

# COMMUNIQUE

## 5TH KNOWLEDGE SHARING WORKSHOP ON CHILD PROTECTION

### GALVANIZING COMMUNITY ACTION AND RESEARCH ON CHILD PROTECTION: SECURING THE ONLINE PRESENCE OF THE GHANAIAN CHILD

25TH NOVEMBER 2021



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Ghana-India Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT (AITI-KACE),  
Ridge-Accra

The 5th Annual Knowledge Sharing Workshop on Child Protection was held on the 25th of November 2021 at the Ghana-India Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT in Accra. This workshop was a partnership between Participatory Development Associates (PDA), Child Online Africa, and the Department of Children under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.

Themed "Galvanizing Community Action and Research on Child Protection: Securing the Online Presence of the Ghanaian Child", a total of about 70 representatives from state institutions, development practitioners in the child protection nexus, and digital security experts participated in the event in-person, while some participants joined in virtually. The recording of the entire session can be accessed [here](#).

The overall goal of the workshop was to amplify the need for awareness creation in child online protection among key stakeholders. The objectives were first, to highlight the need for stakeholders in the child protection ecosystem to prioritize child online safety. Second, it created awareness on the responsible use of the internet by children and discussed the role that parents, guardians, and teachers can play in protecting children online. Third, it kept stakeholders abreast with the national framework on child online protection, and finally, collated feedback from the breakout sessions to inform policy recommendations concerning child online protection in Ghana.

The one-day workshop featured two presentations, a breakout session and a plenary session, as well as the premiering of a documentary on PDA's involvement in child protection over the years. As the event coincided with the celebration of the 20-year anniversary of PDA, a keynote address was delivered by Mr. Tony Dogbe, the co-founder of PDA, who shared PDA's journey as an organization, highlighting the important roles the organization has been playing in Ghana's development space.

The key findings from discussions at the event include a recognition that child protection-sensitive legislation must begin to guide internet usage in the country both now and in the future. Additionally, the inclusion of children's voices in policy-making is critical, and all stakeholders in child online protection must be engaged in national conversation for ensuring it. Finally, the effective implementation of the Cybersecurity Act (2020) is dependent on awareness creation and capacity building among various groups of relevant actors. These dialogues have renewed PDA's commitment to contributing to evidence-based research on child protection, creating sustained awareness on the role of all stakeholders in ensuring child online protection, and collaborating with others to empower children to protect themselves online. We hope to attract more partners to achieve these goals.

## Keynote Address



The keynote address delivered by Tony Dogbe reiterated that the rationale behind the formation of PDA was to promote participatory culture in a society that typically prioritizes the voice of certain people over others'. Highlighting some of the projects that PDA has worked on in relation to child protection over the past 20 years, Mr. Dogbe indicated that PDA as an organization has consolidated its concern for children by including child rights and protection as one of its strategic themes, demonstrated through self-funding the knowledge sharing workshops, the [Child Abuse tracker](#), [the State of Child Protection in Ghana report](#), and the [SDG Kids](#) initiative. Speaking to the theme, Mr. Dogbe underscored the need for adults to engage more with children to help them learn about the world in a safe way in an increasingly digitized world. He encouraged parents to be alert to what their children do online, and live out an example of limiting their screen time. He then urged Ghana to devote more resources to early childhood care and development since the early years are the foundation of every nation.

A video documentary was premiered by the PDA Team at this workshop. Titled "[Child Protection in Ghana: Telling the PDA Story](#)", the documentary gave an overview of the different dimensions in which PDA as an organization has been involved in child protection over the two decades of its existence. Highlighting the annual Knowledge Sharing Workshops on Child Protection which began in 2017, the video shed light on some of the key initiatives regarding child protection which PDA has worked on, including the Child Abuse tracker, the report on "The State of Child Protection in Ghana" (released by PDA in 2020), SDG Kids, and many other such, mostly self-funded and in partnership with other local/international organizations. It also featured the comments of some key stakeholders in the child protection space and partners of PDA on the usefulness of PDA's child protection workshops and PDA's contribution in general to child protection in Ghana.

## Presentation on Child Online Protection

A presentation delivered by Awo Aidam Amenyah, the Executive Director of Child Online Africa, explained that child online protection (COP) is a holistic system where young people have what it takes to engage online, preserve evidence of infractions for prosecution, and can gain the support of adults to prosecute illegal actions taken against them. She emphasized that digital tools and technologies must protect children from inappropriate content online, that cross-cutting measures must be taken by the government and telecommunication providers to make provision for children to report abuse and bullying online, and that opportunity must be given for children to participate in digital spaces with the right conduct and contact. To ameliorate the associated risks faced by children online, she stressed the need for digital literacy and digital citizenship: that is, beyond having the knowledge on how to engage online, children must be taught how to behave in digital spaces and react appropriately.

