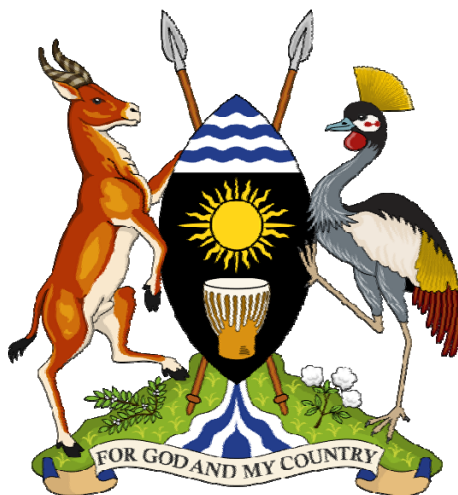# TECHNICAL ADVISORY PAPER

TOWARDS THE NATIONAL CHILDREN POLICY IN UGANDA

Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development

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Contents

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
CRC	Convention of the Rights of the Child
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EAC	East African Community
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development
MIS	Management Information System
NIECD	National Integrated Early Childhood Development
NSP	National Strategic Plan
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PMTCT	Prevention of Mother to Child Transition
PPP	Public Private Partnership
QEI	Quality Enhancement Initiative
RMNCH	Malaria Reduction Strategic Plan
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDIP	Social Development Sector Strategic Investment Plan
UNAP	Uganda Nutrition Action Plan
UNCRC	United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child
UNEPI	United Nations Expanded Programme for Immunization
UNGEI),	Nations Girls Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPDF	Uganda Peoples Defense Forces
UPE	Universal Primary Education
VAC	Violence Against Children

INTRODUCTION

This technical advisory paper is prepared for the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to guide the scope of the National Children Policy expected to replace the existing National Policy on Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Uganda which has been in existence for past 12 years . In 2004, the Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Gender labour and Social Development developed the OVC policy whose goal is ensuring full development and realization of the rights of Orphans and other Vulnerable Children. The policy has two attendant National Strategic Programme Plan of Intervention for OVC i.e. 2004/2009 and 2011/2016 to support its implementation. While OVC targeted interventions were on going in line with the policy and attendant action plan, by 2010 a situation analysis on child vulnerability indicated that nearly 96% of Uganda's children were vulnerable, of which 43% were moderately vulnerable and 8% critically vulnerable (Kalibala and Lyne 2010). This revelation requires for a complete review of the OVC policy to improve the quality of lives of children in a comprehensive manner. There are changing realities at the national, regional and global levels focusing on addressing the root causes of children's vulnerabilities, overall child well -being and violence against children that is not only specific to OVC but affects all children throughout out their life cycle. These and other emerging trends necessitate a complete review of the existing OVC policy to respond and improve the quality of life of the children in a comprehensive manner. Furthermore Uganda has several national policy frameworks that contribute and impact on the well being of children but they are fragmented and not adequately coordinated country wide and cannot adequately improve the quality of lives of the children. All these legal frameworks, policies and their attendant action plans will therefore require an overarching children policy to ensure a coordinated multispectral response to child well-being and improved quality of life.

This technical paper proposes key features and components of a comprehensive child Policy beyond the orphaned and vulnerable, highlighting the justification and need for coordinated processes in view of the existing national OVC policy at all levels. It further proposes critical parameters that need to be instituted to guarantee effective delivery of a comprehensive national policy on children. The paper provides comprehensive understanding, knowledge and evidence that is critical in informing policy and practice so as to promote effective and sustained action and child well being. This paper has been developed with the understanding that the pathway to "evidence-informed" policy and practice involves three active stages of progression, influenced by the policy context. The three stages are (1) sourcing the evidence, (2) using the evidence, and (3) implementing the evidence. A comprehensive desk review of key documents that aim at improving the lives of children in Uganda was conducted to explore the policy environment, understand key gaps and emerging issues and provide information and recommendations on the appropriate policy components and features for an overarching children policy. The process of developing this technical advisory paper involved input by

stakeholders at a national dialogue held on 9th November 2016 in Kampala as a platform to reflect and work towards a comprehensive national children policy.

This paper is divided into three parts. Part I provides a policy context based on the international and national policy and legal frameworks aimed at improving the lives of children. Part II analyses and presents the key emerging issues, gaps and opportunities for programming and policy aimed at improving the well- being of children. Part III suggests the key components and features of a comprehensive children policy to guide interventions and programmes for children in the sustainable development agenda in Uganda.

PART I : POLICY CONTEXT

Situation Analysis of Children in Uganda. Policy analysis and practice is informed by evidence that is usually derived from research. Recent studies indicate that Uganda is among the leading countries worldwide with a population of more than 56% below 18 years of age and over 78% under the age of 35 years. According to the situation analysis of children in Uganda report , it is estimated that 11% of Uganda's children are orphans and that more than half of all children are either moderately or critically vulnerable. These children are most likely to die before the age of five, suffer from malnutrition, exploitation, abuse and neglect, have inadequate access to education, and be more exposed to commercial exploitation (MoGLSD and UNICEF, 2015). According to the situation Analysis of Children in Uganda (2015), child survival has improved but under nutrition persists, stunting is at 33% and 167,000 children under five still die every year. With respect to education and other development rights, primary school enrolment is high but quality remains poor and dropout rates are high in both primary and secondary schools. Children continue to experience high levels of violence at home, schools and on the streets. Only two thirds of children are registered at birth and participation of children in decisions that affect them is restrained. Children aged 0-8 years are seen to be especially vulnerable and face a range of regional, income and gender- related inequalities. Below is a summary of the situation of Uganda's children through a rights based lens:

