# Measuring child protection advocacy reach: Development of an Advocacy Reach Calculator

Claire Dunn [a,*] , Saranga Jayarathne [b], Verónica Burbano Burbano [c], Fatima Al Maamari [c], Walter Okello [d], Águeda Carmo [e], Darcy Strouse [f]

[a] Metrics for Management, 12 West Madison Street, Baltimore, MD, 21201, United States of America
[b] ChildFund International, Colombo, Sri Lanka
[c] ChildFund International, Quito, Ecuador
[d] ChildFund International, Kampala, Uganda
[e] ChildFund Brazil, Belo Horizonte, Brazil
[f] ChildFund International, Richmond, VA, United States of America

### A B S T R A C T

Policy advocacy has emerged as a vital strategy for advancing child protection, yet there are no standard approaches for quantifying the reach of policy advocacy wins. To measure the reach of its policy advocacy work as part of a comprehensive approach to advocacy monitoring and evaluation, ChildFund International engaged in a deliberative process to develop an easy-to-use Advocacy Reach Calculator. This novel tool estimates the number of children and family members reached due to the approval and implementation of child protection legislation. In this discussion paper, we present the systematic process undertaken to develop the Advocacy Reach Calculator from conceptualization, to operationalization, validation, and finally pilot testing. We then present pilot results from four countries – Brazil, Kenya, the Philippines, and Uganda – and discuss how the estimates generated by the Advocacy Reach Calculator can be used for monitoring, evaluation, and learning, forecasting and resource planning, and resource mobilization. This innovative measurement approach provides a practical method to demonstrate advocacy reach and optimize child protection strategies.

## 1. Introduction

Since 2017, ChildFund International (ChildFund) has engaged in policy advocacy work as one way to advance its goal of strengthening child protection systems around the world to enhance children's well-being. Experiences from country offices suggest that such advocacy work is contributing to lasting and positive changes in the child protection space. Given this anecdotal evidence, ChildFund sought to develop a strategic approach to systematically monitoring and evaluating its child protection advocacy work, including an assessment of reach for children and family members.

Advocacy has been increasingly recognized as an essential strategy for achieving social change. Yet, evaluating the effectiveness of advocacy has proven challenging. Unlike the evaluation of programmatic interventions, the literature on policy advocacy evaluation remains quite nascent, particularly when looking beyond the Global North (Esala

et al., 2022). The challenges with evaluating policy advocacy work are well-established (Devlin-Foltz et al., 2012; Gardner et al., 2023; Glass, 2017; Guthrie et al., 2005). These challenges likely explain why many organizations report not engaging in efforts to evaluate their advocacy work (Glass, 2017). Yet, these challenges do not negate the importance of such efforts for monitoring organizational advocacy efforts, adaptive management, and for building support for continued investment in advocacy as a valuable strategy to achieve socially desirable and sustainable outcomes.

Because traditional program evaluation approaches cannot easily be applied to advocacy, there have been efforts in recent decades to identify strategies for evaluating advocacy that recognize the inherent challenges such as the fact that policy change can be a long and often unpredictable process influenced by external factors such as political turnover. A variety of approaches for advocacy evaluation have been proposed and implemented (Glass, 2017; Morariu et al., 2009; Reisman

---

et al., 2007). These include a focus particularly on measuring shorter- and medium-term outcomes as well as using qualitative approaches to reflect on the efforts that have been undertaken and what effect those efforts have had. Often, multiple different evaluation approaches are brought together to bring greater insight to this complex area.

While a focus on process measures and shorter-term outcomes is reasonable, the ultimate goal of policy advocacy is policy change and there remains a gap in how to measure what it means when this goal is achieved. The ability to estimate concepts such as reach can be useful for both evaluating policy change efforts and aligning organizational communications. When a policy victory is achieved, having clear reach estimates helps quantify how many children may eventually benefit from its improved protections. Additionally, these metrics enable the organization to discuss advocacy work using the same language applied to programmatic and communications initiatives, creating a more cohesive approach to measuring and communicating reach across all activities.

In this discussion paper, we present the process undertaken by ChildFund International, in collaboration with Metrics for Management, to develop a novel advocacy measurement tool, an Advocacy Reach Calculator. The Advocacy Reach Calculator is an easy-to-use tool to estimate the number of children and family members reached due to the approval of new or amended child protection legislation. We outline the process undertaken from conceptualization to operationalization, and finally to pilot testing of the Advocacy Reach Calculator. We discuss how the calculator is designed to play a valuable role in an advocacy measurement strategy, as well as acknowledge some of the limitations that come with this measurement tool. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of next steps for the Advocacy Reach Calculator.

## 2. Development process

The development of the Advocacy Reach Calculator occurred as part of a thoughtful, multiyear process which began with the development of an advocacy theory of change (Appendix A1) based around the goal, "To improve and sustain protection and well-being outcomes for children and families through policy and budget advocacy" (ChildFund International, 2022).

Following the finalization of the theory of change, ChildFund then turned towards developing a results framework and measurement strategy to assess progress along this theory of change. Measuring advocacy reach could not easily be done using the same approach and methods the organization currently uses for programs, leading to the need to develop policy advocacy-specific measurement tools. Rather than relying on any single tool, ChildFund developed a suite of measurement tools that, when triangulated, can provide a more nuanced and complete picture of the organization's progress. These tools include the Advocacy Indicator Tracker, an adapted version of the Simple, Participatory Assessment of Real Change (SPARC) qualitative advocacy evaluation approach (Dasmariñas & Schlangen, 2021), and the Advocacy Reach Calculator, the focus of this paper. The full measurement framework is available in Appendix A2.

Given that ChildFund was unable to identify an existing, standard approach for measuring policy advocacy reach, a comprehensive, four step process, outlined in Fig. 1, was followed to develop a novel Advocacy Reach Calculator. This section provides a detailed overview of each of the four steps: conceptualization, operationalization, validation, and pilot testing.

A steering committee, composed of a global group of monitoring and evaluation experts and advocacy specialists, led the calculator's development, incorporating feedback from country office staff at each stage to create a tool adaptable to multiple contexts and users.

### 2.1. Conceptualization

The first step in the development process was to clearly define what the calculator would measure. The calculator development team identified four key questions that needed to be answered prior to creating a new measurement tool.

#### 2.1.1. What is advocacy reach and when is it achieved?

Getting new legislation approved can be a long and complex process and, in many cases, significant effort can be exerted to no avail. While ChildFund recognized the importance of all the actions taken leading up to the approval of a new piece of legislation, including agenda setting, policy formulation, and lobbying for support, it was decided that until a policy has been formally approved by a government's legislature, it is premature to claim reach.

