

GFEMS Research and Programming to tackle Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) in East Africa: Supporting survivors to access comprehensive, trauma-informed rehabilitation and reintegration services

Context

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) thrives when perpetrators are not held to account. In Kenya and Uganda, this lack of accountability can occur when criminal justice actors don't have adequate technical capacity or resources. Capacity constraints paired with issues of corruption within the government institutions can result in low levels of trust between the community and criminal justice actors. Consequently, community members are less likely to report trafficking cases to the police or at all.

Survivors of CSEC are extremely vulnerable to being re-trafficked. Therefore, reintegration programs for survivors must be carefully planned and tailored to the needs of each survivor so that they receive the necessary support to physically and mentally recover from their trauma and the resources, tools, and knowledge necessary for successful social and economic reintegration. This brief provides an overview of programs and research funded by the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS).

Intervention Models:

GFEMS uses a sector-geography based strategy to identify the key drivers of modern slavery in a given region and then design, fund, and adapt programs to address those vulnerabilities. In the case of CSEC in Kenya and Uganda, GFEMS identified three key outcome areas for project interventions, and from November 2020 through October 2022, funded three organizations to deliver activities to address them.

1. Building stronger, more resilient communities with improved CSEC response and referral mechanisms.

GFEMS funded Terre des hommes (TdH) Kenya, in partnership with Kesho Kenya and Dwelling Places, to implement a pair of community-based projects to reduce communities' vulnerability toward CSEC. The projects took place in known CSEC hotspots— Kwale and Kilifi counties in Kenya and Napak District in Uganda. Though specific project activities varied across the two projects, both sought to:

- Train community structures and schools to identify and report CSEC cases
- Establish child rights clubs (CRCs) in schools to raise students' awareness of CSEC and promote peer-to-peer learning and support
- Provide financial and in-kind support to young survivors of CSEC to enroll and remain in formal education
- Provide livelihood support or skills training to older survivors of CSEC and very vulnerable families
- Conduct a broad-based community awareness campaign to change deeply entrenched cultural norms that perpetuate CSEC.

In Uganda, mass media campaigns on radio and TV were also used to promote awareness about CSEC. The Uganda project adapted its design midway through implementation to include training on better parenting skills to caregivers in target communities, following findings from a baseline study (see research section) suggesting poor child/caregiver relationships are a significant contributor to CSEC vulnerability.

2. Capacitating criminal justice sector actors to investigate and prosecute trafficking cases and building community trust to increase reporting

GFEMS funded International Justice Mission (IJM) to implement a project in Kilifi, Kwale, and Mombasa counties in the southern coastal region of Kenya to improve criminal justice response to combat CSEC and through coordination with related social services. The project strengthened the government of Kenya's capacity to effectively investigate and prosecute CSEC through engagement with victims and communities to increase reporting. The project also supported training, mentoring, and technical assistance within the justice sector and with social service officials to promote victim-sensitive investigations, prosecutions, and case management. Specifically, the project worked towards:

- Strengthening referral pathways and increasing community trust in criminal justice actors
- Developing the capacity of police stations and specialized law enforcement agencies
- Developing prosecutor and magistrate capacity for enhanced interdisciplinary case coordination
- Building the capacity of civil society for victim accompaniment and support.

3. Supporting CSEC survivors to recover and reintegrate

GFEMS funded Hope for Justice (HfJ) with the The University of Nottingham's Rights Lab and Platform for Labour Action (PLA) to implement a strategic set of interventions to expand and standardize trauma-informed care (TIC) for CSEC survivors on a national level in addition to providing survivors

with direct support services in Kampala. Specifically, the project:

- Provided capacity building support to the Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons Uganda (CATIPU), a network of anti-trafficking organizations providing services to survivors
- Worked closely with CATIPU to develop trauma-informed standards of care (SOC) for providing services to survivors
- Piloted an Immersive Learning Center to train staff from other service provider organizations on how to implement Trauma Informed Care (TIC)
- Provided direct support services and shelter support to survivors.

