The Columbia Group
for Children in Adversity

It takes a world
to end violence against children

World Vision

Strengthening Child Protection Systems:

A Promising Approach to Violence against Children in El Salvador

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than one billion children worldwide suffer from the scourge of violence every year. Violence against children occurs in homes, at schools and in wider society.[1] Violence takes on many forms, and the negative effects can be long lasting, often preventing children and adolescents from thriving. Many children and adolescents in El Salvador, as well as other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, live in areas where violence is all too common. The enormity of this problem has caused the international community,[2] including World Vision, to strengthen its commitment to end all violence against children.

Since 2011, World Vision El Salvador has significantly increased its efforts to reduce violence against children and strengthen child protection systems. This report documents findings from a qualitative assessment conducted in El Salvador. The assessment examines children and adolescents' experiences in their homes, schools and communities; protective factors such as life skills; and the changes in the legal framework and partnership for child protection. The evidence is presented according to the main child protection issues, the immediate and root causes of these issues, the characteristics of the child protection system, and World Vision's contributions to the child protection system.

The main child protection issues identified include:
- Child labour
- Neglect and intra-familial violence
- Teenage pregnancy
- Violent gangs

The immediate and root causes of these child protection issues include:
- Poverty and Lack of opportunities
- High rates of migration and Family separation/ Child abandonment
- Changes in family structures and values
- Cultural and traditional beliefs and practices

The child protection system was characterized by:

Weaknesses
- Delayed implementation of child protection legal framework
- Limited collaboration and coordination
- Political barriers and limited political will for child protection
- Lack of trust in the efficiency of child protection authorities and reporting mechanisms
- Limited understand of child protection legal framework

Strengths
- Children and Adolescents' knowledge of rights and laws
- Voices of children and adolescents
- Local actors' contributions to child protection, especially parents, faith based organisations and teachers
- Strong legal framework for child protection

Key contributions by World Vision include:
- Establishing and strengthening local child protection committees and boards
- Mobilizing communities to protect children and adolescents, especially churches and faith leaders
- Strengthening protective factors through trainings and workshops
- Developing partnerships for child protection

1 S. Hillis, J. Mercy, A. Amobi, et al., 'Global Prevalence of Past-year Violence against Children: A Systematic Review and Minimum Estimates', Pediatrics 137/3 (2016): e20154079.
2 UNICEF sponsors a campaign to end violence against children; see https://www.endviolenceagainstchildren.org/.

Where more work must be done:

- Continue to strengthen collaborations across sectors and between government and civil society, especially at the local level
- Encourage the significant participation of children and adolescents in child protection systems strengthening
- Build communication and trust between communities, especially children and adolescents, and child protection authorities and governmental agencies
- Make meaningful investments in children and adolescents and their protection
- Increase efforts to address gang violence and its effect on children, adolescents, and youth
- Support the improved implementation, coordination and monitoring of child protection policies and legal frameworks

The assessment identified best practices that could be scaled up, especially the strengthening of links between child protection actors from civil society and government. Further analysis is needed within the context to identify specific actions for the effective and sustainable strengthening of the child protection system in El Salvador.

INTRODUCTION

The assessment identified best practices that could be scaled up, especially the strengthening of links between child protection actors from civil society and government. Further analysis is needed within the context to identify specific actions for the effective and sustainable strengthening of the child protection system in El Salvador.

Child protection is critical to the well-being of children and adolescents. Where children and adolescents are not safe in their families, communities and at school, they cannot thrive. Violence against children can have long-lasting negative consequences on children and adolescents and society. It jeopardises the survival, health and education of children and adolescents, eroding countries' economic and social capital. Many children and adolescents in El Salvador live in areas where violence against children is all too common. As a result of the growing rates of violence against children, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children and its recommendations as well as extensive consultations and assessments, World Vision developed strategic programming and advocacy plans to strengthen child protection systems. It used a systems approach to address violence against children and create lasting, positive benefits for children and adolescents.

World Vision's approach aims to strengthen local and national child protection systems in contextually appropriate ways so that governments, civil society, faith-based actors and organisations, community stakeholders, families and children and adolescents are empowered, coordinated and working together to create a protective environment that cares for and supports all children and adolescents, especially the most vulnerable. World Vision uses evidence to advocate for better public policy, mobilise others, foster partnerships and build capacity to enhance child protection and well-being.

World Vision's activities target both formal and non-formal elements of the child protection system and respond to the gaps and strengths identified at both national and local levels. This approach, which brings together the formal and non-formal elements and actors, has the potential to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence. This systems approach looks comprehensively at the root causes of child protection issues, drawing attention to the gaps or weakness in a society which put children and adolescents at risk and do not respond adequately to instances of violence against children.

World Vision was widely recognised for its contribution to strengthening child protection. Evidence demonstrated that children and adolescents' had knowledge of their rights. Parents, faith leaders, teachers and child protection actors, formal and non-formal also increased their knowledge and capacity related to child rights and protection. World Vision successfully influenced the legal framework for child protection, especially its implementation at the local level. The evidence also pointed to World Vision's ability to convene communities, governmental authorities, civil society organisations, including churches and faith based organisations, and children and adolescents themselves in effort to promote child rights and protection. Furthermore, as a result of World Vision's convening of key actors and institutions/organisations, partnerships with formal and non-formal child protection actors were established and capacity and coordination was improved which resulted in better support services for children, adolescents, families and communities.

Considering the findings and analysis, World Vision has contributed to the strengthening of the child protection system both locally and nationally. In close collaboration with communities, civil society and governments, World Vision has created safer environments for children and adolescents, stronger protective factors among children and adolescents, and more rigorous legal frameworks and support services that strengthen child protection.

While World Vision's contributions are highly valuable, it is important to analyse the implementation of the findings to continue to strengthening the child protection system. Best practices were identified and, and consideration should be given to scaling up such practices, especially the establishment and expansion of links among child protection actors from civil society and government. Based on the key findings and analysis, recommendations were made to World Vision as well as to child protection actors, including civil society and government. Additional analysis of the findings within the specific context is necessary in order to develop and implement appropriate and effective solutions.

BACKGROUND

World Vision has been working in El Salvador since 1975. World Vision El Salvador serves hundreds of communities and supports more than 50,000 children and adolescents and their families in 37 municipalities and seven departments including Ahuachapan, Sonsonate, San Salvador, Usulután, San Miguel, Morazan, and San Vicente. World Vision El Salvador provides support through programming and advocacy related to education and life skills, health, emergency preparedness, economic development, justice for children, faith and child protection and participation.

World Vision´s Systems Approach to Child Protection

To identify the most pressing child protection issues, gaps and strengths, World Vision conducted a comprehensive assessment in three area development programmes in El Salvador during 2011 and 2012 using the Analysis, Design, and Planning Tool (ADAPT). The ADAPT engages children, adolescents and community actors in participatory assessment, analysis and planning that seeks to understand the state of child protection in the given context. The ADAPT allowed formal and non-formal child protection actors to collectively identify the root causes of child protection issues in the community, as well as the effectiveness of and gaps in the current child protection system.

Results from the ADAPT assessments[3] in El Salvador identified the child protection systems' strengths as a robust legal framework for child protection, a comprehensive child protection policy, and the inclusion of diverse public institutions in the child protection system in accordance with legal mandates. The assessments also found significant child protection gaps, including weak coordination between institutions, insufficient operating budget to fulfil the legal mandates and responsibilities, and limited resources to care for vulnerable children. The main child protection issues identified were child labour, poverty, human trafficking, gang recruitment, irregular migration, gender based violence, security, health and education. The main root causes of these issues included domestic violence, community violence and structural violence. This data was used to inform World Vision programming and advocacy at the local and national level, to influence stakeholders, and to set benchmarks for monitoring and evaluation.

Following the United Nation's Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children and its recommendations, as well as the consultations and assessments conducted by World Vision, World Vision acknowledged the need for a systems approach to address both the formal and non-formal elements and actors that together have the potential to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence. To strengthen child protection, World Vision used a systems approach which looked comprehensively at the root causes of child protection issues, drawing attention to the gaps or weaknesses in the system, targeting both formal and non-formal elements of the child protection system[4] and addressed the gaps and strengths identified in the child protection systems and the particular contexts (national and local).

