reports overcoming challenges of subjectivity and sensitivity with careful training of professional social workers to use the tool, often in pairs or teams, and ongoing review of the tool's use.

The *Yekokeb Berhan* project, led by Pact and based in Ethiopia, is a program for highly vulnerable children that incorporates economic strengthening. This program uses both a questionnaire from the CSI adapted to the Ethiopian context as well as a modified version referred to as a Vulnerability Index to assess household economic status. The *Yekokeb Berhan* version of the CSI, referred to as the Child Support Index, includes questions at both the household- and child-levels, including several variables added to the original related to disability, HIV-testing, economic status and the coordination of care (Steinitz 2012). The vulnerability index uses eight of the original 20 variables to classify households according to the PEPFAR categories of economic status. The tool is used for both targeting and impact assessment. Adaptations were meant to align the tool with government standards and context-specific indicators.

Table 7. Analysis of MEASURE Child Status Index Tool

Criterion	Observations / Assessment / Comments
Do indicators address existing standards for risk assessment related to child well-being and protection, including domains of child's development needs, parenting/caregiving capacity, economic factors, community and wider family influences and social and cultural context?	Yes, the tool is focused on child well-being.
Do indicators address known drivers of separation?	Well-being indicators are relevant to known drivers of separation, but would have to be modified for context to incorporate specific drivers for a given location.
Do indicators assess risk, including shocks and stressors, as well as resilience?	Although the CSI does not account for economic shocks or measure assets, it does include a number of risk factors associated with future child well-being
Does the tool address issues at both child level and household level?	The original CSI focuses on the child level. YB's Child Support Index includes indicators at the household level as well.
Do indicators align with national strategies?	The original CSI can be adapted for this purpose. YB's Child Support Index included indicators to align with the Government of Ethiopia's Standard Service Delivery Guidelines for programs serving orphans and vulnerable children.
Does the tool place households in valid categories for ES targeting?	No, it is not intended to do so. However, YB's adapted subset of CSI questions—the Vulnerability Index—does categorize households in this way.
Does the tool identify key assets that protect against separation or indicate readiness for reunification?	No.

ChildFund's DOVCU project: PRA and Family Status Vulnerability Index

ChildFund's DOVCU project works on both reintegration and prevention activities. DOVCU uses a multi-phase process to target families and children at risk of separation, including a structured PRA, a tool known as the Family Status Vulnerability Index (FSVI), and the CSI. For its prevention efforts, DOVCU uses information from government-led assessments of child care institutions as well as its own assessment data to identify sending areas from which children are most commonly placed in institutions and separated from family. Then, ChildFund engages local

stakeholders and representatives from these areas to identify some of the drivers of child separation. PRA is used to define and rank specific community recognized risk factors and to identify households at likely risk of family-child separation. Households that are identified through the PRA process are then administered the FSVI questionnaire, which generates scores for different categories of questions, which are summarized to classify households as at either high, medium, or low risk of family-child separation. Economic vulnerability sub-scores correspond to the PEPFAR ES categories. High and medium risk households, as assessed by overall FSVI score, are enrolled in the program, and the CSI is then used among those families for monitoring purposes.

ChildFund has a very structured approach to PRA, which helps ensure replicability. The PRA process involves facilitating community discussion of risk factors for separation, ranking those risk factors in order of importance, then using the risk factors to score households according to their potential for separation. The FSVI is based on the 30-item, six-core-program-area Uganda VI, with a few additional questions. It generates individual scores for each CPA, as well as a “Risk Analysis” score based on the total score across all CPAs, and a separate “Destitution Analysis” score based on CPAs 1 and 2 (household economic livelihood security and access to basic needs), which places households in the PEPFAR economic status categories. The overall “Risk Analysis” score is used to determine enrollment in the program, and the “Destitution Analysis” score is used to match households to ES interventions, in alignment with the PEPFAR recommendations.

Because it is based on the Uganda VI, the FSVI is likely to face some of the same validity concerns as the VI, including indicators that may not be valid across both urban and rural contexts. As with other quantitative tools, cut-offs for economic status categories are arbitrarily divided across potential scores, making it difficult to ascertain if proposed ES interventions are most appropriate for matched households based on their “Destitution” scores.

