LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

Reducing Violence in Schools and at Home
Improving Educational Performance and Attainment for Vulnerable Children in Upper West and Upper East Regions of Ghana

By Nancy M. Drost
Independent Education Consultant, Accra

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### Acronyms

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community Based Organisation</td>
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<td>CDC</td>
<td>Community Development Committee</td>
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<td>CHRAJ</td>
<td>Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (Ghana)</td>
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<td>CPN</td>
<td>Child Protection Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOVVSU</td>
<td>Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (Ghana Police)</td>
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<td>GES</td>
<td>Ghana Education Service</td>
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<td>GHS</td>
<td>Ghana Health Service</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>International Children’s Trust</td>
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<td>KNM</td>
<td>Kasena Nankana Municipal</td>
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<td>KNW</td>
<td>Kasena Nankana West District</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>PE</td>
<td>Peer Educator</td>
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<td>PTA</td>
<td>Parent-Teacher Association</td>
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<td>SMC</td>
<td>School Management Committee</td>
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<td>UER</td>
<td>Upper East Region</td>
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<td>UWR</td>
<td>Upper West Region</td>
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Students a morning assembly being reminded to focus on their studies and conduct themselves well.
Executive Summary

This lessons learned document on the project *Reducing, Violence in Schools and at Home – Improving Educational Performance and Attainment for Vulnerable Children in Upper West and Upper East Regions of Ghana*, is a companion piece to the project’s final report and evaluation. In just three short years, Youth Alive has managed to significantly reduce violence against children in 14 communities. They did this by providing education about child rights and protection for community members and leaders, teachers, parents, children, and concerned government staff – in workshops, durbars, radio broadcasts. Also, community committees, Parent-Teacher Associations, school clubs and district Child Protection Networks were formed or strengthened to ensure that measures put into place to prevent violence against children were regulated and institutionalized.

This document provides guidance to those who want to achieve the same transformational results in their schools and communities. It is written for teachers, NGOs, CBOs and government staff who desire to eliminate violence against children.

For the purposes of this document, “lessons” are reflections on experiences that happened during the life of the project. Lessons are learned for application to future projects and to share with others implementing similar activities. Some of Youth Alive’s lessons learned in this project are:

- If consequences of an individual’s actions are made clear and they are expressed in ways that illustrate that the stakes are high, people will choose a better future.
- If children are educated on the importance of intervening for the rights of another child, they will do so, even if their socialized background reinforces ultimate respect for adults, including parents and teachers.
- If men are socialized that they have no responsibility for children, especially girls, they will not be interested in spending time with them. However, if men are told that their marriage implies joint responsibility for children, they will pay more attention to this information than to their socialization.

Within the context of this document, Best Practices are actions and activities which should continue to be promoted because they are effective in making sustainable changes. Some of Youth Alive’s best practices in this project are:

- When children are subjected to “positive discipline” rather than beating, they will respond by adjusting their behaviour and following adults’ instructions and guidance.
- When parents are shown alternative ways of instructing and disciplining their children, they will respond positively to children’s needs by talking to and explaining things to them.
- When child protection officers from different agencies (DOVVSU (Police), CHRAJ (Human Rights), Social Welfare, District Assembly, Ghana Education Service, Ghana Health Service) are recognized and supported for their work, they can take more effective actions together.
- When all target groups – children, parents, teachers, community members – are educated with the same child rights and protection messages consistently, the possibilities for change are great.
When community leaders – both Traditional Authorities and prominent members of the community – are adequately assisted to acquire the right knowledge, attitude, practice, and skills, they become more responsible towards their children, and will put in place a number of measures to ensure children’s quality education, their safety, security, and general community development. The most important aspect of regulation is that it comes directly from the community.

Many of these lessons and best practices challenge existing practice – this is why this advice is so valuable for NGOs which are striving to change community attitudes toward child rights and gender equality. Building on previous work, Youth Alive strove tirelessly for three years to listen to communities, educate them, and walk hand-in-hand with them as they strove to be better parents, teachers and leaders for the sake of their children. Remote, isolated and disadvantaged villages have been transformed into enlightened communities whose members can clearly articulate their “paradigm shift” from their situation before the project to their present reality as a result of the project. They now have a purpose – to protect and educate their children for the future. They have deeper concern and emotional ties to their children, spouses and neighbours. These changes for children have provoked many new initiatives in line with development goals and progress. Putting children – their future – at the centre of development has inspired new hope in communities.

Introduction
In January 2014, Youth Alive with the support from the International Children’s Trust (ICT), accessed funding from UKAID to implement a three-year project to reduce violence at home and in school. The project’s reach was 5,601 children (2637 girls and 2964 boys) in 22 schools in 14 rural communities in the Upper East and Upper West region in Ghana. By intervening in the lives of those children, it was expected that enrolment, retention and educational performance would improve, in addition to their overall life outcomes. These outcomes were achieved through the following strategies and processes:

- Train and support peer educators to reach out and educate their fellow youth on their rights and responsibilities
- Identify and train a 25 member community committee to lead efforts to reduce violence in their respective communities in general
- Public education through radio
- Community forums
- Formation and use of school clubs in all participating schools.
The project is implemented in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Community</th>
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<tr>
<td>Upper East</td>
<td>KNM</td>
<td>Vunania, Biu,*Sensaa, Gaani,<em>Janania, Tampola</em>, Kapania</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KNW</td>
<td>Kayoro (Wuro, Baliu),<em>Katiu/Saa, Abulu</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper West</td>
<td>Jirapa</td>
<td>Baazu,<em>Tizaa-Mwofor</em></td>
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<td>Lawra</td>
<td>Domwine, *Babile</td>
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**The purpose of this exercise was to:**
- Analyse the appropriateness and effectiveness of processes and strategies adopted to facilitate the achievement of key project results/outcomes
- Document best practices of project implementation
- Document lessons learned (positive, negative)
- Document Challenges
- Recommend future directions for Youth Alive.

**Methodology**

In addition to review of project documents, the evaluator used participatory tools that were appropriate to the aims of the exercise: focus group discussions, observations, and one-on-one interviews in communities, schools and district offices. One round table discussion was held in each region with representatives from all participating communities and collaborators: students, parents/guardians, community members, school authorities, Youth Alive staff, District Assembly persons, and members of the Child Protection Network.

