

See Our World

An essential part of Plan's work is to help create spaces for children and young people to discuss together the issues which affect their lives, then ensure adults respect their views so that children may be involved in community decision-making. This communication has been prepared with and by children directly and is intended to give a general sense of the kinds of issues children discuss and how they work together.

Introducing the “Community Child Helpline”

Meet us

Hello! We are a group of boys, girls and young people from Kasungu's area and would like to inform you how we together with Plan and communities work to protect children from abuses. This time in particular we would like to share our experiences about the “Community Child Helpline” project that we have been involved recently to deal with this problem.

Our concern

As children we discuss a lot of things that affect our growth and development. One of the things that concern us is the child abuse. It is a fact that many children in our area, experience different forms of abuse and we find difficulties to report it because the process sometime is victimising.

Being children we sometimes are exposed to difficult circumstances that often have harmful physical, psychological and emotional impact on us. Very often we do not have the capacity to cope with such circumstances.

“My name is Masozi from Kasungu. I heard from my friend how she used to be abused while working as a domestic worker in town. There are many other children also being forced to work alongside their parents as full time workers in tobacco estates. This affects their health and education.”



Children from different schools divided in groups to discuss issues that affect the enjoyment of their rights

Another form of abuse that concerns us is the child molested and the rape. The cases have been rising so much compared to the past, and in most of the cases are not the strangers that perpetuate these , but people within our own families, village or community.

Plan is working with us and our parents for the development of our area and we have been discussing together, how to deal with it and stop the child abuse in our communities and villages. Thanks to the Plan's support we children have a voice to speak out in the community discussion and we are encouraged to be in the forefront to suggest the best solution for the issues that affect us.

We acknowledged to the adults and Plan that there is no any systematic way to report or to seek further information in case of the abuse, without us being victimised further. In some cases we might have a good support system but we may not be comfortable to talk about personal issues like rape, teen pregnancy or molestation to just anyone.

It is through discussions that we suggested to Plan and agreed to make available a way through which we can seek information and report when our rights are violated and being comfortable speaking without fears of further victimisation.

Today, we have a toll free community helpline that Plan in partnership with a mobile phone company “Celtel” introduced at strategic points in our communities for us to use as reporting sites and access well trained counsellors or the police.

How we make use of the helpline

Before setting up the helpline, there was a big launch where all chiefs, police authorities, area legal counsellors and community members were present to witness and introduce the helpline, and making people aware of the existence of this system.

We also participated in the identification of sites where the helpline was strategically located for easy access. Our major preferences were the schools because that is where we spend most of our time. The help lines were also located in hospitals and police victim support units.



A child making a test call using the helpline service

Now all children know that in case one of us experiences any form of abuse, the child will go to the nearest helpline location and ask the attendant to assist him or her to connect to a community helpline crisis centre, where there are well trained counsellors or legal advisors. The phones are accessible to any child who wishes to use the helpline and children will either seek help at the centre or police or social service depending on the need.

‘My name is Chisomo. Having the child helpline in our community will assist a lot of children to report child abuse cases without fear of further victimisation from adults. The introduction of helpline has also assured us that our voices are being heard by Plan and the adults in our community’

Our achievements and the way forward

So far we have seen a reduction of the child abuse cases in our areas because the perpetrators now know that they will be easily reported either to police or to legal advisors who live amongst us in our villages. We are proud that our suggestion and initiative is realised and now we feel safe because we know we have access to help in case something happens to us without our identity being revealed.

However we are facing some challenges in the progress of the project due to the power shortages and we are working with Plan how to find a solution as soon as possible.

Plan is working with our communities in setting up village child protection committees and increasing the awareness on child rights and protection among families and community members. In addition these committees are able to follow up on child rights violation cases and report to the relevant authorities. The emphasis of Plan support has been to enable communities to take a leading role in all child rights and protection activities through structures that Plan has helped to establish in the communities.

Some of the children who took a leading role in the production of this document are: Junior Mkandawire, Chisomo Mkhosi, Rebecca Kambwiri, Isaac Nkhata, Joseph Kasadzula and John Nyirenda. The document was reviewed and edited by Plan staff.