



Opportunities to Incorporate Child Protection into a World Bank Social Protection Project in Nigeria

Overview

The [Nigeria COVID-19 Action Recovery and Economic Stimulus \(CARES\) Program](#) is a World Bank-funded social protection project designed to respond to the adverse economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The project's stated objective is "to expand access to livelihood support and food security services, and grants to poor and vulnerable households and firms". The NG-CARES project offers supplementary funding to already-existing government safety net interventions at the state level, including cash transfers, public works opportunities, and agricultural infrastructure improvements.

In 2023, BIC partnered with the African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect ([ANPPCAN](#)) Nigeria to monitor this project, after noting [potential promising practices](#) outlined in project documents. Though this social protection project was not designed to specifically address child protection issues, children were nevertheless impacted, and yet there were missed opportunities to incorporate their concerns throughout project design and implementation.

Findings

The project established platforms for inter-agency coordination, but ministries missed an opportunity for collaboration on child protection issues. Mechanisms such as the Federal CARES Steering Committee brought together core government ministries, to provide oversight and technical assistance to states on social protection projects. While the Steering Committee did include the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD), the ministry's Child Protection sub-Sector has had little-to-no role or input into the steering committee's priorities. This is a missed opportunity to highlight child-specific considerations such as child participation, or urgent risks facing children in Nigeria such as early marriage, child labor, and adolescent pregnancy that could have been addressed in the context of this project.

Lack of engagement with child-focused civil society organizations. Interviews with several Nigerian child rights organizations revealed that the majority of organizations surveyed were not consulted in the planning, design, or implementation of the NG-CARES project at either the state or federal level, and furthermore were not aware of the project.

Capacity-building activities for states on sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEA/H) response lacked child-specific information. Trainings were intended to increase government capacity on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and covered important information related to GBV root causes and response, but did not include training on the unique ways that children are affected by SEA/H and how their needs as survivors may be distinct. Additionally, it is unclear how the Bank or the Borrowers are monitoring the replication of these trainings to confirm that trainings have been administered to state-level staff as intended.

Recommendations

Support the creation of platforms for multi-sectoral collaboration that increase government capacity to deliver results for children, and assess their impact. Despite NG-CARES's creation of several inter-ministerial collaboration mechanisms, child rights concerns were not mainstreamed in project design or implementation. BIC's [research](#) has highlighted inter-ministerial coordination in social protection projects as a promising practice for improving results for children. Children especially stand to suffer as a result of ministerial fragmentation due to cross-cutting needs that may require collaboration between agencies that handle health, education, gender, and family issues respectively. Moving forward, the Bank should actively assess how and whether project platforms for multi-sectoral collaboration are supporting children.

Support thorough training on child SEA/H risks, prevention, and response for project actors, especially those working directly with beneficiaries. Social protection projects that are not specifically targeting children may still unintentionally create risks for them. NG-CARES funded several state-level social protection interventions including, for example, WASH projects and nutrition programs that take place in health facilities, primary schools, markets, and other environments where children can be found, and thus be at risk for SEA/H. This risk can be mitigated if project workers and government staff and consultants working in connection with the project are trained on how to identify, prevent, and respond to incidents of child SEA/H. The Bank should follow its own [best practice](#) in reviewing Behavioral Standards for project actors, and work with implementing agencies to strengthen labor contracts if necessary to address child SEA/H concerns, supported with sensitization and training efforts.

Design projects to engage with children as stakeholders, rather than just passive beneficiaries. In all social protection projects where children are direct or indirect beneficiaries, their needs and experiences should inform project design and implementation. The Bank should thus support Borrowers in safe, meaningful, and ongoing consultations with children and incorporate their feedback into project design and implementation.

Prioritize working collaboratively with child rights CSOs. Implementing agencies should consult with CSOs that already have connections to marginalized populations, including children, and incorporate their input into project design and implementation. Moving forward, the Bank should support Borrowers in consulting with child rights CSOs throughout the project cycle, and in addressing any concerns that CSOs may raise about the project's impact on children.

Require Borrowers to disaggregate beneficiary data by age to record social protection projects' inclusion of children. More information is needed on how, and to what extent, World Bank social protection projects are impacting children. Borrowers should record disaggregated data on beneficiaries by age, which should be included in Bank-published implementation status reports. The Bank should use this data as a starting point to assess the inclusion of children in projects across its social protection portfolio.

Evaluate the inclusion of children in the World Bank's social protection portfolio, and look for opportunities to incorporate child protection elements in projects that affect children as direct or indirect beneficiaries. The lack of child protection elements in the NG-CARES project is part of a larger pattern found in BIC's [research](#) analyzing key trends in recent World Bank social protection projects. As the World Bank works to align its portfolio with [the goal of universal social protection](#), it has acknowledged that a crucial part of closing the coverage gap requires reaching groups that face barriers to accessing social protection, which specifically includes children. Moving forward, the Bank should recognize children as key target beneficiaries of social protection projects with distinct needs, and incorporate indicators to assess progress towards child protection in project design, implementation, and monitoring.