This report lists best practices, lessons and challenges in the areas of the project’s target groups, governance structures, activities and community take-up.

**Project Concepts**

The project emphasised uncommon definitions for common words – this caused a paradigm shift in the minds of community members and was in itself a best practice.

**Child:** The future of your community. Children are your future – do all you can to ensure children have a good future (“otherwise it will come back on you” – Community Development Committee, Tizza-Mwofor).

**Education:** The key to a good future for your children.

**Violence:** Anything that gets in the way of your child’s success at school.

This project chose to use the concept of “violence” as an entry point to child protection interventions. The term “violence” was used broadly to cover many issues and contexts – all of them grounded within the realities of communities from beatings and snatching girls to preventing children from attending school and refusing them the ability to express themselves.

1 Communities marked with an asterisk were visited by the education consultant.
• We didn’t know the effect of beating
• When I beat my child, I don’t have peace of mind
• Children are not clever in class if beaten on the head
• Children are beaten so much, they are afraid of any interaction with the parent
• We used to beat them to “deform” them – they were hurt and injured. (Community durbar, Domwine)

The use of “violence” was strong and powerful, and provided no escape for those wanting to temper it with cultural or other relativism. Violence was seen as unacceptable with negative and sometimes irreparable consequences for children. Therefore, according to the project, all forms of violence had to stop.

Lessons Learned

Lessons are learned for sharing and applying to similar projects. Project lessons are learned from experiences, both inspiring and challenging. The following lessons are organized according to easy-to-follow topics for those working in the area of child rights and protection: target groups, governance structures, activities, community take-up, and implementers. The guidance provided in the following sections identifies lessons, and highlights best practices, challenges and recommendations.

Target Groups

The target groups for the project were school children and their parents and teachers. The following lessons describe how to effectively influence these groups.

Students

Children in school were central to the project, and they played an active part in promoting child rights and protection through school clubs and as peer educators.

Best Practice: When children are given permission and encouraged to express themselves by adults, they will speak up for their rights. Most children at school and in the home are afraid to express themselves because they may be punished. In the northern part of Ghana, children are property of their parents, fathers in particular, and are to be “seen but not heard.” Youth Alive workshops educated children about their rights to talk and express themselves. School Club quizzes encouraged children to speak up in English. The clubs also offered an opportunity for children to talk amongst themselves and with their teacher-patron about sensitive issues, such as children who are not coming to school and why, and teacher behaviour such as drunkenness in and lateness to class. As a result of follow-up, students came back to school and teachers had their salary suspended or were transferred.

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2 Project Baseline Survey, Section 2.2.1., page 14.
Students are also encouraged to tell their teachers if they have problems with their parents. Some parents do not buy any of the clothing and supplies that their children need for school. Others have parents who would prefer if their children would work rather than study. Because children were encouraged to tell a trusted adult what was going wrong in their homes, teachers, the PTA and the Community Development Committee could intervene on their behalf.

**Lesson:** When children are subjected to “positive discipline” rather than beating, they will respond by adjusting their behaviour and following adults’ instructions and guidance. When children are aware of their rights, their respect for adults will increase, not decrease – especially when parents understand and ensure that their rights are met. “Children obey now – they used to run and hide.” One of Youth Alive’s greatest strategies was to train all stakeholders on the same topics in the same way at the same time. Because of this consistent approach to sensitization and training, children and parents were compelled to comply with communities’ commitment to the goals of the project. The project’s broad definition of violence addressed all types of behaviour that was considered acceptable in communities, when in fact it threatened child rights. As children and adults learned about child rights, they also learned about their responsibilities to each other. With community mechanisms put in place for protection of children, adults and children became more accountable for their behaviour toward each other.

**Parents**

Parents participated in awareness events sponsored by the project. Parents who were members of Parent-Teacher Associations or School Management Committees also benefited from training.

**Lesson:** If NGOs plan to intervene with children in rural, isolated communities, they cannot take for granted that parents will raise their children based on conventional Western parenting values and practices. In general, parents follow others’ example in not taking responsibility for their children, being neglectful, and communicating with them through beatings. This fact may immediately undermine child protection efforts.

**Lesson:** If parents do not send their children to school, there is a good chance that they do not value their children’s future, and therefore, do not feel that schooling is an important investment. In general, not sending children to school seems to be more about parenting and less about money. Children interviewed in Tizza-Mwofor said that parents are the most to blame for drop-out and absenteeism. Now parents send children to school at 2-3 years rather than 8-9.

**Best Practice:** When parents are shown alternative ways of instructing and disciplining their children, they will respond positively to children’s needs by talking to and explaining things to them. For the first time, Youth Alive introduced parents to the concepts of child rights and their responsibilities as parents, including “positive discipline.” A distinction was made between “punishment” which is negative, hurts, and could result in various behaviours, such as aggressive behaviour in the victim, timidity, withdrawal, hate for the perpetrator, seeking love and acceptance from outside the home and getting into the wrong hands. As opposed to “punishment,” “discipline” draws children closer, so that they are open to advice and seeking help, which yields positive and lasting results. The explanation of these concepts caused a complete shift in many parents’ thinking about what it means to be a parent and the related responsibilities. Now many parents take time to
relate to their children, rather than beating them. “I reduced my harshness toward my child. He used to put on his uniform and go to school. Little did I know that he was climbing trees to pick fruit because he was hungry. Instead of beating him, I hold him like an egg. Now he goes to school on time.” “I now feel excited to talk to my child -- it gives me peace of mind and I can sleep better.”

**Best Practice:** When parents are made aware of the benefits of good parenting practices, and given the permission to care and express concern for children in their communities, they will take notice of those not going to school and parents who are neglectful of their children’s daily needs.

In response to the training by Youth Alive, Community Development Committees encouraged all adults in the community to be attentive to children who appeared abused, neglected or out of school. Members of the committee would go from house to house asking about the welfare of families, vigilant to parents and children who had special needs. Now, if a child is at home and not at school, any adult can intervene by involving the committee to talk to the parents and teachers and ensure that the child goes to school.