In the systems approach, World Vision's project activities target both formal and non-formal actors and elements that together have the potential to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and all forms of violence against children and adolescents. (See Figure 1.) The term formal elements refers to laws, regulations and policies established by the government, while non-formal elements are the attitudes, values, behaviours, social norms and traditional practices in society. Formal actors are recognised as government authorities at different levels, such as those responsible for the defence and administration of justice, police, and those working within public services that directly and indirectly contribute to the strengthening the child protection system. Non-formal actors include parents and caregivers; civil society organisations; community and faith leaders; and children, adolescents and youth. The boundaries between these elements and actors depend on the country contexts and are often more blurred at the community level.[5]

Within this approach World Vision El Salvador strives to identify and address gaps and to foster strengths of the child protection system identified in the communities and at the national level. This systems approach seeks to:

- address child protection issues in a comprehensive and sustainable manner;
- affirm the role of parents and caregivers in the care and protection of children and adolescents;
- affirm the responsibility of states to guarantee the care and protection of children and adolescents; and

3 Diagnóstico y Análisis de la Protección de la Niñez a Nivel Nacional y en tres Municipios: Armenia, Depto. de Sonsonate; Santa Elena, Depto. de Usulután y Ciudad Barrios, Depto. de San Miguel

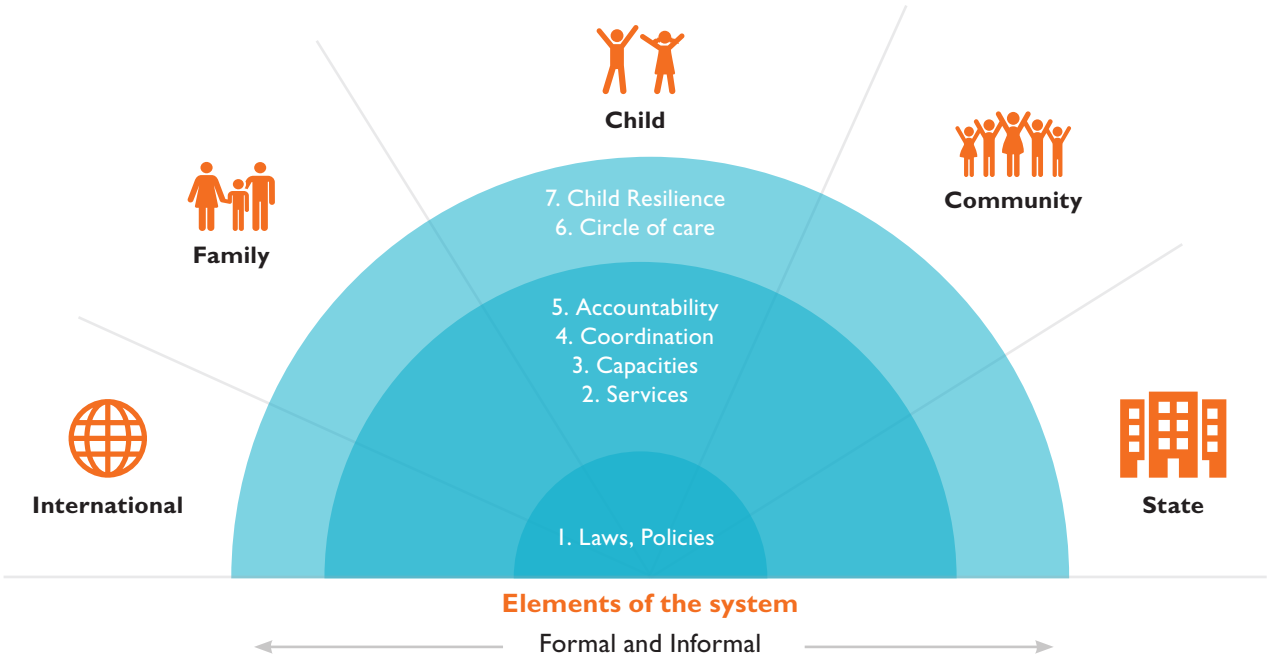
- strengthen the protective environment for all children and adolescents.

At the centre of the systems approach was the Child Protection and Advocacy project model. The Child Protection and Advocacy model is a set of specific interventions that focus on strengthening the child protection system (both formal and non-formal elements) at the community level, thus empowering local communities to strengthen the protection of children and adolescents from abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence. The four key components of the Child Protection Advocacy project[6] model include:

1. Raise awareness and mobilise through community dialogue around child protection issues of concern.
2. Provide quality support to vulnerable families through social support networks and services.
3. Establish and/or strengthen reporting and referral mechanisms to respond to incidents of violence.
4. Build life skills and resilience in children, adolescents and youth through the positive development of boys and girls and asset building.

The Child Protection and Advocacy project model provided a comprehensive framework for child protection work at the community level while also establishing an evidence base for advocacy efforts at local, national, regional and global levels. World Vision programme staff and partners have contextualised the Child Protection and Advocacy project model and developed interventions specific to the particular context following in-depth analyses with partners.

Figure 1. The seven elements and five main types of actors of the child protection system.



4 World Vision defines the child protection system as a set of coordinated formal and non-formal elements working together to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence against children.
5 World Vision International, A Systems Approach to Child Protection: Discussion Paper (2011), 2.
6 Please note that the Child Protection and Advocacy project model was revised in 2016 to address four domains of change.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was led by Columbia Group for Children in Adversity with the aim of providing an independent assessment of the outcomes of World Vision´s efforts to strengthen child protection systems in El Salvador from 2013 through June of 2016. The objective was to collect qualitative data pertaining to the main child protection issues, the strengths and weaknesses of the child protection system and World Vision´s contribution to strengthening the child protection system at the local and national level.

Qualitative methods were used to collect data during July and August of 2016. Qualitative data were collected using focus group discussions with adolescents, parents and caregivers, and child protection actors, both formal and non-formal, at the local and national level. Individual key informant interviews were also conducted with youth, parents and caregivers, and child protection actors, both formal and non-formal, at the local and national level. The focus groups and key informant interviews were conducted in Spanish.

Sampling strategy and population

Non-probability sampling strategies were used for the focus groups and in-depth interviews at the local and national level. World Vision national office and area development programmes staff and volunteers used a combination of purposive and convenience sampling to identify and convene informants. The sample population consisted of two area development programmes within the municipalities of Jucuapa and San Francisco Menendez. These area development programmes were purposely selected in order to manage security concerns.

Jucuapa, in the Usulután department, is characterized by moderate to extreme poverty. The majority of its inhabitants have migrated from rural areas looking for economic opportunities and a better quality of life. There are high homicide rates in Jucuapa due gangs and criminal groups. Violence primarily affects adolescents and youth and has created a sense of insecurity across entire population.

San Francisco Menendez is part of the Ahuachapán department which is located 130 kilometres from the national capital. It shares a border with Guatemala and is an agricultural area, cultivating corn, beans and grains. In San Francisco Menendez, the main problem is insecurity followed by droughts and floods.

Participants

More than 143 persons participated in 19 focus groups. Eighteen persons participated in individual in-depth interviews. The demographic composition of the focus group and interview participants follows in Tables 1 and 2.

A total of eight focus groups were conducted with adolescents, and four with parents, three with formal actors and three with non-formal actors, and one with World Vision staff. The adolescent focus groups were segregated by gender and sponsorship status according to World Vision. Parent focus groups were segregated by their children's World Vision sponsorship status. Focus groups with child protection actors were segregated by formal and non-formal.

Table 1. Focus group demographics by location and number of participants.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS	
Demographic Characteristics	Number
JUCUAPA, USULUTÁN	
Adolescent girls, not sponsored	11
Adolescent girls, sponsored	11
Adolescent boys, not sponsored	12
Adolescent boys, sponsored	11
Parents of not sponsored children	5
Parents of sponsored children	4+
Formal actors	4
Non-formal actors	5
SAN FRANCISCO MENENDEZ , AHUACHAPÁN	
Adolescent girls, not sponsored	12
Adolescent girls, sponsored	7
Adolescent boys, not sponsored	10
Adolescent boys, sponsored	11
Mothers of not sponsored children	4+
Mothers of sponsored children	4+
Formal actors	4
Non-formal actors	8+
SAN SALVADOR	
Non-formal actors	13
Formal actors	7
TOTAL	143

Table 2. In-depth interview participants by location.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS	
Demographic Characteristics	Number
LOCAL LEVEL	
Youth leader[7]	6
Formal actor	3
Non-formal actor	4
Sub-total	13
NATIONAL LEVEL	
Youth Leader	1
Formal actor	1
Non-formal actor	3
Sub-total	5
Total	18

Data collection tools

The qualitative tools used were guides for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with subgroups at local and national levels. In-depth interviews were also conducted at local and national levels with formal and non-formal child protection actors, including youth leaders. Interview and focus group discussion guides aimed to collect data on children's and adolescents' experiences with violence, perspectives on violence against children, structures and support mechanisms that promote child rights and protection, pathways to response, the functioning of the child protection system, changes that have occurred in the last three years, and preventative factors that limit violence against children at the community level and/or national level depending upon the participants' roles.

