

UNICEF Country Office for Afghanistan

**Evaluation of the  
Social Work Coaching Projects supported  
by UNICEF Afghanistan (2007-11)**

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## List of Acronyms

CFA	Child Fund Afghanistan
CIC	Children in Crisis
CPAN	Child Protection Action Network
DCPAN	District Child Protection Action Network
DOLSAMD	Department of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International non-Governmental Organisation
JRC	Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre
LAOA	Legal Aid Organisation
LOA	Letter of Agreement
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOI	Ministry of the Interior
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MOLSAMD	Ministry of labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled
MOPH	Ministry of Public Health
NGO	Non-Governmental organisation
PME	Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
SC	Save the Children
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SIR	Social inquiry Report
TdH	Terre des Hommes
TOR	Terms of reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF ACO	UNICEF Afghanistan Country Office
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WAW	Women for Afghan Women
WCUK	War Child United Kingdom

# 1. Executive Summary

## Background

With support from the UNICEF ACO, four international NGOs: Children in Crisis (CIC), Child Fund Afghanistan (CFA), Save the Children (SC) and War Child UK (WCUK) began implementation of the Social Work Coaching Projects in 2007/2008. By 2010 two phases had been implemented in 12 provinces of Afghanistan. Each phase lasted 12 months and was guided by an overall concept note. A concept note for a third phase has been developed and one partner (CIC) is currently implementing a phase III project.

The projects aim to strengthen child protection through capacity development for social work. There is not yet a formal social work training programme in Afghanistan, though efforts are currently underway towards establishing such a programme. When the projects started in 2007 social work was neither widely understood nor recognised as a key component in child protection. The term “social worker” in Afghanistan is therefore not used to define a person with formal social work qualifications; rather it is used to describe anyone who works on “social issues”, including support to children. In other contexts these “social workers” would be referred to as community workers, care workers etc.

Initially, the projects focussed on children in orphanages. This focus was chosen because institutional care is widely used and perceived as beneficial in Afghanistan, in spite of the substantial international body of knowledge, documenting the detrimental effects of institutional care. Subsequently, the projects widened their focus to also include children in conflict with the law and, to a lesser degree, early marriage and child labour.

The projects all had two major components:

- Capacity development for social work, which included training and coaching of “social workers” and improvement of case management at institutional level. The projects developed training and case management tools and worked with CPANs, Orphanages and JRCs as well as community structures with child protection responsibilities to strengthen capacity.
- Direct support to children and families for repatriation and reintegration of children held in orphanages or JRCs. This included social workers providing psycho-social support and facilitating access to justice for children in conflict with the law.

The projects built upon the experiences and outcome of earlier support to MOLSAMD to strengthen basic social work capacity. The objectives of the projects are defined as follows:

- 1) To develop a regional social work coaching system in at least four regions
- 2) To develop a system of peer-support among social workers at provincial level
- 3) To develop capacity of para-social workers working in government and NGO child protection organizations and agencies

## Evaluation methodology

The evaluation of the Social Work Coaching Projects was carried out by an independent evaluator in June and July 2011. The TORs define the evaluation purpose as follows: “The prime objective of the assignment is to evaluate the interventions under social work coaching projects supported by UNICEF to assess their relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and appropriateness in the context including :

- a) Extent of skill enhancement among social and care workers who were part of this project
- b) Number of children and families who benefitted from the services provided by the social workers and quality of services provided by social workers
- c) Quality of services provided by the social work agencies to Government in JRCs, Orphanages and CPANs
- d) And Recommend a cost effective strategy to sustain the skills of the workers trained under these projects and promote protection of children within communities and institutions”

The evaluation mainly used participatory and qualitative methods, though simple quantitative methods were also employed. A number of detailed evaluation questions were developed for each of the standard UNICEF evaluation criteria (relevance, appropriateness, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability) used in the evaluation.

### **Summary of main findings**

The evaluation found that the projects were relevant and appropriate. They all address real needs both in terms of child protection and capacity development. The training and coaching methodologies used are appropriate to the context and to the capacity development needs identified. The focus on children in institutions and children in conflict with the law is in line with national priorities as they are spelled out in the National Strategy for the Protection of Children at Risk and the National Social Protection Strategy.

The projects have been very effective in strengthening capacity for quality social work in Afghanistan. At the beginning of the projects, social work was a largely unrecognised field and the projects have contributed to placing social work and child protection on the national agenda and preparing the ground for more systematic, large scale interventions. This is due primarily to the quality and appropriateness of the training and coaching.

The tools developed by the projects, both the training and the case management tools, were found to be good quality and were generally appreciated by stakeholders interviewed. Due to minor inefficiencies in the development process for the tools, there is need to streamline and replicate tools across the four projects, however. In particular, consolidated handbooks on social work could increase the value of the projects’ tools. Moreover, only the SIR appears to have been fully institutionalised. The institutionalisation of the SIRs was realised through a successful combination of micro-level support to developing the tool, and training social workers and other relevant stakeholders to use It, and macro-level policy dialogue that resulted in a national level LOA, which stipulates the role and use of the SIR in juvenile justice.

In terms of direct services to children and families the picture is less clear. Interventions to support reintegration have been less effective and the impact is not yet clearly visible, partly due to the short time during which children and families were supported. However, the evaluation also found, that in order to effectively create sustainable impact in children's lives, the projects most likely need to refocus their strategies.

Firstly, it may be necessary to change the protection approach from one of reaction, once a child is a victim of abuse and exploitation, to one that focuses more on prevention of exploitation and abuse to improve effectiveness. Moreover, the evaluation found that direct support to children is not sufficiently holistic to create sustainable impact. In particular, more attention to access to education and training for children and more attention to economic empowerment for families is required. In addition, the current interventions are strongly biased in favour of boys. This is probably a reflection of the focus on institutions that house many more boys than girls. Hence, broadening the scope to include other protection issues and more preventive approaches is needed to improve the gender balance in the projects.

The projects have increasingly mobilised communities for first line protection and social work. This strategy was found to be very effective in reaching out to more children, in creating ownership and acceptance among families and key community stakeholders, in sustaining activities (including during implementation breaks between phases and in situations of deteriorating security) and in changing attitudes and behaviour locally.

Overall, the projects have registered substantial impact on attitudes and behaviour among professional groups and community members alike. Staff in orphanages and officials in the juvenile justice system reported changing attitudes and behaviour more in line with the provisions of the UNCRC, after receiving coaching and training. The coaching seems to have played a key role in facilitating the translation of improved knowledge and understanding into behaviour change.

The strengthened capacity also extends to the CPANs in the project areas. Perhaps the most important contribution from the projects to strengthening the CPANs has been to actually place social workers on the ground, who can follow-up cases overseen by the CPANs.

Real and large scale change is challenged, however, by limited government capacity and commitment to changing practises and to allocating sufficient resources for social work towards child protection. Positive steps have been taken, for example towards establishing a formal social work education, but at the same time detrimental practises, such as admitting children seeking education into orphanages, continue.

The limited government capacity means that the current child protection system in the project areas relies very heavily on the social workers employed or otherwise supported by the implementing partners. CPANs appear to rely heavily on social work services provided by the projects for case management and support to children and families. Therefore, actual case follow-up appears to decrease (both in terms of frequency and quality) when the projects are not implementing full scale. This is essentially a case of NGOs gap filling and making up for limited government capacity. While this is necessary in the short to medium term to ensure that children can be protected it is not sustainable in the long run.

## **Summary of key conclusions**

Based on the findings summarised above, the evaluation's main conclusions can be summarised as follows:

- The projects have successfully and effectively strengthened capacity for social work and child protection in the project areas. The methodology used for capacity development, i.e. the combination of training and coaching, has been very effective. Moreover, the tools developed under the project were useful and appropriate overall.
- The projects have registered fewer results in direct support to children and families, primarily because more time, and a more holistic approach with a stronger prevention focus, is required to create sustainable impact.
- The main challenge for the projects at this point is sustainability, both in terms of institutionalising social work in the government system and in terms of sustaining change within communities, where more time is needed to consolidate the results.

### **Summary of key recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions, the evaluation recommends that the projects continue operations for a further three to five years, but with a substantial change in strategies and approaches to adapt to the changed circumstances, resulting from the project results in capacity development, and address the impact and sustainability issues identified in the evaluation.

Towards this change, the evaluation provides recommendations for concrete short-term actions as well as longer term changes to the strategies and approaches in the projects.

Key short term recommendations include the following:

- The first and foremost recommendation is to carry out thorough strategic planning for any future phases of the projects. The strategic planning should involve all relevant stakeholders and result in a comprehensive and coherent results framework for a more holistic and programmatic approach. The planning must also include detailed planning around time frames to avoid breaks in implementation in the future.
- Clear exit strategies must be included from the onset and partners must, in addition, develop resource mobilisation plans to ensure that interventions do not rely solely on UNICEF funding.
- Baseline research should be carried out as a matter of priority to inform the strategic planning and to feed into longer term evidence based advocacy and policy dialogue.
- Partnerships, both amongst the implementing partners and with other stakeholders, should be strengthened and nurtured as a matter of priority to prepare the ground for implementation of more holistic interventions in the future.
- Tools, both training and case management tools, could be streamlined and distributed more widely. The replication of a handbook for social workers and referral directory, developed under one project, is recommended in particular.

The above recommendations could be implemented through a short bridging project. A bridging project could also include provisions for keeping social workers on the ground while a new, more programmatic intervention is being prepared.

Key long term recommendations include the following:

- The projects must capitalise on their results in capacity development and move towards facilitating sustainable support to children and families.
- The most important step towards sustainable impact on children's lives is to systematically identify and provide holistic services that tackle the root causes of exploitation and abuse. This includes promoting access to education, economic empowerment for families, and continuing to facilitate changes in attitudes and behaviour in communities and families towards creating a protective environment.
- It also entails changing the focus from reactive services only to more interventions that will prevent exploitation and abuse. It is important to ensure that social workers and other key change agents have capacity for prevention, while maintaining preparedness to support children who become victims of abuse, exploitation and neglect.
- A more holistic and preventative approach would also entail widening the projects' focus to include other priority protection issues (for example early marriage). This is already happening, but must be strengthened and done in a systematic manner, not least to ensure that the services provided through the projects reach girls and children in remote areas.
- Continued and increased community mobilisation is essential in this regard and will be a key contribution to sustainability in the long run, especially in areas with high insecurity.
- Increased focus on evidence based advocacy and policy dialogue is equally important in order to promote government ownership. This must be combined with support for government capacity development.
- None of these strategies can be effectively and successfully implemented in isolation or by one partner alone. Therefore, the projects need to focus on partnerships for service delivery and advocacy. This will entail building and nurturing partnerships with external partners as well as working for closer integration within the projects themselves among the implementing partners.
- Though the recommendations focus on scaling up and improving the quality of direct protection support and prevention, the evaluation stresses that social work is not a static field and continued capacity development is essential. On the job coaching has proven effective and could be continued, but other capacity development initiatives may also be included to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Mainstreaming of social work components into pre- and in-service training for other professional groups, such as teachers and police officers, could be one such intervention.

## **2. The object of evaluation: background on the Social Work Coaching projects**

### **2.1 Project description**

With support from the UNICEF ACO, four international NGOs: Children in Crisis (CIC), Child Fund Afghanistan (CFA), Save the Children (SC) and War Child UK (WCUK) began implementation of the Social Work Coaching Projects in 2007/2008. By 2010 two phases had been implemented in 12 provinces<sup>1</sup> of Afghanistan<sup>2</sup>.

