

# Social Welfare System Strengthening: Improving OVC Support Systems in Nigeria

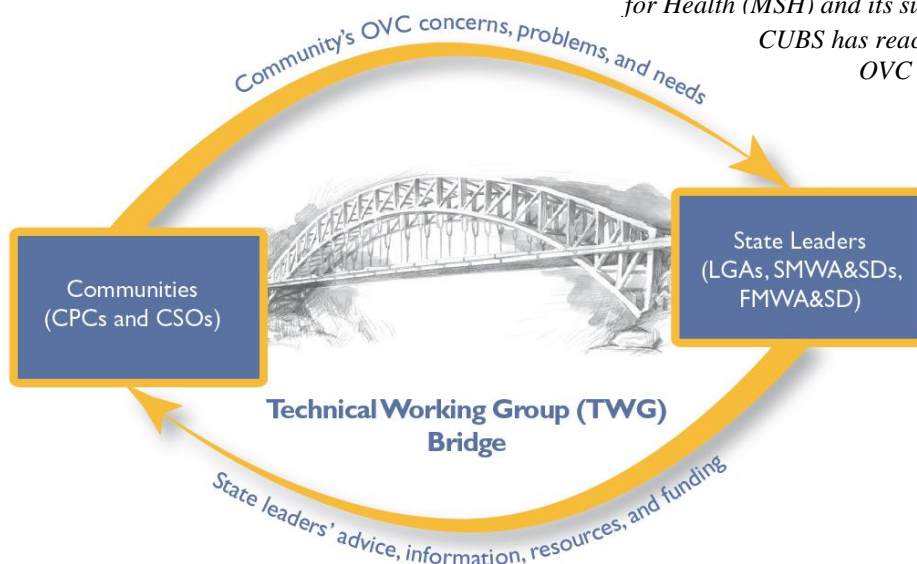
## Building Community Capacity

Nigeria is home to 17.5 million orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) who struggle daily to access food, shelter, education, protection, and care. In 2009, the PEPFAR-funded, USAID project, Community-Based Support for OVC in Nigeria (CUBS), began working to improve support for vulnerable children by strengthening the civil society organizations (CSOs) and child protection committees (CPCs) in their communities. In addition to formalizing and training these community groups, CUBS also linked them to powerful state leaders and stakeholders so they could advocate for government assistance, resources, policy change, and partnerships to support the OVC in their communities.



Through its implementer, Management Sciences for Health (MSH) and its subcontractor, Africare,

CUBS has reached more than 51,200 OVC with care and support services since 2009.



## Linking Communities to State Leaders

To help community and state leaders begin working together to improve OVC support, CUBS first identified influential leaders and citizens to form state-level OVC technical working groups (TWGs). In addition to the traditional OVC stakeholders, such as social workers, CSO directors, and CPC chairmen, CUBS recruited representatives from health facilities, donor agencies, implementing partners, child protection networks, religious bodies, law enforcement agencies, local government areas (LGAs), and state ministries of women affairs and social development (SMWA&SD). By 2011, CUBS had formed 46 TWGs in 11 states and trained their members on OVC care and advocacy, fund raising, referrals, and monitoring and evaluation.

## Advocating for Stronger State Support

The OVC TWGs now form a bridge between communities and state leaders and provide a formal platform for OVC advocacy and support. Quarterly state-level meetings allow CPC and CSO members to communicate their needs to the TWGs who, in turn, provide information, resources, and policy support to address the communities' needs. TWG members also advocate for support from the ministries, organizations, and agencies from which they were recruited. This TWG "bridge" keeps state leaders abreast of the OVC landscape and related community needs, while giving community leaders a voice and providing an official setting where they can advocate on behalf of their young citizens.