The focus group discussions were guided by five questions containing themes of risks to children and adolescents, resources in the community for child protection, usage of these resources, local efforts to promote child protection, and World Vision's interventions. These questions were followed by established probes which varied slightly depending on the participants' responses. The discussions were held in Spanish, guided by an independent female researcher and assisted by a female note taker that was formerly a World Vision staff member.

The in-depth interviews were guided by eight questions that were posed to participants revolving around threats to children and adolescents, structures that promote child rights, usage of these structures, the functioning of the child protection system in general, and World Vision's role in child protection processes. Interview participants were from different sectors of the child protection system.

Informed consent was obtained from each participant. Voice recorders were used (with participants consent) during focus group discussions to enable verbatim transcription in addition to written notes.

Data analysis

The qualitative data analysed changes in violence against children and in the child protection system that had occurred over the past three years. The data analysis was conducted using a grounded methodology led by international researchers. Key categories, themes and patterns were identified inductively through holistic reading and examined through processes of triangulation with different subgroups (e.g. adolescent girls affiliated with World Vision; adolescent girls with no affiliation with World Vision; formal child protection actors; non-formal child protection actors and so on). Since qualitative data frequently provides insight into processes of social change and the mechanisms through which changes occur, the qualitative data was triangulated with the qualitative secondary data, boosting analytic power through convergent findings where possible.

Limitations

Due to the prevalence of violence as well as ethical and security concerns, probability quantitative methods were not possible and only non-probability qualitative methods were used.

World Vision staff helped to recruit participants in the qualitative data collection, and this could have been a source of social desirability bias. Similarly, though the researchers presented themselves as being independent from World Vision, nonetheless because they were accompanied by World Vision staff, this may also have created potential biases.

7 For the purposes of this table, youth leaders are noted separately from non-formal actors.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings and analysis are organized into five sections, including main child protection issues, immediate and root causes, weaknesses and strengths of the child protection system and World Vision´s contribution to strengthening the child protection system.

Main Child Protection Issues

Child Labour. As many families in El Salvador live in poverty, children and adolescents are sent to work instead of school. Between 2009 and 2012 the average number of child labourers remained constant at 7% of the Salvadoran population under the age of 16, reaching a total of 144,168 child labourers in 2013.[8] An adolescent girl from Jucuapa recounted her classmate's situation:

> She missed school regularly. She only came to school four or five times per month. This was a result of her helping her mother at the market, so that the family could have a way of life. She missed school a lot.
> – Adolescent girl, Sponsored, Jucuapa

Similarly, a non-formal child protection actor remarked on the prevalence of child labour in the community:

> Child labour overwhelms our community. Sometimes these children don't go to school so they can work. It is regrettable. Perhaps it is not about punishing the parent, but rather figuring out how to help them so that their children can go to school instead of work.
> - Non-formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

An adolescent girl and a youth leader explained the connection between child labour and increased risks and exposure to harm:

> Due to economic problems, parents are also sending their children out to sell candy, which creates safety issues. Children are left unaccompanied. They especially tend to sell on buses.
> - Youth leader, San Francisco Menendez

> It could be because the lack of money among families… maybe parents don't have money to help their children, so they send them to beg or work. Since children learn from what they see. Sometimes on the street, they become violent.
> - Adolescent girl, Not sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

Neglect and intra familial violence. During discussions with adolescents, parents and community members, participants spoke of the negligence and intra-familiar violence children and adolescents experience. Participants often attributed this violence and neglect to parents' interests in pursuing matters other than raising their children.

> Mothers, fathers, or caretakers of boys and girls are those carrying out the violations of rights, principally abuse. For example beginning with negligence, there is a lot of negligence on behalf of families in the country. It can be negligence because the parents do not know how to exercise their role, or it can be [negligence] because the parent does not want to exercise their role.
> - Non-formal actor, National level

> Sometimes [there is] family violence. People get into fights over nothing, or because they hate each other. Sometimes when fathers show up drunk, they get into a fight with the wife because she does not make food. Then she tells him that he is drunk all the time, that he is a slacker, that he doesn't spend time at home, doesn't work. All these type of situations cause fights amongst families and friends sometimes too.
> - Adolescent boy, Sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

Some participants attributed teenage pregnancy to a lack of attention or neglect from parents or caregivers, for example:

> Pregnancy at an early age… a child caring for another child… they do not have the maturity to handle the mess they have got themselves into. It might be a lack of understanding within the family or [lack of] communication between the mother and her daughter. Then she looks outside the home, which then ends in becoming pregnant at an early age.
> – Mother, Jucuapa

> In the case of the girls, if one of them ends up pregnant, many times, as I heard someone say, it is because the parents were neglectful. So the girls don't have anyone to orient them or give them advice about what to do.
> – Adolescent girl, Not sponsored, Jucuapa

8 UNICEF, 2014.

Teenage pregnancy. According to the United Nations Development Programme, each year 42% of all pregnancies in El Salvador are teenage pregnancies. Each day 70 adolescents become mothers in El Salvador.[9] Across all age groups, genders, and municipalities, participants considered teenage pregnancy to be the greatest threat to girls' well-being. It is a complex issue with negative consequences for the adolescent girl and her child. Participants described some of the consequences as a loss in opportunities, stigmatization, and seeking out illegal activities to terminate the pregnancy.

> Early pregnancy affects someone a lot because the goals that they had, will not be met. Their life will change. It will take a new course, and they will set new goals. It is like a chain in that the same thing gets repeated over and over. What happened to her, might happen to her child. They don't give much importance to improving themselves.
>
> - Adolescent girl, Not sponsored, Jucuapa

> I think that it's harmful to a girl when she gets pregnant at a young age, because people start to discriminate against her. They [the pregnant teenagers] get told they are easy or that they go around with all the men. She will feel bad, she might get depressed, and that child that she is carrying is not at fault. She might decide to abort or when the baby is born she might abandon the baby.
> - Adolescent girl, Not sponsored, Jucuapa

When discussing teenage pregnancy, participants notably ascribed "responsibility" to girls. There was mention of adolescent boys or men "taking off", but there was no mention of the social expectations or long-term consequences faced as a result of becoming fathers. According to participants, adolescent girls bear the stigma as a result of becoming pregnant at an early age. Adolescent girls are stigmatized by their communities as well as their families.

> When girls get pregnant, parents do not notice it until their belly starts to show. Parents will get mad because they have not been told, then they begin to scream at them, sometimes they even throw them out on the street, and girls do not know what to do.
> – Adolescent Girl, Not Sponsored, Jucuapa

Violent gangs. Gangs were recognized as an overwhelmingly source of anguish for all participants, especially children, adolescents, youth and parents.

Gangs affect nearly every realm of life. Gang threats are directed at adults, adolescents, and especially boys as they are the primary target for gang recruitment.

> I was telling my friends, that for us boys, sometimes we get threatened, as well as our family. In order to avoid that, we are forced to join a gang and do bad things, because if we do not do that they are going to kill us or something might happen to our families.
> - Adolescent boy, Sponsored, Jucuapa

Children and adolescents are subject to continuous recruitment and harassment by gang members, and have little choice but to try to avoid exposure. This often leads to dropping out of school since recruitment takes place in and around schools.

> Another reason children stop going to school is because they feel threatened because the criminal groups, or gangs, harass and bully them. It causes them to fear that they will be killed so they stop going to school.
>
> - Youth leader, San Francisco Menendez

> In each school there are one or two [students] who have joined gangs. This boy bullies the other boys, or tries to find ways to get other boys into the gangs and stay in school [to recruit others], or tries to get them to stop studying.
> - Youth leader, Jucuapa

Gangs often have control over children and adolescents by establishing and enforcing rules of mobility and dress. Geographical territories are established in neighbourhoods and certain types of clothing are connected to particular gangs. If a child or adolescent mistakenly wanders into the wrong territory or dresses in an incorrect manner, there consequences can be dire.