**Best Practice:** When parents are advised about how children learn at school, even if they are not literate, they will try to meet their children’s requirements to be better students. Youth Alive advised parents to provide children with breakfast before going to school, so that they can concentrate on learning, rather than hunger. They were told to provide their children with school supplies, such as pens, pencils, exercise and text books, so that they could follow their teachers’ lessons. Parents were counseled to show an interest in what children are learning at school, and also provide them with the time and space to do homework. Now, if a child appears sad, parents will ask if he or she has a problem at school. “Formerly, I didn’t buy school books for my children. Now I sit down with them and discuss what I need to buy for them before I buy it.”

**Best Practice:** When parents appreciate that children need to continue learning at home after school, they will give their children the time and space to do homework and even supervise it.

Previously, parents thought that children were trying to get out of work when they said that they needed to do their homework. They would overburden their children with household or farm work, i.e. going to irrigation canals, chasing birds. Now, with Youth Alive’s instruction, they know how to supervise their children with homework through a system of monitoring x’s and checks in their exercise books.

**Best Practice:** When parents are aware of the laws protecting child rights and the sanctions thereof, they will pay more attention to their whereabouts throughout the day, their attendance at school and their bed-times. Using the Children’s Act, 1998 (560), Youth Alive provided basic parenting information to parents, making them aware of the dangers of leaving their children unsupervised during the day and night. Parents were told that children should have schedules, curfews and bed-times. The Community Development Committees developed rules and regulations about what times boys and girls should be inside their homes after dark. Previously, many parents allowed their children to roam freely, not caring where they were. Even those parents who cared could not control their children – they would get angry and beat them if they were out. In response, children would just run away. “Now we know where our children are at all times, unlike before.” “We know our children have a future – no more walking around at night.”
The following box provides a list of characteristics of community members who are most amenable to changes in their attitudes and behaviours. The list was developed during stakeholder meetings held for this study, and included students, teachers, parents, community leaders, and social workers.

**Lessons Learned about community members who are willing to change and become change agents:**

- Attend meetings regularly
- Willing to listen and learn with open minds, and seek advice
- Desiring of development and progress
- Regretful and remorseful of their violent behaviour, willing to say sorry and not repeat the violence
- Accepting of their mistakes and willing to change and practice new ideas and behaviours
- Love their family and accepting of their children’s mistakes, i.e. willing to pay school fees for their children and involving them in decision-making at home
- Friendly and cooperative
- Peace-loving
- Respectful of authorities, i.e. following laws, enforcing them, and comporting themselves as examples
- Willing to report and follow-up cases without compromise, i.e. criminal case, non-maintenance cases (in situations where no one takes responsibility for pregnancy)
- Children who follow “good friends”

**Teachers**

Before the project, teachers’ behaviour did not make school attractive for children. Teachers were disrespectful of children, and emphasised punishment and caning, rather than learning. Some children dropped out of school just because of teachers. At first, teachers were reluctant to get involved with the project because they thought that it would force them to make unwanted changes to their teaching routines. However, after they were trained, they realized that using “positive discipline” with students would make their work easier and more effective. Better relationships between teachers and students, and led to improvements in students’ attendance, retention and performance.

**Lesson:** If teachers become more aware of child rights within the context of their work to promote a child-centred teaching-learning environment, they will decrease the hierarchal gap between themselves and students, becoming more friendly and less intimidating and punitive – especially when they understand the implications for better performance.

**Best Practice:** When teachers are proactive in identifying potential drop-outs, they can significantly reduce the drop-out rate and intervene in way that encourage students. Because teachers are with their students all day long, they are in a good position to identify at-risk children whose parents are not providing them with basic supplies for school, or those who are abused, or
even pregnant. Teachers were educated on how to identify at-risk children and how and where to report such cases for the appropriate intervention.

**Project Governance Structures**

The project’s governance structures included 25-member Community Development Committees at community level, district Child Protection Network (CPN) comprising all government agencies involved in child protection issues, Peer Educators (PEs), Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees (SMCs). The CDCs, PEs and CPNs were initiated by Youth Alive. Even though the PTAs and SMCs were in place to some extent, most were dormant before Youth Alive came to intervene. These structures were revived and strengthened by Youth Alive. These local structures were put into place to facilitate post-funding period continuity and sustainability of the project and development in general, should Youth Alive phase out of the communities.

**Community Development Committee**

Community Development Committees were initiated after 25 members from all participating communities were trained by the project. They were trained to be peer educators in their communities, reaching out to community members and parents to promote child rights and protection. They were later constituted into committees, core groups of trained community members. This alleviated the need for non-trained people to attend project workshops, since a critical mass of people were available.

“If the Community Development Committee was not in place, we would go back to square one.” (Committee member from Kayoro)

“The establishment of Community Development Committees has provided communities with a focus, something to talk about, and something that interests everyone all the time. There’s always something to do.” (Committee member from Bazuu)

“We saw it as something to help us in our development process.” (Committee member from Domwine)

**Lesson:** In remote, rural communities where the majority are traditionalists and uneducated, they may not know, understand or value child rights. “We were ignorant – now we know.” In Tampola-Kapania, everyone— all seven clans -- accepted new rules and bye-laws protecting children.

**Lesson:** If the community committee was effective in its role with the Youth Alive project, it will stay intact to intervene in any community issues in order to promote peace and development. The Community Development Committee promotes unity. If given the mandate by the community, Community Development Committees can be even more effective than Unit Committees in changing community behaviour. Whereas Unit Committees are associated with local government, Community Development Committee are grassroots bodies than are able to influence all parents by “spreading learning throughout the community,” so that all children stay in school.

**Lesson:** If community structures are well organised and trained, they can lead the development agendas of their communities. The CDCs are divided into sub-committees. In addition to the Parent Teacher Association and School Management Committee, a sub-committee of the Community

![CDC meeting in Bazuu](Image)
Development Committee visits the school weekly and has a meeting with the teachers to discuss progress. Another sub-committee is in charge of the children who are out of school, engaging their families in order to find ways to get them back in the classroom. In addition, the 25-member Community Development Committee divides itself among the children who are out of school, engaging their families in order to find ways to get them back in the classroom. Also, at every monthly meeting, members collect contributions for children who have no books or pens – they take an interest in individual children, encouraging and counselling them.