Even after a policy is approved, there is a long way to go for a policy to be effectively implemented and directly reach those it is intended to benefit. Complex issues in local contexts, including a lack of proper budget allocation, tensions between legislative and executive powers, and changes in governments, are just some of the factors which may delay implementation. Because of this, we determined that two distinct measures of reach should be estimated: potential reach and actual reach. *Potential reach* is captured at the stage of policy approval and captures the number of children that are expected to benefit from the law once it is implemented. *Actual reach* is estimated once a policy is implemented at either the national or subnational level. For actual reach to be estimated, there must be sufficient evidence of implementation such as budget allocation, establishment of institutions, and appointment of staff. This distinction between potential and actual reach acknowledges that policy approval alone doesn't guarantee reach—real benefits only emerge when policies move from paper to practice.

#### 2.1.2. How should organizational contribution be accounted for in the reach estimate?

The process of getting new legislation approved is rarely attributable to a single organization's efforts, something which has been identified as a particular challenge in advocacy evaluation (Devlin-Foltz et al., 2012). ChildFund is unlikely to be the lone actor promoting a policy change
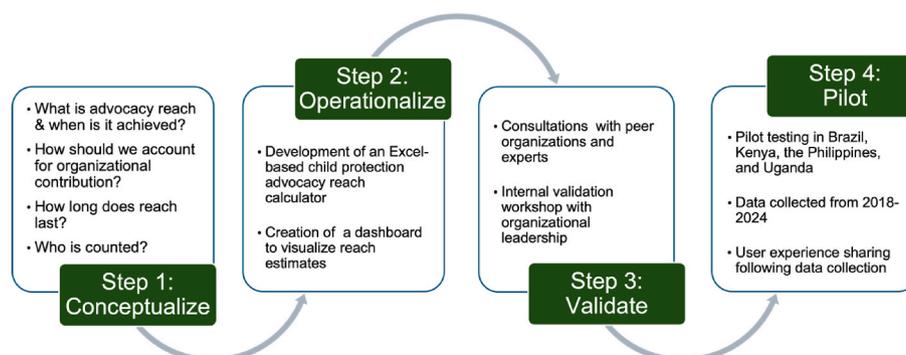
**Fig. 1.** Advocacy Reach Calculator development process.

which can complicate efforts to claim reach from a policy win. Because of this, it was deemed essential to be able to capture ChildFund's level of contribution to any policy win to determine if it was significant enough to be able to claim reach. To promote consistency across the organization's suite of advocacy measurement tools, the same contribution scale was incorporated into the Advocacy Reach Calculator as was already being used in the Advocacy Indicator Tracker. This five-point scale, shown in Table 1, was informed by internal scales used by the Robert Carr Fund and American Jewish World Service (I. Houvras, personal communication, January 25, 2022.) A moderate level of contribution, defined as "one of many" or higher on the contribution scale, was set as an initial threshold for calculating reach. Reach would be calculated the same whether the contribution level towards a policy win was "one of many", "important", or "vital"; however, if the contribution level was negligible or undetectable, ChildFund would not claim any reach for the policy regardless of if it was approved and implemented.

### 2.1.3. How long should reach be counted?

Once a policy is approved, there are still many steps needed for the policy to take effect and begin to be felt by the policy's beneficiaries. As a result, a third key question that needed to be answered was how long to continue to count reach from a single policy. After discussing possible options, ChildFund determined that reach would continue to be counted as long as the organization continued to meet the minimum contribution threshold.

### 2.1.4. Who should be counted in the reach estimate?

After determining when reach would and would not be counted, the next key decision was who should be counted. Should we include all children potentially affected by a policy, or only those deemed most vulnerable? Defining vulnerability is complex, as concepts like deprivation, exclusion, and vulnerability have numerous interpretations and measurement approaches (Wordsworth et al., 2005; Chakravarty & D'Ambrosio, 2006; Schweiger, 2019; Biggeri & Ferrone, 2021).

Likewise, policies have the potential to reach a much broader group than targeted programmatic interventions, making narrow definitions of vulnerability less applicable. For example, a policy that focuses on online sexual exploitation and abuse of children (OSEAC) may not only benefit those typically defined as vulnerable, like children living in poverty or migrant children. Rather all children with access to the internet could be considered vulnerable and could therefore potentially benefit from an anti-OSEAC policy. Given ChildFund's goal to ensure all children are healthy, educated, skilled, and safe, the Advocacy Reach Calculator counts all children who may benefit from a policy rather than applying a single definition of vulnerability.

**Table 1**
Contribution scale.

| Level of Contribution | Definition |
|---|---|
| Vital | If ChildFund were not supporting the work, there would be no action towards the outcome or milestone. |
| Important | If ChildFund were not supporting the work, the level of action towards the outcome or milestone would not be optimal. |
| One of Many | If ChildFund were not supporting the work, the level of action towards the outcome or milestone would be the same: ChildFund is acting consistently. |
| Negligible | If ChildFund were not supporting the work, the level of action towards the outcome or milestone would be the same: ChildFund is acting in solidarity in a minor capacity and inconsistently. |
| Undetectable | If ChildFund were not supporting the work, the level of action towards the outcome or milestone would be the same: ChildFund is not acting. |

### 2.2. Operationalization

The next step in our process was to operationalize the concept of policy advocacy reach. This process included agreeing on assumptions, building a beta version of the Advocacy Reach Calculator, and developing user-friendly visualizations of the reach estimates.

### 2.2.1. Assumptions

To operationalize the concept of advocacy reach, three assumptions guided our approach. The first assumption is that the calculator measures the number of children potentially affected by policy advocacy wins (reach), but it does not measure how these policies actually changed children's lives (impact). Though impact remains the goal, understanding reach provides crucial insights into the scope and scale of a policy change. Reach data can inform strategic decisions and provide a foundation for subsequent assessments of impact.

Second, the calculator assumes that all children targeted by a policy are successfully reached, representing the maximum possible reach rather than actual implementation outcomes. While incorporating the quality of policy rollout into reach measurements would provide more accurate insights, such assessments present significant challenges and would require substantial resources to implement effectively.

Finally, children may benefit from multiple policies in a single year, especially when a country office is operating in a favorable political environment. However, to accurately measure ChildFund's aggregate contribution to child protection, our calculator only counts each child once per year. We've designed the calculator to avoid double-counting; if a child is reached by multiple policies in the same year, they only appear once in our annual country-level totals. Similarly, reach is not summed across years, ensuring our metrics represent the number of unique children reached each year rather than cumulative counts that would count the same children multiple times.

### 2.2.2. Building the calculator

Once key decisions were made, we began to develop the beta version of the Advocacy Reach Calculator using Microsoft Excel. To generate reach estimates, data are drawn both from entries provided by users on the details of a policy win and from population data built into the backend of the calculator.