Providing an overview of the five pillars for COP -- legal measures, technical and procedural measures, organizational structures, capacity building, and international cooperation -- Mrs. Amenyah walked through a national checklist for child online protection preparedness, and spoke about the need for training individuals, organizations, and technical people in child online protection. Child Online Africa, she indicated, plays their role in Ghana's child online protection space by providing need-based training for stakeholders, pursuing partnerships, driving awareness campaigns, hosting forums, and engaging policy. In conclusion, she called on child protection stakeholders to align their work towards the digital space, and recommended that child protection actors should develop internet safety materials that reflect our culture and are published in local languages that can be presented to stakeholders who matter. She also called on child protection stakeholders to help in creating awareness about the provisions and sanctions stipulated in the Cybersecurity Act (2020), and building capacity for child online protection.



## Presentation on cyber security in the context of child protection: the state's interventions in protecting children online

A second presentation was given by Mr. Nelson Herald Darko, a representative from the Cyber Security Authority (CSA). He stated the CSA's dedication to policy direction, awareness creation, and capacity building in Child Online Protection, and gave an overview of the various ways in which the government of Ghana has been working to ensure digital safety, including for children. In general, the Authority engages digital protection through:

1. Providing leadership and initiatives;
2. Instituting legislation such as the Cybersecurity Act (2020), the Criminal Offences Act, and the Electronic Transactions Act (2008);
3. Ratifying international conventions on online protection and child online protection;
4. Participating in capacity building and workshops on child online protection;
5. Developing an incident reporting centre; and
6. Running several awareness creation campaigns alone and in partnership with other organizations.

He also acknowledged the role of both government and non-governmental stakeholders in driving the protection of children in digital spaces, and presented the government of Ghana's priorities for 2022 with regards to child protection. Chief among these are:

- Launching a national COP framework to guide its operationalization and enforcement in Ghana
- Capacity building for stakeholders in COP principles, including safety, security, data protection, and children's rights and responsibility online
- Establishing a network of COP champions across various domains including civil society organizations, internet service providers, academia, and religious organizations
- Positioning Ghana as a centre for excellence through COP research and development, evaluation, and innovation, as well as promoting national, regional, and international cooperation on COP awareness creation
- Strengthening and enforcing laws that prohibit COP-related offences through awareness creation in workshops, conferences, and seminars

## Breakout Sessions

The breakout session of the Knowledge Sharing Workshop aimed to collate and review feedback to inform policy recommendations and action to ensure the protection of children by all key stakeholders. While the Cybersecurity Act 2020 (Acts 1038) addresses child online protection and outlines some punitive measures for cybersecurity offenders, some government institutions are yet to integrate the requirement for child impact assessment in their policies and interventions. Discussion groups in the breakout session considered some practical aspects of effectively implementing the Act by key stakeholders.

Guided by the five key pillars of child online protection outlined by the ITU Global Cybersecurity Agenda (GCA) -- legislative Measures, Technical and Procedural Measures, Organizational Structures, Capacity Building and Awareness Creation, and International Cooperation -- the topics of discussion of the various groups aimed to engage child protection actors to think through their own roles in implementing the Cybersecurity Act, 2020.

**Group 1:** zeroed in on children's rights and the extent to which they are considered in government policymaking. Discussants were asked to share which area of government they work in, and whether child impact assessment is a requirement for them.

**Group 2:** focused on the potential risks and harms of children in various relevant policy areas, and encouraged participants to consider the possible implications for child online protection in policies concerning ICT, criminal justice, consumer protection, health, education, among others.

**Group 3** was concerned with the need for the inclusion of children's voices in the decisions made by various levels of government leadership. Their focus was on how children's perspectives and concerns can be included in policy-making, in order to make our laws and institutions more relevant and forward-looking.

**Group 4** members discussed some of the specific roles of various stakeholders in child online protection. While it is evident that stakeholders like children themselves, families, educators, civil society, law enforcement, private businesses, government, and telecommunication organizations all definitely have a role to play in ensuring the safety of children in digital spaces, the specific ways in which they can play their roles have not always been clearly defined. This group offered some scope for this.

Finally, **Group 5** considered some of the various ways in which the implementation of the Cybersecurity Act (2020) can be made more effective in practice.