Box 1: Summary of the situation of Uganda's children through a rights based lens

The Right to Health	The Right to Education
- Uganda ranks among the top 10 countries in the world for high maternal, new born and child mortality rates 43% of births do not take place in a health facility - Child mortality rates (deaths per 1,000 live births) stands at 13 deaths on first day, 20 deaths in first week, 27 deaths in first 28 days, 56 deaths in first year, and 90 deaths in first 5 years. - Malaria, diarrhea and infections like HIV account for more than 70% of under-five deaths - Under nutrition accounts for 40% of under 5 deaths 37% of mothers do not exclusively breastfeed in the first 6 months 66% of all new HIV infections are contracted by adolescent girls	- Only 10% of children aged 3-5 enroll for pre-primary education 33% of children who start primary school drop out before completing ¾ of children who started primary school never make it to secondary school - Only 40% of students are literate at the end of primary school - Only 10% of children with disabilities access specialized schools (and only 5% of children with disabilities in public schools are getting specialized education)

▪ 30% of children do not have access to safe water (with 60% of children living more than 30 minute trip from the nearest water source). There is only 1 latrine for every 70 students (far above national standard of 1:40) **The Right to Protection** ▪ Nearly 40% of children ▪ have experienced physical violence ▪ 58% of 15-19 year old women have experienced physical or sexual violence ▪ 11% of children are orphans ▪ 40% of under-five children are not registered at birth (3 million children) ▪ 2.5 million children live with a disability ▪ 1 in 4 teenage girls are pregnant ▪ Nearly 50% of 20-49 year old women were married by the age of 18 ▪ Of the 1.2 million pregnancies recorded in Uganda annually, 25% of these were teenage pregnancies. ▪ Engaging in early sex, early marriages as well as teenage pregnancies are the current pressing blockages to girls' concentration, performance and completion of different levels of education (GoU- Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013).	**The Right to Participation** ▪ Children are not given a voice to participate on decisions that affect them or contribute to the country's development and future prosperity ▪ Attitudes within Uganda society are not conducive to children and young people expressing their views

Uganda has several international and national policy frameworks and their attendant action plans are in place relating to children's rights and aimed at to improving their quality of life.

International Frameworks

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Uganda is signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) periodically reports progress on the implementation of child rights to the United Nations. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the principal children's rights instrument at the international level, and acts as a common standard on child rights. This Convention provides for a range of children's rights and the corresponding state obligations for their realization. The articles of the convention may be grouped into 4 categories of rights and a set of guiding principles.The specific rights as contained in UN CRC articles are:

Article 2– All children have a right to be protected from all forms of discrimination and unfair treatment no matter the child's culture, family status, religion, sex or disability

Article 6 – All children have the right to life

Article 7 & 8 - All children have a right to a legally registered name and nationality

Article 9 & 18 - Children have the right to live with their parents and families.

Article 12 – Children have the right to participate when adults are taking decisions concerning them. Decisions made by those who have authority over the child must always take into account the best interest of the child when the child may be affected by the decision.

Article 13 -Children have the right get and share information and express their beliefs and thoughts as long as the information is not damaging to themselves or to others

Article 16 - Children have a right to privacy

Article 17 - Children have a right to educative and reliable information from the mass media

Article 27 - Children have a right to good quality healthcare, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment

Article 28 - All children have a right to primary education

Article 30 - Children have a right to learn and use the language and customs of their families

Article 31 - All children have a right to relax and play

The responsibilities of States Parties to the CRC include adoption of laws and policies that domesticate the standards of the CRC in national law which Uganda successfully domesticated through the Children's Act Cap 59. The CRC is supplemented by three optional protocols that are Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2001), Optional Protocol on Child Sale, Prostitution and Pornography (2001), and the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure (2011). So far Uganda has ratified the first two optional protocols.

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is the main children's rights treaty in the African region. The Charter contextualizes the rights in the CRC to the African continent. Further, the charter recognizes and addresses African specific issues affecting children and acknowledges African values such as the promotion of positive culture and the responsibilities of the child. The first section of the charter spells out various rights and duties of different child actors. It recognises that children in Africa are affected by many different types of abuse such as economic and sexual exploitations, child labour, gender discrimination and armed conflict amongst others. It recognises the child's unique and privileged placed in the African society and that African children need protection and special care. It also acknowledges that children are entitled to enjoyment of freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, thought, religion and conscience.

It aims to protect the private life of the child and safe guard the child against all forms of economic exploitation and against work that is hazardous, interferes with the child's education or compromises his or her health or physical, social/mental, spiritual and moral development. It calls for protection against abuse and bad treatment, negative social and cultural practices, all forms of exploitation or sexual abuse including commercial sexual exploitation and illegal drug abuse. It aims at preventing the sale and trafficking of children, kidnapping and begging of children.

Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 17 in number were launched in September 2015 to replace the Millennium Development Goals. Below is an outline of sustainable Development Goals aimed at addressing different forms of violence including violence against children:

4. 1 Provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

4.7 Ensure that all learners acquire knowledge for promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking, sexual and other types of exploitation.

