



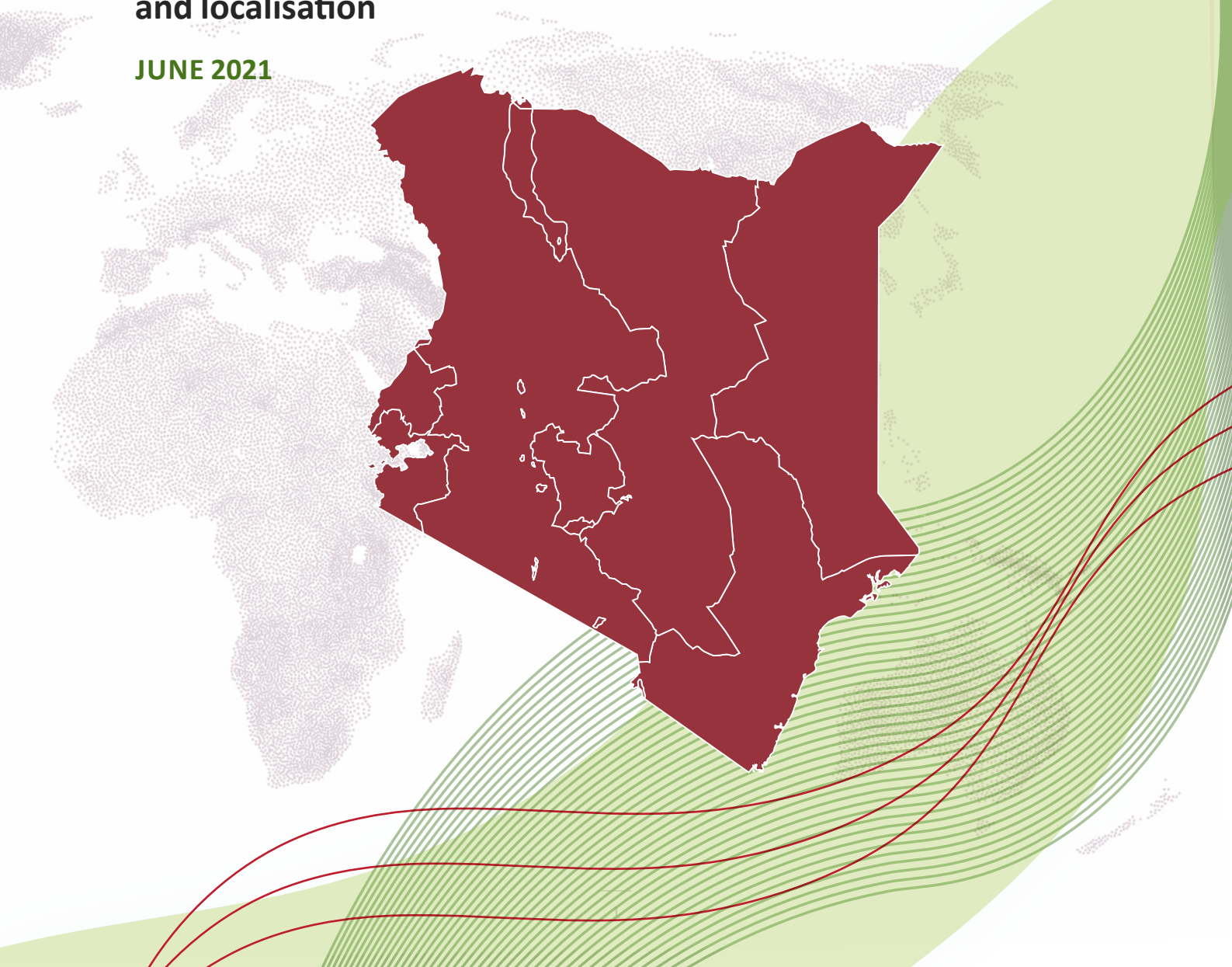
 COLUMBIA | MAILMAN SCHOOL
OF PUBLIC HEALTH




Implementing a National Action Plan for Child Protection in Emergencies in Kenya

Case study documenting the
successes and challenges of
strengthening coordination
and localisation

JUNE 2021





*“The government
sees a humanitarian
situation for
children as being
their responsibility.”*

BACKGROUND

Local actors¹ and national organisations in the Global South are often excluded from decision-making mechanisms in international humanitarian responses.² The **Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility's (CP AoR)** Localisation Initiative has committed to implementing the **Grand Bargain**, which aims to shift power and resources into the hands of local actors and improve local capacities in humanitarian response.³ To better understand the experiences of local actors who have engaged with the international humanitarian response, the **Care and Protection of Children (CPC) Learning Network** and the CP AoR are documenting several localisation initiatives, highlighting promising practices and lessons learned from approaches to localisation, as well as suggesting alternative methods for those approaches that did not evolve fruitfully.

