THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

MINISTRY OF GENDER, LABOUR AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

NATIONAL CHILD FOCUSED RESEARCH AGENDA

2022 - 2026

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

1922 - 2022

AfriChild
Research. Policy. Impact.
The Centre for the study of the African Child

Acknowledgements

Contents

Foreword

The Uganda government recognizes the need to harness the full potential of children as a key strategy for social and economic transformation, leading to the attainment of the vision 2040. We have made strides to create an environment that allows every child to realise their full potential, including inter alia, the National Child Policy (2020) and action plan (2020/2021 -2025/2026) which provide a framework for child well-being.

The favourable policy regime notwithstanding, the concurrent experiences of exclusion, poverty and deprivation and violence among children are a real risk to the targets embedded in Vision 2040. Half of the children in Uganda live in households with insufficient financial resources, experiencing multidimensional poverty, a low standard of living and being deprived of material items and services like quality health and education, essential for a minimum quality of life. Additionally, physical, sexual, and emotional violence against children is rife. Sexual violence affects mostly girls; moreover, this violence is associated with mental distress. Harmful traditional practices, sexual exploitation and stigma disproportionately affect girls. Global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and the economic recession, further exacerbate challenges for children in Uganda.

As the timeline for the 2040 Vision draws close, it is critical for Uganda to marshal all efforts to maximize children's potential. Accordingly, a focus on generating contextually relevant research is important and timely. This second National Child Focused Research Agenda (2022-2026), was developed by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in partnership with the AfriChild Centre-Makerere University, and a steering committee comprised of the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), the National Children's Authority, and UNICEF – in consultation with key stakeholders. The Agenda will support and enable relevant research that will subsequently support evidence-based programming. It outlines the research questions that need to be answered in the broad areas of child health and survival, education and development, childcare and protection and child participation and systems strengthening. It also identifies the topical issue of climate change as a cross-cutting research theme.

This research Agenda is expected to drive action and investments to improve child well-being in Uganda. We hope that our research partners will embrace the agenda, direct investments in this much-needed research and help fast-track the generation of evidence on the key priorities herein identified. We anticipate that our implementation partners narrow the gap between research generation and uptake in programming, policy development and resource allocation by using the emerging evidence to inform decision-making.

For God and My Country.

Hon. Nyirabashitsi Sarah Mateke,

Minister of State for Youth and Children Affairs
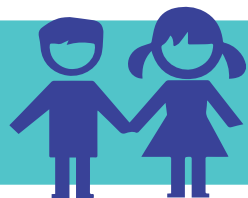
> *This research Agenda is expected to drive action and investments to improve child well-being in Uganda.*

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AFHS	Adolescent-Friendly Health Services
ANC	Antenatal Care
BVTVET	Business and Technical Vocational Education Training
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CTPD	Continuing Teacher Professional Development
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EMTCT	Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
GoU	Government of Uganda
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSSIP	Health Sector Strategic and Investment Plan
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NCA	National Children's Authority
NCP	National Child Policy
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIRA	National Identification & Regulatory Authority
NSP	National Strategic Plan
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PMTCT	Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendants
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNMHCP	Uganda National Minimum Health Care Package
VAC	Violence Against Children
VHT	Village Health Team
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene

1.0 Introduction

Improving child well-being is one of the Government of Uganda's priorities as demonstrated through the aspirations of the National Child Policy (2020) and its attendant National action plan 2020/2021 -2025/2026. The National Child focused research agenda (2022- 2026) is the second in succession of the 2015- 2020 research agenda. The development of the 2022-2026 research agenda draws lessons from implementation of the National Child focused research agenda (2015- 2020) and emerging challenges facing children in the aftermath of COVID-19. The Post COVID-19 context sets new dynamics in delivery of children services; therefore, evidence is needed now more than ever to facilitate evidence-informed decision-making for the delivery of more effective and lasting solutions to emerging challenges facing children in Uganda. Goldman and (Goldman & Pabari, 2020) in describing types of evidence use suggest four types, one of which is defined as 'Instrumental' that involves specific actions taken arising from an evaluation or research evidence. Indeed, the research agenda 2022-2026 is designed to produce evidence of value for policy-makers, practitioners, donors and researchers working to promote children's rights and well-being in Uganda. It is therefore expected that the evidence that will be generated through research studies drawing from the research questions in this agenda will inevitably drive action and investments to improve child well-being in Uganda.

Investing in the child focused research will contribute substantially to the achievement of the goals of the National Child Policy (2020) and its attendant Action Plan which provide a framework for addressing issues related to children's rights and well-being in a holistic and coordinated manner ensuring their survival, development, care and protection, participation as well as strengthening of systems for child wellbeing.