Table 8. Analysis of ChildFund Targeting Tools: PRA, FSVI, and CSI

Criterion	Observations / Assessment / Comments
Do indicators address existing standards for risk assessment related to child well-being and protection, including domains of child’s development needs, parenting/caregiving capacity, economic factors, community and wider family influences and social and cultural context?	Yes. The FSVI covers key domains, including indicators related to conflict, violence, substance abuse, basic care, legal support, and others.
Do indicators address known drivers of separation?	Yes. The FSVI is complemented by context-specific information provided through PRA.
Do indicators assess risk, including shocks and stressors, as well as resilience?	PRA identifies key risk factors. FSVI includes few indicators on shocks or stressors, though

	many indicators are relevant to risks and resilience.
Does the tool address issues at both child level and household level?	Yes. FSVI addresses household level, with some child-level indicators, while CSI addresses child level.
Do indicators align with national strategies?	Yes, aligns with Uganda VI.
Does the tool place households in valid categories for ES targeting?	Unclear. Uses PEPFAR categories, but seem to be based on arbitrary category cut-offs.
Does the tool identify key assets that protect against separation or indicate readiness for reunification?	Key assets not identified.

Retrak: Community Assessments and Case Management Tools

Retrak is a large international NGO working on both reintegration and prevention in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Malawi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe and Brazil, with special attention to street children. Retrak assesses vulnerability at two levels: the community level, to inform community-wide prevention interventions; and the household level, to assess vulnerability to separation, or readiness of integration. For prevention purposes, Retrak traces street children who are identified through street outreach to their families of origin, allowing the organization to map “sending” regions or communities. Key informant interviews with separated children as well as community members and local authorities in those areas are used to understand why children are leaving the area. Community mapping of child protection risks and responses also help inform interventions. This process involves using key informant interviews, focus groups, and community observation to explore risks to child protection and how communities prevent and respond to risks (Retrak 2014). Retrak then intervenes at the community level to address identified risks by implementing activities such as self-help groups for women and well-being clubs for children, where participation is based on self-referral. These groups receive child protection information and other messages aimed at addressing risks for separation.

When working on reintegration, Retrak assists families to prepare through training and asset transfers for small businesses. Retrak monitors participants’ household situations using case management tools, which are informed by the Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children (welcomed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2009) and address primary child protection indicators. Case management tools refer to the records required under Retrak’s standard operating procedures, including: the child’s personal profile, Retrak center records, reintegration records, and removal of child from family care records. These tools are assessed here as a type of vulnerability assessment to determine readiness for reintegration. There are

no set criteria for matching ES interventions to households according to economic status.

In addition to the CSI (mentioned in the section above), most of the tools require case manager assessment on several domains of well-being at the caregiver and household level, including: food and nutrition, shelter and care, protection, health, psychosocial well-being, and education and skills training.

Table 9. Analysis of Retrak's Community Assessment and Case Management Practices

Criterion	Notes
Do indicators address existing standards for risk assessment related to child well-being and protection, including domains of child's development needs, parenting/caregiving capacity, economic factors, community and wider family influences and social and cultural context?	Yes, Retrak's case management tools address these, but they are not scored quantitatively, meaning that interventions are assigned based on case manager's judgement.
Do indicators address known drivers of separation?	These are identified using key informant interviews at the community level.
Do indicators assess risk, including shocks and stressors, as well as resilience?	No.
Does the tool address issues at both child level and household level?	Yes, Retrak's case management tools cover both levels, including child and caregiver assessments.
Do indicators align with national strategies?	Yes.
Does the tool place households in valid categories for ES targeting?	No.
Does the tool identify key assets that protect against separation or indicate readiness for reunification?	No, there is no system for this.

Kids Alive's Oasis Keeping Families Together: Basic Needs Assessment

The Oasis Keeping Families Together is a faith-based child reunification program implemented by Kids Alive International in Guatemala that works specifically with victims of sexual abuse who were separated from their families and sent to the organization for protection by court order. After the arrest of the perpetrator, Oasis works to reunite the victims with their families. The assessment used by Oasis is designed to assess readiness for reintegration, and there is a

version used for the child and a version for the household. The questionnaires are based on basic child well-being and protection criteria including physical and psychological health, work, living conditions, family and social relations, penal process, as well as some indicators related to spiritual life. Scores of 70% and above on both instruments indicate that families are deemed ready for integration, but ultimately the decision depends on a court order.

