



# CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

A Review of Multifaceted Approaches for Prevention and Response



## SUMMARY

Child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) is a growing threat to child protection efforts especially as it mutates to more sophisticated platforms like the internet where transmission of content is cheap or free, faster, and is quick to go viral to millions of faceless and obscure ‘buyers’. Equally, socio-economic disasters, fragmented societies and conflict-torn communities increase vulnerability of children to CSEA as laws are flouted, parents are uninvolved or complicit in the abuse, and children unwittingly offer themselves to this abuse for their family survival. This reader explores key approaches being implemented by international bodies and national nonprofits to aid the prevention of CSEA both physically and virtually online.

**Keywords:** Sexual exploitation and abuse, online child sexual exploitation and abuse, technology, international Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) Database, Technology Coalition

## Tracking child sexual abuse and exploitation

Child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSEA) spawns from multiple sources – socio-cultural practices that endanger children, impoverished communities, non-responsive to child abuse regulatory frameworks, community indifference and frequent conflict which displaces peoples and erodes the protective family unit. Other risk factors include child labour, increasing mobility for work, long work hours that keep caregivers away from home, remote school locations that require children to walk long distances, and the proliferation of technology that enables online CSEA. Under-reporting, social stigma, cultural tolerance, and lack of awareness foster an environment that looks the other way when CSEA occurs.

*Approximately 120 million girls under the age of 20 (about 1 in 10) have been subjected to forced sexual intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point of their lives. -2014 UNICEF study: “Hidden in Plain Sight”*

Globally, measures are being taken to combat CSEA. However, there is a growing realization that a multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder effort is stronger and sustainable as it allows all sources and types of CSEA to be explored and tackled through a broader, more inclusive response. Further, considerable resources are required to deter and monitor exploitation and abuse, which calls for collaboration.

For example, an important UN tool developed by the Economic Intelligence Unit –*Out of the Shadows*– measures how countries are effectively addressing sexual abuse and exploitation in four areas: safety of the child’s environment; protective legal framework, government commitment to address abuse and exploitation; level of

### Box 1:

#### WHO definitions of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

**Sexual exploitation:** Actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

**Sexual abuse:** Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

#### Interrelated dimensions of CSEA

- Context (Armed conflict, crisis, emergency, social norms, migration, rule of law, governance, socio-economic development)
- Setting (Home, school, workplace, online world, neighbourhood, sport/leisure, travel and tourism)
- Relationship (Family, boyfriend/girlfriend, duty bearers, person in authority, stranger, gang)
- Victimization (rape, sexual touching, non-contact abuse, child abuse images, solicitation of child prostitution)

engagement of the private sector, civil society and the media. The benchmarking tool was developed to respond to increasing global cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation as part of the SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) 16.2 target to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against, and torture of children”.

*The global costs of physical, psychological and sexual violence towards children are between 3–8 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP). UNICEF 2015*

## Efforts in Africa: Global collaboration for detection and prevention of CSEA

**The International Child Sexual Exploitation database:** The International Child Sexual Exploitation database managed by INTERPOL in France, supports certified law enforcement officers to investigate child sexual abuse and exploitation material from more than 80 countries. This database supports the identification of victims allowing investigators to recognize themes and curb potential abuse before it occurs. A complete report *Towards a Global Indicator on Unidentified Victims in Child Sexual Exploitation Material* is available at the ECPAT International website ([www.ecpat.org](http://www.ecpat.org)).

*In Africa, in 2019, Kenya was the first country to connect to the INTERPOL International Child Sexual Exploitation database (a victim identification tool) and working together with the Kenyan Police Service’s Child Online Cyber Centre was able to identify three confirmed cases, with other cases of online child sexual exploitation currently under investigation in the greater Nairobi area.*

*Kenya’s connection and active usage of the database is particularly significant as this has provided expertise on African languages which are heard in videos submitted by other agencies.*

*The Nigerien National Police was also able to successfully collaborate with INTERPOL to identify 46 cases of forced begging and sexual exploitation of children under 18 years and arrest the perpetrators. The Nigerien team was also trained in conducting victim interviews around trafficking and child sexual exploitation.*

*Source: <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2019/Kenya-first-African-country-to-connect-to-the-International-Child-Sexual-Exploitation-database>*

### What strategies are promising for creating frameworks that support the prevention and response for CSEA in sub-Saharan Africa?

