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**4Children**  
Coordinating Comprehensive Care for Children

# Keeping Children in Healthy and Protective Families

## Operational Research Project in Cambodia, Rwanda and Uganda

November 2015

Initiated in September 2014, 4Children is a five-year USAID-funded consortium of organizations led by Catholic Relief Services with partners IntraHealth, Maestral, Pact, Plan and Westat. The project aims in part to strengthen and build the evidence base for effective orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) programming through research and evaluation. Working with a team of leading experts in child protection and OVC, 4Children will design and implement assessments, evaluations and other special studies of new and ongoing projects and portfolios.

With dedicated funding from the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund at USAID (DCOF), 4Children includes an applied research project called **“Keeping Children in Healthy and Protective Families,”** (KCHPF) which focuses on strengthening family care among households at high risk of children separating or where children can be reintegrated after having been placed in residential care. From 2015 to 2019, 4Children will implement KCHPF in Cambodia, Rwanda and Uganda, priority countries for the United States Government Action Plan for Children in Adversity.



Karl Grobl for CRS

### APPROACH TO PROJECT DESIGN

#### **EXPANDING THE EVIDENCE**

KCHPF aims to build the evidence base around what works to keep children in healthy and protective families - especially in contexts that render families and children vulnerable to a wide range of adversities. While there is very little research about what effectively works to overcome such adversities in lower and middle-income countries, KCHPF aims to build on the existing evidence around child vulnerability and development, family resilience and reunification, and prevention of violence and separation. The project places great emphasis on ensuring relevant global and local evidence has been reviewed and that respected practitioners and academics with expertise in the sector contribute to project and research design. By collaborating with international and local researchers, 4Children ultimately aims to generate robust knowledge that can inform implementation of similar projects.

#### **COORDINATING WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS**

While KCHPF aims to be an operational research project, it also aims to ensure its activities contribute to larger child care reform and child protection systems strengthening efforts currently being undertaken in all three countries by a wide range of stakeholders. 4Children initiates engagement in each country by collecting in-depth local information and establishing connections with key national and international actors in the sector. If not locally available, 4Children carries out a country mapping to identify existing programs, their geographical areas of coverage and types of services being delivered to inform KCHPF project design. The report is developed in consultation with local actors and is later shared with all stakeholders as a tool to support ongoing coordination across the sector. 4Children believes outcomes will be more useful and legitimate if developed in close collaboration with local experts.



## **STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS**

By committing to support systems strengthening efforts, 4Children makes a deliberate choice to contribute not only to existing coordination mechanisms and to initiatives, but also to build the capacity of local stakeholders. KCHPF will place a specific emphasis on strengthening the capacity of the social service workforce, including formal and informal workers, which often include community volunteers. Depending on the context, the project will adopt, adapt or develop a local case management model and will train cadres of workers at different levels to carryout family reintegration case work according to harmonized standards. All KCHPF local



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partners will be trained to better understand the importance of family-based care and continuum of care options according to the 2009 [Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#). Identified partners will be trained to deliver the services prioritized by KCHPF, which may include parenting programs and household economic strengthening initiatives. By sharing lessons learned throughout the life of the project, 4Children hopes that the knowledge it generates will inform and influence gradual improvements in child protection legal and policy frameworks.

## **PARTICIPATORY AND ACCOUNTABLE**

KCHPF is committed to involving children, families and communities to the furthest extent possible during the life of the project. While adhering to strict ethical and safeguarding standards, the project will strive to promote local understanding and ownership of its activities by transparently sharing information and establishing beneficiary consultative and feedback mechanisms. The involvement of local authorities and community-based organizations will be critical to sustainability of KCHPF efforts.

## **TAILORED TO CONTEXT WITH A GLOBAL OUTLOOK**

KCHPF will aim to answer research questions that are relevant to each context, by testing different family strengthening interventions and measuring their impact on child wellbeing as well as their effectiveness in keeping families together. To that end, 4Children will seek to establish partnerships with local actors that have relevant experience in services that prevent separation of children from their families, and support reintegration of children living in residential care back into family-based care. Decisions about which interventions should be tested and how these should be delivered will be made in close dialogue with local stakeholders. Research design will be a strong consideration during this process and will influence how the project will be ultimately implemented. Consequently, KCHPF will look different in each country, but in each country, the activities will contribute to building a national evidence base. Due to 4Children's global scope, lessons learned from the three countries will be shared internationally through webinars, conferences and journal articles.

## **TIMELINE**

From November 2015-June 2016, KCHPF will work closely with partners in each country to identify project sites, design the project and research protocols, finalize the ethical review process, initiate a capacity-building program for key staff engaged in the project and begin baseline data collection. Implementation will be for approximately three years, with final data collection and closure in 2019.

## **CONTACT**

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