Oasis also provides low-level economic strengthening support by providing mothers with microenterprise training following reunification. Typically, this training is focused on street vending, though a representative from Kids Alive stated that the organization is seeking more market-based, scalable opportunities for ES. The decision to reunify children to their families is ultimately determined by a judge, and economic status is typically not a high priority in that decision, so other indicators in the tool have limited emphasis on economic status.

The Oasis questionnaires use an arbitrary cut-off point for determining readiness for reunification and the program does not use scores related to household economic status to match households to (limited) ES interventions. Some of the assessment indicators are subjective in nature, where data collectors must rate items such as a child's physical health or living conditions as "good" or "bad." The tool is most useful for tracking some basic well-being indicators, but does not address risk or resilience in a systematic way to be used as a forward-looking vulnerability measure.

Table 10. Analysis of Oasis Ministry Reintegration Tools

Criterion	Observations / Assessment / Comments
Do indicators address existing standards for risk assessment related to child well-being and protection, including domains of child's development needs, parenting/caregiving capacity, economic factors, community and wider family influences and social and cultural context?	Yes, psychological and physical health, substance abuse, violence, housing, work and education status are addressed.
Do indicators address known drivers of separation?	Yes, in this case, exclusively related to sexual abuse.
Do indicators assess risk, including shocks and stressors, as well as resilience?	Some risk and resilience factors related to child well-being are included, but few indicators relate to economic resilience, and there are no indicators related to shocks.
Does the tool address issues at both child level and household level?	Yes.
Do indicators align with national strategies?	Aligns with court system.
Does the tool place households in valid categories for ES targeting?	No effort is made at this. Minimal attention paid to economic status.

Does the tool identify key assets that protect against separation or indicate readiness for reunification?	No.
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Hope and Homes for Children: Risk and Protective Factors Assessment

Hope and Homes for Children (HHC) is another major international NGO focused on both prevention and reintegration. Its programming is based on what is known as the ACTIVE Family Support Model, which is designed to “address the root causes of institutionalization by focusing on overcoming crisis situations that might result in separation of children from their families” (Sofovic et al. 2012). This involves extensive community-based prevention work, including Community Hubs that link community members to needed services. HHC has identified critical risk factors based on patterns in the profiles of separated children, targeting families that demonstrate similar characteristics.

HHC programming depends on trained social workers who use a suite of tools to determine how children should be placed according to their best interest. These include a series of child assessment tools, which measure progress along a series of key development indicators, and family assessment tools. Social workers employ a social dialogue approach to build trusting relationships with families and collect information on their living conditions, social relationships, health conditions, children’s health and behavior, and the household economy. There is no standardized tool to assess household economy; approaches vary by country and generally include variables including food security, assets, income, and expenditure. The household economy assessment is used to inform referrals to ES interventions and determine eligibility for grants to cover basic needs. To assess readiness for placement in a family, HHC uses a Child Protection Risk tool to determine if there are any risks associated with placing the child in the family.

HHC uses a tool that catalogues risks and protective factors as part of a set of tools to determine a household’s risk of separation or readiness for reintegration. The Risk and Protective Factors tool includes the following domains: living conditions, family and social relationships, behavior, physical and mental health, education and household economy. Each question is answered using a numerical score according to whether a need is met, with scores ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely) based on input from a social worker. Scores are collected during an initial assessment, immediately after intervention, and six months after intervention for needs and impact assessment. Scores are then aggregated for each domain to determine if all of the needs of the child of interest are adequately met. This tool is the only one reviewed that explicitly incorporates protective factors, but, in practice, most of these are simply the converse of the indicators used for risk factors. HHC does not directly provide ES, but instead links households to needed ES services by facilitating access to training and connecting households to savings groups. Occasionally, HHC will provide grants for business development.

The Risk and Protective Factors tool provides a comprehensive assessment of child well-being, including risk and resilience factors, and is used for assessing intervention needs and monitoring. Like other case management tools, it is subjective in nature and depends on the social worker's clinical judgment. The tool only explores economic status in a cursory way, but it is meant to be supplemented with a more in-depth economic assessment. Because household economy is not assessed in a standardized way, only the Risk and Protective Factors tool is analyzed here.