Learning and Evaluation:

GFEMS contracted two research partners, NORC at the University of Chicago and ICF Macro, to conduct a wide range of research studies to support both operational learning and better understand contribution of specific activities to project objectives.¹

COVID-19 situational analyses

Interventions were launched in November 2020 while both Kenya and Uganda were in the middle of pandemic-related lockdowns. To better inform project implementation, GFEMS commissioned ICF and NORC to conduct COVID-19 Situational Analyses in both Kenya and Uganda. These studies assessed the immediate, short, and long term impacts of the pandemic on both project implementation as well as the vulnerable populations the projects served.

CSEC prevalence studies

GFEMS funded three studies to measure the prevalence of CSEC in project intervention areas. This includes one [prevalence study](#) covering Kilifi and Kwale Counties in Kenya; one study in Kampala, Uganda and a hybrid knowledge, attitudes, and practices ([KAP](#)) and [prevalence study](#) conducted in Napak District, Uganda. The prevalence studies are not intended to measure project impact, as there are many other socio-economic factors that likely have a greater impact on prevalence (such as COVID). Repeated measurements of prevalence of CSEC in project areas provide greater insights into site specific characteristics of CSEC and how it is facilitated, and more broadly strengthen prevalence estimation methodology designs, data collection approaches, and analytics.

CSEC knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) Studies

One of the central objectives of the TdH projects was to change deep seated cultural norms and perceptions of CSEC in intervention communities. ICF and NORC conducted large scale surveys in intervention areas to measure community members' KAP towards CSEC both at the beginning and end of the project. The ICF study was conducted in Napak District, Uganda and the [NORC](#)

¹ NORC and its local data collection partner, Kantar Public conducted all research in Kenya, while ICF and its local data collection partner, Makerere University conducted all research in Uganda.

study was conducted in coastal Kenya. Both intended to employ a difference in differences (DiD) approach, drawing samples at two time points in both intervention and comparison groups to estimate the extent to which project activities were responsible for any observed change. Due to significant contamination issues with the comparison groups, the analyses were adapted to measure change (e.g. pre/post design, reclassification of respondents, and regression analysis).

Evaluative Case Studies

NORC and ICF each conducted a series of evaluative case studies. The studies assessed the appropriateness of intervention modalities, the manner in which they were implemented and adapted, and the extent to which objectives were achieved. The studies also documented the challenges and successes of the projects as well as adaptations made along the way. NORC conducted four case studies for the Kenya based projects and ICF conducted five studies for the Uganda based projects.²

Project-level research

Complementary to the research conducted by NORC and ICF, each project partner also implemented a learning agenda which guided research activities to improve implementation. Learning agendas consisted of several key questions to be informed by small scale qualitative and quantitative studies. Quarterly internal reflection meetings were held to review results from learning activities along with the studies conducted by external research partners.

Key learnings

Understanding Scope: The prevalence studies provide reliable benchmarks on the levels of CSEC in a given geography. The studies also support sector learning needs

on how to implement prevalence estimation methodologies on vulnerable and hidden populations.

Region	Method	Population	CSEC prevalence estimate	
			Spring 2021	Summer 2022
Napak District, Uganda	Representative Household Survey	12-17 years of age ³	6.9%	2.2%
Coastal Kenya (Kilifi and Kwale Counties) ⁴	Link-tracing	13-17 years of age	1.7%	0.8%
Kampala, Uganda	Respondent Driven Sampling	12-17 years of age	26.3%	27.6%

Reductions over time cannot be directly attributed to programming. Differences in Kampala and Kenya were not statistically significant and could be due to random sampling variation. In Napak, changes are likely due to a variety of large socio-economic factors, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic.