5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation

8.7 Elimination of the worst forms of child labour including slavery, human trafficking, recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

Goal 16 has targets which are explicit to prevention and responding to violence against children including:

16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children It is imperative that the overarching children policy strategic priorities are aligned to the SDGs and being monitored by relevant government ministries to achieve child well - being.

16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime

16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration

16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

It is Imperative that the overarching children policy strategic priorities are aligned to the SDGs and are being monitored by relevant government ministries to achieve child well - being outcomes. The SDG Goal 16.2 is particularly critical for Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social

Development to provide the required leadership at country level following Uganda's recent admittance (2016) among the pathfinder countries on ending Violence Against Children.

The East Africa Child Policy. The East Africa Community (EAC) child Policy 2016 was developed to be responsive to emerging child related issues of regional stature. The policy among others is intended to provide guidance to EAC partner states (Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi) on focused implementation of the core principles of the UNCRC and ACRWC as well as enable the impact of the EAC policy on children to be assessed systematically, at sub-regional level, improve coordination and encourage greater exchange of good practice between EAC partner states, promote investment of more resources in support for child rights observance, improve data-collection and analysis of the impact of economic and social change on children within the EAC, as well as clarify and strengthen the role of CSOs within the "civil dialogue" at sub regional level and ensure that the voices of children are heard in policy-making processes.

The EAC child policy focuses on ten areas considered a priority for child wellbeing in the region namely: a regional approach to ratification, domestication and implementation of international instruments, harmonization of national laws and policies to the African Charter and UNCRC and other key international child rights instruments, right to citizenship and identity, addressing cross border child rights violations, strengthening of national child protection systems and community mechanisms within the EAC region, an integrated approach to providing quality education, health and social protection to children, child protection in conflict and emergency situations, resourcing of child welfare services and institutions, regional mechanism for monitoring, evaluation and reporting of child rights and child participation. The Overarching children policy ought to be aligned and as well be responsive to emerging child related issues in the East Africa region.

Analysis of existing National legal framework and policies

Uganda has several national policy frameworks that contribute and impact on the well being of children that include:

- The National Health Policy
- The National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons 2004
- Uganda Gender Policy
- National Child Labor Policy
- National Orphans and other Vulnerable children Policy
- Nutrition Policy
- Education Policy

- National Youth Policy

- Uganda National Land Policy

- National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy

- Youth Livelihood Policy

- National Adolescent Health Policy

- National Policy on Young People living with HIV/AIDs

- Reproductive Health Policy

- PMTCT Policy

Besides that policy frame works, there are national legal frameworks that in part impact or regulate the fulfillment of the rights of children. They comprises of the following legal instruments.

- Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995)
- Children's Act (Cap 59)
- Articles of Penal Code
- Education Act 2006
- Uganda Prisons Act
- Evidence Act
- The local government Act 1997
- The Anti- Trafficking in Persons Act 2010
- The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda
- The Domestic Violence Act (2010)
- The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons (2010) Sec 6
- Employment Act (2006) Sec 32
- The Prohibition of the FGM Act 2010
- The Penal code Act cap 120
- The Birth and Death registration Act cap 301
- The Prisons Act
- The UPDF Act
- The Succession Act cap 162

Despite the fairly impressive legal and policy framework, Uganda faces a critical challenge in implementing these various laws and policies to improve the quality of lives of children because they are fragmented and not adequately coordinated country wide. It is important to mention that there are also several attendant action plans and initiatives in different sectors that support the implementation and operationalization of these policies. All legal frameworks, policies and their attendant action plans will therefore require an overarching children policy to ensure a coordinated multispectral response to child well- being.

The Children Act. The Children Act Cap 59 provides an overarching legal framework for child care and protection and draws largely from the United Nations Convention on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).The Children (amendment Act) 2016 provided for new legislative provisions that enhance care and protection of children. These include recognition and respect of full rights of children, protection of children from harmful traditional practices notably early marriage and female genital mutilation and cutting, protects children from harmful employment including hazardous work and worst forms of child labour, protects children from violence and provides a right to access child protection services, offers clarity on guardianship of children, prohibits death sentence for a person below 18 years and prohibits corporal punishment in schools.

National OVC Policy. The goal of the national OVC Policy 2004 is stated as full development and realization of rights of orphans and other vulnerable children. The overarching OVC policy priorities include: socio-economic security , food and nutrition security, education, psycho-social support, Health and Child Protection. The attendant plan to the policy (the National strategic programme plan of interventions – NSPPI I&II) were purposed to strengthen the response systems for vulnerable children towards more equitable and sustainable services and outcomes. Vulnerability was defined as a situation where children and their caregivers are defenseless when exposed to risks and shocks. The following categories of children were particularly targeted orphans (with HIV and AIDs identified a major cause of orphan hood), children living on the streets, children under exploitative labour, children that suffer sexual abuse and other forms of exploitation, children affected by armed conflict and children affected by preventable diseases notably malaria and Tuberculosis.