The research agenda aims to:

a) Guide undertaking child focused research that is anchored on the national child policy priority areas and actions to improve the realisation and enjoyment of all children's rights to survival, development, protection, and participation by all children in Uganda.

b) Provide evidence through empirical child focused research to inform policy and action for improved service delivery in Uganda.

c) Contribute to knowledge generation and facilitate learning on deeper and more complex research problems and answer questions related to child wellbeing.

d) Provide a compendium of research questions for utilization by professionals interested in the child rights sub-sector.
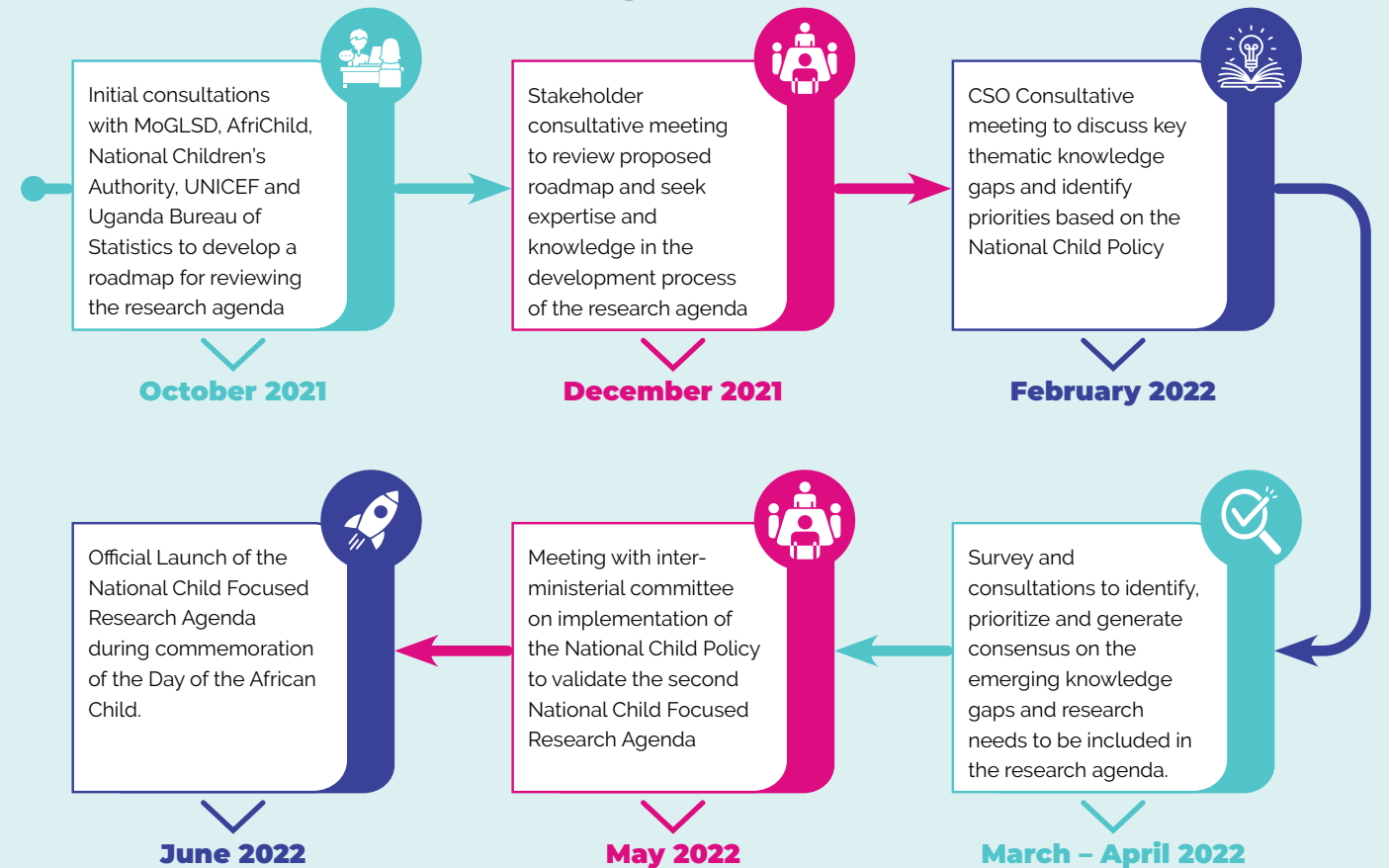
1.1 Development Process of the Research Agenda

The development of this Research Agenda involved of a wide range of stakeholders. This extensively consultative process was structured at two levels i.e. steering committee level; and Inter-Ministerial Committee on the implementation of the National Child Policy. The steering committee comprised of officials from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBoS), the National Children's Authority, the AfriChild Centre-Makerere University and UNICEF Uganda.

The Inter-Ministerial Committee chaired by the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development provided the necessary sector-specific technical corroboration that informed the scope of questions. The process involved a survey and a series of consultative meetings to reach consensus on what the child focused research priorities are.

Development Process

Initial consultations with MoGLSD, AfriChild, National Children's Authority, UNICEF and Uganda Bureau of Statistics to develop a roadmap for reviewing the research agenda
October 2021

Stakeholder consultative meeting to review proposed roadmap and seek expertise and knowledge in the development process of the research agenda
December 2021

CSO Consultative meeting to discuss key thematic knowledge gaps and identify priorities based on the National Child Policy
February 2022

Survey and consultations to identify, prioritize and generate consensus on the emerging knowledge gaps and research needs to be included in the research agenda.
March – April 2022

Meeting with inter-ministerial committee on implementation of the National Child Policy to validate the second National Child Focused Research Agenda
May 2022

Official Launch of the National Child Focused Research Agenda during commemoration of the Day of the African Child.
June 2022

Delphi Methodology

The Delphi method is a process used to arrive at a group opinion or decision by surveying a panel of experts. Experts respond to several rounds of questionnaires, and the responses are aggregated and shared with the group after each round.