To ensure OVC's needs stay in the states' spotlights, CUBS worked with the TWGs to strengthen the legal framework around OVC support. In less than five years, these efforts inspired the following OVC policy and protocol improvements:

### **National Priority Agenda on OVC**

CUBS, in collaboration with other donors and implementing partners, worked with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWA&SD) to update the *National Priority Agenda on OVC*. The revised agenda draws on the most current data, research, and best practices to guide OVC advocacy and service delivery efforts. Representatives from federal ministries, international organizations, USAID, donor agencies, and implementing partners worked together to ensure the National Priority Agenda was relevant and realistic. Once finalized, CUBS helped 10 SMWA&SDs adapt the agenda for their unique state contexts. State and national ministries now use the agenda to guide, coordinate, and monitor their OVC activities.

### **National Guidelines for OVC Programming**

CUBS used its OVC programming experience to help the FMWA&SD and University Research Company pilot test the *national standard operating procedures for OVC programming*. The project team disseminated 1,000 copies of these documents and trained staff at state, LGA, and community levels to use them to guide their OVC support activities. CUBS also established quality improvement teams to ensure accurate and consistent implementation of the standard operating procedures.

### **Child Rights Act (CRA)**

The CRA is a federal act that calls on leaders and stakeholders to prioritize the prevention and elimination of sexual abuse, exploitation, and violence toward children. Although the CRA was passed in 2003, until CUBS and the TWGs' advocacy efforts, the provisions set forth in the act were not enforced, nor were states aware of or discussing the rights of children. CUBS helped seven SMWA&SDs establish culturally-appropriate laws and structures to operationalize the act within their states. The team also trained more than 300 police and security officers to understand the CRA and enforce its statutes. These efforts are bringing child abuse, rape, domestic violence, and other sensitive issues to the forefront of national and state-level OVC discussions and inspiring advocacy and policy improvements to enhance child protection throughout the nation.

### **National M&E Plan for OVC**

Throughout the project, CUBS worked closely with the FMWA&SD, state ministries, LGAs, CSOs, and other stakeholders to implement the *National M&E Plan for OVC*. The 38 CSOs and the 11 OVC desk officers in the CUBS-supported states now use this nationally-approved data collection tool to record and report all OVC service delivery data. This improvement has allowed for more regular and consistent data collection to inform OVC programming. To expand this progress, the FMWA&SD invited CUBS staff to train M&E officers at numerous agencies and partner organizations beyond the project-supported states.

## ***Situation Analysis Informs State-Level OVC Programming***

Although Nigeria has prepared a national OVC assessment report, state-level data are needed to describe OVC's unique social and geographic conditions and develop an effective local response. In 2012, CUBS collaborated with the Ekiti State's SMWA&SD to conduct a situation analysis on the causes of vulnerability and characteristics of OVC in Ekiti State. The 70-page report includes estimates of the number of OVC in each LGA and a description of their needs, the available services, service delivery gaps, and recommendations for OVC program and service improvements. State leaders used this report to guide the allocation and distribution of resources for OVC programming and CUBS distributed the survey to state ministries throughout Nigeria. Impressed by the utility of this resource, many SMWA&SDs have initiated similar situation analysis projects.







### Technical Working Groups' Achievements

CUBS state-level interventions contributed to the formation or strengthening of 46 OVC TWGs with more than 400 members. Some of these group's achievements include the following:

- Advocated for SMWA&SDs to increase budget allocation for OVC service delivery
- Established and enforced laws to prevent street roaming and hawking during school hours
- Supported the rescue and rehabilitation of abused and abandoned children
- Advocated for enforcement of the Child Rights Act
- Worked with government leaders to waive tuition fees for OVC
- Provided laptops to support OVC program data collection and coordination
- Worked with the International Federation of Women Lawyers to support OVC in inheritance cases
- Raised funding for OVC service delivery, tuition, and school materials

### *Maintaining Momentum*

*In five years, CUBS established 46 OVC TWGs across 11 states. These groups now have more than 400 members who meet regularly and are committed to helping OVC through direct support as well as policy change and advocacy. Other states are learning from CUBS' example and starting to develop their own OVC TWGs and conduct assessments and surveys to better understand the OVC situation in their states and develop tailored interventions to help vulnerable children.*

*"People are now able to talk about children and their issues...once we talk about it we're putting pressure on people to take responsibility."*

*~ Ugboga Adaji  
CUBS' OVC Services Advisor*



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