While OVC targeted interventions were on going in line with the policy and attendant action plan, by 2010 a situation analysis on child vulnerability indicated that nearly 96% of Uganda's children were vulnerable, of which 43% were moderately vulnerable and 8% critically vulnerable (Kalibala and Lyne 2010) . The situation analysis influenced the design of the second OVC Plan (NSPPI II 2011/12-2015/16) that resulted into seven OVC core programme Intervention areas developed along a rights based approach. The Core Programme areas are economic strengthening, food and nutrition security, heath, water, sanitation and shelter, education, psycho-social support and basic care, child protection and legal support, Policy and institutional mechanisms.

Although good progress has been made in improving the well being of children in Uganda, the majority of children especially OVC are still deprived of their rights due to extreme poverty, discrimination, exclusion, exploitative relationships and disasters. The critical policy implication of this analysis is that comprehensive interventions that address the root causes of vulnerability, ensure overall child well being with a right -based approach, child protection systems strengthening with a focus on the life cycle of a child will be adopted through an

overarching children policy that includes all children beyond OVC since the majority (96%) of children in Uganda are vulnerable.

The National Child Labour Policy. The National Child Labour Policy 2006 was also developed to address the vulnerability of children that predisposed them to hazardous work at a tender age. The policy has since been supported by 3 attendant action plans namely - The national action plan on the elimination of the worst forms of child Labour 2012-2016, The National Action plan to address child labour 2010-2015 and the National Action plan on child sexual abuse and exploitation 2010-2015. Despite the existence of this policy since 2016, according to the 2015 Situation Analysis of children in Uganda, child labour which include its most hazardous forms is on the rise in Uganda. Half of 5-17 years olds are working, a quarter of them in hazardous conditions. Children still make up a majority of workers in the informal sector and in rural areas 93% of children are engaged in agriculture and fishing. In terms of extent to which policy goal and objectives were achieved, ILO best practices report 2012 indicates progress on multi sectoral and integration approach notably establishing 'Child Labour Free Zones' and the inclusion of child labour in district Action Plans. However this took a pilot approach in 3 districts (Mbale, Wakiso and Masaka). Overall policy implementation taking a targeted approach to only 3 districts could effectively address magnitude of child labour and show contribution to education outcomes. Situation of children 2015 report statistics on child labour and education confirms this gap.

PART II EMERGING ISSUES AND GAPS

This table summarizes the analysis and presents the key emerging issues, gaps and opportunities for programming and policy aimed at improving the lives of children based on a review of the National legal and policy context on children.

Table 1. Emerging issues

What has worked	- Recognized key drivers of vulnerability as Household food insecurity, poor child care practices, armed conflict, HIV and AIDS and poverty and mapped OVCs and their households - Rights based approach used to define a minimum package of services for OVC's as provision of services being a combination of at least 3 Core Program Areas but with Psycho social support as an integral part. - Mapping of all OVC service providers has improved reporting , referral and follow-up of child protection cases - Establishment of the toll free Child helpline for reporting and responding to child abuse cases. - OVC Management Information System (MIS) to generate and disseminate data on children, including on refugee children to support learning for monitoring and evaluating the OVC policy

	• Capacity enhancement for para-social workers as an effective mechanism for identification, reporting, responding and referral of OVC. • Operationalized the harmonized minimum ages of marriage, sexual consent, in line with the definition of the Child as provided by the UNCRC and the ACRWC, age for criminal responsibility, conscription into armed forces and employment as provided across policies and legislations. • **Existence a of** MoUs and informal partnerships between government and civil society to strengthen coordination to deliver and monitor services and standards. • **Existence of coordination structures and mechanisms** mostly at the national and sub-county levels for monitoring of services and are also available in the context of emergencies which can identify children, including children with disabilities. • **Existence of programmes and services** for OVC children are increasingly available at community level and in humanitarian settings. There is a wide range of actors involved (government, civil society, private sector, faith based organizations). • Establishment of AfriChild Research Centre at Makerere as a key research institute also focused on data generation and dissemination on children. • Availability of social workers within civil society, supplementing and complementing the probation & social welfare officers, including para-social workers at district level • Increased recognition of the importance of **family-based care** over residential care by a range of actors, including by faith based organizations.
Issues and Gaps	• While so many pieces of legislation, policies and action plans exist to address different issues affecting children, these lack clear points of convergence in service delivery and aggregation of impact on children reached by programmes under the various sector based policy frameworks and attendant action plans. • There are insufficient community mechanisms that address child protection issues even for the policy targeted orphans and vulnerable. The OVC policy, other policies and programmes barely meet the needs of many vulnerable children in need of protection as evidenced in the findings of the Uganda 2015 Situation analysis of children report. • There is un clear policy provision on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) for children affected by emergencies and emerging security concerns that target children notably terrorism and extremism. • While investment in birth registration systems has been made, however, generally instituted systems are not responsive to the needs of marginalized and hard to reach communities (there are issues of access to services and affordability as well as inconsistent approaches to popularizing the importance of birth registration in the form of Information, Education and Communication). • While the National OVC Management Information system was established, it only