> The gangs affect us because of the crime. There are things that we cannot do anymore. We cannot go out to certain areas. We cannot dress in certain ways.
> – Adolescent boy, Not sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

> Gangs affect us because we cannot go out to just any place. We have to know how to dress. If we go to visit a family member who lives far away, we have to ask for permission from the ones watching over that locality [the gang], because otherwise you can get killed and you will not go back home.

9 United Nations Development Programme, 2016.

– Adolescent boy, Not sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

Most of them [children and adolescents] are from here, and they are already "marked" by criminal groups. If you live in a certain community, you cannot freely go and enter another community. Why is that? It is because if that other community is controlled by an opposite criminal group, you are practically facing death even if you have nothing to do with the criminal groups.
- Youth leader, Jucuapa

Adults also regret the situation created by gangs and the ways in which they have left children and adolescents confined to their homes. Adult participants consistently expressed worry for children and adolescents to be in the wrong place or mistaken as a gang member.

We have heard of murders, the murder of girls. Sometimes they leave their bodies on the street. This really upsets the children and sometimes they do not want to go outside. I have a son that rarely likes to go out. I tell him to be careful and to not get involved with bad influences when he goes to the park, for example.
- Mother, San Francisco Menendez

Here, we still see a lot of human rights violations. It is a crime to be a young person. They [young people] get mistreated [by the police]. I have seen cases of young people that are not involved in anything negative but dress a little differently, so the police think that they are part of gangs or other gangs.
- Father, Jucuapa

Gangs are pervasive throughout the communities consulted. Participants explained that ignoring a gang's orders often results in death, mostly of adolescents and youth.

Young people today think that going into gangs will resolve everything, but that is not correct. They say they will come back home, but no—they come back in a box [coffin].
– Adolescent boy, Not sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

The effect of it [ignoring gangs] are deaths. Sometimes something painful, which you can't cure in a person… It causes a lot of consequences. An adolescent will get killed when he joins a gang. It also causes depression because you don't find a way out of those situations. Especially if you're involved in that. The only way out is to kill yourself or to be killed.
- Adolescent boy, Sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

Immediate and Root Causes

Poverty and Lack of Opportunities. According to the World Bank, 25% of the Salvadoran population lives in chronic poverty.[10] Poverty was identified as one of the main sources of child rights violations and other barriers to child well-being.

I think we are moving forward in preventing violence, but we also have to see other variables that contribute to the violation of children's rights, and one of those is the poverty in which families live. There is also a lack of education, lack of work, alcohol, family disintegration…The first thing to fix is the poverty in the country, since that's the biggest driver of the violations of children's rights.
- Formal actor, Jucuapa

Sometimes the biggest issue with poverty is not the lack of money. It is that it does not let you see beyond what is in front of you. Children from low income areas are vulnerable to the violence, but also face a lack of self-motivation and a lack of support from their parents.
- Non-formal actor, Jucuapa

In some instances, joining a gang is understood as a deliberate choice for children and adolescents facing poverty and limited opportunities.

On the situation in this municipality, violence happens because young people do not have opportunities. Young people who do not study or who do not have the means to study, or do not have the possibility of having a good job, they end up deciding to get mixed up in gangs, and this generates violence. Because of these groups, the people who are not mixed up in gangs feel unsafe on the street.
- Adolescent girl, Not sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

High rates of migration and family separation/ child abandonment. Highly related to poverty and a lack of opportunities is migration—of parents and of children and adolescents. Among adolescents and youth, migration was described as an opportunity to work and/ or study, support their families and escape the violence in El Salvador.

10 World Bank, 2016.

The situation in this country, with the crime, is putting our young people in tremendous danger. The parents many times say 'it is better for my child to go to the United States.' There they will find a means to survive, work and help us.
- Non-formal actor, National level
Here in El Salvador there is no work. That's why it is said that there is a better future there [in the United States], especially for the adolescents who will receive a better education in the United States. That is why we have immigration or migration.
- Adolescent boy, Sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

When parents migrate, they often leave children behind and there are negative effects. As described by participants, children and adolescents are left under the care of relatives, sometimes with little supervision and even neglected.

One way or another, migration puts them [children and adolescents] at risk. Another vulnerability is when parents migrate and then they [children] are left without with their mother and father, and in one way or another it contributes to their rights being threatened.
- Non-formal actor, Jucuapa

[Parents migrate] to look for resources, and it separates families. The children stay behind in the towns, and either the church arrives or the gang members arrive, or the drugs arrive, and are immediately followed by gang members.
- Non-formal actor, National level

Another problem is migration, because the children are left with their grandparents who are already tired from life and they just let them run free. These children who have been abandoned by their parents are just waiting for their remittances and do whatever they want with that money when it arrives.
- Formal actor, Jucuapa

Changes in family structures and values.
Although migration is one of the factors that contributes to untraditional household arrangements, many participants noted the deterioration of the family unit and altered family values in general. The perceived deterioration of the family unit brings about various threats to children and adolescents according to participants. Such threats include an overburdened single parent or a child with too much responsibility at a young age.

There are dysfunctional marriages at home. Sometimes only mom is taking care of all the responsibilities. Sometimes mom has to work and the children are cared for by their older brother or sister. Sometimes not having an adult at home creates problems in the behaviour of the child.
- Mother, Jucuapa

I think that maybe teenagers feel the need for someone to support them or to be supported. They are affected by growing up without a father. When we get together in churches, we hear young people who feel bad about not growing up with a father, or because they have had to play the role of a father. They have to work from the time they are children and have had to assume that role.
- Mother, Jucuapa

Well, I would think we would have a better country if everyone spent more time with their children.
- Adolescent boy, Sponsored, Jucuapa

Participants also mentioned a change in values and a loss in family unity as causes of neglect.

A lot of work needs to be done within the families. I tell the parents in our assemblies that values are learned at home, and school should just complement what is learned at home. What is happening now is that the family is not taking on this responsibility. Many children are learning their values in the streets. There are particular situations that lead children astray. In general, a vast majority of families are not taking on this role that they should.
- Formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

A lack of faith, also the lack of being responsible… They [parents] are very negligent. [There is] a lot of materialism. They are looking for their own dreams. There is a lot of selfishness in the home.
- Non-formal actor, National level

A lack of values like respect and love… these are fundamentals. The family has totally deteriorated. Now dad is an alcoholic who abandoned the house. Mom looks for another person to be able to support her, and from this comes sexual abuse. There is no teaching about respect for the body, sexuality-- premature sex, gangs, drugs…. Now at the churches, we see that the people want to hear what pleases them, and not the important topics. This has caused the family to crumble,

which has created more homes where mom is alone, or the children are alone with grandma or with uncle. This has led children to gangs, or death in crime, or young single mothers.
- Non-formal actor, National level

Cultural and traditional beliefs and practices. Some beliefs and practices rooted in culture and tradition threaten children and adolescents' protection and well-being. Several child protection actors recognized these beliefs and practices as challenges to strengthening child protection systems. Many noted that children and adolescents are not recognized as "rights bearers" but instead as subjugates to their parents' will according to traditional beliefs and perpetuated culture in El Salvador.

We have a society built and based on unequal relations and structural [inequalities] that have to do with the involvement of violence in different dimensions. It has an adult-centrist vision of children, where boys and girls are not subjects of rights but instead objects.
- Non-formal actor, National level

The issue of adults has been a big challenge in our project. We have decided to work with them. Some adults do not accept that children are entitled to rights because of the culture they've [adults] lived through and their realities.
- Youth leader, National level

As a result of such beliefs, children and adolescents are often severely punished. This use of corporal punishment is often justified by parents as it is the same treatment that they received growing-up.

When there is maltreatment, there are children with bruises and marks on their bodies. The fathers are spoken to and sometimes they leave angry, saying 'it's my problem, not yours'. However, they are violating their rights. Today things are not like before, when you could severely punish children. Now there are laws in El Salvador.
– Formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

The other part is parenting practices. Inadequate parenting practices result in having families who use abuse as discipline, which is something natural and traditional in our country. Mothers and fathers discipline through hitting their children with belts or slippers. For them [parents], this is discipline.
- Non-formal actor, National level

Attitudes, beliefs and practices related to **gender** are also a determinant of the protection and well-being of children and adolescents. Adolescent girl participants expressed the way in which they are perceived as the "weaker sex". They described increased vulnerabilities to mistreatment and restricted opportunities.