Each subsequent round then becomes part of an "evaluation phase" in which the results of the previous round are used to frame another set of questions. Each round provides an opportunity for the experts to respond and revise their answers in light of the group members' previous responses. Over multiple rounds, the process can gradually lead to consensus or near-consensus (E. & Adler, 1996).

The Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development worked in partnership with the AfriChild Centre to select a panel of 40 experts with knowledge and experience on child well-being from the civil society, academia, government line ministries, private sector and multilateral agencies to participate in the development of the child focused policy research agenda process. The panel of experts was purposively selected based on agreed criteria that included: expertise, skills and knowledge in child well-being policy and practice.

Consensus was reached on the research gaps hinged on the four cardinal rights of a child: Survival, Development, Protection and Participation. The fifth priority area is System Strengthening that is cross cutting/supporting nature. Each priority area has a set of consensus generated research questions identified under each strategy.

Table 1: Criteria for selection of research questions (Sharma R et al (2018)

Criterion		Sub questions
Answerable by research	1	Would you say the research question is well framed?
	2	Can a single study or a very small number of studies be designed to answer the research question?
	3.	Do you think that a study designed to answer the proposed research question would obtain ethical approval without major concerns?
Research feasibility	1.	Is it likely that there will be sufficient capacity to carry out the proposed research?
	2.	Is it feasible to provide the training required for staff to carry out the research?
	3	the cost and time required for this research reasonable?
Deliverability	1.	Taking into account the level of difficulty with the implementation of the potential delivery strategy (e.g. need for a change of attitudes and beliefs, supervision, transport infrastructure), would you say that this strategy would be deliverable?
	2.	Taking into account the resources available to implement the intervention, would you say that the potential delivery strategy would be affordable?
	3.	Taking into account government capacity and partnership required, would you say that the potential delivery strategy would be sustainable?
Impact	1.	Will the results of this research fill an important knowledge gap?
	2.	Are the results from this research likely to shape future planning and implementation?
	3.	Will the results of this research lead to a long-term reduction in disease burden?
Effect on equity.	1.	Would you say that the present distribution of the target disease burden /health issue affects mainly the poor and marginalized in the population?
	2.	Would you say that the poor and marginalized would be the most likely to benefit from the results of the proposed research?
Necessity	1.	Is this area significantly lacking in research evidence?

A review was conducted to build on the research questions previously identified as priority areas pertaining to delivery of interventions. The agenda has laid out priority research questions that comprehensively cover the priority areas and strategies in the National Child Policy. Participation in the development of the research agenda process was voluntary. The research protocol for developing the agenda went through a research ethics review and clearance by the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST).

1.2 Targeted Users of the Research Agenda

The research agenda is designed to be used by a diversity of constituencies and stakeholders with an interest in undertaking child focused research. These will include the following categories:

a) Academia-individuals and academic institutions will use the research questions to guide their research e.g. professionals, PhD, Masters and Undergraduate students.

b) Government institutions focusing on child well-being

c) Non- government institutions supporting child focused programmes

d) Young people who have an interest in child focused research

e) Private sector

f) Donors funding child focused programmes

2.0 Priority Areas and Research Questions

The National Child focused research agenda is anchored on the priority areas of the National Child Policy whose building blocks are the four cardinal rights of a child: Survival, Development, Protection and Participation. The fifth priority area is System Strengthening which is cross-cutting. Each priority area has a set of research questions identified under each strategy.

2.1 Child Survival and Health

The Government's Health Sector Strategic and Investment Plan (HSSIP III) recognizes the National Minimum Health Care Package (UNMHCP) as the main mechanism for achieving the sector-wide goals by delivering cost-effective health interventions to improve outcomes in key areas such as maternal and child health, and prevention and control of communicable diseases. The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2016) aims to ensure children's universal access to primary health care services. Similarly, the National Strategic Plan (NSP) for HIV and AIDS seeks to reduce the transmission of HIV from pregnant and lactating women to their unborn or infant children.

If children survive beyond their fifth birthday, they face ongoing risks to their health due to poor sanitation and hygiene, and lack of access to clean water. At least 30% of the rural population does not have access to a latrine and more than 70% of households have no soap and water for children to wash their hands, putting them at risk of disease (Ministry of Gender, 2014)

The main constraints to good-quality health service provision include understaffing and absenteeism; inequitable geographical distribution of health facilities; poor logistics management (including frequent stock-outs of drugs and other essential supplies); poor linkages between services (e.g.

elimination of mother-to-child transmission (EMTCT)) and family planning services); weak monitoring systems to prevent absenteeism and corruption; and budget constraints. On the demand side, barriers include poor utilization of health services (continuity of use), socio-cultural practices and beliefs, lack of information (on the part of authorities and citizens), and low levels of education among parents. For example, gendered social norms and traditions, particularly around household decision-making and care responsibilities, have a detrimental impact on women and children's health.

Strategy 1: Increase access to and improve provision of reproductive and maternal health care services

Research Questions

1. What are the barriers to the provision of and access to appropriate reproductive and maternal health care services in rural communities of Uganda?
2. What are alternatives to strengthening the Village Health Team strategy for improving access to reproductive health services?
3. How should HIV-positive mothers be supported to overcome stigma and freely access ANC/EMTCT services?
4. What socio-cultural, behavioural and systemic actors constrain women/girls from accessing reproductive and maternal health services?
5. What groups of people find it difficult to access reproductive and maternal health care services and why?
6. How can mobile technology be used to facilitate early access for mothers in need of reproductive and maternal health care services?
7. What role can men/fathers/ males play in promoting better reproductive and maternal health care services?
8. What new actions are required in the implementation of PMTCT to further reduce and or end mother-to-child transmission at birth or after birth?
9. What solutions can solve challenges associated with modern contraceptive use in areas with very low usage?