	captures services extended to OVCs. There is no national score card to monitor the implementation of Child Rights compliance. Similarly there is no evidence of a comprehensive national monitoring and evaluation framework on children rights in totality.
	• Addressing social norms and regressive culture particularly for adolescent girls and engaging at community level across the continuum of care is a crucial area of concern
	• Harmful traditional and religious practices e.g. child sacrifice and child marriage are areas not adequately addressed
	• Weak and un coordinate child protection system leave children unprotected and without access to basic service.
	• Inadequate capacilies and capabilities for children; human finance and infrastructure across all ministries both at the national and sub- national levels.
	• Limited child focused accountability mechanisms that ensures that children's rights and services are being secured at all levels.
	• Limited finance tracking to aggregate investment in children by different sectors including civil society organizations at all levels.
	• Weak coordination of implementation and monitoring, because: o Lack of harmonization between laws and policies o Unclear roles and responsibilities and reporting structures (across sectors, and across administrative levels
	• Limited prioritization of OVC children's issues related to lack of opportunities for children's participation and inclusion in decision making processes.
	• Minimal access & poor quality of services, particularly in rural areas and war affected areas (need for services that can function in humanitarian settings). This has implications on sustainability of outcomes on children
	• Weak linkages between formal and informal child protection structures and mechanisms
Opportunities	• The SDGs with 4 goals having a provision on addressing violence present a great opportunity for additional resourcing and partnerships.
	• The formation of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children in line with SDGs has great potential to support child rights realization at national levels. The Africa Child Policy Forum has already initiated consultations on the formation of the Africa Partnership to End Violence Against children to facilitate generation of African Perspectives on the Global VAC agenda. Uganda is among the few countries already admitted into the Path finder Countries on ending Violence against Children.
	• The East African Community child policy priority areas include some of the identified gaps in the operationalization of the national OVC policy. Therefore

	Uganda stands to benefit from a regional approach to addressing some of the gaps if its policy on children can be broadened to take a holistic view of a child rather than target a section of children. • The Children (Amendment Act) 2016 with 7 new clauses presents an opportunity for expanding investment towards the realization of children's rights across different sectors notably health, social welfare, education and justice. • The National Development Plan II has a special focus on human capital Development through investing in children rights along the continuum of the child's lifecycle. • The new policy frameworks in Social Development Sector notably the Social protection policy and its attendant action plan (particularly the plan for the pillar of social care and support) • The Integrated Early Child hood Development Policy and its attendant Action plan present some unique aspects on child care and protection that should feature prominently in the overarching children policy. • Proactive and responsive child welfare department at the MGLSD

PART III: KEY POLICY COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND PRINCIPLES

Addressing the root causes of vulnerability. Under the Uganda policy framework for Orphans and Vulnerable Children, vulnerability is defined as a state of being or likelihoodness to be in a risky situation, where a person (in this case below 18 years), is likely to suffer significant physical, emotional or mental harm that may result in their human rights not being fulfilled. It is a a situation where children and their caregivers are defenseless when exposed to risks and shocks. In order for ensure that children achieve their full potential of well being, it is imperative that any effective children policy broadly addresses those vulnerability factors than only focusing on strategies that address a group of children who are already orphans or vulnerable . There are four broad categories of vulnerability factors commonly experienced by children and therefore need to be addressed. Abusive or exploitative relationships which are characterized by violence or use of a child to benefit others sexually or commercially, or which consistently harm the child through intentional acts or negligence. Extreme deprivation particularly poverty or deprivation by parents or other care givers is fundamental adverse effects. Serious discrimination and social exclusion for example severe social stigma which prevents children from accessing services or opportunities essential to their protection or development and finally negative impact from a catastrophe or disaster where certain children or groups of children are more likely to be impacted negatively by catastrophes or disasters, and less likely to be able to recover

The more factors that a child experiences, or the longer that a child experiences any factor, the more vulnerable they become until he or she is among the most vulnerable in a given area.

Therefore it means that by tackling the root causes of vulnerability and risk factors, their resilience will be enhanced and there will therefore be a reduction on the burden of vulnerable children and reduced orphan hood. The logic here is inclusive, to challenge the notion of addressing the effects of vulnerability which promote   person centered approaches than addressing the root causes of vulnerability and risks that all children are faced with. We however at the same time need to understand, be intentional and work towards ensuring equity for the most vulnerable children and their families through participation and empowerment to improve their quality of life and well - being.
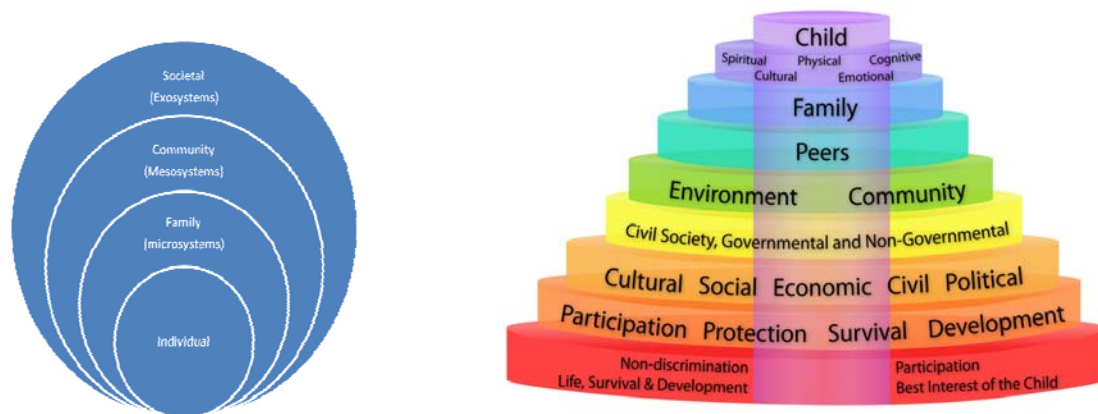
Systems approach . A systems approach addresses child protection more holistically, brings greater focus on prevention, and strengthens the critical roles and assets of the key factors responsible for child protection. As a key component of a children policy, a systems approach helps to strengthen the protective environment around children, as well as the children themselves. The formal and non formal system can achieve its outcomes through the effective functioning of a set of key elements and structures that include collaboration/ coordination, capacities, service delivery for children, laws and policies, accountability, circle of care and child resilience. Effective approaches to address root causes affecting child well-being require mature and sustained cooperation and collaboration between all levels of partners and stakeholders