The Advocacy Reach Calculator uses this information to generate reach estimates, assuming that reach is a function of several factors: the organization's level of contribution (How important was ChildFund's role in the policy's approval?), the geographic scope of the policy (Is the policy national or is it targeting a specific subnational area?), the policy's target age and gender groups (Is the policy targeted at all children regardless of gender or does it focus specifically on girls or boys and does the policy target all age groups or is it focused on specific age groups, such as children in their first years of life?), and policy specific exposures (Must children have certain characteristics or access to a particular service, technology or institutions-e.g. internet for online safety policies or school enrollment for in-school interventions-to benefit from this policy?). In a simple formula, reach is conceptualized as:

Reach = $f$ (Level of Contribution, Geographic Scope, Targeted Age Groups, Targeted Gender, Policy Exposure).

Data entered by country advocacy specialists which provides detail on specific policy wins is essential to generating reach estimates. The data entry interface was designed to be intuitive and as error proof as possible. ChildFund country advocacy specialists from Brazil, Guatemala, and Uganda provided essential feedback to ensure that the data entry page was user-friendly and included the required information to reflect the nuances of policy approval and implementation in their different contexts. High-level use instructions are included in the calculator itself, and more detailed use instructions were developed separately in a training manual.

The data entry tab in the Excel workbook consists of 14 dropdown menus. These menus capture key information such as the country and

year in which the policy win occurred, the demographic groups expected to be reached by the policy and ChildFund's level of contribution to the policy's approval and/or implementation. A separate tab is included in the Excel file outlining the definitions for each of the levels of contribution categories, as listed in Table 1, to promote consistency in use. In addition to the dropdown menus, users are asked to enter the name of the policy to provide additional context to the data entered and to support triangulation with other advocacy monitoring approaches such as the qualitative evaluation approach, adapted SPARC. To calculate reach, users must enter all requested data for each policy; no cells can be left blank. If a cell is left blank, a warning message will appear, encouraging the user to go back and verify that the entry is complete.

In addition to the user-entered data, the reach calculations draw on population data that is built into the backend of the calculator. A full list of the data sources used to build out the backend of the calculator is included in Appendix A3. The primary data source feeding into the backend of the calculator is national census data. This data provides information on the possible population to be reached. Using United Nations projected population growth rates, annual population estimates were generated from 2018 through 2030. These estimates were generated both at the national level and, based on country program feedback, the first administrative level (e.g. province, state, or region) to allow for calculating the reach of policies that may be approved at the subnational level or national policies that are gradually rolled out across a country over time.

Population estimates were also broken down by sex and age category. Such filters can be useful for narrowing in on the reach of policies targeted specifically at one sex, such as those focused on female genital mutilation, or on specific age groups. When considering its programmatic work, ChildFund categorizes children and youth into three age groups: infants and young children (ages 0-5), children and young adolescents (ages 6-14), and youth (ages 15-24). To promote greater comparability between advocacy and programmatic reach estimates, ideally the same age categories would be used for both; however, based on feedback from country programs, adjustments were needed to reflect the realities of policy advocacy work. Most importantly, country advocacy specialists identified it as important to divide the youth age group into those below the legal age of majority and those above. While the legal age of majority varies, it was decided to use a standard of 18 years of age as this was among the most common thresholds. This resulted in four age groups: 0-5, 6-14, 15-17, and 18-24.

In addition to measuring children reached, a measure of children and family members reached was also added, as improving the lives of children has ripple effects for their families. To estimate children and family members, data on average family size and the number of households with at least one member under age 20 was pulled from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Household Size and Composition Database.

Finally, while it was agreed upon that no single organizational definition of vulnerability would be uniformly applied, several more targeted filters were built into the calculator to narrow reach estimates to focus on those most likely to be affected by child protection legislation. Three initial filters were selected for incorporation into the Advocacy Reach Calculator based on the major areas of focus for ChildFund's policy advocacy work, including the proportion of households with internet access at home, the proportion of children that are in school, and the proportion of the population that lives below the poverty line. These filters can be selected on their own or in combination with each other depending on the details of a given policy. As use of the calculator expands and the organization's policy advocacy portfolio of work evolves, there are opportunities to add to this set of filters.

### 2.2.3. Visualizing reach estimates

Once complete data has been entered, the Advocacy Reach Calculator automatically generates reach estimates at three different geographic levels: the multi-country level, single country level, and subnational level. The multi-country estimates allow users to examine combined reach in all countries, or a relevant subset of countries such as a regional grouping, over time. This estimate is particularly useful for those working at the international level and senior leadership aiming to understand combined reach across the full advocacy portfolio of work. Single country and subnational estimates, on the other hand, may be particularly interesting to country office staff seeking to monitor their own advocacy plans over time. Users can customize the country or countries, subnational units, and years for which they'd like to see estimated reach.

For each of these geographic scopes, four distinct reach metrics are estimated: 1) potential reach for children only, 2) potential reach for children and family members, 3) actual reach for children only, and 4) actual reach for children and family members.

### 2.3. Validation

The Advocacy Reach Calculator is a novel tool and, as such, was developed based on a set of decisions and assumptions. Prior to moving forward with finalizing the initial version of the calculator, two steps were taken to review and validate these assumptions. First, the team held consultations with external experts to understand alternative reach measurement approaches and gather their feedback on the assumptions included in the calculator. Second, the feedback from these consultations was summarized and shared back to ChildFund's organizational leadership for further discussion and decision-making during an internal validation workshop.

During the first step, we sought insights from global monitoring and evaluation leaders from CARE International, Save the Children, and Solutions for Igniting Social Transformation who had experience with advocacy evaluation in the international non-governmental organization space. Insights from World Vision were also captured earlier in the process. These consultations were a key step for understanding how peer organizations and thought leaders in the space of child protection were thinking about measuring advocacy reach and ensuring that the assumptions in the calculator were viewed as reasonable. Prior to each consultation, a summary brief outlining the calculator's purpose, assumptions, and key considerations was shared with participants for their review. During the conversations, participants were provided with a brief overview of the calculator development process before they were asked to share their own experiences, if any, with measuring advocacy reach, and their thinking on the key questions and assumptions laid out in the summary brief. These consultations solidified our Advocacy Reach Calculator development team's belief that there is no standard approach for measuring advocacy reach that is consistently being used in the child protection space. Rather, each organization has its own approach which reflects a series of tradeoffs depending on organizational objectives and resources available for monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

Following the external consultations, an internal validation workshop was held with ChildFund's leadership. During the workshop, the beta version of the calculator and a summary of the key decisions that fed into the calculator, were presented alongside a summary of the feedback shared during the external consultations. This workshop provided an opportunity for senior leadership to reflect on the initial decisions, consider alternative proposals and come to consensus on any revisions to be made to the calculator prior to pilot testing.