The localisation initiative explored in this case study is Kenya's Action Plan for Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE) (referred to as the Action Plan, hereafter) elaborated as part of the joint initiative launched by the CP AoR, the **African Partnership to End Violence Against Children (APEVAC)**, and the **International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC)** in Eastern Africa in 2018. Kenya's Action Plan aims to strengthen coordination from the national down to the county level in order to ensure effective service provision to children in emergencies. This analysis aims to understand how international, governmental, and local leadership and coordination for CPiE has evolved since the Action Plan's launch, and whether local officials have meaningfully been integrated as agents of change in preparedness, response, and coordination⁴ for CPiE.

1 Local, here, refers to actors originating from the country of focus.

2 See assessment commissioned by the CP AoR and conducted by the CPC Learning Network at Columbia University, *Envisioning the Grand Bargain* (2020). https://www.cpaor.net/CP_AoR_approach_to_localisation

3 CP AoR (2020). *Localisation*. <https://www.cpaor.net/node/666>

4 For the purposes of this case study, coordination is defined as determining all stakeholders that should be involved and how they should work together to ensure that child protection issues are prioritised, including having clear policies which outline who will lead coordination efforts and where accountability lies.

SNAPSHOT OF HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION FOR EMERGENCIES IN KENYA

In emergency-prone areas of Kenya, children face multiple emergency situations such as drought, floods, landslides/mudflows, inter-ethnic conflict, wildlife/human conflict, locust invasion, water-borne disease outbreaks, refugee crises, and now, the COVID-19 pandemic. Most emergencies are climate-related, with the government retaining the primary role in the coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.

Coordination mechanisms for humanitarian response are well established and utilised in Kenya. The Emergency Steering Group is coordinated by the Ministry of Interior under the Office of the President and the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) for drought related crises. Kenya has adopted a “sectorial approach” since 2015, in line with humanitarian reform to ensure that the requisite coordination mechanisms are in place at the national and local levels (as opposed to a “cluster” approach seeking to formalise the accountabilities and responsibilities of a lead agency for a technical sector). Six sectors are established in consultation with stakeholders in the sector, government and non-government alike, while the government takes the lead: WASH, Health, Nutrition, Education, Livelihood/Agriculture and Peace and Security. These sectors exist even when the country is not in an active emergency mode, with each sector continuing to address risk factors, resilience strengthening, and keeping members/partner agencies connected. Parallel to this structure, the UN manages interagency coordination.

The National Disaster Operations Center (NDOC) acts as the focal agency for coordinating the response to emergencies and disasters in Kenya. Its mandate is to monitor, coordinate, and mobilise national resources to respond to disaster incidents in the country, except for climate-related emergencies. Most of its staff is seconded by other ministries, leading to interinstitutional turnover.

METHODOLOGY

A desk review of relevant literature and internal documents was conducted and individual perspectives collected from four in-depth interviews with key informants from government ([Department of Children’s Services](#) and [National Drought Management Association](#)), [UNICEF](#), and [Save the Children](#). A semi-structured interview guide was drafted, iteratively revised, and tailored to each interviewee. Opening questions focused on the overall structure of the Action Plan, and included specific questions about coordination mechanisms within Kenya. Closing questions focused on lessons learned since the launch of the initiative and recommendations going forward.

FINDINGS

Although governmental authorities have successfully institutionalised CPiE at the national level and built local capacity, the launch of Kenya's Action Plan shone a light on the lack of preparedness and response structures specifically targeting CPiE. CPiE coordination, resources, and policies remain centralised among national and international actors, however, efforts are being made to centre the experiences of frontline child protection actors. The themes emerging from the in-depth interviews include:

- **Mainstreaming Child Protection into Kenya's Humanitarian Response**
- **CPiE Institutionalisation and Governance**
- **Operationalisation of CPiE**
- **National, County, & Community Capacity Building for CPiE**