Standards and accountability mechanisms. Accountability ensures that the key actors responds effectively to children's concerns and functions according to the CRC, relevant policies, laws and regulatory frameworks in the best interest of the child. An effective children policy should clearly state the accountability mechanisms by stating what rights or services are, who deserves them and what actors are responsible for ensuring that these rights and services are being secured . Besides the purpose of the child standards is to promote consistently high quality, responsive service delivery to children and families receiving services from formal and non formal service providers across the country. High quality and responsive children's services are focused on producing positive outcomes   to ensure well-being, while simultaneously demonstrating accountability for decisions made and services provided in keeping with the expected level of performance set by the government Ministry frameworks. Accountability and ensuring child standards in service delivery should be the responsibility of the duty bearers across all sectors and levels. On the other hand the Children policy should empower citizens through Social accountability in where ordinary citizens and civil society organizations can participate directly or indirectly to stimulate demand to meet their obligation to delivery of quality services.

Adopting an ecological understanding of child well- being: A child's well-being depends on his or her relationships with others and the social, political, spiritual, physical and environmental contexts that they live in. This is called the ecology of the child or an ecological model. The approach helps us to consider the different relationships, institutions, systems and

structures that create a positive environment where a child can develop to his or her fullest potential. The social ecological perspective of a child that examines the developing individual (indo), the environmental context, and the interaction between the person and the environment. The environment may include most important relations e. g. parents and siblings (microsystem), direct community influence e.g. school, church (mesosystems), broader indirect social system settings e.g. institutions (exosystems), and/or societal norms, culture and ideology (macrosystems). The model shows us the different levels and types of influence on a child's development, from the closest (e.g. families and peers) to the farthest (e.g. political and cultural systems and structures). In each context, children are unique and affected in different ways. Children's nature, where they live, and who they live with affects how they deal with the risk factors in their lives. This means that the children policy should as such make provision for interventions based on this ecological model.

Figure 1: An ecological model by Bronfrennbrenner (1970)

Promoting child well being. Child well being represent the whole child's physical health, development, and safety psychological and emotional development, social development and behavior, cognitive development and educational achievement. Child well - being is also indeed child rights based because it recognizes and puts the rights of a child at the centre of the development process. Child well being recognizes the development of a child throughout their life cycle from early child hood to adolescent development and needs to be assessed at all ages based on particular indicators. An overarching children policy should therefore focus on child well being outcomes that include; education, health, behavior, emotional and spiritual well-being as well as the broad categories of rights that include survival, development, protection and participation rights. Complete and accurate measures of Child well being are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends, monitor progress and build a knowledge base to inform programming

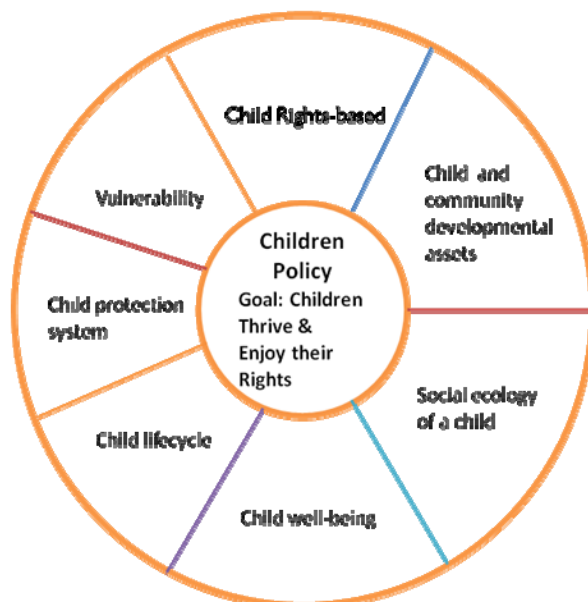**Enhance child and community developmental assets**

A children policy should recognize and builds on existing resources and assets within communities, families and children that enable children to thrive. 'Assets' are positive experiences, attitudes, relationships, values, skills, and qualities found in children, peers, families, schools, and communities. Building and strengthening existing assets as well as addressing gaps

helps to sustain community efforts towards the well-being of their children. The more assets children have both as internal skills and competencies, and external within their families and communities, the better they are able to thrive (Search Institute USA).

Anchored on a rights-based approach. A rights- based approach is poised on the notion that the process of human development is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. An effective children policy should be aligned and function according to the Convention of the Rights of the Child while promoting the best interest of the child. A rights-based approach aims at strengthening the capacity of duty bearers and empower the rights holders. The ultimate outcome is the fulfillment and enjoyment of the a child's survival, development, protection and participation rights. The Children policy may be structured around these CRC broad categories of rights. Governments are therefore held accountable for their actions or inaction for the provision of these child rights.