As a result of the validation workshop, answers to the key questions from the conceptualization phase were revisited. Some decisions were solidified while others were adjusted to reflect organizational consensus. The workshop reinforced the decision to estimate potential and actual reach separately, though there was agreement that clearer guidance would be necessary for determining when a policy was sufficiently far along in the implementation process to begin counting actual reach. Participants agreed to hold further internal discussions to develop clear milestones that needed to be achieved to consider a policy to be implemented and, therefore, to begin estimating actual reach. As a

result, the steering committee, with input from country advocacy specialists, developed a checklist of key milestones shown in Table 2 below. Actual reach cannot be counted until budget allocation and at least one other milestone have been reached.

Participants also agreed that it was important to only count reach when ChildFund's contribution to a policy win was sufficiently high. Initially, reach was calculated if ChildFund's contribution was "one-of-many" or higher on the contribution scale. However, because of the validation workshop, this threshold was raised so that reach would only be estimated if ChildFund's contribution was "important" or "vital". The validation workshop reinforced the decision that reach would be calculated annually and reach for any single policy would continue to be counted each year that the organization met the contribution threshold. The workshop similarly reinforced the decision to forego a single definition of vulnerability in favor of several more targeted filters to narrow in on the specific populations likely to be affected by a policy, such as households with internet access for anti-OSEAC policies.

### 2.4. Pilot testing

Following the validation workshop, the calculator was updated to reflect any changes, such as increasing the contribution threshold, and pilot tested by advocacy specialists in Brazil, Kenya, the Philippines, and Uganda. These four country offices each have comparatively advanced policy advocacy portfolios which was essential given that the Advocacy Reach Calculator is intended to capture the reach of policy wins. In addition, the four selected country offices work in a range of child protection policy areas including prevention of domestic violence, school-based violence, child marriage, anti-OSEAC policy, and overall child protection system strengthening (Table 3).

After undergoing virtual training on the Advocacy Reach Calculator, the advocacy specialist from each country was provided with a written training guide and a copy of the Advocacy Reach Calculator. Each of the four country advocacy specialists was requested to enter their policy advocacy wins from fiscal years 2018 through fiscal year, 2024. Completed calculators were then shared with the calculator development team for review and meetings were held to discuss user experiences.

## 3. Pilot test results

### 3.1. User experiences

Overall, country office advocacy specialists reported positive

**Table 2**
Actual reach criteria checklist.

| Criterion | Achieved (Yes/No) |
| --- | --- |
| Budget allocated at the national or subnational level[a] | |
| Establishment of centralized or decentralized policy coordination & oversight mechanism | |
| Establishment of specialized implementation agencies or authorities at national or subnational level | |
| Creation of new government positions (ministers, directors, advisors, implementing officers, etc.) at grassroots level | |
| Creation of capacity building & technical support structures (training centers, staff capacity building schemes, etc.) | |
| Establishment of interagency or cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms such as steering committees | |
| Establishment of community-based or grassroots implementation mechanisms (school or village committees, etc.) | |
| Development of government-led programs such as public awareness campaigns or education curricula | |
| Creation of action plans, protocols, or operating procedures | |
| Other (specify) | |

[a] Criterion is mandatory. If not met, actual reach will not be estimated even if all other criteria are met.

**Table 3**
Pilot countries and policy advocacy areas.

| Country | Policy Advocacy Areas |
| --- | --- |
| Brazil | Violence in the domestic sphere, child protection system strengthening |
| Kenya | Child protection system strengthening, OSEAC, school-based violence |
| Philippines | OSEAC, child marriage |
| Uganda | Budget advocacy for child protection |

experiences with using the Advocacy Reach Calculator. The process was more time consuming than would normally be expected given that this was both the first time the advocacy specialists were using the calculator and that they were asked to backfill the calculator with data starting in 2018.

Data entry was, for the most part, viewed as straightforward, but clarifications were required on when certain selections should or should not be applied. For example, users had different interpretations of when to apply filters, most notably the poverty filter. While some interpreted this filter as intended, to be applied only if a policy explicitly targets those children living in poverty, others interpreted it to mean a policy would most affect those living in poverty even if it was a broader policy. These different understandings may relate to the fact that programmatic interventions are often more narrowly targeted than policy interventions.

An unanticipated challenge encountered in the process was a need to clearly define what would and would not count as a policy win to be reported in the Advocacy Reach Calculator. ChildFund has some work which can neither be cleanly defined as programmatic in scope nor advocacy in scope. For example, the advocacy team may support government adoption of a protocol or program designed by ChildFund's programs team. While the advocacy team has a role to play in such efforts, they do not result in legislative change. Among country teams there has been some confusion as to whether such "grey area" wins should be captured in the Advocacy Reach Calculator or not. To avoid the inclusion of activities which do not aim to produce a policy change in advocacy reach measurement, we have added a warning to the Advocacy Reach Calculator to inform users not to continue if the win they are entering did not produce legislative change. Further work is needed, however, to consider where these "grey area" activities fit into the organizational monitoring and evaluation strategy.

The experiences of the pilot countries suggest that the Advocacy Reach Calculator has promise and can be easily adopted, but that there is also a need for very clear guidance on when and how to use the calculator. Likewise, there was a benefit to having a secondary, critical review of the data entry as countries gained experience using the calculator to ensure consistent and accurate data entry.

### 3.2. Reach estimates

Following the experience sharing sessions, advocacy specialists made any needed adjustments to their data entry, and data from all four countries was then combined into a single version of the Advocacy Reach Calculator to allow for a comparison of reach across all four pilot countries. Three types of reach profiles are shared: a) single country, b) subnational, and c) combined multi-country. The findings presented here represent pilot results only and should not be interpreted as official organizational reach metrics.

Between 2018 and 2024 eleven policy wins were reported by the four pilot countries. These policies covered a range of areas including child protection system strengthening, domestic violence, school-based violence, online sexual exploitation and abuse of children, and child marriage. Most policies were national-level policies with national-level implementation. However, both Kenya and Uganda reported policies that were either approved at the subnational level or were being rolled out gradually among the subnational units so the ability to capture reach only in specific subnational units was important.

The top panel of Fig. 2 shows the single country reach estimate using Brazil as an example. Brazil reported policy wins in four of the seven years, focused in the areas of child protection system strengthening and the prevention of violence in the domestic sphere. In 2018, though a policy win occurred, ChildFund did not meet the contribution threshold, reporting a contribution of "one of many", so the estimated reach was zero. In the other three years, the threshold was met so reach estimates were calculated. Actual reach estimates were calculated in both 2022 and 2023, because policies were not only approved, but also implemented (Lei No. 14.344, 2022; Lei No. 14.432, 2022). On the other

hand, only potential reach was calculated in 2024 because a new policy was approved but had yet to be implemented (Lei No. 14.826, 2024).

The middle panel of Fig. 2 shows subnational reach estimates using Kenya as an example. In Kenya, ChildFund has worked to get county-level child protection policies approved and implemented and has had success in seeing such policies implemented in both Turkana and Makueni counties. Though policies specific to a single subnational unit are not expected to have the same reach as national-level policies, they can still be quite meaningful. For example, the Makueni county children Policy (2021) is estimated to have reached nearly 435,000 children.