Table 11. Analysis of Hope and Homes for Children Risk and Protective Factors Assessment

Criterion	Observations / Assessment / Comments
Do indicators address existing standards for risk assessment related to child well-being and protection, including domains of child's development needs, parenting/caregiving capacity, economic factors, community and wider family influences and social and cultural context?	Risk and Protective Factors tool addresses these.
Do indicators address known drivers of separation?	Yes.
Do indicators assess risk, including shocks and stressors, as well as resilience?	Somewhat, risk and protective factors are assessed, but shocks not clearly addressed.
Does the tool address issues at both child level and household level?	Yes.
Do indicators align with national strategies?	Unknown.
Does the tool place households in valid categories for ES targeting?	No, it does not attempt to classify households this way.
Does the tool identify key assets that protect against separation or indicate readiness for reunification?	No. The household economy domain asks about employment, income-generating opportunities, stability of income, access to benefits, and presence of family financial support.

DISCUSSION

This review compared several different assessment tools according to an external set of criteria to understand their utility in the context of family-child separation. The tools are structured to meet the needs of a diverse range of projects, not all of which emphasize economic strengthening or family-child separation, so it is natural that none of them align with all of the

criteria introduced in this review. Despite variation among approaches, the results of this review yield some patterns that can inform future assessment approaches for programs addressing family-child separation using ES. Our findings suggest that though the tools share some common strengths, including incorporation of standard child well-being and protection indicators and attention to government standards, most could be strengthened by greater objectivity and more robust economic indicators.

Most of the tools reviewed were rapid quantitative tools. It should be noted that these instruments represent only part of what is required to obtain a context-specific understanding of vulnerability dynamics. For assessments of economic vulnerability, an analysis of livelihood patterns in a given context is required to understand the types and quantities of assets required to avoid negative coping practices in response to a shock. The tools reviewed here focused on assessing a general level of deprivation, but did not assess the context-specific assets required for economic resilience in their respective contexts, limiting their utility to inform ES interventions.

The analysis of assessment tools showed that there is notable overlap among domains used, reflecting general aspects of child well-being rather than risk factors specific to separation. These align with standard guidelines in child protection, including basic needs, child's development needs, parenting/caregiving capacity, economic factors, community and wider family influences, social and cultural context (Global Child Protection Working Group 2014) and CSI domains. With the exception of the HRI, FSVI, and HHC's economic assessment tool, attention to economic security is somewhat limited across tools. Assets examined are general in nature, not tailored to either livelihood type or urban/rural status, resulting in problems with both validity and comparability. There is also little attention to how households cope with shocks.

For those tools used to generate economic vulnerability categories, cut-offs between categories are generally based on assignment of points calculated using the quantitative tools, and are not validated. Although several programs, including *Yekokeb Berhan*, *Higa Ubeho*, and SCORE, use standardized language around economic vulnerability by drawing on PEPFAR's pathway approach to ES, the cut-off points for designation of households into each of these categories is not standardized, as each program uses different vulnerability indicators and scoring schemes. Although categories should be adapted to context, it would be helpful to ground distinctions between categories using standard empirical criteria, with the ES approach to vulnerability assessment described in an earlier section as one way to do this.

Another issue with assigning ES vulnerability categories is that, although they may be used for monitoring and evaluation purposes, they are often not used to match households with appropriate interventions, likely because many agencies simply lack the capacity in ES to offer an array of interventions according to the PEPFAR categories of household economic status.

As with economic vulnerability, overall classifications of households as vulnerable to separation or re-separation were frequently based on subjective cut-off criteria, either case manager

discretion or category cut-offs determined by dividing points evenly across categories from a total score. Since there are no existing, validated tools for measuring vulnerability to separation, and since there are likely many pathways to family separation, there is no pre-determined standard for weighting different domains or creating cut-off points to classify levels of vulnerability. This reinforces the importance of strong contextual analysis related to risk factors for separation as well as good quality training for professional social workers in the case management process to ensure that risk factors for separation are monitored and addressed. It also suggests that the known risk factors for separation are too varied and context-specific to develop a simple tool for targeting households at risk of separation. It is possible that retrospective analysis of the characteristics of households that have separated as well as of households that have demonstrated positive deviance can shed light on the relative importance of different factors in contributing to vulnerability and resilience to separation. This may help researchers identify the “red flags” that indicate risk of separation for targeting households.