The project was implemented in phases of 12 months, with periods in between implementation phases of no support and limited activity.

The overall project direction and purpose is outlined in a concept note<sup>3</sup> describing the background, objectives and scope of interventions for the Social Work Coaching Projects. The concept note guided the implementation of phases I and II, but did not provide an overall programmatic results or logical framework for the projects. For example, no results, outputs or indicators were developed.

A new concept note has been developed to guide implementation of phase III of the projects in March 2010. In addition to objectives, this concept note does include expected results and activities and provides a more coherent framework for the projects.

Based on the overall concept note, implementing partners developed individual proposals for each of the two (three in CIC's case) phases implemented under the project. These proposals did not follow a specific format either and included different types of information and varying degrees of detail. This has implications for the evaluation methodology and will be discussed in section 4 below.

The projects build upon the experiences and outcome of earlier support to MOLSAMD to strengthen basic social work capacity. The objectives of the projects are defined as follows:

- 4) To develop a regional social work coaching system in at least four regions
- 5) To develop a system of peer-support among social workers at provincial level
- 6) To develop capacity of para-social workers working in government and NGO child protection organizations and agencies

### **2.2 Project Context**

A major child protection concern in Afghanistan is the widespread acceptance of institutionalisation as a primary alternative care option. According to MOLSAMD records, 12,209 children were placed in

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1 Baghdis, Baghlan, Bamian, Daikundi, Ghazni, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunduz, Paktia, Panshir, Urugzan

2 At the time of evaluation, CIC was implementing a third phase, while the other three partners had submitted proposals for phase III

3 Undated but presumably developed in 2007 by UNICEF ACO

state-run orphanages in 2009. This figure does not account for children placed in privately run facilities and for children held within the JRCs<sup>4</sup>.

The practise of institutionalisation is widespread in spite of substantial international evidence that institutional care places children at increased risk of abuse, exploitation and neglect and generally equips children poorly for adult life outside of institutions.

Alternative care priorities in Afghanistan are identified in the Government's National Strategy for Children at risk (2005). The strategy prioritises the deinstitutionalisation of children. Yet, orphanages continue to accept children and the government and external partners continue to strengthen the infrastructure and create more spaces in orphanages. This may stem from the limited availability of alternatives in communities, and the difficulties associated with providing these in an environment of insecurity. Moreover, institutionalisation is generally viewed as an acceptable response to child protection both amongst government staff and in communities and families. It was pointed out several times, by key informants, during the evaluation, that children in the orphanages are not necessarily orphans. Rather, children are sent to the orphanages by their families to access education. The children hail mostly from remote areas with limited facilities and/or from poor families, who find it difficult to cover the costs associated with attending schools under the MOE. Though education is free, in principle, families still need to cover costs such as uniforms. Moreover, children sent to orphanages to access education receive meals etc. in the institution, indirectly substituting family income.

There are currently no clear and written national minimum standards for institutional care, but they are under development according to MOLSAMD. TdH is supporting the development of standards and a Child Protection Supportive Guide for use in orphanages, JRCs, schools etc. has been completed. Based on the guide, individual institutions can now develop local standards while the national standards are completed.

The Government's response to children in conflict with the law is characterised also by institutionalisation. Children in conflict with the law are detained in the JRC both pre- and post-trial. If space is not available in the JRC, children may be detained in police stations awaiting trial or in adult prisons. Mechanisms for diversion and for rehabilitation and reintegration of children are poorly understood and poorly developed in general.

Afghanistan is among the poorest countries in the world, ranked 155 on the 2010 UNDP Human Development Index, and suffering the consequences of close to 30 years of war, civil strife and insecurity. This has resulted in poor coverage of basic social services, especially in rural areas, and in limited capacity for child protection. The role of social workers and sound social work practise in child protection is generally not recognised. Afghanistan has no formal social work school or training programme and formal social work qualifications cannot be obtained within the country. The term "social worker" is used to refer to anyone working on "social issues" (e.g. children's welfare and protection), not to refer to someone with formal social work qualifications. This report uses the term "social worker" to identify someone, trained by the projects in social work skills and methods, and working in government or NGOs to protect children and support families. This is consistent with the terminology commonly understood in Afghanistan, but readers are reminded that, social workers in the Afghan context would be referred to as "care workers", "community workers" etc. in other countries where social work defines a set of professional qualifications. Efforts are underway, with

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<sup>4</sup> UNICEF ACO Social Work Coaching Projects Phase III, Concept note, March 2010

support from UNICEF, to include a formal social work pre-service training programme under the National Occupational Skills Standards Framework.

Substantial efforts have gone into establishing provincial level Child Protection Action Networks (CPANs) to promote child protection through improved coordination, referral and communication among government and civil society organisations, working to protect children. As of 2010, 28 CPANs were established in the five regions of the country. The level to which, the CPANs function actively and independently vary between provinces. Under a separate programme UNICEF is supporting the establishment and institutionalisation of CPANs, through, amongst others placing CPAN Technical Advisors in DOLSAMDs. Within the last couple of years, work has started to create district level CPANs, operating under the oversight and guidance of the provincial CPANs. District CPANs do not yet have significant coverage, however. The projects aim to support the capacity of CPANs at provincial levels and have also supported the establishment of DCPANs.

In addition to the institutionalisation of children, the National Social Protection Strategy and the National Strategy for Children at Risk identify, amongst others, the protection of children from early and forced marriage, child labour and discrimination based on ethnicity, gender and disability status as priorities. The actual implementation of both strategies is, however, hampered by low government capacity to plan, coordinate and monitor interventions. In addition, the responsible parent ministry, MOLSAMD, faces severe resource constraints and frequent turn-over of staff.

The institutions responsible for juvenile justice are also characterised by limited capacity and a nascent understanding of child protection issues. Key informants also repeatedly pointed to the severe corruption problems in government, contributing to an inefficient juvenile justice system with low capacity for protecting children.

Finally, it should be highlighted that communities and families often have low levels of understanding and awareness on child protection. In this context, traditional beliefs and practises contribute to an environment that may not enable the protection of children.

## **2.3 Project components**

In the original concept note the project components included:

- 1) Support to regional social work coaching focal point NGOs to provide coaching to social workers in institutions and government departments
- 2) Support for mobile social work clinics
- 3) Support for intensive training at provincial/regional level

The mobile social work clinics proved unsuitable, partly due to security constraints and were not pursued. Instead, the projects focussed on formal trainings in workshops and coaching, both face-to-face and via the telephone.

NGOs identified and trained coaches/mentors<sup>5</sup> to provide on-the-job guidance and coaching to social workers after and in-between formal training sessions. A coaching log was used to keep track of the

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<sup>5</sup> Different partners use different terminology (Master trainer, Coach, Mentor) for this function. For the purpose of this report the term “Coach” will be used.

coaching sessions and their progress and outcome. Each implementing partner also developed a training manual for use in the formal training session. These training manuals were developed individually by each agency. Part of the training and coaching consisted of training on how to use the various case management tools, like the SIR forms, developed under the projects.<sup>6</sup>

The training and coaching was coupled with actual support for case management. The projects supported the reintegration of children from institutions into families and communities. This included case follow-up of reintegrated children. At the same time, partners worked with institutional stakeholders to improve protection of children within institutions.

Based on experiences from this, and other UNICEF Afghanistan projects, the project scope widened in phase two. Firstly, it was decided that the projects should also contribute to strengthening the capacity of CPANs in the project implementation provinces. This was done through providing training to CPAN members on child protection and children’s rights. Training was also provided to other professional groups, notably police officers and prosecutors.

Secondly, the projects widened their scope to also include direct support to communities in a number of ways. First and foremost, community workers/volunteers were identified and given training and coaching to provide first line response in cases and to raise awareness and mobilise families and community members to prevent child abuse, exploitation and neglect within their communities. Community workers have been very active in mediation between families; for example, community volunteer mediation can often prevent an inter-family conflict from escalating by facilitating community based, negotiated solutions as an alternative to court cases.

In the second phase, the community outreach was, in some cases, coupled with provision of services to children and families, such as vocational training, non-formal education, repatriation packages (mainly food stuff) and limited business development support, mainly in the form of business start-up grants or interest free credit. This component, however, is still nascent.

In sum, the projects have focussed on strengthening capacity of individual social workers. Institutionalisation of good social work practise in institutions (including the CPANs) has also been an important area of focus. To a lesser degree, community mobilisation and capacity development in communities has been a priority area of intervention. Interventions have primarily been directed at the micro (or individual) level and, to a lesser degree, at the meso (or institutional level). Macro level interventions have not been included, apart from one instance where UNICEF facilitated the signing of a LOA between six government ministries to make the SIR a standard form in all juvenile court cases.

The objectives of the projects during the first two phases are presented in the table below<sup>7</sup>.

CFA	<p><b>Phase I and II:</b>  Strengthen child protection services through building the capacity of 308 key stakeholders in social work, government, police residential care and detention centers sectors</p> <p>Provide outreach and follow up child protection services including monitoring, maintenance and care plans to 250 children and their families currently in residential care settings or detention/rehabilitation centers</p>
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<sup>6</sup> For further detail, please refer to Annex VI Tools review report

<sup>7</sup> Project proposals did not follow identical formats and some partners formulated results, some targets, some outputs etc. The only level that is comparable across the four projects is the immediate objective level and the projects will be evaluated against this level. Please, also refer to methodology.

	<p>Provide child protection tertiary prevention and remedial services to 1,800 children and their families in 50 communities in Kunduz, and Baghlan provinces through outreach and community based child protection services.</p>
CIC	<p><b>Phase I:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Social workers in three central region provinces will be more effective in their work with vulnerable children</li> <li>2) Social workers in three central region provinces will be able to implement peer support groups with their colleagues to resolve difficult child protection issues and incidents</li> <li>3) Provincial CPAN will be stronger, with a pool of provincial social workers available to be utilised to provide support for child protection incidents</li> </ol> <p><b>Phase II:</b> Kabul component</p> <p>Children within institutions in Kabul City are receiving a better quality of care from staff and are protected from harm</p> <p>Kabul CPAN has Child Protection cases referred to it and area able to resolve these cases with a pool of available social workers and with relevant community networks.</p> <p>3 provinces component: Children within institutions in three central provinces are receiving a better quality of care from DOLSAMD staff and are protected from harm</p> <p>Provincial CPANs are having child protection cases referred to them and are able to refer these cases to relevant community networks</p> <p>Existing community networks have been strengthened and are providing protection for vulnerable children and families</p> <p><b>Phase III</b> Continuation from phase II in additional districts in more provinces. Increased focus on children in conflict with the law.</p>
SC	<p><b>Phase I and II:</b></p> <p>To develop a work-based social work coaching system for key staff and community members working with vulnerable children in Kandahar, Uruzgan and Jalalabad</p> <p>To create a professional network for social workers within Kandahar, Uruzgan and Jalalabad, with links to regional and national networks for peer support and professional development.</p> <p>To build the capacity of DoLSA, CPAN members and other NGO providers on the core approaches and skills required for social work.</p> <p>To provide outreach support and guidance to Uruzgan province seeking to develop their own capacity for social work.</p> <p>To contribute to the development of national standards and experience in social work that can lead to the future creation of a nationally implemented social work system in Afghanistan.</p>
WCUK	<p><b>Phase I:</b></p> <p>To strengthen the social work capacity among state and NGO actors involved in child protection work in the two provinces of the western region in the context of child rights convention by building capacities in research and project implementation through training workshops.</p> <p>To establish a dialogue on mainstreaming social work education with relevant actors in the country (non-funded objective to be supported by War Child).</p> <p><b>Phase II:</b></p> <p>To expand, strengthen and build the capacity of local government, civil society and community- based structures and mechanisms to address child protection issues and concerns</p> <p>To facilitate family reintegration of children in conflict with law with a focus on girls who are accused of having committed so-called "honour crimes"</p>

## 2.4 Key stakeholders

Key stakeholders include, first and foremost, the social workers, community workers, CPAN members and others working in child oriented organisations and institutions, who received training and coaching under the project. They all have the responsibility to ensure that children in conflict with the law or otherwise vulnerable receive appropriate support through a trained social worker or other suitable adult.