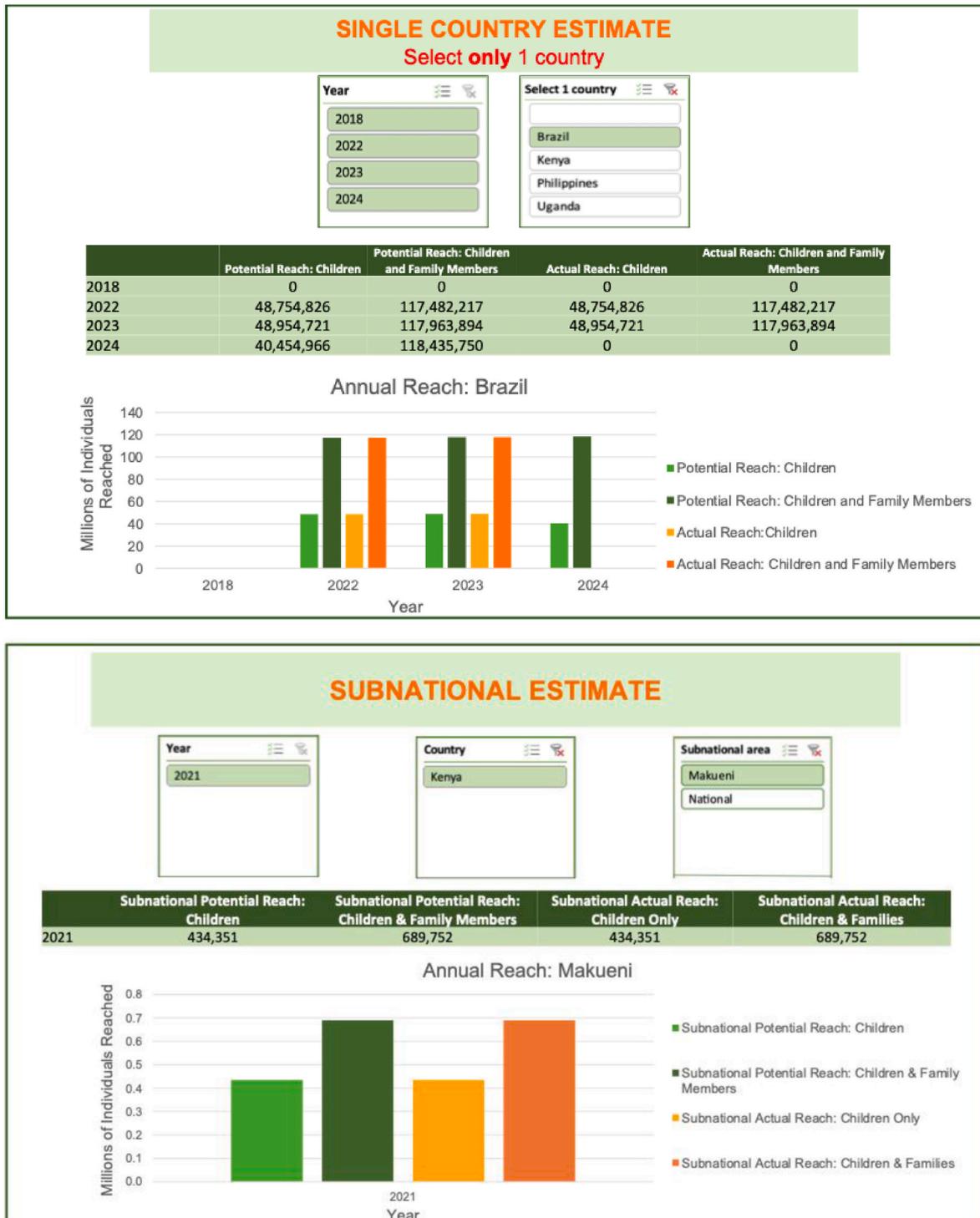**Fig. 2.** Reach estimates from Advocacy Reach Calculator pilot study.

**MULTI-COUNTRY ESTIMATE**

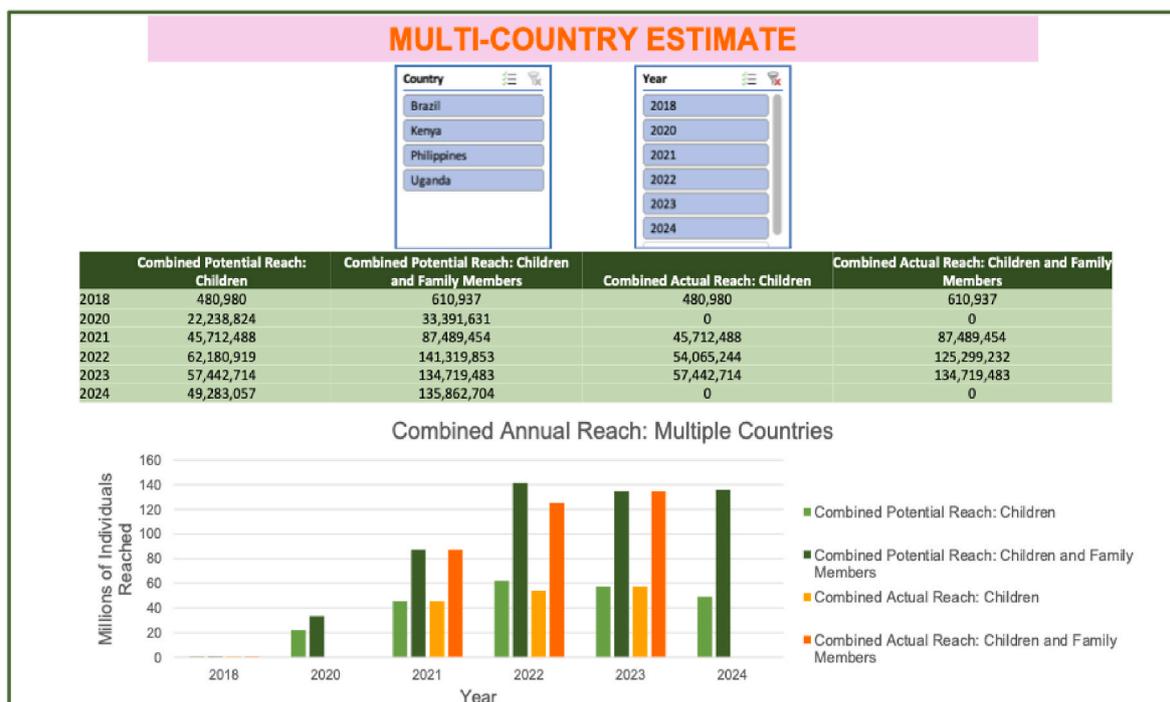| | Combined Potential Reach: Children | Combined Potential Reach: Children and Family Members | Combined Actual Reach: Children | Combined Actual Reach: Children and Family Members |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2018 | 480,980 | 610,937 | 480,980 | 610,937 |
| 2020 | 22,238,824 | 33,391,631 | 0 | 0 |
| 2021 | 45,712,488 | 87,489,454 | 45,712,488 | 87,489,454 |
| 2022 | 62,180,919 | 141,319,853 | 54,065,244 | 125,299,232 |
| 2023 | 57,442,714 | 134,719,483 | 57,442,714 | 134,719,483 |
| 2024 | 49,283,057 | 135,862,704 | 0 | 0 |