*Source: UNICEF: Promising programmes to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and exploitation*

**Mapping and assessment:** In Tanzania, the results of the mapping of child protection structures, systems and services were strengthened through the National Study on Violence against Children leading to the formation of the Multi-sectoral Plan for Prevention and Response Plan 2011-15 driven by the government health ministry and other civil society actors.

In Côte d’Ivoire, the publication of the national mapping and analysis of child protection was used as a platform to engage sectoral stakeholders in fine-tuning collaboration to protect children.

**Creating political space:** This focuses on strengthening systems by increasing political will, empowering more decision makers, inclusiveness, and building cross-sector discussions to improve child

protection systems. This worked well in Ghana where national policy directives for children forged the pathway for leadership and governance efforts for better protection of children.

**Forging broad and inclusive alliances:** The authors of the UNICEF research note that: “...creating broad partnerships, coalitions and participation is critical to national ownership and sustainability. Externally imposed solutions or forcing the national agenda through isolated initiatives are not effective approaches and are often criticized.” This validates the required policy actions and awareness levels as religious leaders, children, civil society, government champions and donors amplify their voices for the same goal.

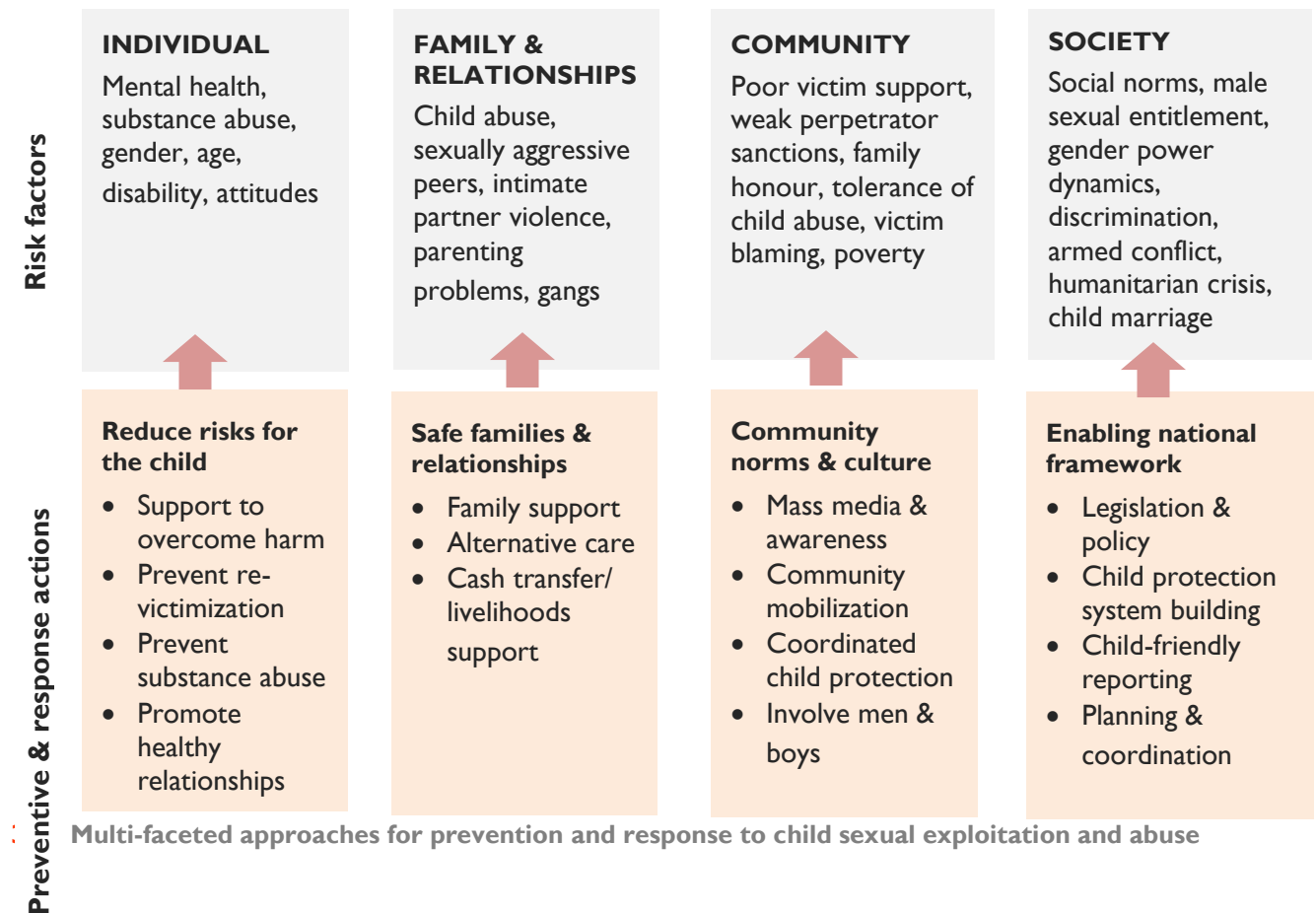
**Policy Development and Law Reform:** Equally, working towards review and update of existing strategies, laws and legislation has proven a key avenue for strengthening systems and efforts towards ensuring children are not exposed to risk factors for abuse and exploitation, a strategy that has worked in Mauritania and Senegal.