Overall, the methods assessed demonstrate several strengths. They generally cover standard child well-being indicators, incorporate community input, and pay attention to national standards. On the other hand, few components of the tools have been formally validated, and most are fairly subjective. Several organizations use the CSI in a manner for which it was not designed such as for impact assessment and targeting, pointing to a clear demand for standardized assessment tools for these purposes. Some programs used the ES pathway approach to match interventions to households (DOVCU, *Yekokeb Berhan*), some relied on case manager input (HHC, Retrak, SCORE), and others provided the same intervention to all participants (*Higa Ubeho*, Oasis). Few assessments accounted for context-specific shocks. Since the integration of ES into reintegration and prevention work is fairly new, organizations working in this area need capacity-building to develop tools to match ES programming appropriate to the households they serve.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This report endeavors to inform approaches to vulnerability assessment for projects related to family-child separation through a critical analysis of existing tools. Beginning with an overview of the concept of vulnerability, it seeks to better understand known factors related to vulnerability to family-child separation and presents a theoretical framework that can be used to examine the economic aspects of this type of vulnerability. It also seeks to gain a better understanding of the research methods used for vulnerability assessments by the seven programs selected for review. Based on this exploration, the review suggests a set of review criteria for assessment tools, culminating in analysis of the tools used by these programs according to these criteria.

Although only addressing a handful of programs that incorporate ES into prevention and reintegration work, this review highlights some important gaps in assessment methods and organizational capacity for implementing integrated ES and child protection programs. A first

step in addressing these gaps will require some additional research to improve our understanding of the causal links between household economic status and family separation outcomes.

One opportunity to advance this agenda is to do a comparative test of similar tools against one another to see how they score the same set of households to better understand their validity. For example, quantitative tools that generate household level economic vulnerability categories, such as *Yekokeb Berhan's* Economic Vulnerability Index, DOVCU's FSVI, and *Higa Ubeho's* HRI, could be tested in the same households. An existing, validated tool expected to vary in accordance with these categories, such as the Grameen Foundation's Progress out of Poverty Index (PPI), could be included. If tools do not vary with the PPI, and do not vary with each other, it will demonstrate that they are not measuring the same concept of economic vulnerability. Similar processes can be undertaken with tools that assess overall vulnerability to separation, which can be compared against each other as well as an existing validated tool, such as the Comprehensive Child Welfare surveys used by Sabin et al. (2011) when testing the validity of the CSI. Additionally, sensitivity analysis can be used to test the effects of different indicator weights on household categorization as part of a validation process.

Another opportunity is to conduct field research to better understand key asset thresholds where the effect of poverty on family separation reaches a tipping point. A major component of vulnerability that was almost universally absent from the tools reviewed was an assessment of shocks. We need to understand which shocks can send a household over the edge, as organizations like Retrak have attempted to do in retrospective analysis of separated children, and this should be incorporated into vulnerability analysis.

Future research should also account for the role of gender in contributing to vulnerability, at the child, household, and intra-household levels. Although likely addressed in other case management tools used by the programs who use them, gender was notably absent from the vulnerability assessment tools in this review. This is an important shortcoming, because gender can have major effects on a child's likelihood of separation as well as household economic vulnerability dynamics.

Finally, many assessments had few indicators related to protective factors or resilience. We should seek to understand which practices and assets make households resilient to separation in the long-run, which can be informed by learning from households that demonstrate common risk factors for separation but manage to avoid it. Future programming should continue to leverage partnerships between implementers specializing in child protection and those specializing in ES, such as that between AVSI/SCORE and Retrak. There is clear demand for standardized guidance on vulnerability assessment tool development and validation.