**Fig. 2.** (*continued*).

Finally, the bottom panel of Fig. 2 shows the combined annual reach from 2018 through 2024 in Brazil, Kenya, the Philippines, and Uganda. Over the seven years for which data was captured, potential reach estimates were calculated in six of the seven years, while actual reach occurred in four of the seven years. No potential reach was estimated in 2019, while no actual reach was estimated in 2019, 2020, and 2024. Potential reach was estimated in at least one year for all countries and actual reach was captured for all except Uganda. While Uganda did report some policies reaching the stage of implementation, the organizational level of contribution did not meet the threshold for estimating reach in those cases.

In years where potential reach was estimated, the combined potential reach across all four pilot countries ranged from a low of 480,980 children in 2018 to a high of 62,180,919 children in 2022. The combined potential reach estimates are reflective of both smaller-scale and larger-scale policy wins in each of the four pilot countries. Reach from policies which were being implemented on a smaller scale, at the subnational level rather than the national level, such as county child protection policies in Kenya, unsurprisingly led to smaller, but still important estimated reach.

Higher combined annual reach estimates were driven by policy wins with broad reach in large countries, such as Brazil and the Philippines. For example, the implementation of a law prohibiting child marriage in the Philippines (An Act Prohibiting the Practice of Child Marriage and Imposing Penalties for Violations Thereof, 2021) was estimated to reach over 40 million children, accounting for almost 90 percent of the combined actual reach estimated for that year. The approval of a law promoting positive parenting and the right to play to prevent domestic violence (Lei No. 14.826, 2024), likewise had an estimated potential reach of over 40 million, contributing approximately 82% of the combined potential reach for 2024.

## 4. Discussion

The pilot process demonstrated that an easy-to-use Advocacy Reach Calculator could be created and implemented to generate reach estimates for child protection policy wins supported by ChildFund. The estimates generated by the Advocacy Reach Calculator provide opportunities at multiple levels for monitoring, evaluation, and learning, forecasting and resource planning, and increased resource mobilization. While reach is not a measure of impact, it lays the groundwork for impact and serves as an important interim measure to maintain focus on how policy advocacy can meaningfully improve child protection.

### 4.1. Monitoring and evaluation

Estimates of advocacy reach can serve as an important tool for advocacy monitoring and evaluation. Many policy advocacy monitoring and evaluation tools focus on process (e.g. number of meetings held, or position papers drafted), or qualitative assessments of how outcomes were or were not achieved. Such approaches are important and can facilitate organizational learning on how to increase the efficacy of their advocacy work. A quantitative estimate of advocacy reach is not a replacement for these tools. Instead, it is an additional source of information to contribute to a well-rounded understanding of the contribution of an advocacy initiative. For example, the Advocacy Reach Calculator was developed for use in conjunction with the Advocacy Indicator Tracker and adapted SPARC, with each tool providing complementary insights to help advocates learn from their efforts, identify how different strategies lead to specific results, and understand the scale of outcomes they achieve. Policy wins are comparatively rare and can often take years to occur, but they are also the ultimate goal of advocacy work, making the ability to move towards measuring what achieving these wins means all the more important.

### 4.2. Forecasting and resource planning

Along with monitoring existing advocacy plans, an Advocacy Reach Calculator can play a role in planning future advocacy efforts. It is possible to use the calculator to project reach should a new policy be approved and to consider different scenarios to determine where the greatest reach can be achieved. For example, all else equal, would a country office be able to reach more children by directing its efforts towards advocating for an anti-OSEAC policy or for a policy aimed at

preventing violence in secondary schools? Combined with information on strategic priorities, assessments of the probability for meaningful progress, the expected impact, input from affected children and families, and other contextual variables, potential reach can help guide strategic resource deployment. While the potential reach should not be the only piece of information feeding into the decision-making calculus, it can prove valuable in operating contexts where organizations are trying to maximize reach with scarce resources. Country offices may identify multiple policies that are likely to be impactful and have a reasonable probability of success yet lack the resources to advocate for all of them simultaneously. The Advocacy Reach Calculator helps navigate these trade-offs by comparing the potential reach of different policy options within a country, enabling offices to direct their limited resources toward interventions that will reach the most children. Cross-country comparisons should be interpreted with caution, as potential reach will naturally appear larger in more populous countries regardless of policy effectiveness. Directing all advocacy efforts toward large countries based solely on potential reach may overlook critical child protection needs in smaller countries where vulnerability or harm may be more severe.

### 4.3. Resource mobilization

Finally, the Advocacy Reach Calculator can effectively demonstrate the value of policy and advocacy work to donors, governments, or even skeptical organizational leadership. Organizations face pressure to demonstrate their value in tangible ways. Direct service programs generate readily quantifiable results such as the number of children provided with nutritious food. Such results can be used to craft compelling narratives of organizational reach that resonate with donors. Since policy change is a comparatively rare outcome, there are often extended periods of time where the only quantifiable results available are process measures. Being able to demonstrate the reach that can be achieved from a single policy win, however, can strengthen the case for investment in advocacy, and build a more compelling narrative for just how powerful advocacy can be for child protection (Masters, 2009).

### 5. Limitations

Though the Advocacy Reach Calculator was developed using a rigorous and consultative process, there are several limitations that users of this tool or developing a similar tool should consider.

First, the estimate produced by the tool should be interpreted as reflecting the maximum possible reach of a policy assuming it is implemented as designed. This tool does not include a step to verify reach, and, as a result, remains a maximum estimate of the expected reach. While reach verification may be desirable and considered as a potential next step, it is important to weigh the added value of taking this additional step compared to the cost. All peer organizations consulted in the calculator development process cited the expense of gathering monitoring and evaluation data as a challenge for advocacy evaluation. These resource constraints require trade-offs; investing heavily in reach verification may consume funds that could be better allocated toward rigorous impact evaluation down the road. The Advocacy Reach Calculator addresses this challenge by providing valuable insights into the potential scale of advocacy work at minimal cost, allowing organizations to preserve resources for the more critical question of whether policies actually improved children's lives. In resource-constrained environments, estimated reach offers a practical middle ground, more informative than advocacy activities alone, yet less

resource-intensive than full verification, enabling organizations to demonstrate progress while maintaining capacity for the ultimate priority of impact measurement.