Government departments, particularly MOLSAMD and provincial level DOLSAMDs are also major stakeholders as are community leaders (village elders, Mullahs, Maleks), families and children. MOLSAMD and DOLSAMDs have the responsibility to oversee and coordinate support to children and to provide adequate services to children and families through their overall mandate on social protection. Due to capacity constraints, however, the government relies heavily on NGOs to provide the actual services and the social workers, employed by the NGOs under the projects, are instrumental in this.

Stakeholders also include NGOs and other government departments, with whom the implementing NGOs cooperate to provide services. These include, for example, legal aid NGOs, NGOs running shelters or providing education or health care services, Independent Human Rights Commission, the MOE and the MOPH.

Furthermore, stakeholder include international organisations, bilateral cooperating partners and other international partners supporting social protection (including social work training) and children's rights. Apart from UNICEF, these have not played a significant role in the projects till now, as areas where partnership at this level typical add value, such as advocacy and policy dialogue, have played a minor role in project implementation.

## 2.5 Implementation status

At the time of evaluation, all partners had completed two phases of project implementation. Each phase ran for a maximum of 12 months, with a gap in between phase I and II where the proposal for the next phase was processed and approved. One partner (CFA) has had six month no-cost extension to phase two and one partner (CIC) had embarked upon implementation of a third phase of the project. At the time of the evaluation, only CIC had project activities on-going (under phase III) and WCUK was finalising implementation of phase II in Herat and Badghis. The other two partners were awaiting finalisation and approval of proposals for phase III and therefore had no project activities under implementation.

Generally, partners had completed activities as per their proposals, though the reintegration of children from orphanages had proven to be more difficult than expected. For all partners, the number of children actually reintegrated from orphanages remained relatively low. Please, also refer to findings on efficiency and effectiveness below.

Different partners had started activities at different times and implementation time frames and timing therefore varied. Phase I activities were implemented for twelve months between 2007 and 2009 and phase II activities between 2008 and 2010/11.

### 3. Evaluation Purpose, Objectives and Scope

The TORs for the evaluation define the purpose, scope and objectives of the evaluation as follows:

**“Purpose of this project is to:** The prime objective of the assignment is to evaluate the interventions under social work coaching projects supported by UNICEF to assess their relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and appropriateness in the context including :

- e) Extent of skill enhancement among social and care workers who were part of this project
- f) Number of children and families who benefitted from the services provided by the social workers and quality of services provided by social workers
- g) Quality of services provided by the social work agencies to Government in JRCs, Orphanages and CPANs
- h) And Recommend a cost effective strategy to sustain the skills of the workers trained under these projects and promote protection of children within communities and institutions

#### **Evaluation scope and objectives**

The evaluation intends to assess the activities implemented under the social work coaching projects by the four agencies since 2007 and having reached 12 provinces by the end of 2010. These activities although aimed towards ensuring family reintegration of children in institutional care or children in conflict with law, essentially focuses on building the skills of the social /care workers in knowledge and processes to facilitate towards this end. The in depth analysis will include review of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the tools and training manuals; impact of the training and adoption of due process on the trainees and the beneficiaries.

Evaluation needs to focus on arriving at a clear direction for these interventions towards consolidation of the interventions in sustainable manner and the scope of the resources developed during the implementation towards policy and practice at national level.”

The final TOR also includes a set of key questions to be answered by the evaluation as follows:

- Were stated outcomes or outputs achieved?
- What factors have contributed to achieving or not achieving intended outcomes and outputs?
- What strategies have been used, what are working, and what are not working?
- What factors contributed to not working, what would be alternative?
- Has the project been appropriate and effective
- What factors contributed to effectiveness or ineffectiveness?
- Has the project been efficient
- What factors contributed to efficiency or inefficiency
- Can the project be sustainable, and replicate to other places in the country?
- Were the project cost effective to be measured against impact on skill development as well as benefits to children, i.e. were the project's cost efficient and cost effective?

These questions were detailed further into a set of specific evaluation questions for the different evaluation criteria (relevance and appropriateness, impact, effectiveness and efficiency, sustainability) when the evaluation methodology was developed (see below and Annex V).

Evaluation deliverable include the inception report, made up of Annex V and the evaluation schedule (Annex II), a tools assessment report (Annex VI) and the main evaluation report as presented in this document.

## 4. Evaluation Methodology<sup>8</sup>

The evaluation was carried out in June and July 2011 by an independent external evaluator. The evaluator received technical support and oversight from the UNICEF ACO PME Unit and information and technical support from the UNICEF ACO Child Protection Unit. Translation was provided by the UNICEF ACO PME Unit.

The evaluation employed a combination of desk reviews and field work. The desk review included background materials, such as project concept notes and progress reports, as well as an assessment of the case management and training tools developed under the projects.<sup>9</sup>

The evaluation aims to evaluate the four projects in totally (i.e. not one-by-one per partner) in order to provide recommendations for the way forward for promoting social work and child protection in Afghanistan in a wider sense. As no overall programme document, specifying results, indicators etc., against which the four projects can be evaluated uniformly, is available, the evaluation is based on a number of evaluation questions, developed by the evaluation consultant in consultation with UNICEF ACO (Child Protection and PME). The questions were used to focus and shape the evaluation and ensure attention to all relevant aspects of the projects at an aggregate level across all four projects.<sup>10</sup>

Projects were also evaluated against their immediate objectives as presented in the partners' proposals to UNICEF. However, the evaluation was not able to evaluate projects against indicators and targets, results etc. as these were, in some instances not included in the proposals. Where they were, different levels (e.g. outputs and results) were used by different projects and the only comparable level across all four projects is therefore immediate objective level.

During the field work, semi structured interviews were carried out with project managers, government and civil society project partners, direct recipients of training (community and social workers) and a limited number of children and families benefitting directly and indirectly from the projects.<sup>11</sup> Due to security concerns, the evaluation had to be carried out under restricted movement that did not allow for visit to communities to carry out interviews. Instead, community workers, children and parents were met in NGO partner offices. Field work was carried out in Kabul and Jalalabad. In addition, community workers and social workers from Kunduz, Herat, Panjshir, Paktia and Ghazni travelled to Kabul and met the evaluation consultant and interpreter there. While the evaluation had sufficient access to trained social workers, access to repatriated children and their families was very limited, as the children and their families were unable to travel to Kabul.

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<sup>8</sup> Please, refer also to Annex V Evaluation methodology

<sup>9</sup> Please, refer to Annex VI Tools assessment report

<sup>10</sup> Please, refer to Annex V Evaluation methodology for the list of evaluation questions

<sup>11</sup> For a full list of people met please refer to annex III

In addition to the restrictions on movement, the evaluation scope and methodology was limited by language barriers, which were overcome for the most part by excellent translation by the UNICEF ACO PME Assistant. Moreover, some parents and children were reluctant to meet with the evaluation team due to the stigma and shame associated with their cases. This was overcome to the greatest possible extent by community and social workers sharing illustrative case stories during interviews. It does mean, however, that triangulation of information is not complete in all cases. The report will indicate where findings and conclusions are only tentative. Overall, the evaluation had good access to information about capacity development interventions under the project, including several in-depth interviews with social and community workers who were trained. The quality of data on direct and indirect assistance to children and families is more limited, due to the constraints mentioned above.

Finally, it should be noted that the interviewee group is not gender balanced. More men and boys were interviewed simply because more boys than girls were supported by the projects and because more men than women worked in or with the projects.

An estimate of the costs associated with the training and coaching and with the support to children was done through simple cost-per-trainee and cost-per-child calculations. The calculations were done based on data on recipients and expenditure summaries provided by implementing partners. These calculations must however be read with caution. Partners have not used a standardised system for recording information on recipients. Therefore, some partners provided information only on children reintegrated from institutions and other provided aggregate information also including children supported within their communities, for example through social workers' outreach and case mediation. Estimates of indirect child beneficiaries have not been used for the calculations as they are not available for all partners and as their error margin is too wide for the "unit cost" calculations to be meaningful. Therefore, the cost efficiency calculations are only a supplement to the qualitative assessment of efficiency and effectiveness, based on the interview questions and semi-structured interviews.

At the end of the field work, a feed-back meeting was held with project partners and UNICEF staff to present and discuss tentative findings and conclusions.

In spite of the limitations and their impact on data quality and triangulation of information, the evaluation was provided with sufficient information to reach conclusions about project relevance and appropriate, impact, effectiveness and efficiency, impact and sustainability. The evaluation findings are presented below, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

## 5. Evaluation Findings

### 5.1 Relevance and appropriateness

The original focus for the projects was protection of children in institutions through improved capacity for social work. This includes both repatriation of and better conditions for children in orphanages and the protection of children in conflict with the law, especially those children detained in the JRCs.

Afghanistan's formal child care and protection system is dominated by institutional responses and the risks associated with growing up in institutional care are not well understood and recognised by some parts of government or by society at large. Often, families, communities and government welfare staff believe that children are better off in institutions. Orphanages are often used as boarding schools by families who believe their children will get a better education by being sent to an orphanage.

There is therefore an urgent need to address issues of institutionalisation and work for more appropriate responses. Hence, the projects' focus on protecting children in institutions is relevant.

The projects have continued to address emerging child protection issues as they materialised. Hence, for example, early marriage and child labour have been included as areas for attention in some project in addition to the original priorities relating to children in institutional care.

The selection of particular protection areas as priority does not appear to be the result of a systematic strategic planning, but rather the result of organic learning and growth in the projects. This has given the projects a high degree of flexibility to maintain relevance as new lessons and issues emerged. There is a risk, however, that other highly important, and possibly less visible, protection issues may fall off the table if no strategic analysis and planning is carried out for future phases of the projects. Moreover, the lack of strategic analysis and planning in the design of projects has led to projects focussing rather narrowly on social work capacity development in relation to specific protections issues. A number of people interviewed questioned the projects' approach, focussing primarily on capacity development. They stressed that more holistic services were required to ensure that families do not send children to orphanages to access education and to prevent children from coming into conflict with the law. It should be noted that phase two and proposals for phase three increased focus on service delivery in addition to capacity development, but services are not necessarily holistic and they are still at small scale. Thus, there is an immediate need to rethink and re-strategize on project approaches to ensure that the projects build upon achievements and stay relevant (please, also refer the discussions on effectiveness below).