We think that the situation for girls is that sometimes we are discriminated against by the opposite gender. They say that we are not useful for anything except housework...
- Adolescent girl, Not sponsored, Jucuapa

Girls run the risk of being mistreated. There are boys who think that girls... [..].. are the weaker sex. But as they say, women have one more sense than men. Boys think they are bigger than girls.
- Adolescent girl, Sponsored, Jucuapa

Participants also recognized machismo[11] as a source of the hostility and violence against women and children.

In our culture there has always been a lot of machismo. The culture has always been like this, where men mistreat their wives and children.
– Non-formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

Characteristics of the Child Protection System in El Salvador

Principle Weaknesses

Delayed implementation of child protection legal framework. The passage of the Law for the Integral Protection of Childhood and Adolescence (Ley de Protección Integral de la Niñez y Adolescencía- LEPINA) sparked action in formal and non-formal actors at all levels. Committees were formed, alliances were made, child protection advocates were trained, and communities were engaged and mobilized to protect and promote children and adolescents' rights. Despite these promising advances in the child protection system's development, there are still many gaps and shortcomings in its implementation.

I would like to see the LEPINA law put into action and well-managed. It is a very comprehensive law. It is a first world law. It is really great and from a legal perspective. They did a terrific job, but we are still waiting on the implementation, [it is difficult because] it requires commitment

11 Machismo is an attitude, quality, or way of behaving that agrees with traditional ideas about men being very strong and aggressive. Def. 1. Merriam Webster Online, Merriam Webster, n.d. Web. 12 Sept. 2016

> from everyone: from those at home, schools, and all the systems that protect children. We need courage, organisation and knowledge in order for the LEPINA law to function in a comprehensive way.
> - Formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

> In the excitement of coordinating, we are opening many spaces. My personal critique is that... [..].. It does not go beyond three actions or products—the periodic meetings, the creation of a plan, and the creation of a directorate. It does not transcend this. There are various councils in the territory, but they are not enacted to support the population.
> - Formal actor, National level

For example, the Local Rights Committees in Jucuapa and San Francisco Menendez have been established, but have yet to respond to or resolve cases of child rights violations.

> In our municipality, we have started forming a Local Committee for the Rights of Children and Adolescents with supervision of CONNA, which will be in charge of receiving complaints and reports of abuse. They have been organizing themselves, but it is expected that it will be a place where a child can feel confident to go and make a report.
> - Non-formal actor, Jucuapa

> We believe that the Local Rights Committee will be a success, a place where children and women can turn to for help. We believe that it will be operating in six months.
> - Non-formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

While Local Rights Committees have been assembled, participants described that these committees were not fully functioning.

> I would not venture so far as to say that we have a [local rights] committee functioning 100 percent, but rather that they are beginning to do some of their functions. Some are at the point [of having] a work plan, and through this work plan, they are beginning to carry out some rights promotion activities in their municipality or through the schools. [But] according to what people have said in the territories, few cases have been resolved.
> -Non-formal actor, National level

> I believe that there has been a lack of progress in the local system itself, because we have been very procedural. The regulation is highly developed. There are many requirements for the selection process, for the election, and the training process. It is unclear how this [local rights] committee will assume full function.
> - Non-formal actor, National level

Limited collaboration and coordination. As identified by several of national child protection actors, part of the delay in implementation is due to compartmentalisation and reluctance for cross sectoral collaboration within the child protection system.

> The main barrier that we face is the institutional culture… [..].. We do not have a culture of acting as a system. We have the tendency of seeing only our own functions. Competencies and everything else that makes up these functions, or adds to or takes away from new functions, we see as adversities and we do not see the possibility of synergy in systemic action.
> - Formal actor, National level

A formal actor illustrated the sectorial mentality:

> To use another example that is a little more recent, the Salvadoran Institute for Women—they said 'My competence is with women, not with girls.'… But [girls] are women! Right now some of these elements have been overcome, and this is allowing us to begin to coordinate ourselves, but very slowly. We are still missing although I prefer to say that we are still learning how to coordinate ourselves. But one of the principle causes has to do with this organic system in our country, which is structured in a sectorial way.
> - Formal actor, National level

Political barriers and limited political will for child protection. Another hindrance to the child protection system's implementation is the absence of political will to contribute to the process. Children and adolescents are often not prioritized by politicians and elected leaders. At the municipal level, the absence of political will causes frustrations and delays in the provision of child protection services according to the participants.

> We have set up forums on [the importance of] investing in children to speak to the mayor. Sometimes girls and boys are not seen as part of the municipality government's responsibility. They think that [since] boys and girls do not vote, they do not need to show them what is being done.
> - Non-formal actor, National level

> Another barrier is the political culture. We are a polarized country, and when it comes time to assign priorities to policies, the "people pleasing" begins. [Children and adolescents] are far from being the absolute priority in budgets. The role of civil society is to be more influential, more organized, and to place children on the agenda, on the forefront.
> - Formal actor, National level

In El Salvador, political offices at the municipal level are elected every three years, leading to what participants described as an environment of fiercely competitive political rivalries. While the child protection system should be autonomous, its actors often find themselves having to deal with political parties that are expecting endorsements or other trade-offs in exchange for their collaboration or support of child protection efforts.

> It is all under the [political] party's banner. 'Only if you are in my party, I will collaborate with you on this. If you're not in my party, I won't collaborate. You can't participate in this'.
> - Non-formal actor, National level

> When working with municipal governments and government in general, we face bureaucracy. There is a lack of political interest in supporting children. Also our culture naturalizes violence… […].. Also when we think about the projects or the things we want to do, sometimes we are very ambitious and we want things to happen in the timeline that we have planned, but we have to take into account the barriers that we face, for example the changes in government at the municipal level, which are every 3 years, generate delays in project implementation.
> -Non-formal actor, National level

It was evident that this political maelstrom was present in Jucuapa, where a recent change of administration deviated plans that had been progressing steadily.

> To be honest, the only part that is being done well right now is the operation of a computer centre. There were changes in leadership in the municipality and each person brings their projects and new authorities push away what was being done and start with their own ideas.
> - Formal actor, Jucuapa

> We were really affected by the election process. The mayor changed after this last election, which meant that we would not be able to do much for a while… [..]… Both the Inter-Sectorial Committee and the Local Rights Committee could not get together. We could not do anything. That really affected us and delayed us a bit. First there was the election process. Second, the change in government. One mayor left, and another one came in, which meant we had to start from scratch with him explaining everything…[..]..This also delayed everything. These were our biggest barriers.
> - Youth leader, Jucuapa

Lack of trust in the efficiency of authorities and reporting mechanisms. National law and policy establishes official mechanisms for reporting violence against children, including at the local level. Participants demonstrated awareness of these means of reporting, but they consistently expressed a lack of trust and little faith in the efficiency of these mechanisms and the authorities managing them.

> The authorities do not really do much when parents or adolescents seek help. There should be more organisations to protect the rights of adolescents.
> - Adolescent girl, Sponsored, Jucuapa

> If there is a problem, it is best to deal with the person and not involve the authorities, because the authorities do not do anything. They're afraid of the criminals.
> - Mother, San Francisco Menendez

> If the harm occurs from a gang, girls and boys only have their family at a minimum. In these cases the child cannot decide [what to do]. The family seeks to move the child to where a relative lives, or the child becomes internally displaced within the country. Few people report these situations to the police, because there is suspicion that organized crime has infiltrated the police. It is also difficult for the district attorney to provide a satisfying resolution to these investigations. Nothing happens if I file a report with the district attorney. - Non-formal actor, National level

Although parents were aware of laws and organisations that promote child rights, they were sceptical about their reach and capacity.

> The municipal government, World Vision, Ciudad Mujer… [others]… are the organisations have advised us to go and speak with the police, but nothing has changed. They do not do anything.
> - Mother, San Francisco Menendez

Due to the lack of response, communities have little faith in police and the other institutions and agencies that form part of the reporting and referral system.

> You go through the whole process and then the organisation says 'you do not qualify for my programme.' So then the population says, 'what is the point of going to institutions if they don't work?' I go to the police. The police say come into the car and show me who and where the person is so I can arrest them. But this is a death sentence. In my opinion, it is not that there is a culture of not relying on institutions, but rather that the responses that the institutions provide do not respond to the needs of the population.
> - Formal actor, National level

Participants also explained that reporting a case of intra-family violence could increase risks for the victim.