Best Practice: Nurturing local structures to grow into recognised Community Based Organisations facilitates sustained community development. Still committed to the aims of the project, they reached beyond child rights and education to health, water and sanitation, and other community development priorities. Youth Alive assisted Community Development Committees to become formal associations and to prepare project proposals for funding from external donors. They registered with the Social Welfare Office, wrote their own constitutions and opened bank accounts. This way they can lead their communities to plan their own activities and mobilise human and financial resources to address their development goals. For example, by the end of this project, four CBOs (Tampola, Janania, Gaani, and Vunania) in KNM came together and submitted a proposal to STAR Ghana for one year funding to enable them to consolidate the gains of the project.

Lesson: If communities have outlets for reporting child protection issues, they will address them. Previously, they felt helpless to deal with violations, even of their own children. Now, community committees are able to report child protection cases to the authorities. Because they know the reporting channels for teenage pregnancy and elopement, they are able to deal with them.

Lesson: If Community Development Committees are initially supported with hand-holding in their communities and schools, they are more encouraged to move forward with their child protection plans. Committees which were initiated by Youth Alive needed its support to make its first steps. Getting organized to address child protection issues was new to them. Youth Alive staff met with them frequently and were always on call. However, once they received more and more training and became acquainted with members of their district Child Protection Network, they gained confidence to make changes in their communities. Some members of the committee felt free to contact government child protection staff when an incident occurred or even when they had a question. Issues communities needed assistance to resolve were “elopement” or snatching and kidnapping of girls for early marriages, and paternity when men do not take responsibility for pregnancy.

Lesson: Once established and functioning, Community Development Committees will take on a leadership role recognizing the performance of teachers and students because they see it as their responsibility to acknowledge performance and achievements. One community, Gaani, held a teacher appreciation event at the end of the year because the students achieved the best grades in the history of the school. In another community, Vunania, the Chief and community leaders went to
encourage candidates writing their final exams. This recognition also promoted good relations between the community and the school.

Best Practice: Community Development Committee members reinforced messages about child rights at every opportunity and venue because they knew they could be influential in promoting change. Youth Alive encouraged committee members to promote child rights and protection wherever they went: home, places of worship, market, and even drinking bars. In particular, market days are prime times for child rights violations, such as snatching or kidnapping of girls, because so many people are together in crowded markets.

Best Practice: Community Development members “walked the talk,” both practicing child protection at home and promoting it in their communities. Inspired by the commitment of Youth Alive staff, committee members became passionate about ensuring that no child in their community would be subjected to abuse or neglect. They were convinced that they had to put in place measures to protect children from bad influences and exploitation. The committee imposed community bye-laws and curfews. One bye-law prevented children from attending all-night dances. The youth protested this rule, but with a critical mass of acceptance due to the level of discussion everywhere in the community, they had no choice but to agree and comply.

Challenge: If Community Development Committee members feel they are over-stretched, they will complain about their volunteer roles and not being compensated for their volunteer work. The issue of volunteerism is always difficult, especially within the context of projects. People do not understand why they cannot be paid or given incentives.

Challenge: If CBOs and committees are not strengthened to function effectively (organisational skills, etc.), their influence may be limited or short-lived. Committees were not given training on how to manage their committee. Therefore, their performance across communities was variable, i.e. not all set up bank accounts or registered. Their effectiveness was mostly dependent on the quality of their leadership and whether members were experienced or exposed to other groups and associations.

Recommendation: All Community Development Committees should be encouraged to formalize themselves. This involves local registration, payment of dues, opening of a bank account, instituting regular meetings, annual planning and goals. This way, “going forward we will still address the same issues, but if we face new challenges, we will deal with them” (Bazuu committee members). By being empowered as an official association, they will find ways to build their capacity and manage the challenges of volunteerism with livelihood options.
Child Protection Network

The Child Protection Network is an initiative of Youth Alive to promote greater coordination and collaboration between government departments and offices responsible for aspects of child protection. These include: CHRAJ, the Department for Social Welfare, DOVVSU (Police), GES (Education) and GHS (Health) representatives, and offices of the District Assembly (Gender, Planning). Youth Alive promoted officers from these agencies as experts and participants in the project. It involved network members in all activities, supported the network to meet formally on a quarterly basis, and encouraged members to work together daily on incidences of violence against children in their areas.

Best Practice: When child protection officers from different agencies are recognized and supported for their work, they can take more effective actions together. Coordinated efforts around child protection makes work easier. For example, several agencies may need to come together to manage cases related to teenage pregnancy, early marriage, “elopement” (child abduction), and child abuse. Facilitated by Youth Alive to know and understand the remote areas in their areas of jurisdiction, these agencies working together had better relationships with communities and were able to assist them to address and resolve child protection cases.

Lesson: Communities are able to learn from each other within the context of coordinated efforts of the Child Protection Network. Youth Alive promoted the work of members of the Child Protection Network, and exposed them to communities through training, durbars, radio broadcasts and visits for case management. Previously, communities did not know what to do when a young girl was snatched or found pregnant. Parents knew it was not right, but did not know that they had any recourse under the law. However, with Youth Alive’s assistance, members of the Child Protection Network came to communities to address a wide range of issues related to violence against individual children. Community leaders and committee members learned from them how to deal with cases, which ones should be referred to the police, and which they could resolve themselves. Communities’ ability to collect accurate information about cases improved, so they are able to solve issues of contradictory information. They now have the confidence that they can pursue issues without being harmed themselves by the perpetrators. Some cases were able to be justly resolved at community level, rather than through the police. The Child Protection Network empowered communities with information and processes to be able to find justice for children and families affected by violence.

Lesson: What the Child Protection Network has learned from Youth Alive, it is also able to apply to its entire coverage area. Although members of the Child Protection Network were the experts, they learned a lot from Youth Alive’s experience with parents, teachers and communities and their struggles to protect children. They were intensely involved in the project as resource persons for awareness and training – they were also engaged by Youth Alive in hands-on case management of violence against children. For example, if a case was brought to Ghana Education Service by a teacher, the GES officer could call on colleagues from Social Welfare, Police and Health Services in order to ensure that due diligence was done for the child. This type of collaboration, undertaken regularly and consistently, was unprecedented. Network members learned new things from each
other and from their collaboration – this enhanced district capacity to reduce violence against children. Finding this new way of working together effective, members of the Child Protection Network applied it not only to Youth Alive communities but to their entire districts and even the region.

**Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) and School Management Committees (SMC)**

PTAs and SMCs existed in communities, but sometimes in name only. Youth Alive brought new life to these groups.