Define the role of family and community. The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the significance of relationships to children's lives in reference to parents, guardians and families. The family is seen as mediating the states relationship to the child and should therefore be supported to fulfill its responsibilities and to ensure the well being of the child. The institution of the family has the primary responsibility of nurturing the development of the child through provision of the children's needs and socialization in order to fulfill their rights. The children's policy should therefore recognize the implicit role of the family in child development and suggest strategies to strengthen the capacity of families and parents to foster quality care and support to the children. Recognizing how societal practice is based on kinship and community safety nets, the role of empowering entire communities and kinship relationships will be important in fostering care and support for the children.

Figure 2. Child policy Key components summary

Child Life cycle. A Child-focused policy should takes into account that children develop rapidly and dynamically through different life cycle phases. With each phase, from prenatal to five years, six to 11 years, and 12 to 18 years, we recognise that there are specific survival, growth and development issues that should be prioritised. Each child progresses through these life phases at his or her own pace, shaped by genetic and environmental context. Life stage interventions that link health, nutrition, education and protection outcomes with economic development and advocacy issues significantly improve children's spiritual, cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. A life cycle perspective also gives attention to the special needs of girls and boys at each stage of development (WV child well being guide).

Theory of change. The Children policy should define the **theory of change** . The theory of change ought to define the conditions that influence the desired outcome and the critical assumptions.
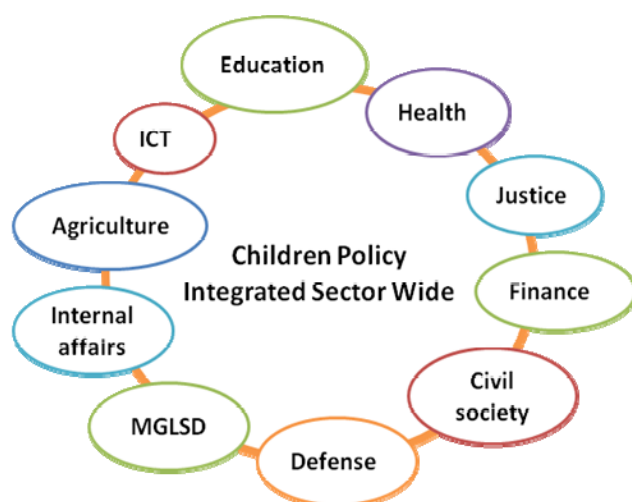
Social investment case The policy should make a social investment case on how much finances can be saved by investing in children through resilience and production. The comprehensive policy should therefore speak to professionals outside the social development sector like to economists and planners. This will align the policy to the a new global trend on social bond impact financing and socio- capital development.

Institutional arrangements
The implementation arrangements for an overarching children policy will require institutional mechanisms with ability to provide the required technical leadership while adapting multi sectoral approach. The National Children's Authority introduced in the Children (amendment) Act 2016 is well positioned to coordinate implementation of the overarching children policy because among its functions is to advice government on the formulation of a child protection policy and child rights programmes; as well as supervise all children services in the country in line with government ministries and authorities.

a) Integration through Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPS). Children do not live their lives in "sectors" and therefore the well being of children will depend critically on how dynamics within the different sectors act on one another. This calls for a preference for a policy logic of integration through Sector Wide Approaches (White, 2002). Building on the understanding that child well-being is holistic and interconnected, effective programming approaches maximize the potential for impacting multiple well-being outcomes in each sectors. The child therefore becomes the point of integration. A framework that describes how this integration happens should be agreed upon based on a participatory approach.

Figure 3: Example of an integrated multispectral - interconnected approach

It is further suggested that the following sector plans and initiatives focusing on children be anchored on an overarching children policy for an effective multi-sectoral collaboration and leverage : Uganda Nutrition Action plan**,** Action plan for water and sanitation**,** Uganda National Expanded Programme on Immunization (UNEPI)**,** Malaria reduction strategic plan 2014-20**,** Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (RMNCH) Sharpened plan, Quality Enhancement Initiative (QEI) **,** United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), National Strategic Plan(NSP) for HIV and AIDS, Uganda Nutrition Action Plan (UNAP), National Policy for Disaster Preparedness and Management, Universal Primary Education (UPE), Education Sector Strategic Plan, National Framework for Alternative Care (2014) and National Action Plan on Integrated Early Child hood Development among others.

b) Cooperation, coordination and collaboration mechanism. For a children policy to be effective, all child focused sectors must work in a holistic and coordinated manner to ensure the well- being in the country. Child responses must not only be multi-level and multi-dimensional but is also multi-sectoral. This is why collaboration and coordination between both the formal and non formal actors and structures is critical in ensuring the proper implementation of the policy and to enable the state to fulfill the rights of children.

c) Local and the national linkages. Sub national and community level actors, mechanisms and structures play a significant frontline role in ensuring the well being children. The children's policy should put in place an institutional framework that articulates how the community level structures link with the national structures . The children's policy should leverage and build on the already existing structures at the community level to ensure that children's interventions are adequately coordinated and integrated in all these structures and mechanisms.