Relatedly, the Advocacy Reach Calculator does not capture the impact of a policy, a critical distinction for organizations ultimately seeking to understand not just whether a child was reached by a policy, but what difference that policy made in the child's life. While the tool cannot provide such impact data, it serves an important intermediary function in the theory of change: reach is a necessary precondition for impact. A policy cannot change a child's life if it never reaches them in the first place. Given that measuring true impact often requires years of longitudinal data and rigorous evaluation, reach serves as a valuable interim indicator. It demonstrates the potential scale of change, provides tangible evidence of progress to sustain organizational commitment, and helps advocacy leaders maintain momentum and stakeholder engagement during the extended period before impact can be reliably assessed. In this way, reach measurement bridges the gap between advocacy activities and long-term outcomes, offering organizations actionable insights while more definitive evidence of impact is being developed. However, it is essential to emphasize that reach measurement should complement, not substitute for, impact evaluation. When sufficient time has elapsed and conditions allow for rigorous assessment, it remains important for organizations to measure impact to determine whether their advocacy efforts actually improved lives.

### 6. Next steps

Based on the results of the pilot study, ChildFund will continue to move forward with rolling out the Advocacy Reach Calculator on a larger scale. Three clear next steps have been identified.

First, a plan will be developed to consistently update the calculator's backend as new census or other relevant data become available. Having the most up-to-date data available in the calculator helps to ensure that the reach estimates are as accurate as possible.

Second, ChildFund will work on moving the Advocacy Reach Calculator from a standalone tool to an integrated part of the organization's Comprehensive Approach to Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (CAMEL) platform. From an operational perspective, the Advocacy Reach Calculator is currently an Excel-based tool which can create some challenges. Integrating the calculator into CAMEL would streamline cross-country analysis by eliminating the need for manual data compilation. In addition, since other key advocacy monitoring and evaluation tools, such as the Advocacy Indicator Tracker, are already part of CAMEL, adding the Advocacy Reach Calculator brings the added benefit of creating a centralized platform for triangulating advocacy monitoring and evaluation data.

Third, ChildFund will roll out the tool to new country offices. The organization plans for all 20 of its country offices to be using the Advocacy Reach Calculator by 2030. The calculator will be gradually rolled out to new countries as they have policy advocacy achievements to report, ensuring that country advocacy specialists are trained in using the tool.

### 7. Conclusions

Evaluating advocacy is complex and the state of the field continues to develop as new approaches are tested. While there has been significant progress in developing the study and practice of advocacy evaluation, the literature continues to focus on the process of advocacy, placing less focus on measuring the ultimate goals of such advocacy work. While a

focus on the process and intermediate outcomes makes sense given the long time horizon of advocacy work and lack of guarantee that even the best advocates will be able to achieve the desired results, policy change is still often the ultimate goal. Being able to quantify what it means when a policy win is achieved can be a powerful tool.

This paper lays out ChildFund's efforts to conceptualize a measure of advocacy reach and develop an easy-to-use Advocacy Reach Calculator. The development of the tool followed a deliberative process that included efforts to validate the calculator's assumptions both internally and among peer organizations as well as a pilot test in four countries. Overall, the pilot proved promising, showing that a simple tool for estimating advocacy reach can be created and implemented across a range of contexts. Pilot results provide insight into the scale of reach that can be achieved through advocacy work. In large countries such as Brazil and the Philippines, reach from a single policy win can be in the tens of millions. Even smaller scale policies, such as Kenya's county child protection policies, can reach a significant number of individuals.

Initial responses to the tool have been quite positive with users identifying the benefits of having such a measure for monitoring and evaluating advocacy plans, forecasting and resource planning, and resource mobilization.

We believe that an Advocacy Reach Calculator can be a valuable tool as part of a comprehensive advocacy measurement framework and provide valuable data to highlight the important role that advocacy can play in promoting child protection around the globe.

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Claude.ai in order to ensure clarity of writing. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Claire Dunn:** Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Saranga Jayarathne:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Project administration, Conceptualization. **Verónica Burbano Burbano:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Fatima Al Maamari:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Conceptualization, Validation. **Walter Okello:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Águeda Carmo:** Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Validation. **Darcy Strouse:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Conceptualization.
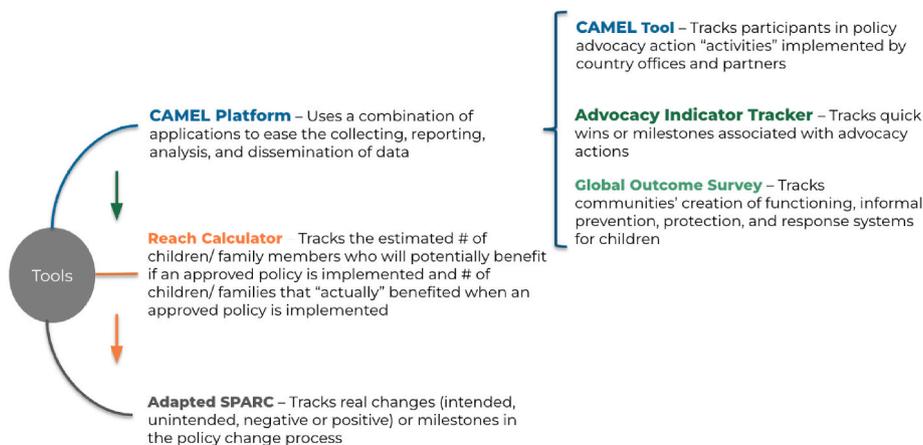
## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Appendix
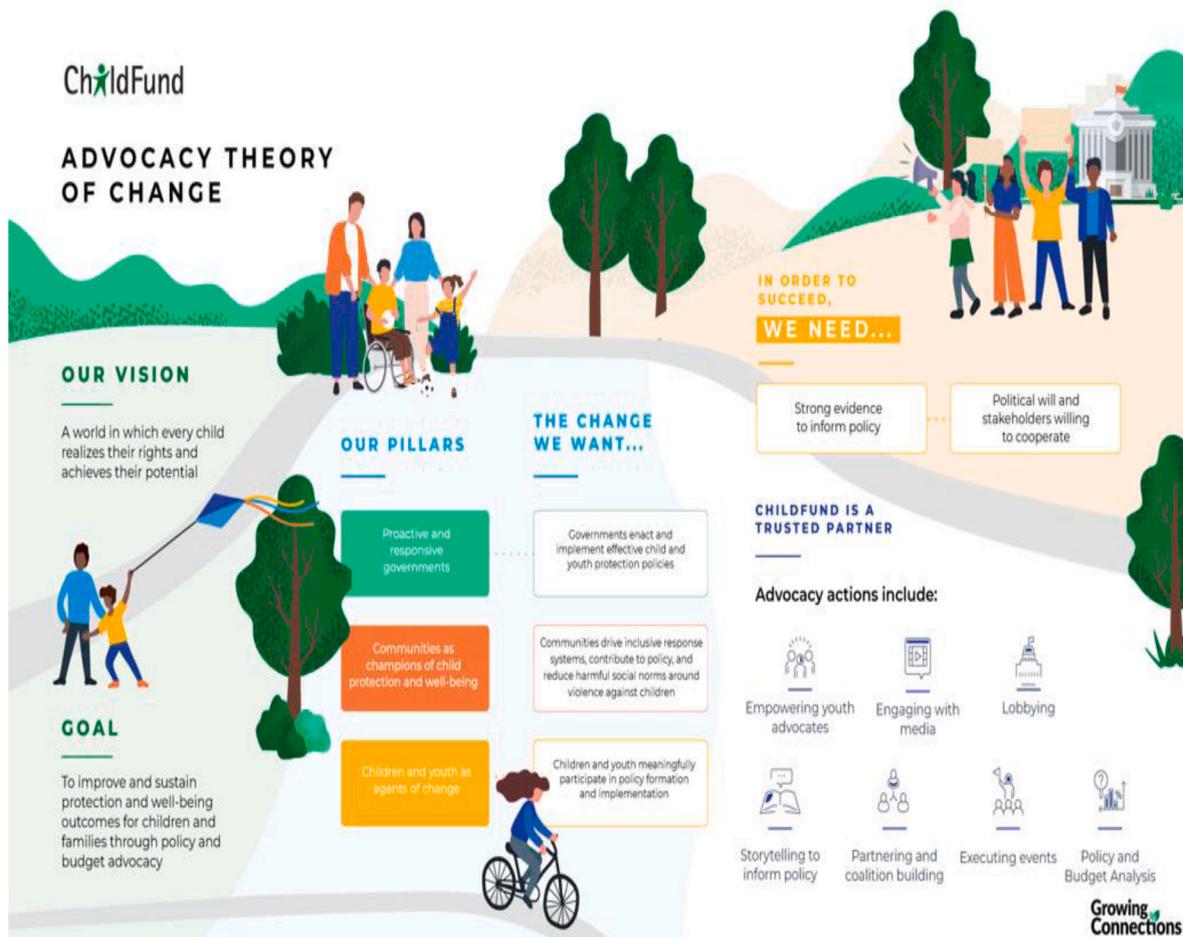