Strategy 2: Promote essential new-born care practices in the home, and health facility level

Research questions

1. What are the barriers to healthcare-seeking behavior among expectant mothers?
2. What are the barriers to the provision of essential newborn care practices at the health facility level and what solutions are feasible?
3. What essential newborn care practices exist in the home and at health facilities?
4. What factors affect the provision of essential newborn care practices at home and how can these be solved?
5. What support do mothers of newborn babies require to enable exclusive breastfeeding practice up to six months of age?
6. How should appropriate education on standardized newborn kits (simple bag/mask, clean blades/knives, and cord clamps) be delivered to yield a reduction in newborn mortality and morbidity?
7. How else should community case management software applications be deployed for more accurate identification and referral of newborns and under-5 children from communities to a health facility?
8. What is the contribution of social protection toward better newborn health and child-related outcomes?
9. What are the strengths and weaknesses of interventions currently targeting the reduction of child and maternal mortality in Uganda?

Strategy 3: Prevention and better management of childhood illnesses/conditions

Research questions

1. What child care practices can be promoted in homes, daycare centres and health facilities?
2. What approaches should the Government of Uganda adopt to ensure teenage children access relevant reproductive health services?
3. How else should families be supported for better management of preventable childhood illnesses (hygiene and nutrition related illnesses)?
4. How can the Village Health Team (VHT) structure improve access to health medicines and supplies for prevention and management of common childhood illnesses?
5. What improvements are required in screening for hearing impairment and early intervention?
6. What are the determinants of health-seeking for children facing mental health challenges in Uganda?

Strategy 4: Increase effectiveness of health systems to improve maternal, neonatal and child health

Research questions

1. What factors hinder implementation of the elimination of mother-to-child transmission (EMTCT) strategy at community level?
2. What actions are required of actors/stakeholders towards more effective health systems for better maternal, neonatal and child health?
3. In what ways can mobile technology be used to facilitate early identification of mothers and children at risk for care?
4. How can the effectiveness of health systems be improved to promote maternal, neonatal and child health?
5. What immediate actions should Government of Uganda prioritize in the health care system for better maternal, neonatal and child health?
6. What is the contribution of social protection towards better maternal, newborn and neonatal health?
7. What role can government structures play to promote EMTCT and reduce maternal deaths?
8. What are the determinants of health-seeking behaviour, including mental health care, for children?
9. What child health indicators align to social health insurance?
10. How does performance-based financing deliver results for child health?
11. What are the key constraints to effectively boosting hygiene and sanitation practice among children?

Strategy 5:   Improve provision of and access to Adolescent-Friendly Health Services (AFHS)

Research questions

1. What are children's perceived risks and consequences of engaging in risky behaviour?
2. What changes in the delivery of adolescent-friendly health services would ease access for targeted beneficiaries?
3. Does the improved provision of and access to Adolescent-Friendly Health Services (AFHS) reduce Teenage pregnancy?
4. What support do Adolescents need in accessing age-appropriate information and other services for the reduction in preventable risks like teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and childhood parenting?
5. In what ways does menstrual hygiene management affect girls' education?
6. How are boys accessing and utilizing sexual and reproductive health services?

Strategy 6:   Improve access to HIV prevention, care and treatment services for children and adolescents

Research questions

1. What essential actions in Public health facilities can boost HIV prevention, care and treatment services for children and adolescents?
2. What appropriate actions are necessary to improve access to HIV care, prevention and treatment services for children and adolescents?
3. What are the alternative approaches towards achieving the 95-95-95 strategy for children and adolescents in our communities?
4. What role can children and adolescents play towards better HIV prevention, care and treatment services?
5. Does improvement in access to HIV prevention, care and treatment services for children and adolescents translate into user numbers for such services?
6. What factors affect adolescents' access to HIV/AIDS services (testing, prevention and treatment)?
7. What mechanisms exist to facilitate orphans and other vulnerable children access to child-friendly HIV services?

Strategy 7:   Develop and promote evidence-based interventions to improve food security and nutrition at national, community and household levels

Research questions

1. What are the contributing factors to persisting micronutrient deficiency (iron deficiency anaemia, vitamin A) in Uganda?
2. What models of food security exist at national, community and household levels?
3. What is the attribution of household food security and nutrition to learner's performance at Primary Leaving Examinations level?

4. What are the key drivers of malnutrition in Uganda?
5. What Malnutrition interventions exist and what lessons are emerging from these efforts?
6. What gaps exist in nutrition interventions targeting stunted children?
7. What unique factors facilitate stunting in children in Southwestern Uganda – the food basket of the country?
8. How do gender dynamics, knowledge, attitudes and practices influence nutrition outcomes of children in Southwestern Uganda?

Strategy 8:   Increase access to and improve provision of WASH services and facilities.