**Best Practice: When PTAs and SMCs receive training to do their work with schools and communities, they will be more active and effective.** Youth Alive gave PTAs and SMCs official recognition at trainings and durbars. Staff paid special attention to their roles and responsibilities when they visited schools and talked to head teachers. Therefore, PTAs and SMCs gained confidence in their offices, and could have a more cordial and less antagonistic relationship with school authorities and teachers. For example, greater understanding by teachers and parents of the Education Capitation Grant led to better maintenance and management of the school. The SMC has a vested interest in the capitation grant and its ability to enhance quality education in their schools and better learning conditions for children. Also, many PTAs are now regularly collecting contributions from parents or starting projects to improve conditions in their schools. PTA members take an interest in the management of schools and monitor teacher and student attendance and performance regularly.

**Lesson: If PTAs have credibility in the community, they can be an effective go-between teachers and students.** When PTAs and SMCs regularly visit schools to familiarize themselves with problems, they can be more effective in communicating and resolving issues with parents.

**Lesson: If PTAs are active, they can influence parents, teachers and children in positive ways.** PTA members were able to get students back to school by talking to parents, gently correcting students who misbehave in class, and mediating in cases of child marriage and elopement to get girls back in class.

**Lesson: If PTAs are organized, they have a tremendous potential to improve the school’s conditions and make it more attractive.** In Kapoor, the PTA collected money to build teachers’ quarters, water containers and classrooms. They even mobilized communal labour for the installation of a borehole. They are in the process of coordinating a school feeding programme.

**Challenge: If parents become aware of the need to send children to school early, schools may be overwhelmed with small children.** Teachers with the appropriate skills are required to meet the needs of children in kindergarten classrooms. If classrooms for small children appear the same as those for older children, teachers are not using early childhood education methods and techniques. If inappropriate teaching methods are used, the school may be less attractive for children and their parents.
The following box lists stakeholders’ views of the most effective activities to stop violence in their communities. The list was developed during stakeholder meetings held for this study, and included students, teachers, parents, community leaders, and social workers.

**Best activities to stop violence (in order of all stakeholders’ preference)**

1. Public education and sensitizations through durbars in communities and other programmes in schools, i.e. PTA meetings, on violence, and child rights and responsibilities
2. Instituting community bye-laws to protect women and children, especially those initiated by Traditional Authorities
3. Legal interventions to CHRAJ, Social Welfare and DOVVSU for resolution, settlement and penalty, even disciplinary committees at schools
4. Improving relationships between parents and children, teachers and children, husbands and wives, parents and teachers
5. House-to-house sensitization, and one-to-one talks, usually as follow-up to durbars and public education activities
6. Engaging students themselves as peer educators to speak up about violence in their homes, communities and schools by giving talks and enacting role plays.

**Activities**

The project’s main activities were sensitization and awareness events (i.e. workshops, durbars), school club, radio broadcasts, and the distributions of teaching-learning materials and community inputs. Activities were scheduled for years 1 and 2 of the project. However, in year 3 planning was more flexible. The project wanted to be attentive to emerging issues that came up in year 3, and thus activities were planned responsively according to the gaps and needs that were identified in communities and districts. This flexibility is in itself a good practice.

**Workshops and cascaded training to community level**

Thirteen separate training sessions were conducted with each stakeholder group: children, teachers, and community committee members. The sessions were held frequently and regularly, each on a different topic related to child rights and protection. They were led by the members of the Child Protection Network with guidance about content and methodology from Youth Alive. Stakeholder groups attended the majority of these sessions, and were expected to cascade them down to their constituents and communities.

**Best Practice: When all target groups – children, parents, teachers, community members – are educated with the same messages consistently, the possibilities for change are great.** Youth Alive’s child protection awareness strategy of providing community members with a series of training sessions with relevant and compelling topics over two years was effective. It propelled communities from old ways of thinking to accepting ideas that are consistent with child rights, gender equality and sustainable development. In the end, no one could argue against the concepts raised in discussions about violence against children. When given an opportunity to learn and given
permission to practice, most people are able to see the benefits in more equitable and humane treatment and care for their children, spouses and neighbours.

**Best Practice:** When training is interesting and relevant, participants will own the messages.

According to the views of its participants, Youth Alive ensured that workshops included a number of attractive elements:

- expert facilitators who were members of the Child Protection Network
- inclusive methods to encourage participation
- material adjusted for audience’s easy comprehension
- informal learning environment
- participants were free to ask questions and for clarification – they could talk about everything, “leaving no stone unturned” – an example given was female genital mutilation
- participants could take their time to discuss issues, even hours, without feeling pressure or being silenced by organizers or facilitators
- the training was provided in their local languages
- participants were grouped so that they could meet others from different schools and communities
- “trial questions” or scenarios were provided for discussion – they were based on local incidents and situations, so were launching-off points for compelling debates
- “T&T” or allowance for transportation and other direct costs was provided
- participants enjoyed good food, which motivated them to continue on into the afternoon and attend the next session.

These characteristics of Youth Alive workshops made participants anticipate the next training opportunity.

**Best Practice:** When training is given by local officials (i.e. social workers, police) who have child protection mandates, people will take up the issues in their communities knowing they have the back-up of the authorities. Youth Alive’s strategy of using child protection officials as facilitators was deliberate because they knew that community members would form relationships with them at training events. These relationships took training from theory to reality, as community members called on officials for assistance with actual cases of violence against children. Thus, many more cases were justly addressed.

**Best Practice:** When follow-up to training at community level involves everyone, the cascaded training will have an impact because all groups were trained with the same content at the same time. Many NGOs are challenged by cascading training because the quality suffers in cascaded versions. However, that was not the case in this project. Youth Alive staff attended the subsequent trainings to fill in any gaps and ensure quality control. At schools, these awareness events were held in assemblies and followed up in club activities, such as drama. In communities, awareness and sensitization took place in durbars, at which parents’ speeches and
Children’s dramatic performances were features. Sometimes members of the Child Protection Network also participated.

**Best Practice:** When resource people are able to attend durbars and answer questions from participants, communities will perceive the importance and urgency of child protection issues. Youth Alive facilitated the participation of members of the Child Protection Network at cascaded training and community durbars. Because of their participation and authority, community members took the training seriously, understanding the legal context, and their roles and responsibilities.