# Key Findings from Stakeholders in Child Protection

## **1. The Present and Future of the Internet must be Child Protection-Sensitive and must be enforced by Legislation**

A group of participants in the workshop representing Ghanaian state institutions and government officials indicated that they had not yet read legislative protocols like the Cybersecurity Act (2020) and the UNCRC General Comment No. 25 on the digital environment for children. They therefore recognized the need for awareness creation even among the regulators, development workers, and government officials. Although the Department of Children under the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MOGCSP) mentioned that it has ratified a number of international conventions which demand periodic reports on a number of different areas including child protection, it also emerged that many government departments do not currently require child impact assessments for government policies, often creating blindspots in legislation that leave children vulnerable to crimes, in both offline and online environments. The need was recognized for various areas of legislation to be more sensitive to the issue of child online protection. Specifically, the following proposals were made:

- **ICT** -- To familiarize children with the digital space, the infrastructure in schools for technology must be improved. The distribution of laptops for the 1-Child 1-Laptop initiative must begin from rural areas, and there should be a target for at least 1-School 1-Laptop since some schools lack access to even one computer. There must also be more focus on educating children in ICT.
- **Criminal Justice** -- There must be more capacity building for judges about COP, and the relevant concerns around justice for crimes against children in digital spaces should be included in their curriculum. There needs to be a juvenile court for only children and child protection issues which is not combined with general family issues.
- **Media** -- There must be stronger enforcement of legislation to protect the identities of children in news reportage, and sanctions for nude pictures shared on the internet must be strongly carried out.
- **International Cooperation** -- More focus must be placed on international efforts to address child online protection issues.

## **2. Children's Voices must be heard in Policy-Making**

There was also the recognition that children in Ghana are often sidelined and ignored even in the formulation of laws and policies that have a direct influence on their wellbeing. As more young people engage politicians and world leaders on issues like climate responsibility, inclusivity, poverty reduction, and global peace, it is evident that the voices of those who will have to live tomorrow with the decisions made today need to be taken into account. It was therefore suggested that certain structures and mechanisms should be put in place to make allowance for the inclusion of children's voices in policy-making. These could include:

- Engaging children in the policy-making process at various levels of society. It is important to consider that the different contexts of children will affect their experiences and exposure, so there should be an intentional effort to involve children from various backgrounds in terms of geographical location, educational level, wealth, etc.
- Working to change the Ghanaian culture that adults know everything and children should be silent.
- Producing child-friendly versions of legal documents like acts and policies, so that children can understand and engage with the key issues
- Organizing forums like children's parliaments for children to discuss national issues in a safe space without the threat of being shut down.
- Requiring policy-makers to intentionally be more considerate of the situation of children with special need.

## **3. All Stakeholders in Child Online Protection must be involved in the national conversation**

Without the specific involvement of all stakeholders in child protection, keeping children safe in digital spaces will always be a challenge. Participants of the workshop representing a cross-section of stakeholder groups admitted the difficulties in ensuring child protection especially when other stakeholders are not equally committed to doing their part. Discussants therefore appreciated the opportunity to bring the issue home in an applicable way to their organizations and institutions. By clarifying the specific roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder group, and supporting them to fulfil it, it is believed that child online protection can be more achievable. In particular, there will be a need for the following:

- **Children:** The issues of digital literacy and digital citizenship must be taught to children, so that they know what is right and wrong online, and how to report incidents. There must also be avenues for peer education on these issues so that children can take charge of their safety online.

- **Families:** Parents must be engaged to monitor more closely what their children are doing when they are online, and must be taught the basics of how to keep their children safe online. They can also engage their children in open discussions about their experiences online, and even reward those who are honest about incidents. Moreover, they can make use of available technologies like the Google Family Link to help set restrictions on what a child does with devices.
- **Educators:** As children spend even more time in educational settings, there must be capacity building of educators on COP issues. They must be trained on how to teach children about digital citizenship. They must also create avenues for children to report negative incidents to them, so that they can take up the issue with appropriate authorities when necessary. They may also intervene in issues like cyberbullying of classmates. Alternatively, there can be a push for schools to reintroduce life skills and mini clubs to engage children and reduce their time spent on the internet.
- **Civil Society:** CSOs must lead advocacy with the government and other institutions, and take responsibility for being abreast with the Cybersecurity Act and its provisions for COP. They can then take the lead in engaging and building capacity among children at the community level, especially by encouraging them to take advantage of the available resources to report negative incidents such as the CSA's toll-free numbers. CSOs are also uniquely placed to break down the details of the Act for easy understanding and dissemination particularly for non-technical citizens, in local languages, and even for children.
- **Law enforcement:** The Act must and other accompanying legislative provisions must be enforced to the latter so that justice can be served to perpetrators. Moreover, law enforcement jargons must be broken down into easy-to-understand language so that everyone can be aware of their rights and responsibilities in digital spaces.
- **Telecommunications organizations:** Telecommunication providers must create awareness on child-friendly content by pushing some adverts on the available resources for child online protection. They must strengthen their systems for identifying child users so that they can monitor and, if necessary, block access to content that is considered age-inappropriate.