Qualitative findings from project level research as well as the COVID-19 Situational Analyses also suggest a decline in prevalence over the program period that is likely due to the easing of pandemic related lockdowns. The first time-point of the prevalence studies took place at the height of COVID. During that time many qualitative accounts indicate that many

individuals were resorting to CSEC as a means of economic survival as the rest of the economy remained closed. Schools were also closed during this period, which meant that children spent more time unsupervised, potentially exposing them to CSEC. The second time point took place several months after the majority of the lockdowns measures ended. It is possible that many of those who were temporarily engaged in CSEC during that period, transitioned back out once alternative livelihood options became available. This hypothesis is further supported by findings from the Kampala prevalence study which identified a clear increase in new entrants into the sex industry during pandemic restrictions. More than one-third of respondents during Time-point 1

2 Under PEMS 2, IAWJ conducted a project across Uganda and Kenya. Project design was identical in both countries. ICF conducted a case study covering its activities in Uganda. No case study was conducted to cover IAWJ’s activities in Kenya. Project design in Kenya and Uganda was identical and a case study would have been largely repetitive.

3 The prevalence rates noted for this study are for those children who have experienced CSEC in the last week. This time period was used for comparison as opposed to longer time periods because a large proportion of the time-point 1 and time-point 2 sample are the same children.

4 Time-point 1 data collection includes Mombasa County. Mombasa County was excluded from time-point 2 in order to economize research costs and because it exists outside of the TdH project area.

had started working in the sex industry within the last year, compared to 14% of respondents at Time-point 2.



FINDINGS SUGGEST THAT
during the COVID-19 pandemic, more children resorted to CSEC as a means of survival

Vulnerability to CSEC

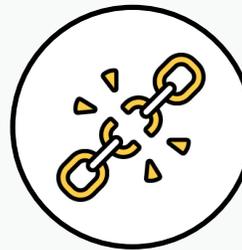
Designing impactful programming is enabled by a deep understanding of the target populations. The ICF studies contributed to vulnerability profiles to better understand drivers of trafficking in these communities– beyond poverty– to support better targeting of activities.

Positive relationships and open communication with parents may reduce vulnerability

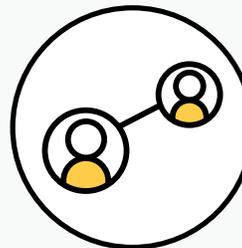
The KAP study in Napak, Uganda used multiple regression modelling to identify characteristics that are more common among households with children who engage in CSEC.⁵ The study identified 3 predictor variables that suggest an individual is vulnerable to CSEC. Children were: 1) over 9 times more likely to experience CSEC if they have been ridiculed or put down by their caregivers; 2) over 20 times more likely to experience CSEC if they have a close friend engaging in CSEC; and 3) 2.6 times more likely to experience CSEC if they regularly keep secrets from their caregiver. These predictors suggest that positive relationships with open communication between caregivers and children might help prevent CSEC and that peer networks also play a substantial role in CSEC vulnerability. Along similar lines, 83% of respondents (who engage in CSEC) in the Kenya prevalence study stated that their parents are unaware of their involvement in CSEC.

Gender is not a predictor of CSEC

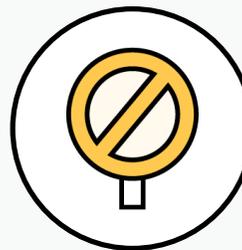
In Napak, **gender was not found to be a predictor of CSEC. Boys were found to be just as vulnerable as girls to CSEC in the intervention areas.** Prevalence rates for boys (12.5%) and girls (11.4%) were not statistically different. This runs counter to many traditionally held beliefs within the anti- trafficking field that women and girls are disproportionately more likely to be engaged in CSEC. One potential explanation is that male CSEC, especially in the case of boys who have sex with men, is an extremely taboo subject in culturally conservative countries such as Uganda. While it may not always be the case that CSEC prevalence is gender agnostic, it is highly likely that male CSEC is a far more secretive phenomenon and more commonplace than we often think



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Truancy appears to have a relationship with CSEC engagement

In Karamoja, school enrollment was not found to be a significant predictor of CSEC; however, there is substantial evidence at the project level and from the COVID-19 situational analyses that suggest **a strong relationship between CSEC engagement and being out of school.** This was the case across all CSEC project locations. During school closures in both Kenya and Uganda, children became more vulnerable to CSEC and started engaging in it. However, with the information available, it is not possible to disentangle this phenomenon from other factors. For example, the leading factor could again be poverty, due to COVID, which drove children to engage in CSEC. Dropping out of school or simply not going to school during the closures may not have had a direct impact. The Kenya Prevalence study also noted that slightly less than half of the respondents (who were actively engaged in CSEC) were not enrolled in school at the time of the survey.