**Best Practice:** When staff, resource people and leaders from other communities attend durbars, they are able to share learning from other places and encourage accelerated change. Youth Alive staff knew that adults and children learn effectively from people to whom they can relate. This is why Youth Alive mixed up participants from different communities and put them into groups to share their experiences with child protection. Members from communities who were successful in reducing violence against children were also invited to durbars to talk about their interventions, such as bye-laws to protect children from activities which could cause them harm. Communities motivated each other to greater aspirations for their children. Even communities which were not directly involved in the project were inspired by the changes in their neighbours and sought to replicate them.

**Lesson:** Durbars can influence individual behaviour through telling stories, acting out plays and providing scenarios that “name and shame” negative actions and decisions. If consequences of an individual’s actions are made clear and they are expressed in ways that illustrate that the stakes are high, people will choose the better option. For example, people attending durbars heard the message: “choose to get drunk and choose poverty – or choose to educate your children and choose a better future.” Given the fact that everyone has heard the message, people will reconsider the amount of money spent for drinking, and re-channel it for school fees and supplies. As a result, in project communities, less money is spent on alcohol.

**Lesson:** Durbars are not only forums for sensitization and awareness, where community members gain new information, but they also become forums for accountability. If something is explained at a durbar, i.e. “children must eat before going to school,” community leaders will follow up to ensure that the advice is followed. If parents are not following this advice, leaders and committee members will point out non-compliance at the next durbar. More pressure is put on parents at subsequent durbars to ensure that all conform to positive parenting techniques promoting their children’s education. If people from the community own and promote change, their lives will be transformed. Project communities were open to change and not resistant to it. Transformation is inspired from outside by Youth Alive, but is owned from within communities because change is perceived as the better way.
School Clubs

On request by Youth Alive, school clubs were formed. Teachers asked students to volunteer to be peer educators on violence against children. Peer educators participated in the training, and were obligated to share what they learned to others through club activities.

“Peer educators were the biggest influence. Child to child education is very effective.” (Teachers, Mwofo R/C JHS)

Lesson: If children are educated on the importance of intervening for the rights of another child, they will do so, even if their socialized background reinforces ultimate respect for adults, including parents and teachers. Students report on teachers for caning, and for forcing them kneel or pick stones as punishments. They also report on parents if they see that children are not provided with school supplies or a conducive atmosphere at home for encouraging good academic performance.

Lesson: Peer educators, having been selected for special training and roles, are higher achievers and models for other children. Peer educators are well behaved and tend to improve their academic performance. PEs are expected to be leaders and champions by their peers and to a great extent by their teachers and community members. They try to live up to this expectation by conducting themselves well and taking their studies seriously; therefore they tend to improve their academic performance. Hence, they are perceived as role models. When peer educators fall short of this expectation, they are told, “You are not behaving like a peer educator.” It has become prestigious to be a peer educator.

Best Practice: Patron’s support (presence, engagement) for school club activities provides peer educators with moral support and motivation. Patron teachers were given training to support school clubs. Clubs were meant to be child-focused, so that children could discuss their pertinent issues freely. Although they were not supposed to direct club meetings, teachers’ overall guidance was essential. Some teachers were not available to clubs because of constraints related to time and transportation. Students felt that if teachers were not available to provide support, participation and quality of their activities suffered. If school clubs had a place on the weekly timetable, they may have more support from teachers.

Lesson: If peer educators are given the time and space for club activities, they can generate more interest and discussion on child protection issues. Peer educators were given opportunities to present at assemblies, invite guest speakers, act out dramas, and hold football games, quizzes, and other competitions. In this way, they could reach children in different settings.

Best Practice: Inter-school and -community competitions and activities allow for communities to come together and share what they have learned, both with project and non-project communities. Youth Alive was aware that students from many communities attended the same school and inter-school events. It encouraged cross-fertilization of ideas to encourage change. When children hear what other communities are doing, they tell other
children, their teachers and parents. Youth Alive saw these exchanges as essential to ending harmful traditional practices, such as the killing of “spirit children” (children with disabilities) and early marriage.

**Best Practice: When drop-outs are engaged in clubs and special activities, they will gain in confidence.** Drop-outs, especially girls who have returned to school, are very shy. In Bazuu, the club included a girl who had returned to school after having a baby. She was able to counsel other girls. Youth Alive encouraged schools and communities to give special attention to drop-outs – to get them back in school, to stay in school, and to perform well.

**Best Practice: When peer educators put on plays at school and in the community, they are able to act out several child protection issues at the same time.** Youth Alive encouraged peer educators to act out what they learned in the training. Drama is an effective communication tool, and given the stage, students are able to play their roles with confidence. Some of the issues addressed in one play were early marriage, snatching/elopement, and teenage pregnancy. Drama illustrates the effects of violence on children, and leads to discussion about children protection issues and how to solve them.

**Best Practice: When children have the chance to interact with others from different schools, they are able to build their confidence as peer educators by sharing experiences and making new friends.** Youth Alive encouraged students to meet with children from other schools and communities during training and inter-school events. When children meet new friends, they are exposed to different ideas and experiences. This may encourage them to speak out about violence against children, adopt new strategies for child protection, or even improve their critical thinking.

**Best Practice: Because the school includes children and parents from other than project communities, the project’s messages have been disseminated to a wider catchment area, and offer opportunities for expanded reporting of child rights issues.** Youth Alive anchored the project in certain communities with the expectation that its intervention may reach neighbouring villages. Peer educators, taking their roles seriously, visited homes in non-project communities where they suspected that children were being neglected or mistreated. Many people from surrounding areas attended community durbars and saw the plays performed by peer educators. Peer educators, because of their position in schools attended by children from many communities, had a wide influence and potential to influence people to stop violence against children.

**Recommendation:** In addition to child protection issues, school club members should be trained on how to read and study more effectively. With better learning skills, they may be more influential in coaching other students to greater academic performance.
Radio broadcasts
Youth Alive sponsored 12 radio broadcasts on child protection issues in each region. Discussion topics ranged from early marriage to domestic violence. Members of the Child Protection Network and Peer Educators participated in broadcasts in addition to members of communities who had made strides in reducing violence against children. The broadcast featured a call-in segment in which people could phone the panel with their questions.