> Often the people affected do not go [to report], perhaps out of fear of reprisals from the aggressor. The fear of the abused person is another problem... the fear of knowing that they will return home to face the abuser. For example, what does the police do? The victim makes the complaint, the National Police puts the accusation in writing, goes to the home and intimidates the aggressor, but then the police go on as they please. Then again the victim is unprotected and there may be greater retaliation on the part of the aggressor.
> - Non-formal actor, Jucuapa

Participants explained that communities are afraid to report cases of violence or threats of violence against children for various reasons. First, communities believe that police will be dismissive and ineffective in responding to a complaint. Second, communities fear reprisal if and when the perpetrator learns of the accusations. Participants described that there are no measures or protocols in place to ensure the protection of the person(s) that report an incident.

> Yes, they [police] should be more attentive because there are times when something bad happens right in front of them and they do nothing.
> - Adolescent boy, Sponsored, Jucuapa

> If you call the police, they will come, but they do not do anything. They turn around and leave.
> - Mother, Jucuapa

> Parents should go to the authorities, but there are cases when the authorities do not take issues related to young people seriously. They think it is a joke.
> - Adolescent girl, Sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

> If someone goes and tells them that they have been touched or something, they can say 'ah, this is just a child thing,' or 'this is not that important. Be careful and if the same thing happens again, we will look into it.
> - Adolescent girl, Sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

> In the community, when a child is being harmed, there is no one to run to. In fact, I cannot go to the PNC [National Civil Police] to report anything… [..].. In many places, you cannot… [..].. We cannot believe in them because they are part of the problem.
> - Non-formal actor, National level

> And there is no programme that seeks to provide protection to the people and the families that manifest being in risk. They face imminent risks, but they do not always have support... [..].. It is difficult for the district attorney or other institution to bring adequate means of protection.
> - Non-formal actor, National level

> What happens is that as a country we do not, or we are lacking a culture of reporting [a problem]. No one takes charge of promoting this culture, and it's because of fear… Because if I report it, it could get worse because of threats, or other situations. This small programme is lacking the ability to protect the people who have filed a report, and to [build] trust in these administrative processes, because many people do not trust them.
> – Non-formal actor, National level

Limited understanding of the child protection legal framework. Both local and national actors have made commendable efforts to increase awareness of child rights and protection. Many participants explained that communities were unaware of LEPINA and the supports and resources to be provided according to the law.

> What we're lacking is communication so that people know where to report or what to do when they encounter a situation of adversity. Many of us pastors have been trained by CONNA and ISDEMO (Salvadorian Institute for the Development of Women). CONNA came to the Christian communities to provide information

and so that children and people could know who to turn to.
- Non-formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

We have commented upon the LEPINA law. It is an important law that could be very helpful, but one that often remains only in the books. There are no meetings in the communities to explain the law. I don't know the law. The authorities sometimes are the abusers.
– Father, Jucuapa

Here in El Salvador for the past few years we've been speaking about the LEPINA law, but as it's still not a widespread law, there are places where little is known about it. The law encompasses all the rights of children, and also their duties as well. I would even dare to say that there are situations in which no significant changes have been made because people are still unfamiliar with the law.
- Formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

While some communities were aware of the law's existence, they did not understand implications of the law for their lives.

Applying all my knowledge [in my profession] is a good thing. The law is good for us. We need to go even further. I worry because I feel the parents should feel more responsible. That's the obstacle. To help them understand and convince them to comply with the law. The law helps me understand my role but what we're missing is the community's understanding it as well.
- Formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

Children in the urban zone know their rights and can demand them, whereas in rural areas we have to tell them that they have rights and it is very difficult for them to demand them, and for that reason they don't know their rights as well and [their rights] are violated more.
- Youth leader, National level

Principle Strengths

Children and adolescents' knowledge of rights and laws. Across the consulted communities, children and adolescents were aware of existing laws to promote their rights and protection. Only one adolescent focus group did not specifically name the Law for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents (LEPINA), although they did make mention of child rights. In all other focus groups with adolescents, they mentioned child rights and LEPINA. Children and adolescents received this information primarily through schools and efforts by municipality actors.

Here in school and in high schools, the teachers always put up posters in the classrooms that talk about children's rights, so that way we learn about our rights, which we should not only defend, but demand as well! … In my home, my family cannot take my rights away because I know the rights that I have and I also demand them.
- Adolescent girl, Sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

About the talks that were done by the police… Lots of children came and they taught us what our rights were and what we could not be forced to do. They told has that we have the right to accuse the people that were making us do those things.
– Adolescent girl, Not sponsored, Jucuapa

I heard about the LEPINA law last year during summer school. The Red Cross and the police came and they gave us a few talks and [they talked about] the LEPINA law. They explained a bit about what it was, how they would take care of us, what the punishments were for people that harmed a child.
– Adolescent girl, Not sponsored, Jucuapa

Adolescents in Jucuapa verbalized their knowledge of child protection laws and organisations that work to promote child rights.

I learned about that in World Vision. They taught us that when someone is threatening you or something like that, you should first go to the authorities. They can look within the law when things are happening to a person, and identify this is what needs to be done and put the law to use.
- Adolescent boy, Sponsored, Jucuapa

World Vision helps the young people a lot. On Saturdays we have talks where they address the problems that are going on. They advise us to not get involved with the criminal groups since that can have bad consequences.
- Adolescent girl, Sponsored, Jucuapa

Voices of children and adolescents. The meaningful inclusion of children and adolescents in planning, decision making and the implementation of projects or programs related to child protection

is central to a strong child protection system. Some adolescent and youth participants felt as though their participation and contributions were valued.

> We are all taken seriously in the inter-sectoral team, especially young people. I feel very included in that way. We formulate proposals to improve the municipality, proposals such as how we can increase safety or how to reduce family violence. I am very much involved in the implementation of the proposals. We consider them and debate them seriously.
> - Youth leader, San Francisco Menendez

> They [Municipal Board of Children, Adolescents and Youth] have been effective. In the group we have learned to communicate and how to face different issues in the municipality… As young people we have begun to do three things: raise awareness, promote and execute.
> - Youth leader, San Francisco Menendez

Some participants were more sceptical and described the participation of children, adolescents and youth as insignificant and undervalued.

> Boys and girls arrive and are presented as advisory committees, but it would have to be evaluated to what extent these boys and girls have a say and a vote. To what extent do they influence the decisions made by the council? At what point is participation real and not so incidental?
> - Non-formal actor, National level

> Mayors have the juvenile departments, but their work is not visible, only the name.
> - Non-formal actor, National level

Local actors' contributions to child protection, especially parents, faith based organisations and teachers.

Adolescent participants identified parents as their primary support. Across all adolescent focus groups, participants mentioned that they would first seek out the support of their parents if threatened or harmed.

> My mother has been with me through many difficulties in my life. I am only 14 years old, but my life has been filled with problems, and my mom has always been with me and we have made it. Moms are the first thing. They are everything.
> - Adolescent girl, Sponsored, Jucuapa

> First it would be good to communicate with our parents about what is happening. If someone is telling us to join a gang, the first thing we should do is say 'Dad, this is happening to me,' and then he can take charge of the matter. Parents can go to the police, or maybe change locations.
> - Adolescent boy, Not sponsored, San Francisco Menendez

Faith based organisations were also mentioned by adolescents as a source of spiritual and moral support and encouragement.

> The youth group from the Catholic Church support us morally... [..].. Since a lot of children do not have their parent's guidance, we can always turn to church groups to ask for advice.
> - Adolescent girl, Sponsored, Jucuapa

Teachers were also identified as a sources of support in the community, understandably linked with schools' teaching of child rights.

> If the parents do not help the child, then the child can turn to their teachers who are very influential in school. They pay attention to us and give us their opinions when we have a problem.
> - Adolescent girl, Sponsored, Jucuapa

> In school we can tell teachers what is happening. Maybe the teachers will go to the police and the problem will be solved. You cannot go to the police by yourself as a child, because the police will not believe anything. A teacher or school staff might be listened to more.
> - Adolescent boy, Sponsored, Jucuapa

Strong legal framework for child protection.