Research questions

1. In what ways can COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures be sustainably enforced post 'COVID-19 era' for more accessible and quality WASH services in public spaces?
2. What motivations can facilitate a family's greater appreciation of benefits from good sanitation practices?
3. What is the role of government in promoting increased access to safe water and sanitation facilities?
4. How can families/communities be supported to promote good use of water sources and sustainable use of other resources in the environment?
5. What barriers exist in accessing WASH services and facilities?
6. What challenges hinder the provision of good quality WASH services and facilities?
7. Does the increase in access to and improvement of provision of WASH services and facilities correspond to reduced water-borne diseases?
8. Does increased access to better WASH services translate into reduction in water borne diseases?
9. What is the impact of improved WASH in schools on learning outcomes?

Strategy 9:   Improved prevention and response to COVID-19 and other epidemics

Research questions

1. What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning processes in Uganda?
2. In what ways has COVID-19 induced child marriages and teenage pregnancies?
3. What early warning child-friendly systems should the government put in place for identification and coping with the COVID-19 pandemic and other related epidemics in future?
4. What is the effective pedagogy for online teaching and learning during COVID 19?
5. What policy-level interventions against COVID-19 and other epidemics should be actioned by the government and other actors?
6. What models are effective in rehabilitation and reintegration of girls in COVID-19-induced marriages back into school and communities?
7. What interventions work in schools and communities to address negative health outcomes of COVID-19 such as mental health among children?

of comprehensive, integrated, coordinated and multi-sectoral interventions for Early Childhood Development (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 24 Mar, 2016). Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) is a foundation for quality education as it encompasses a critical phase in children's physical, mental and psycho-social development. ECCE concentrates on children aged 0 to 8 years of age who need to be nurtured in a safe and caring environment that allows them to become healthy, secure, confident and empowered persons with lifelong learning capabilities (NDPIII, 2020). Parents are key stakeholders in ensuring children access the best possible care, nurturing and stimulation within their homes and in communities and this reaffirms the role of the family as the first, and most important, service point for ECCE delivery (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2018)

According to ECCE Policy (2018), Government has put in place several policy and legal frameworks aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality education services for all Ugandans at various levels of the education cycle. These frameworks; including the Education Act (2008) and the Government White Paper on Education (1992), have entrusted the delivery of pre-primary education to the private sector and charged Government with the mandate of regulating and developing standards in the delivery of pre-primary education.

Early Childhood Development policies have improved at a national level, with implementation and coordination being the core challenges. Whereas Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres are vital to ensure school readiness and future success (UNICEF & Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2015) the attainment of quality ECCE is, however, constrained by several challenges including limited access to ECCE services, ineffective regulation of ECCE delivery, limited awareness of the importance of ECCE, inconsistent levels of family and community engagement, uncoordinated efforts in ECCE delivery, high poverty levels, high cost of ECCE services; limited access to quality ECCE data (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2018).

2.2 Education and Development

Children's right to education is articulated in global, regional and national frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), the Government White Paper on Education, the National Development Plan III 2020/2025 (2020), and the ECCE Policy (2018).

Since 2000, there has been enormous progress in achieving the target of Universal Primary Education. The total enrollment rate in developing regions reached 91 per cent in 2015, and the worldwide number of children out of school has dropped by almost half (UN, nd). There has been a dramatic increase in literacy rates, and many more girls are in school than ever before. These are all remarkable successes, which, however, were challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns as thousands of young and adolescent girls became pregnant (Olukya, 2021)

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy Action Plan (2016-2021) of Uganda presents an opportunity for the development

Early childhood development policies have improved at a national level, with implementation and coordination being the core challenges.

Strategy I: Ensure equitable access to quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for holistic development

Research Questions:

1. What are the hindrances for the government in establishing ECCE in government-aided primary schools?
2. How can government primary schools be supported to promote early childhood learning?
3. In what ways has government supported ECCE stakeholders in the provision of services for the holistic development of the learners?
4. How do children of incarcerated parents access Early Childhood Care and Education?
5. What structures, resources and systems have the potential to make pre-schools accessible and affordable to all or majority of households across the country?
6. What are the long-term benefits of investing in the effective delivery of ECD services?
7. What is the contribution of social protection in strengthening the socio-economic capacity of families and communities towards better child development?
8. What indigenous practices uphold ECD and how can such positive practices be integrated in existing national strategies /policies?

Strategy 2: Improve access to and strengthen the provision of equitable and quality primary and secondary education

Research questions

1. What factors determine quality education at primary and secondary school levels?
2. What competence measures exist for teachers and learners under the new curriculum and how is success measured?
3. How relevant is Uganda's school curriculum in solving contemporary development challenges at country, regional and global levels?
4. What value has the increase in science teachers' salaries had on learners' comprehension and performance in science subjects?
5. How has the prioritization of science subjects and enhanced pay for science teachers affected non-science teachers?
6. What challenges to enrolment, retention, performance, completion and transition do children especially in hard-to-reach areas such as Karamoja face and what additional support do they need to be more resilient?

7. What factors facilitate and/or hamper equitable access to primary/secondary education?
8. What proportion of Ugandan school-going children performs poorly in school due to a learning/developmental/intellectual disability?
9. What proportion of Ugandan school-going children drops out of school due to a learning/developmental/intellectual disability?
10. What is the impact of child labour on learning outcomes for school-going children?
11. What potential impact does the provision of free uniforms, books and school meals have on key learning outcomes for school-going children?
12. What viable options exist to facilitate access to education for children in emergency contexts?
13. How does better housing for teachers affect teacher absenteeism rates?
14. How does increased parental and community involvement in education affect enrolment, retention, completion and learning outcomes, specifically for adolescent girls?