In relation to the national priorities, as outlined in the National Strategy for Protection of Children at Risk and the National Social Protection Strategy, the projects remain highly relevant, addressing core priority protection issues identified as national priorities. This applies not least to the projects' initial focus on institutionalisation of children. However, it was highlighted repeatedly that government practise is not in line with the National Strategy for the Protection of Children at Risk. This could indicate the strategy may in fact not be an accurate account of the real and current national priorities.

The projects have sought to contribute to building essential capacity for social work in Afghanistan. Social and community workers interviewed consistently stressed the usefulness of the projects' training and coaching activities to their daily work with children and communities. Moreover,

government and NGO staff also stressed that prior to the projects, there was practically no recognition of social work and its usefulness in Afghanistan. This appears to have changed. Hence, the project seems highly relevant to essential capacity gaps.

Project training activities have used culturally and socially appropriate methods of social work and stressed interpreting and placing child rights and protection in a locally identifiable and recognisable context<sup>12</sup>, contributing significantly to project relevance and appropriateness.<sup>13</sup>

## 5.2 Effectiveness and efficiency

### **Project tools: Case management tools and training materials.**

Following the signing of a Letter of Agreement between six government departments (MOI, MOJ, the Supreme Court, the Attorney General's Office, MOE and MOLSAMD) in 2010, the project supported the rolling out of the Social Inquiry Forms (SIRs) through training of social workers and CPAN members on their use. The SIRs are a tool for a more systematic protection and involvement of children and families in solving cases relating to children in conflict with the law. Interviewed social workers, CPAN members and government staff uniformly expressed appreciation for the SIRs as a tool to ensure that children in conflict with the law received appropriate treatment. Though social workers still face problems in working with the Police in some areas, the SIRs have contributed to diversion becoming increasingly common as a response to minor crimes. There is, however, still a strong need to inform the police on principles of diversion, and the value of involvement of social workers. Moreover, the number of social workers assigned to the police and prosecutors offices by MOLSAMD is too low to ensure effective case management for all children.

As a result of the 2010 LOA, the use of SIR has become institutionalised in juvenile justice cases that go to court. A completed SIR is now a standard element in the file handed in to the court. The evaluation was given examples of cases that were returned to the Prosecutor's Office if the SIR was not included in the file. UNICEF, along with CIC, played a key role in advocating for and supporting development and signing of the LOA. As such the LOA and the SIRs is a good example of how UNICEF can support implementation of projects and delivery of services through using its leverage and policy dialogue voice. It also illustrates how the combined expertise of UNICEF and the implementing partners can be used to create lasting change.

The SIRs were also uniformly described as easy to use tools that are helpful, albeit sometimes time demanding. Officials in the juvenile justice system (police officer, prosecutors and judges) all indicated that the introduction of the SIRs made them change their practise. All interviewees indicated that they were more likely to use diversion mechanisms for children in conflict with the law after the SIRs were introduced and they started working more systematically with trained social workers. The SIRs therefore appear to be an effective tool to protect children in conflict with the law but more work is required to ensure their universal application in all cases. This will take, not least, increased orientation and sensitisation for police officers in order to ensure that social workers are always contacted, when a child comes into conflict with the law.

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12 The SC booklet on child rights in Islam is a good example of a social and culturally appropriate tool that was highlighted for its appropriateness and widely used (though not developed under the SC Social Work Coaching project)

13 Please, refer also to Annex VI Tools Assessment Report

Generally, social workers reported that with the training from the project, and the tools developed under the project were useful and helped them manage cases in an appropriate and effective manner. The evaluation did find, however, that some tools could be streamlined further to make them more user friendly and efficient. For further detail, please refer to the tools assessment report in Annexes VI.

Field work with children confirmed that files were being generated. The evaluation saw evidence of SIRs and of admission files in orphanages. However, it seems that although admission files are generated, working files with current up-dates are not widely institutionalised yet. Overall, it seems only the SIRs have become institutionalised. Other case management tools are used as and when and there appears to be no systemic requirements for their use. CPAN members did indicate that they develop case management plans for children as a routine procedure. Tools (SIRs, case plans and coaching logs) sampled as part of the tools assessment were generally complete and contained useful information.

It should be noted also, that interviewed children were generally not familiar with the contents of their own files. They knew that files are kept but no one had explained to them what the files contained or what they are used for. None of the children interviewed had actually seen their own files.

A number of tools, notably the training materials, were developed on an individual basis by each agency. This appears to have been a somewhat inefficient use of resources, leading to four different sets of training materials with only minor variation in contents but no scope for, for example, bulk printing. Moreover, agencies have developed project or location specific tools that could have applicability and use across all four projects. There is therefore an urgent need to consolidate tools and replicate useful individual agency tools<sup>14</sup>, not least in light of the initiative to support the development of National Occupational Skills Standards for social work and establish a formal social work training programme. For more information, please refer to Annex V.

In addition to evaluating case management and training tools under project positively in general terms, social workers, NGO project staff and government staff interviewed generally agreed that the CPANs are an effective mechanism for ensuring coordination and effective case handling, in line with the provisions of the UNCRC. There is also general agreement that both the case management and training tools developed under the projects are useful for CPANs, though only one tool (the CPAN referral handbook, developed by WCUK for Herat) was specifically for CPANs. This particular tool seems to be highly effective in facilitating provision of adequate services to children, whose cases appear at the CPAN.

### **Training and coaching: strengthening skills, knowledge and behaviour change**

During the first two phases of the projects, partners trained a total of 1747 social workers and coaches, community workers/volunteers, CPAN members and professionals in the juvenile justice systems. Men outnumbered women by approximately two to one in these trainings (please, see below).

The costs of training materials, training workshops and coaching processes per trainee range between 350-500 USD. This is well within the limits of what other comparable capacity development processes would cost and can be considered cost-efficient.

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<sup>14</sup> The WCUK Directory of Referral for Herat and handbook on case management for social workers are examples of effective and efficient tools that could easily be replicated in other areas.

In general, social and community workers, community members and government officials who have received training under the projects all reported increased knowledge and a change in perspective on children's rights and child protection following training by the projects<sup>15</sup>. Most also indicated that they have changed their behaviour. This was especially true amongst community workers and volunteers working directly with vulnerable children and families within communities.<sup>16</sup>

It therefore seems evident that the projects have been successful in reaching their objectives to build understanding, knowledge and skills and change attitudes and, to some extent, behaviour among social and community workers and community members in the project areas. Both social workers in institutions and social workers working in communities reported such changes.

According to interviewees, the partner organisation had difficulties identifying women, who were willing and able to receive training and do social work, as many women have substantial restrictions on their movement. For women who did receive training and work as social workers, the restrictions are overcome by ensuring that they carry out home visits and similar types of activities with a male colleague, whom they and their family trust. The low number of women social workers does make it more difficult to reach out to girl children and adolescent girls, nevertheless.

The increased body of knowledge and commitment among individuals in target provinces may have also contributed to the improved effectiveness of CPANs in project target areas. Though other factors also influence the effectiveness of the CPANs, the consistent reporting from project stakeholders, that CPANs are actively involved in solving cases indicate that the project has been successful in contributing to strengthening the capacity of CPANs.

### **Repatriation and reintegration of children and reaching out to communities**

While there are clear results on projects' objectives to strengthen capacity among social workers and CPANs, it is less clear how effective and efficient the projects were in terms of providing direct assistance to children for repatriation and diversion. Cost per child estimates vary very widely (from approximately 13 USD per child to over 700 USD per child). As described in chapter 4 on methodology, part of the variation stems from different counting and reporting on direct support to children among different agencies, so this finding is presented with caution. Part of the variation, however, also stems from very different approaches to service provisions with major differences in the service packages, ranging from a "minimalist package" that only includes child and family assessment and follow-up for referral to services through CPAN, to service packages that include repatriation grants, access to non-formal education and vocational training and business development support. As the effective implementation time for the projects is only around two years, it is yet too early to assess which of the service delivery approaches is more effective. The minimalist package has the advantage of relying on existing services. It is therefore more likely to be sustainable. However, some interviewees indicated that the services required are not always available within the existing service

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15 Information generated from both pre- and post-test assessments summarised in partner reports and from interviews with individual trainees during the evaluation

16 For example, a community volunteer narrated how he used to attempt to settle community disputes through violence and with no regard for children's voices. After receiving training by CIC, he had changed his approach to one of mediation and seeking amicable solutions that would take into account children's perspective. This was exemplified by a recent case where two families were in conflict over whose son would marry a sixteen year old school girl. With assistance from the community worker and volunteers, the families reached an agreement that the girl must complete her education and then choose her future husband herself.

provision and therefore, the support that children receive may be less effective and relevant. The direct provision of services through the projects has the advantage that service provision can be tailored to project beneficiaries. However, this approach has sustainability constraints, both in terms of continuation of the service provision and in sustaining impact for individual children and families (please, refer to 5.3 and 5.4 below)

Regardless of the “size” of the service package offered, key informants repeatedly stressed the importance of sustained follow-up with children and families, especially where children were repatriated from orphanages or JRCs. Cases where insufficient follow-up had resulted in children being subject to abuses (such as child labour and drug addiction) after returning home were narrated. Effective, sustained follow-up by social workers and/or community workers (with access to coaching support) appears to be central to effective reintegration of children.

Again, cautioning on possible error in calculations resulting from differences in reporting, phases I and II reached out to and supported a total of 4,624 children for repatriation from institutions or support within their community. Of these 783 were girls. Thus, the projects supported almost five times as many boys as girls. This is probably a reflection of the projects taking their point of departure in institutions, where there are simply many more boys than girls. Hence, this figure is not surprising but it does raise the question of whether the project strategy is effective for protecting girls.

Even though the outreach to children and families may be limited, the social workers trained and, in some cases, employed under the projects seem to contribute significantly to the work of the CPANs. CPAN members uniformly indicated that the availability of trained social workers made it easier to address cases and follow up. Some CPAN members also indicated that social workers are essential in awareness raising with communities. Concerns were raised therefore, over the implementation timeframes and the gaps in between phases experienced in all projects. The short implementation time frames were considered unrealistic for promotion of attitude and behaviour change both among social workers, community workers and community members and families.

The implementation gap between phases meant that the projects lost steam and that all partner agencies lost trained social workers who found other employment when the implementing NGOs were no longer able to pay salaries in between phases. The turn-over of social workers not only meant that NGOs needed to keep training new staff, but also that cases got stuck and that follow-up in many cases was patchy. Cases were narrated to the evaluation where the lack of follow-up meant that repatriated children ended up in hazardous child labour or in conflict with the law. Due to the security constraints, the evaluation was unable to verify this information by interviewing children who may have had such experiences.

The turn-over of social workers in the implementing agencies was compounded by frequent turn-over of trained staff in government agencies, both social workers under MOLSAMD and police officers. Again, this severely impacted on the capacity to follow-up cases. It also meant that partners had to train and re-train new staff repeated, thereby decreasing efficiency.

In addition, it should be noted that a substantial part of the Social work Coaching Projects cost were constituted by salaries and allowances for social work coaches and social workers. These costs can be viewed as a necessary investment in human capital, ensuring appropriate follow-up of cases and ensuring quality coaching in a context where government capacity to ensure continuity is limited.

During the second phase of the projects, a greater emphasis was placed on mobilising communities and working with community workers/volunteers. Volunteers were identified among influential

community members and potential change agents within the communities and include, for example, community elders, village chair persons, teachers, religious leaders and youth group members. The community volunteers appear to have contributed significantly to project implementation, by paving the way for social workers and CPANs to assist families in need of support, by raising awareness and interpreting child protection in a locally acceptable and understandable framework. The SC booklet on the UNCRC within the context of Islam appears to have been very useful in this regard.