In 2009, the child protection system in El Salvador expanded significantly with the passage of the Law for the Integral Protection of Childhood and Adolescence (LEPINA). The law establishes a structure for the operationalization of the child protection system, at the local, departmental and national levels. At the national level, two governmental bodies safeguard child rights and protection in El Salvador – the National Council for Childhood and Adolescence (Consejo Nacional de la Niñez y de la Adolescencía - CONNA) and the Salvadorian Institute for the Integral Development of Childhood and Adolescence (Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo Integral de la Niñez y la Adolescencía – INSA). The law also establishes the Shared Attention Network (Red de Atención Compartida - RAC) which coordinates institutions and non-governmental organisations in the

provision of programmes, projects and services for the care of children and adolescents and is overseen by CONNA and ISNA.

All formal and non-formal actors expressed that this law has been a fundamental step towards improving the child protection system. According to participants, it has significantly refocused efforts to protect children and adolescents and their rights.

> LEPINA went into full force in 2011. This was a defining moment. You could pinpoint before and after LEPINA. There was a previous set of regulations before LEPINA, but they did not fully encompass the comprehensive protection of children. LEPINA seeks to make this leap of quality, and orient but also establish rules for all of the actors in the country that work to protect children and adolescents. Its strengths are that it gives a normative framework with more ownership among governmental and non-governmental institutions; it gives a framework for children's rights; and it promotes governmental institutions that were not considered to not competency in the area of children. LEPINA obligates them to act.
> - Formal actor, National level

> There are entities that motivate us to take up a systemic approach. We have to take a rights approach and change the paradigm (…) until we have an inclusive approach, which will not work without rights. We have to see the child as the bearer of rights and not as a bearer of protection. The LEPINA law is a legal instrument that has set the standard. It is the most important legal instrument for children and adolescents. Before the LEPINA law, we never would have thought that we could bring the rights of the child to court; or to litigate for the right to health and education; or that the Attorney General's office would assume the representation of the child...
> - Formal actor, National level

World Vision and other civil society organisations form part of RAC and join efforts to protect children and adolescents while avoiding the duplication of services.

> The law mandates us to connect as NGOs [non-governmental organisations], through the Shared Attention Network. This is an important element in making the link between national and local. Our advantage is that we have a community base since we work at the local level. At the national level, we can identify how we should coordinate at the local level, and in what instances we can work together with boys and girls.
> - Non-formal actor, National level

> Through the RAC (Shared Attention Network), we [non-governmental organisations] achieve the provision of decentralized services. We know the efforts that each entity is carrying out, and we avoid duplicating efforts.
> - Non-formal actor, National level

WORLD VISION'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO STRENGTHENING THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

World Vision has played a defining role in bringing together formal and non-formal actors at the national and local levels. Participants consistently recognized World Vision's role in the advances achieved in the child protection system during recent years.

> World Vision, like other organisations specializing in children, has contributed greatly to the construction of this system… to change the paradigm. This has been an incredibly difficult transition for a society that did not view children as subjects of rights… I think that its [World Vision] role has been decisive for this system to solidify and settle. The truth is that with the formal institutions alone—they have not advanced. World Vision has made great contributions in research and concrete proposals. For example, they created a mechanism for coordination, publications, and research at the local level. These contributions are very interesting and have left a mark.
> - Non-formal actor, National level

Establishing and strengthening local child protection committees and boards. According to LEPINA, Local Rights Committees are a key structure to support child protection at the local level. These committees are to be established in all 262 municipalities in El Salvador. At the time of the assessment, about 50 committees had been formed, many with the support of World Vision. Participants described World Vision as a leader in initiating dialogue, developing partnerships, and providing support for the formation of the local committees and boards for child rights and protection in Jucuapa and San Francisco Menendez.

> World Vision has established and supported schools, churches, and communities, in terms of promoting good values. They took the initiative to form the Intersectoral Committee and later the Local Rights Committee. They have been developing [plans and initiatives] and have been a supporter and partner with all these entities. With education, World Vision has strengthened us, not just in rights and duties but also in daily coexistence. Yes, we see how they help us with materials and strengthening the committees. They [World Vision] have been pioneers.
> - Formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

> World Vision and the incorporation of certain people to the Local Development Committee… they [World Vision] have developed a level of leadership within the municipality that surpasses the work of other institutions... [..].. in the community.
> – Formal actor, Jucuapa

The formation of the Intersectoral Committee and the Local Rights Committee has proven to be quite a feat. Despite challenges, both communities have been able to assemble stakeholders and form the committees.

> We [World Vision] got started with the Intersectoral Committee three years ago. We managed to establish policies to protect children and then presented them to the mayor's office. Then we began working with CONNA, ISNA, the Board of Protection and then the Local Rights Committee. We invested capital and asked institutions to help us. We created a certification programme and provided training to the staff of the institutions as well as regular citizens including fathers and mothers. Then last year we managed to form the Local Rights Committee, we are the fifth municipality of 262 that was able to form this committee.
> – Non-formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

> We had a change in government, and before that change occurred, the committee was more effective because the municipality was more involved. World Vision's work has been important in order to keep the committee going. Last year, the new mayor had new expectations… [..].. He is not firm regarding the decisions that are made. He is not letting us work the way we had been working before…. [..].. We have implemented all the scheduled activities, and this has allowed us to see that we can be a functional committee without the financial support from the municipality. World Vision's support has been very important for us to continue working according to our plan during this year of government change.
> - Non-formal actor, Jucuapa

> This Local Rights Committee was formed a while ago, but it was not really working. It is as if the government is not interested in these institutions functioning properly. With the arrival of World Vision, they started working and their leadership led to the creation of the Inter-Sectorial Committee for the Development of Jucuapa. World Vision is the only NGO [non-governmental organisation] that has managed to get all the

forces working together over the last four or five years. They have also led the creation of other organisations like the Local Rights Committee, and the Committee for Violence Prevention.
– Formal actor, Jucuapa

Mobilizing communities to protect children and adolescents, especially churches and faith leaders. The mobilization of community organisations was a central to World Vision's strategy to strengthen the child protection system. Efforts were made to involve churches and faith leaders in the formation of Local Rights Committees and the dissemination of information on child rights and protection.

I came to know about CONNA and ISNA through World Vision. Now these institutions are represented in the municipality. Now, you can feel we're really going in the right direction. We have created this group of pastors to take charge of teaching good principles and values, and the government does this too, but it is World Vision that has brought us to this place. We would not have been able to arrive to this point another way. World Vision has been a platform for pastors and their churches that are fundamental to good values in the communities.
– Non-formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

The inclusion and activation of churches was accomplished in two ways. First, World Vision provided training and reflection workshops to churches. These workshops inspired churches and faith leaders to act for the rights of children and adolescents and share messages to promote their protection.

One positive thing that has happened is not just giving talks, but also finding volunteers in the churches and that pastors stopped seeing only the four walls surrounding them. They [pastors] are starting to see beyond those walls. That is one thing we have achieved with the trainings. World Vision trains all the volunteers in values and Christian commitments… sensitizing pastors so that they feel responsible for the boys and girls in their municipalities… this has been one of our biggest achievements.
– Non-formal actor, Jucuapa

As a part of workshops facilitated by World Vision, faith leaders and church volunteers were equipped with resources and materials that supported their engagement with communities.

World Vision has given us trainings, and they have supported us with materials so we can do the work. Many times we are limited due to economic resources. They give us resources to do the workshops, and we organize workshops in the church with World Vision's support. This has helped us a lot.
- Non-formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

There's a lot to do and we cannot do it on our own. I am thankful for the work of World Vision, as a pastor, as the church, but also as a citizen. They have given us the necessary tools so we can do our job better. We are able to teach others about values because we have received training and then we can replicate that training.
– Non-formal Actor, Jucuapa

Secondly, formal local and national level actors were made aware of the potential impact of churches and faith leaders in the strengthening of the child protection system. National institutions worked with churches to transmit national policies to communities through trusted faith based networks and organisations.

They [CONNA and ISNA] have worked well with the churches, since churches are connected to the community. Whether they [community members] are Christian or not, we are connected. It has been going well because they want to work with us to promote children's rights.
- Non-formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

We [World Vision] are also intentionally connecting churches with the system—we have had forums where the president of CONNA or of ISNA is explaining how the system works and how churches are an important part, and what they can do to minimize violence against children. These are some specific things that we are promoting. We have a series of [instances] in which churches had no infrastructure to serve children and now they report [cases of violence against children].
- Non-formal actor, National level

Strengthening protective factors through trainings and workshops. Participants mentioned workshops led by World Vision extensively. These workshops served as a means for providing education and skill building. Some participants also described that these workshops kept children and adolescents safe from harm or potential risks.