- **Private businesses:** They also bear responsibility for including child protection considerations in their decision-making and activities. For example, media houses must realize that some of their content can lure children into unsafe practices in digital spaces.
- **Government:** The government, apart from providing the regulatory and legal framework for protecting children and regulating online content, must work hand-in-hand with all other stakeholders to ensure COP. GES can take the lead to organize workshops for teachers and educators on how they can help children to be safe online.

There was also an understanding that other stakeholders like religious leaders and community leaders can help in awareness creation at their level, playing a leading role in reporting perpetrators of digital crimes against children and providing counseling for victims while liaising with state agencies to provide justice and redress.

#### **4. Awareness Creation and Capacity-Building are Critical for the Effective Implementation of Cybersecurity Act (2020)**

Stakeholders present at the workshop lastly spotlighted the need for awareness creation about the provisions of the Cybersecurity Act (2020). Though Ghana has made significant strides in providing the legislative backing for child online protection, a large number of people remain unaware of the legal provisions for victims of cyber offenses and the avenues for redress available. Attention was therefore drawn to the need for more platforms for capacity building, such as PDA's knowledge sharing workshop, which would arm more people with some of the basic knowledge necessary for keeping children safe in digital spaces. Other proposals in this vein included:

- a. Education, awareness creation, and capacity-building must be intentionally carried out among stakeholders. National institutions like the NCCE should be involved in familiarizing citizens with the Cybersecurity Act (2020). The National Development Planning Commission can also make COP a strategic theme in the national development plan for DCEs to run with
- b. Sensitization and awareness creation efforts must be innovatively crafted to be more effective in communicating the provisions of the Act, including the use of social media, mobile theatres, puppetry shows, flashcards, videos, and such like.
- c. There is the need for decentralization in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Act. Structures must be created at the community, district, regional and national levels. CSOs and other development organizations can be mobilized and involved in this process
- d. Sufficient financial allocation must be made available for this purpose. There must be transparency and accountability in the operationalization of the Cybersecurity Fund.

## Way Forward/Action Plans

As an organization, PDA continues its commitment to child protection in online spaces. It will play its role in:

- **Contributing to research and knowledge creation in the field of child online protection.** In pursuance of this, we are committed to producing the second edition of "The State of Child Protection in Ghana" report, partnering with leading academics and practitioners in the field to shed light on areas of child protection that need attention in the country.
- **Contributing to awareness creation on the role of stakeholders in the effective implementation of Cybersecurity Act 1038 and other legislative instruments.** PDA and Child Online Africa will co-author a Position Paper on the issue that will be disseminated to the general public, and presented to critical institutions like the Ministry of Communications and Digitalization, the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, the Department of Gender, Children and Social Protection, and the National Communications Authority.
- **Supporting the engagement of children themselves to be vigilant in digital spaces.** Child Online Africa has published internet safety materials in the local languages and an audio version of the child online protection portions of the Cybersecurity Act (2020) which will be disseminated.
- **Recognizing and creating awareness about the connection between online and offline child protection.** PDA's Child Abuse Tracker, hosted on the PDA website, tracks cases of offline child abuse in Ghana with regards to defilement, child abduction, physical abuse, and child trafficking. Some of these offline incidents may however stem from a background of online crimes against children such as grooming, exposure to inappropriate sexual content, and interactions with sexual/otherwise criminals via the internet. PDA will continue to raise awareness on this issue.

We call now on all interested stakeholders to contact Aseda Mensah of PDA's Advocacy & Communications Unit at [amensah@pdaghana.com](mailto:amensah@pdaghana.com) to unite our efforts in this direction and contribute to this action plan.

## Conclusion



The 5th Annual Knowledge Sharing Workshop on Child Protection created a platform for stakeholders of child protection to dialogue about practical ways to safeguard the online presence of Ghanaian children. Through the discussions and presentations, the need for awareness creation, stakeholder participation, and child inclusion and consideration in legal instruments was highlighted. Decisions were also taken concerning practical ways to translate the discussions into impact.