APPENDIX 1. SUMMARY OF TOOLS, CATEGORY CUT-OFFS, AND ES TARGETING APPROACHES

Program/ Approach	Countries	Organization(s)	Focus	Tools	Cut-Off Criteria for Participation	Criteria for Matching Households to ES Interventions
Deinstitutionalization of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Uganda (DOVCU)	Uganda	Child Fund	Deinstitutionalization / reintegration of children in family care and prevention of family-child separation	Child Status Index (CSI), Family Status Vulnerability Index (FSVI), participatory methods	FSVI Risk Analysis: high and medium risk scores	FSVI Destitution Analysis: pathway approach
<i>Yekokeb Berhan</i>	Ethiopia	Child Fund, Pact, FHI 360	Reducing vulnerability of OVC	Adapted CSI/economic vulnerability index	At least 4 answers with a score of one “dot” and 8 answers with a score of two “dots.” Specific CSI indicators used to screen for specific interventions	Economic vulnerability index: pathway approach
Retrak model	Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, DRC, Kenya, Ethiopia, Malawi	Retrak	Reintegration of street-connected children in family care and prevention of family-child separation	Child Status Index (CSI), family assessment tools	Score of 2 or 1 on any domain of Caregiver Well-being Assessment or Child Well-being Assessment	Social worker assessment: Families who are not able to support the child enrolled in income-generating activity

ACTIVE Family Support model	Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Sudan, Ukraine	Hope and Homes for Children (HHC)	Deinstitutionalization/ reintegration of children in family care and prevention of separation	Family Risk and Protective Factors Assessment	Street children identified via street outreach. Local assessment criteria used to determine readiness for reintegration.	Household economy portion of Risk and Protective Factors assessment tool
<i>Higa Ubeho</i>	Rwanda	Global Communities (GC)	Reducing vulnerability of households with PLHIV and OVC	<i>Ubedehe</i> , Household Resilience Index	HRI score of "Destitute" or "Struggling"	All participants enrolled in same ES activities
SCORE	Uganda	AVSI Foundation	Reducing household vulnerability	Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT), Needs Assessment Tool (NAT)	VAT score of "Destitute" or "Struggling"	Determined according to needs assessment process (NAT)
Oasis Keeping Families Together	Guatemala	Kids Alive	Reintegration of victims of abuse	Basic needs assessment tools	Girls brought to program via court order. Readiness for reintegration determined by score of 70% on assessment tools for child and family.	Standard ES activity (microenterprise/ending) offered to all caregivers

APPENDIX 2. SUMMARY OF TOOLS BY PURPOSE AND NOTES ON VALIDITY ISSUES

Tool	Organization(s)	Purpose	Notes on Validity
Child Status Index	ChildFund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention and reintegration: Targeting services to kids already identified as struggling, destitute, at risk, or currently reintegrating Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aggregates score to determine vulnerability level: against developer recommendations
	Retrak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring Reintegration: Readiness Prevention: Assessing risk Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not aggregate score (except number of “deprivations”): aligns with developer recommendations
	<i>Yekokeb Berhan</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ES: Used to target interventions Monitoring Impact assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modified original tool: used at family level and child level, added indicators Aggregates score to determine vulnerability level: against developer recommendations
Family Status Vulnerability Index (FSVI)	ChildFund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention: Targeting for households already pre-selected via participatory methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on Uganda OVC Vulnerability Index: questions re. validity of indicators for urban areas, ability to capture “critically vulnerable” Triangulation with PRA and needs assessment enhances validity
Participatory Methods	ChildFund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention: Used to identify high and medium risk households 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standardized PRA method enhances comparability across sites Provides localized understanding of risk
	Retrak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention: Used to identify define risks for separation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides localized understanding of risk

	SCORE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ES: Initial vulnerability mapping exercise used as pre-screening for targeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used maps done by earlier project where possible, or created new ones: may or may not be current Provides localized understanding of risk
Household Resilience Index (HRI) and Ubudehe	<i>Higa Ubeho</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ES: Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rigid indicators, very few indicators, some difficult questions Adheres directly to PEPFAR ES pathway
Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT)	SCORE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ES: Target households 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overlap with Uganda VI tool; potentially related validity questions
Needs Assessment Tool (NAT)	SCORE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ES: Target interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subjective social work evaluation Case management approach appreciates nuances of household situations
Assessment Tools for Case Management	Hope and Homes for Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention: Target households Reintegration and ES: Target interventions Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened by inclusion of both risk and protective factors
Basic Needs Assessments	Kids Alive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reintegration: Readiness determined by 70% of criteria filled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several questions focused on religious status rather unrelated to child well-being Arbitrary cut-off for reintegration
Statistical profiling of street children and children in institutions	Retrak Hope and Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention: Identify risk factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constrained by existing data collected by institutions

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