Community volunteers have also been highly efficient as first line response and follow-up volunteers, especially in insecure areas where government and NGO social workers were not able to travel and work. Though only on board for a limited period of time, it seems the community volunteers have contributed very effectively to protecting children within the communities.

Some partners have faced challenges in mobilising community volunteers as they have had no resources available to pay for incentives to volunteers.<sup>17</sup> One partner, CFA, however has deliberately not paid incentives, but instead used other means of motivating volunteers. These include building a spirit of voluntarisms and making communities own the problems and solutions through coaching and community meetings. Moreover, volunteers were given non-financial incentives, including training and responsibilities. Public recognition of volunteers work was an important element in this strategy, which may be replicable in other projects. The positive experiences with non-financial incentives notwithstanding, all partner faced difficulties covering the actual expenses that volunteers incurred when undertaking family assessments, mediation and follow-up, as only a limited budget was available for travel between villages or communication with social workers and CPANs, for example.

### **Project design and “organic growth”**

The projects have all been designed on the basis of a “reactive approach”, focussing on responding to cases where a problem has already materialised, (as opposed to a preventive approach). This may be a reflection of emergency response being the dominant paradigm in international support to Afghanistan, rather than a longer term development approach, that typically stresses prevention. Whereas response preparedness and capacity to handle cases is critical, prevention is often a more cost-effective strategy<sup>18</sup> in child protection.

Moreover, the projects have been quite “loosely” designed. There is no overall programme document with a clear results or log frame guiding individual projects and defining common standards for, for example, monitoring. Moreover, there does not seem to be one common format for partners’ project proposals, defining common goals and links etc.. This may have contributed to decreasing efficiency in the projects by allowing for e.g. duplication of efforts, as in the case of development of training materials. It may however also, have allowed for a higher degree of flexibility, in turn allowing for adjustments to reflect new learning and changing circumstances. Given that the projects set out to build capacity in an area that was completely unrecognised and were charting new territory through the first years of their lifespan this flexibility did prove an asset as it allowed for learning, ensuring continued relevance and appropriateness. However, with the improved understanding of social work in Afghanistan, such high levels of flexibility are no longer be needed and a tighter, more orthodox

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<sup>17</sup> Payment of monetary “incentives” and allowances to both volunteers and government staff is common practise in Afghanistan when they participate in implementation of donor funded projects. Hence there is an expectation that “incentives” must be paid in return for work, including volunteer work.

<sup>18</sup> Cost-effective in this context is both in terms of avoiding the emotional, physical and economic costs of human suffering to individuals and communities and the resources that are utilised to take action.

project design including, as a minimum, an overall common, programmatic results framework, is essential to improve efficiency and ensure effectiveness in any future phases of the projects.

The projects were designed with a relatively narrow focus on strengthening social work skills for improved protection for children in institutions. While there is no doubt this is relevant, the narrow focus did mean that the projects were not always well geared to respond to changing circumstances, such as changes in political commitment towards repatriation of children from orphanages. This, and the realisation that children need holistic services if they are to successfully and sustainably reintegrate with their communities and families, led to projects evolving into bringing new issues, such as early marriage and child labour, on board. Also, strategies have been adjusted gradually, to change approaches. In all projects, there has been an increasing focus on community workers/volunteers in the second phase of the projects. Moreover, some partners started to include service provision and support for improved livelihoods in their projects.

It is yet too early to say whether these changes in approach have produced sustainable results, but it was stressed repeatedly, that the increased focus on community structures and volunteers is very effective in protecting children within the community and prevent abuse, exploitation and neglect. Moreover, a number of key informants pointed out, that better capacity and changed attitudes meant there more cases could be solved amicably and without going to court. This leaves room for courts to deal with “heavier” cases, it saves time and resources within the communities, and, conditional upon the quality of mediation, allows children a say in their own life and provides them with support and protection within their family. Moreover, it was highlighted specifically, that the improved mediation skills among community members, resulting from the projects’ trainings, contributed to decreasing violence as a result of inter-family conflict.

Hence, the “organic growth” has most likely contributed positively to effectively improving child protection within target communities in early stages of intervention when relatively little information was available.. It may, however, have been a less efficient strategy as there has been no systemic and uniform collection of learning experiences etc. Moreover, scaling up interventions and using lessons learned, through “organic growth” is unlikely to be very efficient. Neither is it likely to be effective in building a protective environment as it seems the “design by organic growth” may favour visible forms of protection issues (such as institutionalisation and street- and working children) over more invisible concerns (such as child domestic labour and sexual abuse). As boys are more likely than girls to be affected by the “visible protection violations”, the “organic growth” project may end up with very skewed gender balances as is indeed the case for the Social Work Coaching Projects.

The “loose design” also meant that there was no systematic effort to integrate the projects across different levels of interventions or link the projects to other interventions that could carry forward the projects’ agenda at policy level. Yet, the LOA described above demonstrates very clearly how important it is to ensure that micro-level interventions, like to social work coaching projects, have a component, or are linked to other interventions, that can take the lessons from the projects into macro-level policy dialogue and systems development. In the case of the LOA, the reinforcement from the top, greatly contributed to increasing efficiency and effectiveness in case management. However, no systematic mechanism is available within the project to ensure that micro and macro level interventions can reinforce each other. Therefore, the projects do not have an effective mechanism to address challenges such as the frequent turn-over of government staff, hampering the effectiveness of project interventions.

### **Stakeholder coordination**

As described above, the projects appear to have been effective in strengthening CPAN capacity for case management and understanding of children's rights and child protection among CPAN members. The projects all seem to make effective use of the possibilities resting with the CPANs to ensure that case management is efficient and that various actors coordinate and work together to ensure adequate support to children of the highest possible standard.

Projects generally tend to have very close working relations with other NGOs and with government departments at provincial levels, very much through the CPAN mechanisms. At national level, however, links are weaker, reflecting the focus on micro-level interventions described above.

Amongst themselves, implementing partners seem to have ad-hoc coordination and collaboration around specific activities, such as development of case management tools. UNICEF, from the beginning, was responsible for bringing together partners for specific activities and for sharing lessons. With the finalisation of the tools, however, the partner meetings appear to have become less frequent and regular. As the partner meetings seem to have been the only mechanism for partners to share and learn from each other, this has meant that learning from each other has not been very systematic and efficient. This has resulted in, for example, duplication of efforts in development of training materials and in useful local tools not being shared for inspiration and replication.

### **5.3 Impact**

#### **Improved understanding, knowledge and skills among social workers and care workers**

Social and community workers, NGO partners' staff and government officials consistently indicated that the social work coaching projects have led to increased understanding of child rights and protection issues among social workers, key government officials and communities. Moreover, they indicated that social and community workers have improved skills in communication and mediation, case management and documenting and reporting. This is supported by background documentation (such as partners' progress reports) and by case examples. It is also clear, however, that even with substantially improved capacity in the projects' target areas, there is still a long way to go, to ensure that social work services are widely available and that social workers have the depth of understanding they require to provide quality services to all vulnerable children on a large scale.

In terms of depth, many social and community workers indicated that they would welcome further capacity development on other, sometimes emerging issues, such as child labour and disability. In terms of the breadth of capacity, professional groups, who are key to case handling, need more orientation and support in order to work effectively with social workers. The police force was often singled out in this regard. Moreover, the Social Work Coaching Projects only covered parts of the country and capacity is still limited in many other parts of the country, notably the insecure areas. Finally, it was repeatedly pointed out in interviews with all stakeholders, that in order to reach scale in the provision of social work services to children and families a much higher number of social workers is required.

It is evident, that the projects have contributed to strengthening the capacity of CPANs. This is a result of the direct training provided to members of the CPANs. Interviewed CPAN members indicated that they have a better understanding of child rights and child protection, were better equipped to assess cases and find solutions for at-risk children and are better at recording and using the tools.

Indirectly, the projects also seem to have contributed to CPAN capacity by making social work services available as a response in child protection cases. It should be noted, though, that while this is a positive development the sustainability of NGOs sometimes gap filling for government is questionable (please. Also see below).

Hence, it seems that the projects have in fact, and within a relatively limited time frame, had a positive impact on social work capacity in Afghanistan. Moreover, the projects have potential for even greater impact in the future if project activities are planned and implemented in such a way as to take interventions to scale.

### **Changed practices in child protection in communities and residential and day care institutions and juvenile justice institutions**

Whereas the impact on capacity is clear and demonstrable, the impact on actual lives of children is less clear. It is evident that a number of children have indeed had quality support from trained social and community workers and are in a better situation than they would otherwise be. However, the impact on children's lives is still relatively small scale, limited to the number of children that the current cadre of trained social and community workers can reach out to within the current framework. Again, there is a need to take interventions to scale.

It should be noted though, that the impact on children's lives may be greater than the 4624 children reported by partners to have been supported by social workers as many minor cases are resolved and prevented informally by community workers and volunteers trained by the projects.

From the case material presented to the evaluation it seems the quality of services offered to children is generally of good quality. It is an issue for concern though, that the gender balance among supported children is very skewed, with close to five times as many boys as girls supported.

Social workers do follow up and visit families, making sure children stay safe after the immediate crisis is resolved. There does seem to be a difference in the follow-up provided by NGO social workers and government social workers, with the latter group being less likely to follow-up cases due to very limited resources available. Also, it was evident that between phases, when there was a gap in implementation of activities and social workers were not on board with the NGOs, case follow-up became a problem. One CPAN directly pointed out, that when the social workers from the implementing partners were not on board they had difficulties seeing cases through.

This very clearly indicates not only that the projects are a substantial contribution to CPANs, but also that the NGOs are in fact gap filling and making up for limited government capacity by taking direct responsibility for case follow-up by employing social workers for case management. This will be discussed further under sustainability below.

It is doubtful also, whether children repatriated from the JRCs will actually be able to stay out of conflict with the law. Prosecutors and JRC staff pointed to most of the children in custody committing petty crimes out of poverty. As there is currently no, or very limited, education and training available in the JRCs, children leaving the JRCs are likely to remain poor and, therefore, likely to continue survival driven criminal activities.

Practices in institutions are beginning to change though. Orphanages and JRC staff interviewed indicated that they have changed their behaviour and do longer beat children as a disciplinary measure. This was supported by the children interviewed in institutions. This is a step in the right direction, but no evidence was available that abuse no longer takes place in institutions. Moreover, the

juvenile justice system still seems to face problems in ensuring that all children apprehended get support from social workers and that all children are kept in appropriate facilities. Hence, it is too early to conclude that abuse of children institutions is no longer a major concern, but it does appear that a positive process has been started by the projects.

### **Improved resilience among families and children as a result of project livelihoods, communication and community capacity building interventions**

It is yet too early to assess whether direct services, such as microfinance tools, introduced to support families in the last stage of implementation has any real and lasting impact on children's lives.

It does seem likely though, that community mobilisation supported by the projects has potential for creation of real and lasting changes. However, such changes need more time to materialise and consolidate.

Interviewees pointed out that in order to create lasting impact in children's lives, it is necessary to tackle the root causes that push children into institutions and/or into conflict with the law. Four primary root causes were highlighted: access to education; poverty among families; family social problems (such as violence and drug abuse) and detrimental traditions, customs and beliefs.