⁵ GFEMS, ICF, and TdH jointly developed a list of potential items which could indicate engagement in CSEC. The study conducted bivariate chi-squared tests between each item and the CSEC indicator. Any items with a significant relationship to CSEC or to adults seeing signs that children in their household are at risk for trafficking were included in a regression analysis. This was used to produce an odds ratios (ORs) of the potential risk factors for child’s engagement in CSEC from the weight-adjusted multivariable logistic regression analysis.

Enablers of CSEC

CSEC is a complex phenomenon and the pervasive narrative of a victim being exploited by evil traffickers can be misleading. In fact, many of those who experience commercial sexual exploitation also play a role in facilitating it. In the Kenya Prevalence study, 37% of children are first introduced by another minor and 77% are introduced by persons they consider their friends and peers. One in five respondents said they personally financially benefit from arranging transactions/clients for other children in the sex trade.

Mental Wellbeing

Engaging in CSEC can have severe negative repercussions on mental health. The Kenya Prevalence Study applied a screener for **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** and found that 70% of individuals currently engaged in CSEC likely suffer from and 46% are very likely to suffer from PTSD.

Learning on what works: Promising approaches to tackle CSEC

Community-based prevention, reporting, and monitoring

The KAP studies conducted in Kenya and Uganda generally suggest that intervention activities led to positive behavior changes for participants. At the same time, findings also suggest that existing social norms and perceptions regarding CSEC persist and would require further exploration of whether more time or different programming could address these issues.

In Kenya:

- Holding all else constant, households that participated in CSEC trainings, dialogues, or forums in the past year were 23% more likely to be familiar with the term 'CSEC', 29% more likely to watch for signs that children in the household may be subject to CSEC, and 7% more likely to know about the legal consequences of CSEC.
- Knowledge about reporting channels other than traditional authorities and the police remained low. At endline, less than 10% of households in BAF communities know about the role that Child Protection Committees, the Department of Children's Services, and Childline Kenya play in CSEC reporting and monitoring, and nearly two-thirds of school children still do not know how to report known CSEC cases according to their Head Teachers.

In Uganda:

- Community-based anti-trafficking programming appears to have a positive effect on increasing awareness of human trafficking and related laws. For adults in the intervention group, there was a statistically significant increase in awareness of the **Trafficking in Persons Act of 2009 from 48% in Time-point 1 to 86% in Time-point 2**.
- Community-based prevention programs also had a strong positive effect on improving communication and the relationship between children and caregivers.
 - The proportion of children who stated that their caregivers always know where they are increased for the children in the exposed group and

decreased for children in the unexposed group (statistically significant).

- The proportion of children who report never keeping secrets from their caregivers increased for children in the exposed group and decreased for children in the unexposed group (statistically significant).
- Self-evaluations also indicated that the project had a positive effect on parenting practices. The majority (82%) of those who listened to or participated in activities reported changes to their parenting practices, and the rate was slightly higher for men (86%) than women (79%). The most common change was more open communication with children.

Strengthening Criminal Justice Systems

Justice centers can be instrumental in providing much needed resources to the wider community to identify, report and refer trafficking cases and increase community confidence in and engagement with the criminal justice system.

Adaptive Management: Implementers learned that taking a trauma informed approach to criminal justice meant not only improving the environment for victims of trafficking but also law enforcement officers who can suffer from vicarious trauma due to the nature of their work. The project adapted in mid-stream to provide trauma counseling services to law enforcement officers. The project also worked closely with magistrate courts to assign a specific day each month for hearing of child trafficking cases. This helped to expedite the long, arduous prosecution process. The project capacitated justice centers, which provided much needed resources to the wider community to identify, report and refer trafficking cases, and increase community confidence in and engagement with the criminal justice system.

