



MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

Infectious Diseases Institute

College of Health Sciences, Makerere University

Investing In the Future: Impacting Real Lives



THE CATALYTIC ROLE OF VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATIONS (VSLA) IN LINKING ORPHANS AND OTHER VULNERABLE CHILDREN TO HIV SERVICES

BACKGROUND

In the context of PEPFAR, Orphans and other Vulnerable Children (OVC) are categorized as 'a child, 0-17 years old, who is either orphaned or made more vulnerable because of HIV/AIDS'.

In Uganda, a total of 1,108,080 Ugandan children are known to have lost one or both parents due to HIV/AIDS and 72% of them do not have access to basic material needs.

When OVC are faced with HIV/AIDS, access to routine HIV prevention, care and treatment (PCT) services and adherence to HIV treatment services are heavily compromised. These challenges are beside the lack of nutritional support which is key for adherence to HIV care and treatment.

SOLUTION

The silver lining to this dark cloud was the Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) micro-finance scheme.

The Infectious Diseases Institute (IDI) and other partners with VSLAs in the mid-West and West Nile region of Uganda (WWN) undertook the project to alleviate the vulnerability among children in the face of HIV/AIDS, conflicts and other causes of vulnerability.

The National framework aims at ensuring that OVC and their families access basic essential service packages; ensuring the capacity of their duty-bearers to provide indispensable services.



Leveraging VSLAs to support the OVC strategy

Strategic approaches to harness financial empowerment with OVC support at household level would include:



Attaching a health worker, an agriculture extension worker and a development officer (CDO) to the OVC project roll out.



Engaging local council (LC) leadership, to spearhead community mobilization efforts for household OVC prioritization assessments, monitoring and evaluation.



Engaging and sensitizing the VSLA members on the critical role the government envisioned through community structures to reduce child vulnerability.



Causing communities to mobilize their own for HIV services and link affected OVC and their households to HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment centers.



Training VSLA members to champion economic strengthening activities in the community.



Strengthening and equipping VSLA members to promote school enrollment and apprenticeship training.



Training VSLAs on child abuse and gender based violence case notifications.



Providing VSLAs with saving boxes, treasurers record books, calculators and padlocks, ink and inkpads to strengthen the saving scheme.

Acknowledgment

The Ministry of Gender, Labor, Social Development

The District Health and OVC teams: Nebbi, Packwach, Masindi, Kagadi Districts

The Sub-County Community Development office teams: Nebbi, Packwach, Masindi, Kagadi Districts

The VSLA teams, Field Agents and Para-social workers

The IDI Outreach Program team: Robert Amade, Twaha Mahaba, Kiyimba Archileo, Sssuna Martin, Joanita Kigozi, Alex Muganzi

The IDI Communications Team: Diakite Tania, Daisy Munduru,, Abubaker Kazibwe, Mulindwa Kenneth, Caroline Asimwe

OBSERVATIONS



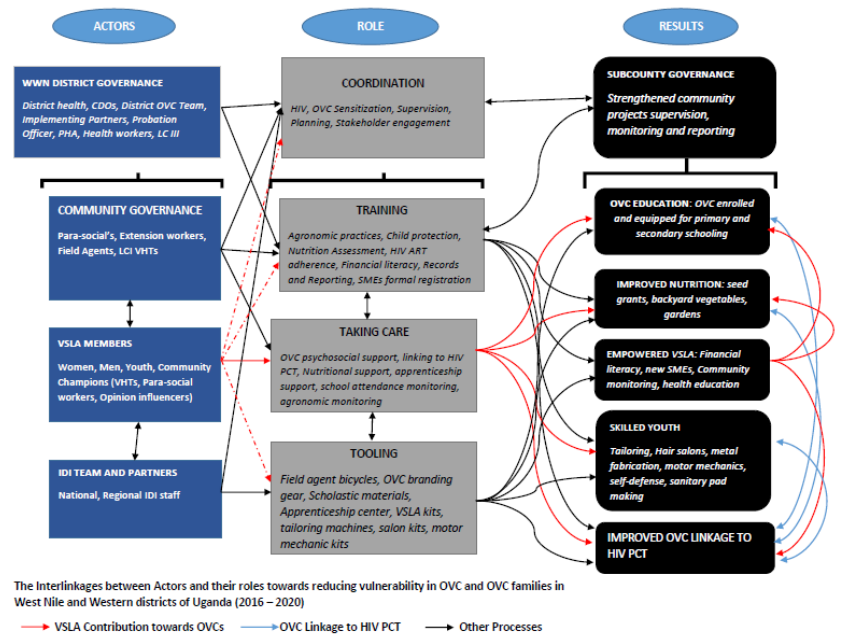
There was improved OVC care at community level.



Viral load suppression among children in the OCV Program has improved from 32% to 95% in 2017



There was improved food nutrition and agronomic activities.



LESSONS LEARNT

Community based VSLAs demonstrated that

community-born structures could play a catalytic role for linkage to HIV prevention, care and treatment.

- The VSLA meetings provided a suitable platform for discussing sensitive OVC matters associated with stigma.
- Diversity of experience amongst VSLA stakeholders enabled a multi-sectoral approach to the OVC problem at community level.
- The VSLA members played a critical role in promoting school attendance and family accountability for OVC education, especially adolescent and teenage girls.
- The VSLA had a positive role in fostering implementation of Government policies on family law for Childcare & protection.
- VSLA platforms facilitated discussions and action plans for food security and nutritional support.
- VSLA platforms played a significant role in minimizing attrition from Youth Apprenticeship Centre
- VSLAs reinforced positive mass messaging about the OVC program.
- VSLA platforms were a focus for a feedback system between community OVCs, para-social workers, CDOs and project officers.

TESTIMONIAL

‘Engaging community household heads to participate in planning and implementing OVC interventions was a winning strategy. As you know, it is IDI’s core value to plan with the people and not for the people. We involved community VSLA members who in turn linked us to household heads at all levels,’

- Robert Amade, Regional OVC Services CoordinatoR

Community outreach should consider exploiting VSLA structures to advance national program implementation sustainably.