The interviews with children in orphanages and with children repatriated from orphanages correlated with research findings and the descriptions in national strategies in that at least half of the children interviewed were not orphans without family ties. In fact they were in the orphanages to access education, either because education was not available within their communities, because attending school through an orphanage is cheaper (as the family does not have to bear the costs of meals, uniforms etc.) or because the education in the orphanage is perceived to be of higher standards.

Currently, children in JRCs have little or no access to education and/or vocational training. They are therefore unlikely to be able to pursue education or find gainful employment when released from the JRC. Hence, they are likely to be pushed back into (petty) criminal activity, simply to survive.

Also, children end up in institutions because they are subject to abuse and neglect at home. Early and forced marriage was highlighted as a critical issue along with economic exploitation of children in child labour. Respondents therefore felt that substantial community mobilisation and capacity development for improved protection of children within communities is essential. Cases presented to the evaluation did confirm that through strengthening community capacity for mediation in family disputes, for example, children can be protected from early marriage, child labour etc. However, it was also stressed that mediation would be more effective if coupled with actual service provision.

Therefore, key informants from communities, government departments and NGOs uniformly stressed the need to tackle the root causes in any future projects focussing on child protection, including projects seeking to reintegrate children from institutions back into their communities.

The projects have moved towards more focus on service provision in the (proposed) third phases of the projects and early work towards education support and economic empowerment was undertaken by some partners in phase two. The work was still reactive, however, targeting only families and children that were involved in repatriation. Hence, the impact of the work may be limited as more children are likely to find their way into institutions if alternatives are not available within their communities. A responsive programmatic approach often leads to replacing the children supported with new children in, in this case, institutions.

Though more time will most likely yield higher impact, it is unlikely to be a substantial and sustainable impact within the current strategies pursued and changes towards more preventive and holistic support for children may be needed to realise actual changes in the lives of children.

## 5.4 Sustainability

The sustainability of projects' impact and, to some degree, their operations is a major concern. As none of the projects have yet prepared exit strategies or sustainability plans, this is an area that requires immediate attention if the results so far realised are to be sustained.

The changes in attitudes and behaviour realised among communities and staff in institutions, as a result of project training and coaching, and the improved capacity of the CPANs hinges to a very large degree on the continued availability of the social work coaches in the NGOs continuing to provide coaching. As social work is a dynamic profession, continued capacity development to ensure that community and social workers, CPAN members etc. can stay abreast of new developments is essential to long term sustainability. The support need not necessarily be in the form of formal training though. This will be discussed further below under recommendations.

As described above, under 5.3, changes to attitudes and behaviour in communities, are still at an early stage. For substantial changes to take root in communities, and thereby remain sustainable, more community mobilisation and capacity development is required. Moreover, to translate changed attitudes into real changes in children's lives, communities must be supported to take action for child protection. This may require support to tackle the root causes as discussed above.

Though the projects have contributed significantly to strengthening the capacity of CPANs and, thereby, to strengthening the child protection system in Afghanistan, the CPANs and communities remain dependent upon NGO employed social workers to follow-up cases and ensure that children live in a safe family environment. The gaps between project phases have led to social workers leaving the project and CPANs having less possibility to assign responsibility for case follow-up. This has led directly to premature termination of follow-up on repatriation cases, for example.

There is an urgent need therefore to develop strategies for the institutionalisation of social work services through the government system. Currently government capacity and commitment to social work services remain low<sup>19</sup>. In fact, the NGOs as of now are providing direct services, filling gaps in the government response. This is not sustainable in the long run and must be addressed through interventions aimed at strengthening government capacity and commitment. In the short to immediate term, maintaining the presence of NGO social workers is vital, however, to avoid a collapse of the budding system facilitated by the projects. Currently, the government is reviewing the so called Tashkeel (the government staff allocation). This also includes revision of job descriptions for social workers in MOLSAMD and is an excellent opportunity to engage in dialogue with both MOLSAMD and other relevant government departments on the need for institutionalisation of social work services and upgrading the social work staff allocations.

While closing the projects at this stage will very clearly leave very little sustainable impact on the ground, there is urgent need to critically assess sustainability strategies and measures in any future phases of the projects. In this regard two areas stand out: 1. Institutionalisation of social work services and strengthening of government capacity and commitment; and 2. moving towards holistic,

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<sup>19</sup> Though the MOLSAMD staff interviewed expressed their very clear commitment to providing social work services and protect children, MOLSAMD is dependent on the wider government and political system to make resources available and back up the implementation of strategies.

community based intervention that will address the root causes of violations of children's rights, in order to create real change in children's lives. While maintaining capacity to respond to cases of abuse, exploitation and neglect and ensure that children in institutions are safe, it is critically important to also start looking at prevention measures. The current system of providing social work services to children once a problem arises (for example once a child is in conflict with the law) is primarily reactive. This means that while children are being supported to reintegrate with their families and communities, new children enter the orphanages and the JRCs, are married off at an early age or are sent to work in hazardous labour. To create real, sustainable impact and make interventions truly sustainable, prevention measures therefore need to be considered. Failing this, "new" children will continue to replace those who are repatriated in from institutions as is currently the case and the sustainable impact will remain limited.

In addition to the above concern, the security situation in some of the project implementation areas is a concern. The security situation changes rapidly and areas that were safe at the beginning of the projects are now not accessible to people from outside, including NGO staff. In such areas, project partners have adjusted their implementation strategies to focus more heavily on community volunteers, who are provided with "remote support" by coaches via telephone. This has contributed to maintaining a minimum level of activity but not to maintaining full scale implementation, effecting both the effectiveness and sustainability of the projects. Ensuring continued availability of "remote coaching" is therefore essential to ensure that activities do not collapse and early results lost.

As sustainability has emerged in this evaluation as the prime area for concern, the recommendations presented below (section 7) will focus to a great extent on proposing courses of action that may improve sustainability. The TORs stress the need to propose strategies to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Such recommendations are also included, but sustainability is an additional main focus.

## **6. Conclusions and Lessons Learned**

### **6.1 Relevance and Appropriateness**

Overall, the projects are relevant to the child protection issues in Afghanistan, to the national strategies and to the capacity gaps and needs in the country. The initial focus on children in institutions was relevant, but the projects' decisions to broaden up the protection issues addressed and include attention also to early marriage and child labour has increased the relevance of the projects and provided a more holistic approach.

Training materials and methodologies were relevant and appropriate. In particular, the coaching component has proven valuable as it seems to have promoted not only changes in knowledge and attitudes but also actual behaviour change among social workers, such as discontinuation of corporal punishment in orphanages.

In spite of the broadening of scope, the projects have remained relatively narrow in focus and strategies, primarily pursuing a reactive strategy of providing services to children "in trouble" over preventive strategies. Limited attention has been paid to tackling the root causes of abuse, exploitation and neglect. A reorientation of strategies towards more holistic approaches, tackling root causes and focussing not only on "reactive services" but also on prevention would increase the projects' relevance and therefore, most likely, also their sustainability.

### **6.2 Effectiveness and efficiency**

Overall the projects have effectively reached their objectives towards increasing social work capacity though challenges were faced in a number of areas. However, the "loose" project design makes it somewhat difficult to say with certainty to which degree the projects have been effective as there has been no consistent development of results frameworks. At individual project level, log frames were developed in some cases. At overall programmatic level, no framework has been developed, though the concept note for phase III is more developed than the original concept note.

The tools developed under the projects are generally assessed to be of good quality and easy to use, though time demanding in some cases. The roll out and use of the case management tools is in progress and only the SIR seems to be institutionalised. This is to a large extent due the LOA signed between six government ministries and brokered by UNICEF ACO and CIC in collaboration. The LOA clearly illustrates to need to focus more attention on higher level advocacy and policy dialogue to reinforce initiatives at lower levels. Effective roll out and use of tools can only be achieved with the backing of central government departments as the government system remains centralised.

The training tools were very effective in improving social work skills and changing attitudes among trainees, and indication also that they were indeed appropriate to the cultural context and the identified capacity gaps. The coaching mechanisms appear to have been highly instrumental in facilitating behaviour change. As such, the combination of training and coaching appears to have been effective and cost-efficient at an average cost per trainee between 350 and 500 USD.

The projects have also contributed to the strengthening of CPAN capacity and effectively reached their objectives for this component. Both the training provided to CPAN members and the fact that social workers were put on the ground to follow through cases has contributed. However, the current system of providing social work services through NGOs is likely not to be sustainable in the long run

and institutionalisation of social work services through government must be the target if effective social work services are to be widely available in future.

Reaching out to children and families has been less effective, with limited follow-up at times, especially in between project phases. Also, the almost purely reactive nature of interventions meant that while children were being repatriated from orphanages new children streamed in, leaving the overall situation at status quo.

While a more holistic approach, tackling root causes and including prevention measures would probably be more effective in changing children's lives, the community mobilisation components in the projects did lead to changes. More cases are settled by mediation within the communities, without going to court. This contributes to de-facto diversion for children in conflict with the law and provides increased protection to (potential) victims of early marriage, family disputes etc. As such, the projects have effectively brought changes to children's lives, though still at a small scale and for a time too short to say with certainty, whether the impact is sustainable.

The coordination and collaboration between project partners and with UNICEF has been centred on concrete activities, like development of case management tools. While this has effectively contributed to good quality tools, it has not effectively promoted learning and cost-efficiency. Partner meetings were held at regular intervals in the first phase of the projects, but have become infrequent later. This means that partners are not sharing knowledge and experience as effectively as possible and valuable opportunities for cross-fertilisation and replication of tools and approaches are lost. The individual development of four, almost identical training manuals was not effective and cost-efficient.

At local level, working through the CPANs has greatly strengthened project effectiveness through promoting coordinated responses. Coordination at national level appear to be less systematic and institutionalised, primarily as the development assistance environment is characterised by limited coordination and government oversight overall. Recently UNICEF is actively leading and participating in improving coordination on social protection, which will most likely provide a positive contribution to the effectiveness of future project activities.

### **6.3 Impact**

The impact of the projects on social work capacity in Afghanistan is clear. The projects have contributed very significantly to putting social work on the map and to strengthening social work capacity in institutions and communities. The impact has been realised within a relatively short period of time, probably owing to the combination of training, coaching and (more recently), limited social mobilisation in communities. Even stronger impact could be realised with more time and an increased focus on community mobilisation and capacity development for community change agents.

The impact on children's lives is not yet fully realised. Individual cases presented to the evaluation point to changes in practises, notably within institutions where physical violence seems to have decreased as a result of the project. Much more time is needed, however, to realise profound, sustainable impact on children's lives in communities.

Moreover, a reorientation of strategies, towards a more holistic approach tackling root causes and including substantial components for prevention of abuse, neglect and exploitation is required to create substantial impact.

## 6.4 Sustainability

Positive results have been achieved, but some of these will require more time and focussed attention to become sustainable. The changes in attitudes and behaviour among community members and professionals are still relatively new and more follow-up is required to ensure that changes take root. Moreover, the changes are still very dependent on individuals, which is problematic in an environment characterised by high staff turnover. Only the use of the SIR in court cases appears to have been institutionalised and more time and deliberate effort to institutionalise sound social work practises in institutions and community responses is required.

Hence, there is an urgent need to work towards greater institutionalisation of social work, including building government capacity and commitment to provide social work services. Currently, the response capacity is dependent to a large degree on the NGO social workers. While this may be necessary in the short to medium term, it is not a sustainable solution in the long run. Therefore, exit plans must be put in place and strategies identified to advocate for and support change within government.