Strategy 3: Increase access to and improve provision of relevant training and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education

Research questions

1. How can skills development with certification be made accessible to the most vulnerable including children of incarcerated parents?
2. In what ways can competency levels of students in Business, Vocational and Technical Education Training (BTVET) be tailored to suit the needs of Uganda's labour market?
3. What strategies can motivate more female enrolment for technical courses in Uganda?
4. What level of certified pre and post-service teacher training has a greater impact on learning outcomes?
5. What value addition does teaching in local languages have on literacy rates?
6. How does the curriculum address the learning needs of each level at primary school?
7. How does the curriculum structure impact learning outcomes?
8. What is the correlation between music, dance, drama and sports with school attendance and completion rates?
9. Does effective supervision and appraisal improve teacher attendance rates and teaching methods?

2.3   Child Care and Protection

According to the Uganda National Child Policy (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2020) child protection entails measures that are taken to prevent and respond to all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children and their rights. Uganda has an Integrated Child Protection System, which has adopted a holistic programming approach to protect all children; it is building stronger linkages between sectors (social welfare, education, health, and justice), and stronger linkages between levels (national, sub-national and local). Although it has a robust legal framework, provisions relating to child protection are scattered across several pieces of legislation, and enforcement tends to be weak (Government of Uganda, UNICEF, 2013)

Uganda has a young population with over 50 per cent of its population under the age of 18 and about half (47.9 per cent) are under the age of 15 years (UBOS, 2016). The National OVC Policy lists the vulnerable groups, include among others; orphans, abandoned children, children living in poor households, children with disabilities, children in child labour, children in need of legal protection, street-connected children and children living in child-headed households. Although there is a legal requirement under the Children Act (2016) to inform the authorities when an orphan is placed in alternative care (in foster care, through adoption, or institutional care), enforcement is inadequate and kinship care is not covered by the law, which is why valid statistics about the number of children in alternative care are limited. Due to a lack of regulation or weak enforcement, there is a proliferation of childcare institutions and most of them are either not registered or fail to comply with rules and regulations (National Child-Focused Policy Research Agenda, 2016-2020, 2016)

Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, and rural adolescent girls face additional challenges due to gendered social norms that place a high value on girls' reproductive capabilities, while reinforcing harmful practices such as early marriage and, in some communities, Female Genital Mutilation(FGM). Girls in rural areas are likely to marry earlier and have at least three more children than their urban counterparts, yet are less likely to have access to family planning services. Child trafficking is a major concern in Uganda, with specific groups of children at high risk, including orphaned children, children from poor households, and children out of school.

Social norms and attitudes in families and parenting also play a strong role, upholding a culture of impunity for perpetrators of Violence against Children. However, domestic violence and other forms of abuse experienced by children are a result of more serious, systemic elements, including but not limited to: complex and poor law enforcement; lack of trained personnel to handle cases of violence; barriers to accessing care; and lack of coordination among sectors responsible for child protection (UNICEF & Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2015).

The National Development Plan 2021/2021-204/2025 offers light and support towards child protection by aspiring for increased uptake and/or utilization of public services (education, health, child protection etc.) at the community and District level, page 171 (NDPIII, 2020).

.... Although it has a robust legal framework, provisions relating to child protection are scattered across several pieces of legislation, and enforcement tends to be weak (Government of Uganda, UNICEF, 2013)

Strategy 1: Scale up the provision and improve access to family strengthening and support services to vulnerable families

Research questions

1. How else can vulnerable families' capacity to care for and protect children from violence be strengthened?
2. How effective are the current social protection interventions in addressing the welfare needs of vulnerable families?
3. How can we effectively increase service uptake for children with disabilities (health, protection, education, psychosocial)?
4. What is the impact of natural disasters and/or displacement (internal and across borders) on children's welfare?
5. How has social protection for children promoted inclusiveness and equity within the national development framework?
6. What actions can the government take to increase the fiscal space for sustained investments in child-sensitive social protection?

Strategy 2: Improve permanency planning for children who are deprived of family care through quality alternative care services for children living outside family care

Research questions

1. How can children who are deprived of family care access quality alternative care services?
2. How have foster care homes and organizations embraced child adoption concerning the laws of Uganda?
3. How can we integrate interventions for child protection in homes, schools and communities?
4. What can be done to support and strengthen local authorities like the Local Council (LC) court in apprehending perpetrators of violence against children in the absence of courts?
5. How effective are the alternative care services for children living outside family care?
6. How can permanency planning for children deprived of a family be an integral part of quality alternative care services?
7. How can registration and regulation of childcare institutions be enforced, and how can enforcement lead to improved child protection in childcare institutions?

Strategy 3: Strengthen the capacity of the national protection system to effectively prevent and respond to all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect of children

Research questions

1. What hinders the implementation of the national protection system from effectively preventing and responding to all forms of Violence against Children and how can these bottlenecks be addressed by the relevant actors?
2. In what ways has the national protection system mapped and responded to all forms of violence against children in the country?
3. How can the national child protection system be further strengthened to prevent Violence against Children?
4. How inclusive is the national protection system in the protection of all categories of children from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect?
5. What is the cost of not investing in the prevention of Violence Against Children?
6. What are the proven methods of preventing violence against children in different settings (school, household, and community)?
7. What is the lifelong impact of violence against children on the following outcomes?
   a. Risky behaviour in adolescence
   b. Academic achievement
   c. Psychosocial well-being
8. What roles do traditional and religious leaders play in the prevention and response to Violence against Children?