Best Practice: When community radio is used to spread messages on child protection, project coverage and reach are extended. Youth Alive’s strategy for widely promoting its messages was radio broadcasts. FM Radio is the major source of information for many remote communities.

Best Practice: When Child Protection agencies participate as resource people for radio broadcasts, they are most effective in encouraging people to report of incidents of violence against children in their communities. Youth Alive was consistent in using the expertise and authority of government child protection officers throughout the project. Their participation in radio broadcasts provided credibility and legitimacy to child protection messages, many of which contradicted listeners’ current practices.

Best Practice: When radio programmes allow for call-ins, different perspectives are heard, allowing for listeners to better relate to the issues. Youth Alive saw the call-in feature of the broadcasts as essential for discussion. Because much of the information was new to listeners, it was important to get their views. During the calls, deeper explanation could be given of the issues within local contexts.

Recommendation: Child protection issues should be monitored in non-project communities which have access to the radio broadcasts, so that their readiness for change may be determined. Leaders from project communities should be encouraged to share their experiences directly with those from neighbouring communities in order that entire areas are sensitized to child protection issues.

Recommendation: Listener groups should be recruited in both targeted and nearby communities which have access to the radio broadcasts. Working with listener groups will allow feedback on the broadcasts to be more easily captured.

Distribution of teaching-learning materials and other inputs
Depending on their needs and within a limited budget, Youth Alive provided inputs to schools and communities. Supplies were provided to schools, such as text books, exercise books, ICT resources, including computers, and sports equipment. Some communities were provided with boreholes, and their committees with megaphones and benches for meetings.
Best Practice: When tangible inputs are given to the community, students, parents and teachers are encouraged and feel recognized for the changes they have made. Youth Alive decided to provide some incentives to schools and communities, apart from the training and sensitization component of the project. This was a good strategy because communities in these areas are disadvantaged and often left out of development projects. Because Youth Alive provided something concrete to represent their participation in the project, communities saw it as a sign of good faith and were willing to cooperate.

Challenge: If inputs run out, communities will need to find another way to replace them. Community Development Committee and Parent-Teacher Associations will have to formalize themselves and learn how to raise funds more effectively from within and without their communities. Dependencies on Youth Alive were discouraged, so that communities could promote themselves to local authorities and other organisations for assistance.

The following box lists views from stakeholders about the projects most popular, and most successful, activities.

The project’s most popular activities were (in order of all stakeholders’ preference)
1. Peer Education Clubs: building students’ confidence in both school and home
2. Community development committees
3. Building capacity of parents, teachers, traditional leaders, PTA members and community members
4. Teaching / learning materials and inputs to the community
5. Facilitating stakeholder engagement and collaboration: the formation of CPN in both Lara and Jirapa which contributed to effective sensitization and action on child protection issues
6. Regular meetings
7. Community outreach, especially durbars and those featuring role plays
8. Radio discussions
9. Child protection interventions with the law and agencies.

Community Take-up
The project had a significant effect on communities. Every discussion started out with what happened before the project and what is happening now – as if the child protection project was a watershed moment in communities’ life and history. The role of traditional authorities was essential in this process of change. Headmen and opinion leaders were emotional when they spoke about their children – how they engaged with their children, got to know and understand their behaviours, and discovered a new-found love for them. Youth Alive could not have predicted what a profound influence their project would have for the good of the communities and their children. Some of the results of the project were unexpected, and yet communities exhibited them with a clear message to Youth Alive and other stakeholders: they were moving forward with their development.
Unexpected results were regulation of child protection measures, commitment to gender equality and social inclusion, and an obligation to sustain gains in reducing violence against children.

**Regulation**

Community leaders wanted accountability for child protection, and thus they put into place bye-laws, rules and regulations for their communities to follow. Without these stringent policies, people would continue to abuse and exploit their children.

**Lessons:** If community leaders – both Traditional Authorities and prominent members of the community – are on the Community Development Committee and given responsibility to be guardians over the children, they will put in place a number of measures to ensure their safety, security and ongoing attendance at school. The most important aspect of regulation is that it comes directly from the community. Bye-laws ranged from dictating times students need to be at home at night, supervised by their parents (different curfews for boys and girls), to outlawing efforts to take children to neighbouring villages for jams, record dances and funeral dances (for which they are picked up at 11 p.m. and returned at 5 a.m.) and outlawing the killing of spirit children. Most bye-laws were put into place to ensure that children are not distracted from school or the concentration needed for their studies. A sub-committee of volunteers is on duty, particularly at night, to ensure that children are at home at the given times. All children need to be in their homes by 9 p.m., and all adults by 12 midnight.

Once consensus is reached in communities, bye-laws can take effect, effectively regulating child protection. The whole process takes about 3-4 months and involves several durbars, during which the following steps are taken: consultation, voting, implementation, reporting. Chiefs, opinion leaders, teacher, nurses and members of the Community Development Committee are involved throughout the process. The role of chiefs is essential to regulation. The chiefs and headmen in project villages were committed to eliminating violence against children.

**Gender and social inclusion**

The project’s main theme for training was the elimination of violence. Although the target group to benefit from the project was children, the participants came to the conclusion that their lives as adults were also affected by violence, and their children by the spill-over effects. Children’s exposure to violence in the home is often the result of domestic violence, violence against women, and violence against the most vulnerable in households. This causes children to become traumatized and to act out in various unproductive ways, especially affecting their behaviour and performance at school. Thus, parents realized that if they were to curb violence against children in their communities, they had to reduce their exposure to it in the home. Primarily, this meant that parents needed to stop fighting with each other, and men needed to stop beating and mistreating their wives. Until then, they could not extend to their children the love and attention that they needed.
Lesson: If men believe that beating their wives is an acceptable practice in their culture, they will continue to do it. However, when men are told that there are laws against wife beating, and that their community will no longer tolerate violence against women, they will change.

Lesson: If parents understand that displays of domestic abuse between husband and wife have a harmful effect on their children, they will stop the violence and start engaging with each other in more cordial and loving ways. This provides a good example to children early on in life.

Lesson: If parents understand the origins of stress in the home, particularly the effect of overburdening women and girls with work, men and boys will share the responsibilities. One woman said that some households do not have girls, but now the boys are doing the work that girls would do.