As discussed above, changes to children's lives are limited yet and sustainable impact may require a reorientation of strategies to become more holistic. It is unrealistic to expect partners to provide a complete and holistic service package by themselves. Partnerships with government and with various international partners will be necessary. Also, anchoring activities firmly within existing structures, such as the CPANs, will be needed to ensure sustainability.

Possible approaches and interventions to improve sustainability will be discussed below.

## **7. Recommendations**

As the Social Work Coaching Projects results are not yet sustainable the first, overall recommendation derived from the evaluation is that activities should continue in order not to waste investment in what has up to now been a worthwhile intervention. However, a new and more holistic approach is recommended for future activities.

It is recommended, that substantial changes are introduced for longer term interventions. However, in order not to lose steam, and to ensure that thorough preparations are undertaken for longer term projects, a bridging project of eight to twelve months is recommended for immediate implementation.

Below, the detailed recommendations are presented for each of the evaluation criteria and divided into short and longer term activities and interventions.

### **7.1 Short/immediate term**

Recommendations for short term activities and interventions, presented here, are activities that may be implemented during the bridging project. They are therefore mainly specific activities.

Recommendations for longer term strategic approaches are presented in 7.2 below.

#### **7.1.1 Relevance and appropriateness**

As was discussed, the projects were relevant to the situation prevailing when the projects were designed. The projects remain relevant. However, in large parts due to the projects, there is now much greater understanding of child protection and social work in the juvenile justice system, orphanages and some communities. Therefore, it is recommended that the projects adjust their strategies to suit this new reality in a coherent and strategic manner.

The first and foremost recommendation is therefore to undertake thorough strategic planning, involving all stakeholders, for any future phases of the projects. This would facilitate development of project interventions and strategies that are relevant to the current situation. It would also allow the development of a coherent results framework that would facilitate solid M&E.

It should be stressed, that capacity development is still relevant and appropriate and therefore, identification of effective capacity development interventions (see below) should be part of the strategic planning exercise.

Moreover, the strategic planning exercise must include all relevant stakeholders: Government, NGOs, UNICEF and other international partners and community representatives in order to promote ownership and partnerships.

#### **7.1.2 Effectiveness and efficiency**

The first short-term recommendation towards improved efficiency and effectiveness is to strengthen planning to avoid the stop-go implementation, which led to turn-over among social workers in the implementation of phase one and two. This recommendation is mainly directed at UNICEF ACO but links with the first recommendation under 7.1.4 below, for NGOs to develop proper exit strategies and resource mobilisation plans.

Secondly, it is recommended that tools developed under the projects must be integrated with the development of National Occupational Skills Standards for social work (the “Hunter College Project”). The tools assessment report contained in this evaluation could be the starting point and the

draft report has been shared with Hunter College by UNICEF ACO. Though UNICEF ACO and MOLSAMD will be the main responsible partners for this process, implementing NGOs must actively participate in consultations on the Occupational Standards and social work curriculum and share their experiences with the curriculum development team.

Thirdly, it is strongly recommended that a working group, with representation from NGOs, MOLSAMD, other relevant government partners, UNICEF and any other interested stakeholders, start streamlining tools developed under the projects immediately. It is suggested that focus should be on: i) Streamlining case management tools to make them more user friendly. This should not entail major changes, as the information gathered through the tools is necessary for proper case management. Rather, the streamlining is about making the tools more user friendly by simplifying the lay-out. This could also include changing the formats from tick boxes to space for narratives where possible, as many social workers seem more comfortable with narratives; ii) the working group should also identify the tools developed by individual projects that can be replicated elsewhere and develop the replicated tools; iii) it is recommended that the working group consolidates (or oversees the consolidation by an external consultant) of the four training manuals, developed by the partners, into one consolidated training manual that can be used by all partners in the future and in the new social work education programme under the national qualifications framework and; iv) the working group could look into developing handbooks for social workers (and others) on good social work practise and child protection. The hand books could be modelled on the WCUK handbook for working with street and working children. A module should describe basic social work principles and practise and additional modules can look into specific needs and approaches when dealing with different protection priorities (early marriage, disability, child labour, juvenile justice etc.) Such a handbook would serve as valuable reference material for trained social workers. The modules on specific protection issues can be based on existing materials already developed by UN and INGOs, national governments and NGOs in Afghanistan and elsewhere. A first step to developing the handbooks is therefore to appraise existing materials.

### 7.1.3 Impact

As discussed under findings, interviewees recommended changing the projects' approaches to more holistic interventions with a stronger focus on prevention. In order for this to materialise it is critically important that the root causes, pushing children into conflict with the law and/or into institutions are clearly understood. Hence, a baseline study/rapid assessment of children in orphanages and in conflict with the law should be carried out as early as possible, for the findings to feed into the strategic planning and into evidence advocacy and policy dialogue (see below).

It is particularly important that the study looks into characteristics of children in orphanages, e.g. how old are they, which geographical areas do they come from. This may help existing education support projects and programmes to target support to areas where children, who have gone into institutions to access education, hail from. The EU is planning an assessment of orphanages and UNICEF and the implementing NGOs could contribute valuable information and advice to this assessment.

Joining forces in research would also contribute to implementation of the final short term recommendation to improve impact: to start building new and to strengthen existing partnerships for a more effective and sustainable approach in the future. In order for a wider partner alliance, working together for child protection and sustaining access to social work services in the future, the strengthening of partnerships must start immediately. It is important to both create more in-depth partnership, through more joint activities and a wider partner alliance, including new partners that can contribute new areas of expertise (such as business development services) to the alliance. Only

through creation of partnerships, can more holistic services be provided in a sustainable way. Involving new partners in the baseline study and the strategic planning may be good avenues for the development of partnerships. It is recommended, that a mapping of potential partners could be carried out as a first initiative. This should also entail identifying existing coordination fora (such as the social protection coordination mechanisms).

#### **7.1.4 Sustainability**

The key to sustaining project results and impact lies in the longer term strategies. However, in the short term it is critically important that partners start planning for their eventual exit. The first short term recommendation to strengthen sustainability is therefore that all implementing partners must develop exit strategies as a matter of priority, bearing in mind that these may need adjustment after the strategic planning exercise. It is further recommended that implementing partners and UNICEF work on the exit strategies jointly and use the opportunity to share experiences and cross fertilize ideas.

Moreover, as discussed above, the implementing NGOs will most likely need to continue gap filling in social work for the foreseeable future, while government capacity and commitment is built to take over. It is unlikely though that UNICEF can continue to mobilise funding for this gap filling. Hence, it is recommended that the implementing partners develop resource mobilisation plans for sustaining the presence of social workers on the ground in the short to medium term.

### **7.2 Intermediate/long term**

Recommendations in the section aim focus on strategic, cost-effective and sustainable longer term interventions. Hence, the recommendations in this section can be used as inputs to the strategic planning exercise recommended above.

#### **7.2.1 Relevance and appropriateness**

It is not only children in institutions and their families who need social work services to tackle problems. It is recommended, therefore, that the projects widen up their focus to protecting children from other forms of exploitation and abuse, in line with the national strategic priorities. This could include increased attention to supporting social work services for prevention and case resolution of early marriage, child labour etc. Any future project phases must clearly spell out their contributions to creation of a protective environment for children, including further institutionalisation of child protection systems, for example through the CPANs

Moreover, it recommended that the projects refocus approaches to become more preventive. This would be a key contribution to creating a protective environment. Moreover, more preventive approaches would not only increase relevance and appropriateness, but also effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

In as far as children in institutions are concerned, appropriate preventive approaches should focus on making alternatives available. This would entail, at a minimum, working systematically to make education and training accessible and improve livelihoods for poor families. This approach would tackle the root causes for institutionalisation. It would also directly address the root causes for other types of exploitation and abuse, such as child labour. Finally, the approach would most likely contribute to more sustainable reintegration of children from institutions and would thereby strengthen achievement of the original project objectives, which are still relevant as discussed above.

### 7.2.2 Effectiveness and efficiency

The first recommendation to improve effectiveness in the longer run is to reorient project approaches and strategies to become more preventive as recommended above also. Not only will this make the projects more relevant and sustainable, but they are also likely to be able to reach out to more children in a cost efficient way. Moreover, preventive protection strategies are, by their very nature, geared towards avoiding exploitation and abuse in the first place, hence saving children from traumatising experiences of abuse, exploitation and neglect.

For prevention strategies to be effective they must tackle the root causes of exploitation and abuse. Hence, it is recommended that the projects look at integrating components that will, *inter alia*, improve access to education, strengthen family livelihoods, raise awareness and mobilise families and communities to protect children and change harmful practises.

This is a complex venture and can be difficult to measure. Therefore, the effectiveness of the more preventive strategies are conditional upon development of a proper overall programme framework, detailing results areas across the projects and defining indicators and targets for effective M&E. The strategic planning exercise recommended under the short term recommendations should be the basis for such a programme framework. It is recommended that indicators could be both quantitative and qualitative and that process milestones could be included in the monitoring framework in addition to indicators at results and objective level. This would give a clearer picture of whether prevention interventions are likely to have impact. Needless to say, the design of a consistent M&E framework (and indeed the design of the actual interventions) must be based upon a thorough baseline assessment as recommended above.

Secondly, it is recommended that projects further strengthen partnerships to ensure implementation of more holistic approaches. The implementing partners cannot be expected to provide all the services required to make the projects more holistic and more preventive. The complexity of the approach would necessitate drawing in expertise from various organisations. Hence, establishing partnerships with other organisations for joint interventions, based upon each organisation's area of expertise and strategic programmes, is recommended for any future phases. As UNICEF has "easy access" to the expertise within the UN system, it is recommended to start by mobilising UN partners as this is likely to be more cost-efficient in terms of time. It is suggested that co-implementation with the UNICEF education, health and WASH programmes should be the starting point. In addition, it should be explored if FAO, UNDP and ILO may be able to support livelihoods activities. Other partners in the social protection sector, notably EU, could also be invited to participate. Partnerships with EU and other partners in the social protection cluster should be explored for policy dialogue and advocacy. All the current partners must participate actively, but it will most likely strengthen efficiency if each partner has specific responsibilities for mobilising and liaising with specific "new" partners. It is not recommended to leave all partnership building with UNICEF alone. Partnership building is highly resource demanding in terms of staff time and leaving partnership building with one partner alone may lead to inefficient bottlenecks. Strong and open communication is of the essence.

Therefore, the third recommendation is to strengthen internal communication and sharing mechanisms through, for example, regular meetings to discuss progress, emerging issues etc. Partners could consider rotating the responsibility for organising and minuting meetings to avoid bottle necks that may develop if only one organisation (e.g. UNICEF) is responsible. If only one organisation is responsible and experiences, for example, staff constraints, meetings may simply not take off. Clear agreements and schedules are needed for rotating coordination to work.

Fourthly, it is recommended that the projects turn more attention to mainstreaming and integration of child protection and social work knowledge and skills in existing training and education programmes as this is likely to be both more effective and cost-efficient than continuing the “stand alone training”. By mainstreaming social work into existing professional training programmes for key groups, such as teachers and police officers, a larger number of professionals will be reached on an on-going basis. Moreover, if pre-service training is targeted, new recruits come into work prepared to work with social workers and protect children. Therefore, in time, when a trained teacher or police officers is redeployed, (s)he can be replaced by someone who has the same prior training, and hopefully, understanding and skills.