d) Capacities. Capacities include providing and performing the child related services, including human skills and competencies, financial resources and adequate infrastructure. Significant investment in child related capacities at both the national and sub national levels is

required for the proper implementation of the children policy. Emphasis should be put on how to develop the social welfare workforce both at the national and community levels for the enhancement and creation of responsiveness to fulfill and delivery of quality services to children. In addition, capacities development on safeguarding children from harm by human resource of social service institutions to ensure no child suffers harm in the course of seeking services.

e) Public and private financing for children. The Public – Private financing for children is informed by the existing untapped potential in the private sector to invest more in children wellbeing. Under the national planning frameworks, the Human Capital Development is a priority development area for Uganda's national development, of which a significant proportion is targeted at youths and children. The NDPII places significant focus on investment in children's survival, development and protection. The NDPII conceptualizes human capital development according to 6 life cycles namely; pregnancy to birth, 0 - 5 years of age, 6 – 12 years of age, 13 – 17 years of age, 18 -24 years of age, and 25 – 64 years of age. The plan outlines key priorities under each cycle.

Guiding Policy Principles

Best interest of the child

This principle is a central building block for the UN Convention the Rights of the Child. It recognizes that in all decisions impacting children, their best interests should be a primary consideration. This applies at two levels. First, decisions and actions affecting an individual child should reflect his or her unique circumstances, second, all actions and decisions – whether legislative, administrative or programmatic – that impact all children or a specific group of children, must consider their collective interests.
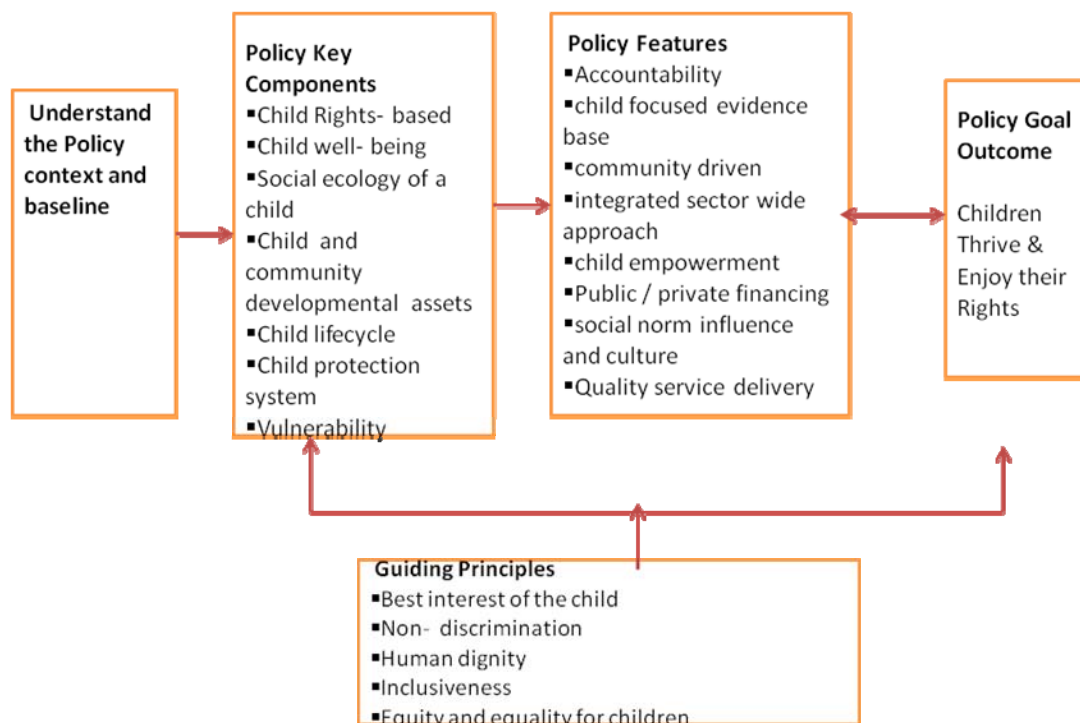
Non discrimination

This principle is derived from the understanding that Human rights apply equally to every child. No child should be discriminated against on any grounds. All programmes must be implemented in a way that does not discriminate on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion or other status of the child or his/her parents or guardians. Any affirmative action targeting a specific group should be designed to promote equality and inclusion.

Child participation and empowerment

The principle of child participation is reflected in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that children have a right to be heard and taken seriously. This includes promoting greater respect for children and their inclusion in decision-making within their families and communities. Children's capacities to participate and contribute need to be strengthened, and environments that encourage and support children in applying those

capacities, created. The nature of children's participation will vary, reflecting their evolving capacity. Empowered children and youth can model new behaviours and values that transform society and contribute to a culture of democracy.

Figure 4: Summary of a Children Policy pathway (Context ,Components, Features and Principles)

CONCLUSION

It is argued that the development of an overarching children policy be based on a pathway that analyses the evidence based on the existing policy context as a baseline with an understanding of key policy components and features that lead to the attainment of policy outcomes. These should be based on the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Child guiding principle that put the best interest of the child at the core of policy and practice. The policy should adopt the child well-being model which is rights-based and addresses the entire life cycle of a child. Other essential components include; the socio-ecology of a child, child protection system strengthening, child and community developmental assets should all underpin a comprehensive and overarching child policy. Clear child guiding principles should be foundational to such a policy to ensure its sustainability.

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