Lesson: If men and women understand and accept what it takes to promote greater equity, they can change, but change may take more time for some efforts than others. A shift in thinking needs to take place – from thinking of discriminatory practices as normal, to thinking of them as wrong and unacceptable.

Lesson: If community members – husbands and wives, parents and children – are used to relating to each other in certain ways, it will take time for them to adjust to new behaviours and commitments. When parents were told to send their children to school, some said that they would not do it and could not afford it. However, eventually, those parents complied, but it took time. Even children who were used to “roaming” took time to learn how to sit down in the classroom and focus on their studies.

Lesson: If men are socialized that they have no responsibility for children, especially girls, they will not be interested in spending time with them. However, if men are told that their marriage implies joint responsibility for children, they will pay more attention to this information than to their socialization. Before the project, one child repeatedly asked her father for a book. The father would tell the child to go to her mother, and instead of buying the book, he would spend the money on alcohol. Now mother and father pool their money and pay for what the child needs.

Lesson: If change for gender equity happens on a community level, the prerequisites are unity, commitment and timely participation. In Kayoro, the Youth Association has been able to influence negative practices, such as drunkenness, marital fighting, early marriage and lack of respect for the elderly.

**Sustainability**

When asked whether or not they would continue to strive toward the elimination of violence against children once the project was over, every community and school respondent said yes. For them, there was no going back. It was as if the project had enlightened them and shown them a new and better path to follow. “Human beings are difficult, but these changes will stay.” (Traditional Leader, Biu)
Best Practice: Constant “bombardment” of the messages leads to greater acceptance on the part of communities. As one opinion leader said, Youth Alive’s strategy for training, sensitization and awareness “doesn’t give them breathing space.” Child protection messages were reinforced constantly in workshops and durbars, and on radio broadcasts.

Best Practice: The longer the time of intervention, the greater potential for change. It takes communities time to trust the organisation. More community initiatives took place in Upper East Region, i.e. formulation of bye-laws and registration of Community Development Committees as CBOs, because Youth Alive had worked there longer than in Upper West Region.

Lesson: If positive social change occurs, ensuring greater adherence to rights and equity, improvement will begin to even be apparent in the economic life of communities. Because there is more trust in communities, people feel more confident to engage in communal labour and even lend each other money. Men and women harvest rice together, unlike before.

Now that communities have taken up the challenge of combatting child violence in their communities, they are ready for other challenges.

Project Implementation

This paper has described the lessons and best practices of Youth Alive’s project, Reducing Violence in Schools and at Home. Each of the best practices identified showcase a particular strategy that Youth Alive used to achieve its success. Along with its project strategies, Youth Alive staff have their own strategy for success: they are always “on call,” available, accessible and responsive to emergency child protection calls. Because of these characteristics, communities trust them and are willing to make changes because they are supported to do so.

“Youth Alive showed us exactly how to go about doing the right things to do.” (Social Welfare Officer, Upper East Region)

Finally, turning the analysis from the project to the implementer, Youth Alive, the following lists show the organisation’s “best practices” and “things to watch out for,” according to the views of Youth Alive’s project participants.

Implementers’ Best Practices

These are the positive observations about Youth Alive staff and operations:

- walk the talk – concerned about education, passionate about child protection
- specialized in protection of women and children
- down-to-earth, approachable, sociable, friendly, respectful
- good communication skills
- regular communication, visits and monitoring
- openness, transparency
- credibility, focussed, influential, role models
- listening, cooperative, collaborative
- proactive, problem-solvers
- sharing, interactive
- team work
Implementers’ things to look out for

These are some cautionary remarks made about Youth Alive staff and operations:

- Frequent turn-over of staff, especially in Upper East Region, discourages community members and even social welfare workers. Relationships are important for effective implementation of child protection activities. If staff change, relationships have to be built all over again.
- Short notice for meetings. Community members said that they were often informed at the last minute about meetings and workshops. Last minute notice often meant that planned activities at home and farm had to be abandoned, or that inappropriate substitutes with no previous experience in the project were sent to attend meetings. Because the communities are reliant on farming for their livelihoods, project staff need to be sensitive to timing activities so that they do not encroach on key periods when project stakeholders need to work on their fields and do related productive tasks.
- Some activities implemented in ways that seem to counterproductive, for example, scheduling project activities during instructional time, taking both teachers and students out of the classroom
- Stakeholders felt that if the project had rewarded students for good grades, greater strides would have been made in school academic performance overall.
- Rationalized area-wide coverage to maximize potential for social change. There was consensus in UER that the project sites were too spread out. Because nearby communities were not on board with the project, they undermined its intent and influenced the results of the project communities.
- As such, stakeholders felt that the project was remiss in not holding durbars in neighbouring communities. This seemed like an obvious thing to do given the close social interaction between adjacent communities and the potential for positive impact by the project.
- Project staff may require a vehicle, rather than a motorcycle. The use of a vehicle is important for travel safety and security particularly for women staff, and especially after dark.

Conclusion

The purpose of this document is to provide advice and guidance to organisations and agencies implementing similar projects.

The experience of Youth Alive has shown that to reduce violence against children, a concerted effort needs to be made with all those in authority and responsible for children. The approach needs to be intense, over a long time, and up close and personal. People have to be reached where they are in their homes, communities and schools. They need to be convinced that the change is necessary, and authorities – both government and traditional – need to tell them that there are consequences for violence against children. Organisations and institutions need to be consistent in their support for the children’s cause. The role of children in communicating messages about their conditions and fears is also essential, and at the same time promotes child rights. None of this can be done without committed staff who see themselves as one with communities and their aspirations. The result of all
this is sustainable change: elimination of violence against children and women, children in school, and hope for the future.

Youth Alive wishes you all the best as you use this guide to strive to eliminate violence against children in your own communities.

For further information, please contact:

Agnes Chiravira, Director
Youth Alive
Opposite Lameshegu Police Station, Kumasi Road
PO Box TL1708
Tamale
Northern Region
Ghana
Email: alagba54@rocketmail.com
Cell: +233 (0) 20 872 2311
youthaliveghana.org

Youth Alive’s vision is a Ghana where every child can live a life of dignity and self-worth. Youth Alive works to improve the lives and restore the lost self-esteem of vulnerable children/youth and vulnerable women, facilitating their reintegration into society so they can contribute to the development of their families, communities and the nation.

Hope for the future -- newly enrolled children marching to class