Fifth, it is recommended to ensure closer integration of project activities at different levels. Currently, the projects focus on individual and lower institutional level. It is strongly recommended, based on the positive experiences with the LOA, that future project phases deliberately focus on integrating all levels to promote reinforcement between the levels. The monthly meetings could also be used as a forum to monitor and adjust this integration. Such integration must be an explicit part of any strategic planning.

Finally, it is recommended that the projects focus their future capacity development activities on the types of social work capacity development that seem to have yielded very positive results in the current projects: coaching and experience sharing. Experience sharing can take many forms, such as development of experience-based handbooks, job placements or job-swaps between social workers in different organisations and exchange visits. Partners are encouraged to be innovative. It may be necessary to make participation in capacity development activities conditional on the trainees signing up to do social work for a specified period of time.

### **7.2.3 Impact**

Above all, it is recommended that the projects move from talking to doing, focussing on getting social work services to children and their families. This will entail a strong focus on building government capacity and commitment through evidence based advocacy and policy dialogue. The dialogue must centre on provision of government resources for social work and engage, for example, the Ministry of Finance in addition to MOLSAMD and other direct stakeholder ministries and departments. It must also include attention to MOLSAMD and DOLSAMD capacity for effective planning, monitoring and oversight of social workers etc. as increased budgets are only helpful if they are spent for the intended purpose of providing more children with access to social work services. Hence, capacity development on planning, M&E etc. may be as important as technical social work training for government staff in any future phases of the projects. Strengthening government capacity would also entail working with MOLSAMD to ensure a more equal gender balance among social workers, by ensuring that working conditions are such that women will accept to do social work. It may also be necessary to support women, deciding to become social workers, to accept that the work may require them to re-evaluate their norms for acceptable behaviour and discuss and agree on this with their families.

Secondly, as mentioned above, it is critically important that the projects widen their scope to more child protection issues and in addition become more preventive to increase their outreach and coverage and to spare children from becoming victims in the first place. This will most likely not only increase outreach and relevance but also make the projects’ intervention more gender sensitive. As most children in institutions are boys, widening the scope to include the protection issues that affect girls is the only way to make the projects more gender balanced.

Key to both prevention and withdrawal with real impact on children's lives is the reorientation of strategies to become more holistic as discussed above under 7.2.1. Only when interventions address the causes of abuse, exploitation and neglect in a holistic way can sustained impact on children's lives be expected.

As the aim is to protect children within their families and communities, the third recommendation is to scale up the community mobilisation and capacity development that appears to have been effective in contributing to improved child protection in the current projects. Supporting community leaders, change agents and other community members will create resilience that is likely to effectively contribute to improving children's lives. The first step in this process is to mobilise communities towards changing attitudes and beliefs that are detrimental to child protection. This must also include working to change gender based stereotypes, such as those leading to early marriage.

Moreover, community based approaches do have the advantage of often being more sustainable if done well. Where NGOs move on, community structures remain and can, if supported adequately and appropriately, maintain local protection systems. It is recommended that CPANs at both district and provincial levels are linked actively to the community mobilisation component as they can provide vital back-up for community members' activities. This is critically important also in the context of insecurity in most parts of Afghanistan. Ensuring local support and ownership is essential to allow for protection of the children living in conflict prone areas.

Finally, it is recommended to look into strengthening CPAN capacity to support and oversee community based prevention activities, such as awareness raising and outreach. CPANs can support such activities e.g. by members talking in community meetings, by ensuring preparedness for case management if children in need of immediate support are identified during awareness raising activities and by supporting community change agents to formulate and target community advocacy messages.

#### **7.2.4 Sustainability**

Many of the above recommendations have been selected as their implementation is also expected to contribute to sustainability of results, both the current results and those expected in the future.

As such, more holistic approaches to reintegration of children in conflict with the law and in institutions, combined with preventive approaches, are expected to be more sustainable than current interventions as they tackle the root causes that drive abuse, exploitation and neglect and place children at risk. Holistic approaches with a stronger focus on prevention are thus expected to lead to sustainable impact on children's lives.

Increased focus on community mobilisation is expected to lead to improved resilience and long term changes in attitudes and behaviours that will improve the protective environment for children and their families within their communities.

The partnership and mainstreaming approaches are expected to improve service quality and longevity. It must be remembered that often substantial time is required for changes to take root. Therefore, sustainability is not only about results, but sometimes also about maintaining service delivery capacity and activities for a period of time that is long enough to realistically bring about change.

Moreover, the mobilisation and capacity development for responsible government departments is expected to contribute to maintaining social work presence on the ground to ensure support to

children at risk and children who have become victims of abuse and exploitation as a permanent feature of Afghanistan's child protection systems.

All of the above, however, will only lead to improved sustainability if systematic, coherent planning, monitoring and evaluation is applied to future projects in order to ensure that the most effective and sustainable interventions are prioritised by various partners, that the realisation of project outcomes are monitored and the course of action is altered if required. This also entails planning within realistic timeframes that recognise the need for on-going nurturing and support for results, such as behaviour change, to take root. Hence, it is recommended that any new project phases designed according to the recommendations above must be designed for a minimum time frame of three to five years. Moreover, exit strategies must be part of the project design from the strategic planning phase. This is recommended to ensure that the end of the project does not come as a surprise to stakeholders and beneficiaries. Poor preparation for exit can lead to collapse of results on project closure and, thereby, to disappointed children and families, who may in fact be worse off than they would have been without the project.

The planning for sustainability must be especially comprehensive when direct support to children and families is included in project interventions. For example, it is vital that any business development support is appropriate and well planned. The aim is to strengthen family income to avoid sending children into orphanages (or early marriage or child labour etc.) to bolster the family's economic situation. Therefore, the business development support must be comprehensive and long term, assisting families with assessing the market, developing a simple business plan, ensuring they have capacity (including literacy and numeracy) to run the business and maintain records and make decisions on possible future business growth. This is not done simply through a one-off grant, but requires longer term engagement in a process of capacity development for the (would-be) business person(s) in the family. In most cases, business development support must also be coupled with sensitisation and follow-up (in this case preferably by social and community workers) to ensure that additional income generated benefit the children in the families and lead to actual improvements in their lives.

This is a complex process that requires expertise. Interventions must be designed in and for partnership with organisations that have this expertise. Similarly, provision of education support must be appropriate to children's interests, cognitive development, age etc., especially for those children who are repatriated from JRCs. Moreover, the provision of education must be linked to interventions to ensure that families have the economic ability to support their children's education until a full education cycle is completed. Central to the provision of education is actual accessibility of education, not least through ensuring that schools are reachable. Given that most of the children in orphanages today are, de-facto, using the orphanages as boarding schools, the actual construction of educational facilities may be an area to explore. Though not an ideal solution, converting some orphanages into boarding schools for children from remote or highly insecure areas may also be explored. If boarding schools were established under MOE it would at least free up MOLSAMD resources (funds, staff, time) to focus on the most vulnerable children, who may not currently be reached.

Long term, it may also be possible to pursue the transformation of orphanages into social service resource centres, providing e.g. psycho-social support to families and children, day care facilities, recreational facilities etc. This is only an option if systematic identification of alternative care outside institutions becomes a priority for all concerned. Given the current unclear government priorities in this area, evidence based advocacy is critical and results cannot be realistically expected within a short timeframe. Intensifying the stakeholder dialogue on the future of the orphanages is therefore a

critical intervention in the short and long term. This dialogue has certainly been opened up through the Social Work Coaching Projects, but as results have been slow to materialise, reviving the dialogue may be necessary. As the current National Strategy for Protecting Children at Risk appears to be “shelved” and government commitment to its implementation is unclear, a starting point for reviving the dialogue could be a review and revision of the strategy. Hence, the final recommendation of this evaluation is to gather evidence (as recommended under short term recommendations) and use this, amongst others, for engaging in policy dialogue on the overall strategic child protection priorities in Afghanistan. This could be done through a revision of the National Strategy for the Protection of Children at Risk.

## **8. Gender and Human Rights**

### **8.1 Gender**

Throughout the project, partners have paid attention to gender equality but this has been a challenging area, notably because most of the children in institutions are boys and therefore the current focus has made it hard to reach out to girls. This can really only be overcome by widening the projects' focus to include protection issues that affect girls also.

Moreover, it has been difficult for the projects to mobilise women social workers due to cultural barriers that limit their movement and interaction with men outside their own family. Hence, sustained efforts to make working conditions acceptable to women social workers and their families are required. In the longer run, advocating for changes in the attitudes that prevent women from becoming effective social workers is needed to ensure that women are on board to support, for example, adolescent girls or victims of SGBV, who are often more comfortable with a woman social worker.

### **8.2 The basic principles of the UNCRC**

In promoting sound social work practises, the projects' have consistently promoted the principles of the best interests of the child and children's right to protection from abuse, exploitation and neglect. The projects are therefore a substantial contribution to the promotion of children's and the implementation of the UNCRC in Afghanistan.

### **8.3 Child participation**

The projects have, especially through the mediation initiatives, promoted children's rights to participation in decisions affecting their lives. The limited knowledge of their own files displayed by interviewed children is, however, a concern. The basic prerequisite for participation in decision making is, knowing what is recorded about oneself. Hence, more emphasis on the principles of child participation must be a priority in future projects. It should be recognised, that child participation may run counter to widely held beliefs among large sections of the Afghan population and therefore this is an area that will require sensitivity and careful planning. Ensuring that social workers understand the importance of sharing contents of the files they create with the children, for whom the files are created, could be a good first step.

### **8.4 Insecurity**

Afghanistan has suffered close to 30 years of conflict and insecurity and this substantially impacts any work undertaken to protect children in the country. While the Social Work Coaching Projects did not aim specifically to protect children from the effects of conflict and insecurity, insecurity impacted on the projects in two ways. Firstly, a number of children targeted by the projects were affected by insecurity and secondly, insecurity in some areas impacted negatively on project performance.

It seems that children may end up in institutions if the area they live in is conflict affected and their access to education at home is therefore restricted. This is an area that could be looked into in more detail in the recommended baseline study.

Moreover, it is critically important that new phases of the projects build upon the lessons derived from the first two phases in terms of ensuring continued operations under changing security conditions.

Afghanistan is characterised by sudden changes in the security situations in some areas.<sup>20</sup> Partners have worked around overcoming security induced constraints on operations, for example, through remote support to community volunteers by the social work coaches. Systematically considering security constraints, and addressing these as part of strategic planning, is essential to ensure that new project phases reach out to the most vulnerable children, including those living in conflict prone areas. The recommendation to scale up community mobilisation and capacity development is critical in this respect.

A final point to remember is that, the Social Work Coaching Projects have potential to reach out to children affected by conflict, offering quality psychosocial support and mediation to the children and their families by trained social workers and community volunteers. Hence, the projects may have potential to directly address the impact of conflict. At any rate, making sure any future phases of the projects are “conflict sensitive” will be important to ensure the projects’ effectiveness and create sustainable impact.

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<sup>20</sup> Kunduz is an example of an area that was considered safe at the start of implementation. By the time of the evaluation, the security situation in Kunduz was such that outsiders could at times not travel to the province.

## **List of Annexes**

Annex I: Terms of Reference

Annex II: Evaluation schedule

Annex III: List of people met

Annex IV: List of key documents

Annex V: evaluation methodology

Annex VI: Tools assessment report (including annexes)