Evaluation results in Kilifi and Kwale counties of Kenya indicated increased community trust and confidence in the criminal justice sector to handle CSEC cases. At endline, 71% of community members trust the police to investigate, arrest and prosecute the perpetrator [of child trafficking] as compared to 63% at baseline.⁶ Similarly, 88% at endline

⁶ This finding is from the community KAP survey conducted as part of the endline evaluation of the IJM project. The responses are representative of individuals in Kwale and Kilifi Counties in Kenya. This KAP survey had a different focus, methodology, and questionnaire than the KAP study conducted by NORC.

indicated that they trust the court to punish the perpetrator, compared to 77% at baseline. Results also indicated that a larger proportion of CSEC cases are being identified by community members and reported to the police.

Although **community trust in police has increased**, overall it remains low, and police capacity to prosecute cases is still less than desired. Community knowledge of reporting mechanisms is also low (see NORC KAP study). Relatedly, the process for prosecuting trafficking cases remains long and arduous. As of the close of the project, none of the cases IJM was supporting had concluded or led to a conviction.⁷

Recovery and reintegration

During the project period HFJ was able to provide trauma informed care (TIC) services to 214 CSEC survivors; 168 experienced substantially improved psychological wellbeing and 111 reintegrated survivors were either regularly attending school or generating an income due to the skills training they received. **The most substantive change brought about**

by the project was in making concrete steps to improve service provision for survivors in a systematic manner. The project worked with the CATIPU network to develop trauma-informed standards of care (SOC) for trafficking survivors in Uganda and operationalized these standards by piloting the Immersive Learning Center (ILC). In total the 22 trainees went through the ILC.

To our knowledge, this is the first time a training model like this has been implemented in the anti-trafficking sector. This pilot initiative was paired with a robust body of evaluative research, which generally found the training model to be highly effective.⁸ Trainees demonstrated a high-level of knowledge retention and went on to train fellow colleagues at their home organizations. The research also documented specific instances where the SOC were being implemented in trainees' home organizations. At the same time, the extent to which the SOC could be implemented in home organizations varied due to resource constraints and limited buy-in from management.

Recommendations

- Community-based models for anti-trafficking programming and better parenting training in particular, have proven to be effective in changing communities' knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding CSEC. However, longer implementation periods for future projects may be needed for these changes to be sustained and lead to more a more substantial shift in cultural norms. Furthermore, project activities were spread out over fairly large geographic areas in both Kenya and Uganda, leading to greater logistical expense and a more shallow intervention. In the future, such programs should concentrate the same amount of funding and activities across fewer villages. This will ensure that a critical mass of behavior change activities take place to maximize effectiveness.
- Justice centers lack core funding and are staffed mainly by volunteers, leaving their sustainability in question. Governments should facilitate longer-term and more stable funding to these organization to cover operational expenses. Policy research actors could support the government in drafting frameworks which recognize these organizations and provide them with annual government funding.
- Funding should be provided to build the CATIPU network's capacity to operationalize the SOC into an active, unifying platform for all service providers. Sustained commitment should be secured from the management of service providers before enrolling staff in ILC trainings. This will allow for not only a change in mindset and practices of individual staff but institutional change towards more TIC standards across whole organizations.
- The anti-trafficking sector should substantially increase access to support services for male CSEC survivors. Our research revealed that male CSEC may be far more prevalent than currently thought; however, existing support to male survivors is sorely limited.
- Reintegration programs should plan and budget appropriately for providing comprehensive, quality mental health services to survivors with a recognition that improved mental health and sustained reintegration may be a long and non-linear process.

⁷ IJM continues to support these trafficking cases via other project funding.

⁸ HFJ administered a series of several surveys to ILC participants both during training and after training. The surveys captured participants' knowledge retention as well as the extent to which participants were able to implement TIC guidelines in their respective organizations.



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