Strategy 4: Strengthen community system for prevention and to Violence against Children (VAC)

Research questions

1. What mechanisms exist to strengthen the community system for prevention of and response to violence against children?
2. How can these mechanisms be further strengthened?
3. What tested approaches can NIRA adopt in the enhancement of children's acquisition of birth certificates?
4. In what ways can community case management software applications be harnessed for the prevention of and response to Violence against Children?
5. What is the relationship between Violence against Children in school and learning outcomes?
6. What are the most effective methods of minimizing all forms of Violence against Children in schools?
7. What are the most effective interventions for the reduction of culturally-induced Violence against Children such as FGM/C, child marriage and teenage pregnancy?

Strategy 5:   Develop and strengthen systems for prevention of, and removal of children from all forms of child Labour

Research questions

1. What new strategies and systems involving parents and communities should be adopted to protect children from all forms of child Labour?

Strategy 6:   Develop and implement measures to ensure that all children in school are protected from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse

Research questions

1. What role can school administrators and proprietors play in safeguarding children in their care from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse?
2. What capacity building approaches are effective in reinforcing school heads' appreciation of the need to uphold child rights in schools?
3. What child protection structures are children in school aware of?
4. How can the enforcement of Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards for a Safe School be enhanced?
5. How can the Senior Men/Women Teachers be supported to report, track, refer and respond to cases of Violence against Children in schools?
6. What child-friendly safe reporting procedures on VAC exist in schools?
7. Are there any cognitive development gaps among children raised under the care of domestic workers?

Strategy 7:   Develop and strengthen systems for prevention of, and removal of children living and working on the street

1. What are the push and pull factors for children living and working on the street?
2. What proven social work approaches can government adopt and promote as lasting solutions to children living and working on the streets of cities and towns?
3. What role have foster and rehabilitation homes played in addressing the plight of children living and working on streets?
4. How can law enforcement be enhanced to prevent children from living and working on the street?

2.4 Child Participation

Child participation is the informed and willing involvement of all children under 18 years, including the most marginalized and those of different ages and abilities, to contribute, take decisions and actions in any matter concerning them directly or indirectly, per Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (MoLGSD, 2020; World Vision International, 2012). This is best done through empowering children and nurturing positive relationships amongst children, adults and communities based on mutual respect and partnership at familial, local, national and international levels.

Child Participation means that children can discuss and co-decide on all matters that affect them, like family, school, community matters, government policies, and legal policies. It means that their voices are being heard. Participation is important for children because it allows them to have a say about issues and decisions that affect them, learn new skills, have fun and develop a closer connection to their community. As a result, programs and services created for children will better reflect their needs (World Vision International, 2015).

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, highlights the child's right to be heard as the fundamental tenet for children's participation. As one of the four guiding principles of the CRC, Article 12 is both connected to and indivisible from all other rights enshrined in the Convention.

There are additional articles that specifically intersect with Article 12 and directly help to define the meaningful participation of children, including the right to freedom of expression, thought, conscience, religion, association, peaceful assembly, protection of privacy and access to information (Articles 13 – 17 of the CRC). Together, this set of civil rights and freedoms have been broadly conceptualized under the term "participation". Children's participation is crosscutting and should permeate all actions/ decisions affecting children. In this way, it is viewed as both an individual's right, but also a working method that cuts across all themes and contexts. As such, children's participation is a set of civil rights to be fulfilled, a principle to be applied, and a means to fulfil other rights. Despite the intentions of Article 12, children still experience enormous limitations, discriminatory traditional practices and exclusion that prevent them from exercising their right to participate in decision-making (World Vision International) In this respect, therefore, the proposed research questions from the experts in each strategy under child participation attempt to reduce or eliminate these tendencies.

Child Participation means that children can discuss and co-decide on all matters that affect them, like family, school, community matters, government policies, and legal policies.

Strategy 1:   Ensure observance and implementation of the domesticated international and regional standards on child participation

Research questions

1. How best can we promote meaningful inclusive child participation on issues that concern them?
2. What strategies exist for monitoring implementation and compliance to domesticated international and regional standards on child participation?

Strategy 2:   Ensure that children are valued as key stakeholders and members of society, without discrimination

Research questions

1. What knowledge and attitudes about child participation do communities especially elders and cultural leaders possess?
2. What mechanisms are necessary to ensure inclusive child participation?

3. In what ways does increased child participation impact the quality of children's services?
4. What are the essential children's services from the children's perspectives?

Strategy 3:   Put in place nationally recognized governance processes, guidelines and mechanisms that enable child participation to be deliberate, systematic and accountable

Research questions

1. What measures have you put in place to enable deliberate and systematic child participation in nationally recognized governance processes, guidelines and mechanisms?
2. What existing planning tools and frameworks capture children's issues in national development strategies, planning and budgeting processes?
3. What platforms are available for children's meaningful participation in community dialogues especially on matters affecting them?

Strategy 4: Ensure inclusion of especially vulnerable children in child participation mechanisms through targeted measures

Research questions

1. What does society consider child participation?
2. What disability inclusive games and sports exist in schools?

Strategy 5:   Ensure that children and children's issues are visible and heard in local and national government processes

Research questions

1. In what ways can children's issues be made visible and heard in local and national government processes?
2. What child wellbeing indicators are tracked within the Local Government Performance Assessment Framework?