Our school also has workshops so that we will not be on the street and we will not get involved with people that are into bad things. They teach us things that can help us in the future.
- Adolescent girl, Not sponsored, Jucuapa

World Vision is one of the fundamental pillars here. Sometimes we just do not know what else to do, but we always have [World Vision personnel] encouraging us or showing us what to do. They are pretty much our pillars, and the ones who have trained us. I have learned so much from World Vision and I am thankful… there are things that I did not learn in the university, but I learned them here through trainings… World Vision has always been next to us through every process in the municipality.
-Youth leader, Jucuapa

Some workshops were the result of partnerships formed between World Vision and community organisations or local institutions like schools.

In the community, we have drawing, painting and music workshops. Some schools have dance too. Unfortunately, as an institution, we do not have enough people trained in these areas to provide workshops on a continual basis. We take advantage of World Vision when they offer resources. They provide the instructor and we provide the children.
- Formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

Developing partnerships for child protection. Non-formal actors praised World Vision for their efforts to bring them visibility and legitimacy. Formal actors recognized World Vision as leader that activated child protection policies and legislation by forming alliances and collaborations across sectors and diverse actors.

We see these organisations, such as World Vision, as natural partners, because of our focus on children. And we [child focused organisation] have always worked on projects together. Now, this approach of coming together has been different. It is no longer World Vision's programme and the government's programme. Now it is about joining forces. There is a vision to build government capacity, so that the [initiatives] developed can be permanent. This is very, very valuable, and I see a change in World Vision. It seems extremely strategic—the idea of doing things together with a vision to institutionalize a programme or service within the government so that it is permanent.
-Formal actor, National level

The work coordinated with World Vision and their willingness to support, not only in assistance, attention or material things, has been evident. Their support has been strategic and they have supported substantial changes, including institutional changes due to their coordination… They are strategic allies.
- Formal actor, National level

I think that the alliance between the non-profits is important, especially the way in which we work with World Vision. Thanks to them [World Vision], kindergarten and pre-school education has improved through support and training and the issues they address. World Vision is constantly working for better interpersonal interaction. Their activities for children have motivated them to go to or stay in school. They protect the well-being of children with support through training, support in coexistence and in education.
- Formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

A notable collaboration between formal and non-formal actors, was that of World Vision and the Attorney General of the Republic to promote the right to identity. The Attorney General's office created pathways to facilitate the acquisition of identity documents to children, while World Vision sensitized local communities about the importance of registering children and ensuring their legal identity.

Through the relationship with the Attorney General, we were able to sign an agreement to hold three fairs at the national level seeking to guarantee the right to an identity for boys and girls. We were able to successfully identify and track cases of boys and girls at the local level that needed identification documentation. Thanks to the relationship with the Attorney General's office we were able to obtain those documents that were pending.
- Non-formal actor, National level

We have a ceremony and communicate to them the importance of having a birthday. There are children that go unnoticed on their birthday. During this event we celebrate everyone's birthday together, and talk about the importance of having been born. We discuss some rights as well, including the right to a name and an identity.
- Formal actor, San Francisco Menendez

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

World Vision was widely recognised for its contribution to strengthening child protection. Evidence demonstrated that children and adolescents' protective factors were strengthened through knowledge of their rights and child protection laws as well as support available. Parents, faith leaders, teachers and child protection actors, formal and non-formal also increased their knowledge, capacity, and commitment to child rights and protection.

World Vision successfully influenced the legal framework for child protection, especially its implementation at the local level. While the legal framework is strong, there are significant delays in its implementation. The evidence also pointed to World Vision's ability to convene communities, governmental authorities, civil society organisations, including churches and faith based organisations, and children and adolescents themselves in effort to promote child rights and protection.

Children and adolescents, as well as parents/caregivers and child protection actors, voiced extensive concerns about violence against children, including structural violence and violence driven by gangs. Participants also described a lack of trust and faith in the efficiency and capacity of child protection authorities and formal reporting mechanisms. This warrants further research in order to address the issues in partnership with the community and authorities.

While community members and representatives at the both the local and national level recognized World Vision for its work with children and adolescents and its contributions to strengthening protection, evidence also demonstrated World Vision's influence in partnership with communities, governmental institutions and authorities, civil society organisations, including churches, and children and adolescents themselves. Furthermore, as a result of World Vision's convening of key actors and institutions/organisations, partnerships with formal and non-formal child protection actors were established and capacity and coordination was improved which resulted in better support services for children, adolescents, families and communities.

Although the accomplishments are valuable, it is important to further analyse the implications of the findings in order to strengthen efforts aimed at ending violence against children and improving child protection systems. Based on the findings and analysis, recommendations are made to child protection actors, including civil society organisations and government. The recommendations intend to respond to results derived from a general assessment of the situation of the child protection system. In developing a response to these recommendations, additional analysis of the context is necessary in order to develop and implement appropriate and effective actions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to strengthen collaborations across sectors and between government and civil society, especially at the local level

The findings identify the significant contributions of government and civil society collaborations for child rights and protection. These promising contributions encourage formal and non-formal actors from all sectors to intensify their efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children. Highly collaborative approaches that link local and national governments and civil society organisations should also be used. Governments, as responsible duty bearers of the law, and child focused organisations should prevent and address violence against children.

2. Continue to encourage the significant participation of children and adolescents in child protection systems strengthening

The findings demonstrated adolescents' sense of agency and contributions to reducing and preventing violence against children. Key next steps are to work with partners to expand child and adolescent participatory approaches to prevent violence against children and also monitor the effectiveness of such approaches using more robust designs. This work should not only embody World Vision's leadership but also serve as a promising practice for other organisations and institutions on how to most effectively reduce violence against children and strengthen child protection systems with the active engagement of children and adolescents.

3. Build communication and trust between communities, especially children and adolescents, and child protection authorities and governmental agencies

A functioning child protection reporting system requires strong collaboration and open dialogue among government authorities, civil society and, especially, children and adolescents. By intentionally supporting relationship development and communication, trust in the reporting system can be fostered.

Having a trusted and reliable reporting and response system is an essential part of child protection. The evidence showed that children and adolescents lack a trusted o in times of need. This warrants immediate attention and strengthening. In facilitating a process to address this issue, it is important that adults are trained in how to engage appropriately with children and adolescents, supporting their empowerment and well-being, building their capacity to access reporting mechanisms and providing accompaniment to children and adolescents when accessing services, if needed.

4. Make meaningful investments in children and adolescents and their protection

Governments and child- and family-focused civil society organisations must allocate adequate long-term and predictable funding for child protection systems strengthening. Efforts should be made to increase budgetary allocation and expenditure in key sectors and programmes that have an impact on children and adolescents. Such budgetary allocations should be supported by a comprehensive situational analysis based on timely and disaggregated data. Transparency and accountability of funds used for child protection systems strengthening should be a shared priority between governments and civil society organisations.

5. Increase efforts to address gang violence and its effect on children, adolescents, and youth

It is critical to address gang violence in order to make communities safer and foster protective environments for children and adolescents. In consultation with civil society, including children and adolescents, governments need to develop and implement national and local plans for preventing and addressing violence and insecurity. Increased attention should be given to the underlying socio-economic conditions and causes of violence, its prevention, and the identification of risk factors and measures for protecting children, adolescents and youth affected by violence. To reduce the role that poverty plays as a driver of violence, it is important for governments and child-focused organisations to integrate social protection into child protection programmes.

6. Support the improved implementation, coordination and monitoring of child protection policies and legal frameworks

As the findings state, there is a clear gap between existent legislation and its implementation, especially in more rural communities. Government at national and subnational levels as well as civil society organisations should take steps to improve the quality and effectiveness of the child protection system and its ability to respond to the needs in communities. Increased involvement of national governments and regional bodies in the monitoring and management of the child protection system's functioning in accordance with the law is needed. This is most effective when conducted in coordination with community and child-focused organisations. In areas where there have been issues of impunity and corruption, governments should develop and use systematic strategies to weed out the corruption and ensure transparency, justice and the rule of law. Furthermore, governments should establish benchmarks for tracking the effectiveness of the system in responding to and resolving cases of violence against children, beginning at the local level and continuing through to the justice system. Key civil society organisations should be consulted in these processes and, when possible, participate in the monitoring of the child protection system and the tracking of cases of violence against children.

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It takes a world
to end violence against children

World Vision

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.