**A1.** ChildFund Advocacy Theory of Change.

**A2.** ChildFund Advocacy Measurement Tools.

**A3**
Backend Data Sources for Reach Calculation

| Variable | Source |
|---|---|
| Population | Country-specific census data |
| Population Projections | United Nations Population Prospects |
| | • Medium Variant Population Growth Rate |
| Internet Access | International Telecommunications Union |
| | •Percent of Households with Internet Access at Home |
| School Attendance Rates | UNICEF Institute of Statistics Data |
| | •Administrative data on out-of-school rate for primary and secondary school |
| Poverty | World Bank Poverty and Equity Briefs |
| | •National poverty lines were used where possible. If national poverty line data were unavailable, the relevant international poverty line was used (2.15 for low income, 3.65 for lower-middle income, 6.85 for upper middle income). |
| Households Size | UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Household Size and Composition Data |
| | •Average Household Size |
| Households with children | UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Household Size and Composition Data |
| | •Households with at least one member under the age 20 |

## References

An Act Prohibiting the Practice of Child Marriage and Imposing Penalties for Violations Thereof. (2021). Pub. L. No. Republic Act No. 11596. https://lpr.adb.org/resource/prohibition-child-marriage-republic-act-no-11596-philippine.

Biggeri, M., & Ferrone, L. (2021). Measuring child multidimensional deprivation: A sustainability perspective. *Sustainability, 13*(7). https://doi.org/10.3390/su13073922. Article 7.

Chakravarty, S. R., & D'Ambrosio, C. (2006). The measurement of social exclusion. *Review of Income and Wealth, 52*(3), 377–398. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4991.2006.00195.x

ChildFund International. (2022). *Advocacy theory of change*.

Dasmariñas, J., & Schlangen, R. (2021). Pushing boundaries: Advocacy evaluation and real-time learning in an HIV prevention research advocacy coalition in Sub-Saharan Africa. *New Directions for Evaluation, 2021*(171), 31–43. https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.20474

Devlin-Foltz, D., Fagen, M. C., Reed, E., Medina, R., & Neiger, B. L. (2012). Advocacy evaluation: Challenges and emerging trends. *Health Promotion Practice, 13*(5), 581–586. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839912446482

Esala, J. J., Sweitzer, L., Higson-Smith, C., & Anderson, K. L. (2022). Human rights advocacy evaluation in the global south: A critical review of the literature. *American Journal of Evaluation, 43*(3), 335–356. https://doi.org/10.1177/10982140211007937

Gardner, A., Williams, S., & Hoechstetter, S. (2023). Amplifying nonprofit voices: Bridging the advocacy evaluation gap. *Center for Evaluation Innovation*. https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/AMP_VOICES_FINAL_PAGES.pdf.

Glass, J. (2017). "Advocates change the world; evaluation can help": A literature review and key insights from the practice of advocacy evaluation. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, 32*(1), 46–64. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjpe.31039

Guthrie, K., Louie, J., David, T., & Foster, C. C. (2005). The challenge of assessing policy and advocacy activities: Strategies for a prospective evaluation approach. *The California Endowment*. https://www.theoryofchange.org/wp-content/uploads/toco_library/pdf/2005_-_Guthrie_-_The_challenge_of_assessing_policy_advocacy.pdf.

*Lei No. 14.344*. (2022). https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2019-2022/2022/lei/l14344.htm.

Lei No. 14.432. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2019-2022/2022/lei/L14432.htm, (2022).

*Lei No. 14.826*. (2024). https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2023-2026/2024/lei/L14826.htm.

*Makueni county children Policy*. (2021). https://makueniassembly.go.ke/download/the-makueni-county-children-policy-2021/.

Masters, B. (2009). Evaluating policy change and advocacy: The funder's perspective. *Center for Evaluation Innovation*. https://evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Masters-Brief.pdf.

Morariu, J., Reed, E., Brennan, K., Stamp, A., Parrish, S., Pankaj, V., & Zandniapour, L. (2009). Pathfinder evaluator edition: A practical guide to advocacy evaluation. *Innovation Network*.

Reisman, J., Gienapp, A., & Stachowiak, S. (2007). *A guide to measuring advocacy and policy*. Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Schweiger, G. (2019). Ethics, poverty and children's vulnerability. *Ethics and Social Welfare, 13*(3), 288–301. https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2019.1593480

Wordsworth, D., McPeak, M., & Feeny, T. (2005). *Understanding children's experience of poverty: An introduction to the DEV framework. Christian children fund: Children and poverty working paper series, 1*.