**Community Protection Models:** Community ownership, linkages between formal and informal structures enhance power sharing, inclusiveness and unearth diverse, sustainable solutions to child abuse. This has been fruitful especially in low resource settings where community-grown solutions are more resource-efficient and blended with local needs.

### A framework to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and exploitation

In 2015, UNICEF commissioned a study that would identify promising programme responses to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and exploitation. The findings draw from case studies on promising practices in prevention and response through interviews with a variety of stakeholders including justice, social welfare, education, health, civil society, community leaders, religious groups, the private sector, media, families and children themselves.

**Figure 2: Actions to prevent and respond to CSEA based on known risks associated with being a victim or perpetrator** (Source: UNICEF)



Evidence collected by UNICEF suggests integrating both preventive and response strategies that can address the risks at structural, community and family level while at the same time providing an effective response at each tier of occurrence.

## Guiding Principles

UNICEF makes key recommendations for a multisectoral response to CSEA based on four principles:

1. Being grounded in a children's rights-based framework where children are rightly acknowledged as the victims, where their best interests and safety are prioritized, and child agency is enhanced including recognition of perpetrators as children.
2. Applying critical thinking which focuses on building evidence to guide decision making, learning through practice and maximizing expertise, as well as seeking sustainable funding to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of promising approaches.
3. Building constructive partnerships and knowledge of the political, economic, social, cultural context which guide the most appropriate responses. By focusing on a child's experiences and engaging other influencing stakeholders like women's organizations, families and communities, negative social norms, for example, can be addressed through this participative approach.
4. Being accountable requires transparency around the violation, steps taken and methodologies, outcomes of independent reviews, reporting systems and effective communication with the child's caregivers, communities, regulatory and statutory bodies. Accountability builds awareness, demands responsibility, gives evidence for better child-related policy and empowers all actors to stand up to CSEA.

## Box 2: EFFORTS FOR CSEA

(End Child Prostitution and Trafficking) ECPAT, is a worldwide network of organizations working to end the sexual exploitation of children through prostitution, trafficking, online and in the travel and tourism sector through advocacy and research. The organization has conducted research that can provide learning experiences for child actors.

### Coalition of the Willing: Tech Giants Develop Plan to Combat Online Child Sexual Abuse:

The Technology Coalition, whose members include Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Twitter, has developed a plan to eradicate child sexual abuse online by providing funding and advice on developing child safety tools as well as tackle the following areas:

- Technology to address CSEA material on the internet
- Annual stakeholders meeting to discuss progress and share insights
- Funding for independent research into trends of CSEA and prevention measures
- Develop systems for information sharing

African countries can contribute to these efforts through engagement with The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (EVAC) and the WePROTECT Global Alliance. EVAC is the lead research partner to drive collective action and share good practice.

### International Commitments for the rights of children subject to CSEA

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC)
- The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol)

## References and Further Reading

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Towards a Global Indicator on Unidentified Victims in Child Sexual Exploitation Material

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Kenya joins INTERPOL International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database

<https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2019/Kenya-first-African-country-to-connect-to-the-International-Child-Sexual-Exploitation-database>

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