Strategy 7:   Creating an evidence-based and enabling learning environment to facilitate and inform effective child participation processes, with data collection and evaluation as a basis for future initiatives

Research questions

1. In what ways can mechanisms for monitoring and measuring results on child participation be strengthened and enforced?
2. What evidence-based approaches exist to assure an enabling environment for effective child participation and results in measurement to inform learning?

2.5 Systems Strengthening

The system strengthening approach is a practical, systematic and comprehensive approach to national research for health system development. It includes a framework for overall system assessment and for overall system development. Derived from the National child policy, systems strengthening in this respect aims to strengthen systems for planning, programming and delivery of quality child rights friendly and comprehensive services to children to ensure their growth and development to full potential (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2020). It is of critical importance that Government works with partners to build and strengthen holistic and integrated systems and models to promote the best interests of the child. Deliberate efforts should be made to work with all partners to build and maintain a strong evidence base on which all future child targeted interventions and programmes can be effectively planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated. In addition, leadership and governance structures, the social service workforce and increased financing in multi-dimensional sectors ought to be accorded critical importance by the stakeholders, more so, Government.
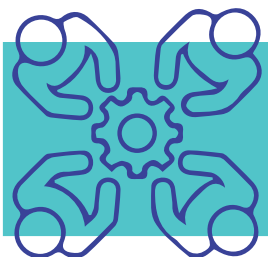
It is of critical importance that Government works with partners to build and strengthen holistic and integrated systems and models to promote the best interests of the child.

Strategy 1:   Strengthen Leadership and Governance Structures

1. What alternative resourcing mechanisms exist to finance systems strengthening?
2. What stakeholder engagements exist in national child-focused research?

Strategy 2:   Strengthen Social Services Workforce

1. What innovations can further strengthen the delivery of Probation and Social welfare services in the context of high worker: client ratio and insufficiently facilitated to CDOs?
2. What are children's perceptions of child protection services, systems and structures, and how can these services, systems and structures be made more child-friendly?

Strategy 3:   Increase Financing

Research questions

1. What funding innovations are necessary to ensure funding availability including public financing for holistic child development?
2. Examine how the Parish Development Model takes care of children's issues at the Parish level.

Strategy 4:   Strengthen Coordination and Networking Mechanism

Research questions

1. How can knowledge sharing among coordination mechanisms on prevention and response to violence against children be further strengthened?

Strategy 5:   Improve Social Service Delivery Models and Mechanisms

Research questions

1. What social service delivery models and mechanisms exist?
2. What evidence is emerging from delivery models and mechanisms on what is working and not?

2.6   Cross Cutting

2.6.1   Climate Change

Research questions

1. How can children be protected from the negative effects of climate change?
2. What solutions can address gaps in existing policies on preservation of the environment and mitigation of climate change challenges?
3. How can children be meaningfully involved in promoting positive environment and climate change behaviour?
4. What is the impact of climate-related hazards on children's welfare?

References

E., Z., & Adler, M. (1996). *Ziglio, E. (1996). The Delphi Method and its contribution to decision making. In M. Adler, & E. Ziglio (Eds.), Gazing into the oracle:Delphi method and its application to social policy and public health (pp. 3-33). London: Kingsley.* London: Scientific Research Publishing.

Fletcher, A. J., & Marchildon, G. P. (2014). *Using the Delphi Method for Qualitative, Participatory Action Research in Health Leadership.* sagejournals.

Goldman, I., & Pabari, M. (2020). *Using Evidence in Policy and Practice: Lessons from Africa .* Routledge.

Government of Uganda, UNICEF. (2013). *The Status of the Child Protection System in Uganda .* Kampala: Government of Uganda, UNICEF.

Ministry of Education and Sports. (2018, December). Reviewed-Draft-Early-Child-Care-Education-Policy-Approved-by-ME-WG-THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND. Kampala, Uganda .

Ministry of Gender, L. a. (2014). *Situation Analysis of Child Poverty and Deprivation in Uganda.* Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/uganda/media/1856/file/Child%20Poverty%20Report:%20main%20report.pdf

Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development. (2020). *Planning for Increased Access to Early Childhood Care and Education Thematic Studies Report.* Kampala.

Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development . (2020). *National Child Policy, 2020.* Kampala: Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development .

Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. (24 Mar, 2016). *The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy Action Plan (2016-2021) of Uganda.* Kampala: Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

(2016). *National Child-Focused Policy Research Agenda, 2016-2020.* Kampala .

Olukya, G. (2021, October 31). Teen pregnancies growing concern in Uganda amid coronavirus lockdowns. Uganda.

Renee Sharma, M., Buccioni, M., Mitchelle , F., Mansoor, O., Scott, H., & Butta, Z. (2017). *Setting an implementation research agenda for Canadian investments in global maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health: a research prioritization exercise.* PubMed Central.

UBoS. (2016). *Statistical Abstract, 2016.* Kampala: Uganda Bureau of Statistics.

UN. (n.d.). Goal of the Week: SDG4 - Quality Education. UN.

UNICEF & Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. (2015). Situation Analysis of Children in Uganda, 2015.

World Vision International. (2015). *Building a Better World for Children.* World Vision.

World Vision International. (n.d.). *Unpacking Gender Equality Approach to Children and Young People's Participation.* World Vision International.

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

MINISTRY OF GENDER, LABOUR AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

in partnership with