Mainstreaming Child Protection into Kenya's Humanitarian Response

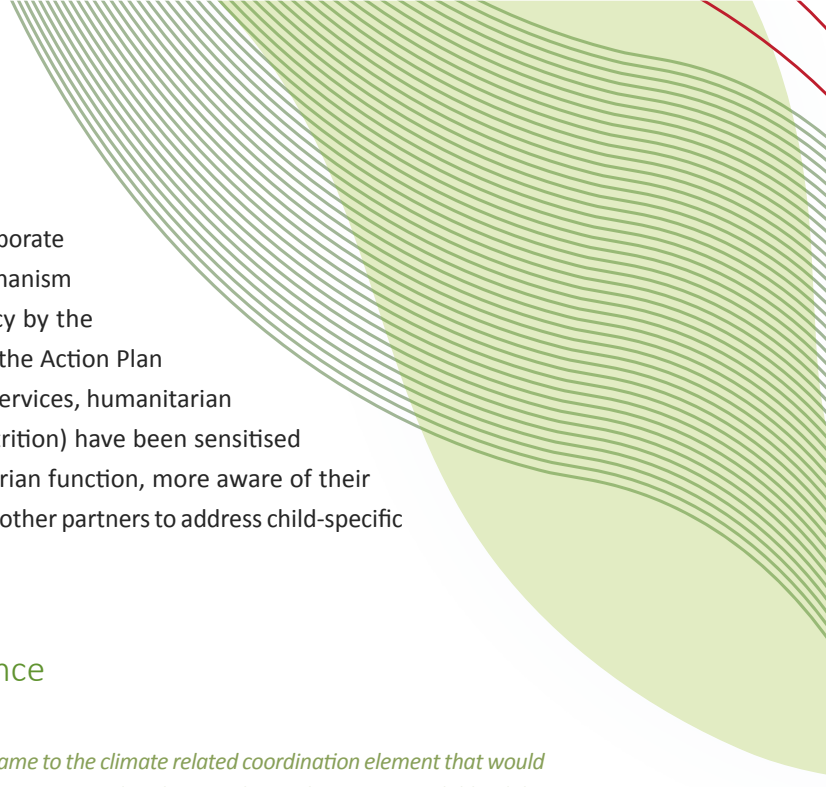
"We realised that child protection in emergencies was not receiving a lot of attention. We used to believe that the sectors were focusing on all the major issues, like education or health, and thought that child protection fit everywhere. It was a gap that we discovered." – Save the Children

The Kenyan constitution changed in 2010 to establish 47 semi-autonomous regional governments with their own structures, governors, parliaments and governmental departments. However, child protection is not considered a "devolved function" meaning that resources from the national budget are not exclusively allocated to child protection programs and there is currently no legal or policy framework guiding local spending of national budget allocations for CPiE. Although, legally, counties are to allocate 2% of their annual budget to emergencies, it is up to counties whether they utilise these funds for CPiE depending on their prioritised needs during emergencies. Due to interest from counties to incorporate children's services into their functions and thereby pave the way for allocation of resources, a number of counties have initiated the development of policies and legal frameworks.

While the Department of Children's Services has lobbied for child protection to be integrated within the bodies that lead the emergency response, the approach adopted thus far has left CPiE as an afterthought, especially at the local level. Child-sensitive interventions under the education, health, or nutrition sectors are thought to encompass elements of child protection. However, many of these sectors are disconnected from child protection officers in communities, often leading to fragmented referral networks and inefficient coordination for CPiE.

An example was given where two parents were placed in quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their two young children were left on their own in an urban informal settlement. These children were taken to isolation facilities irrespective of who they were with and without protection measures in place. It did not dawn on health workers to consider children's best interests as they executed their work, as they failed to contact child protection officers who could have protected these unaccompanied children from potential risks. In fact, services to children were immensely affected as child protection practitioners were not allowed to access their offices or provide on-the-ground services until high-level discussions could happen within the COVID Taskforce⁵, which child protection was initially left out of. This anecdote highlights how weak intersectoral coordination has led to gaps in CPiE integration across other sectors (e.g., Health, WASH, etc.).

⁵ The COVID Taskforce was convened by the Kenyan government and included key health players.



Nonetheless, a key achievement of the efforts to incorporate child protection within the emergency response mechanism is the increased awareness resulting from advocacy by the Kenyan government and its partners. As a result of the Action Plan and rallying done by the Department of Children's Services, humanitarian actors in other sectors (e.g., Education, Health, Nutrition) have been sensitised to the importance of CPiE as an essential humanitarian function, more aware of their specific role in CPiE, and better prepared to work with other partners to address child-specific issues during emergencies.

CPiE Institutionalisation and Governance

"We were missing out especially when it came to the climate related coordination element that would infuse children's issues into preparedness, response and resilience...This is why in 2016, we lobbied the responsible ministry for children to establish a unit within the Department of Children's Services that [would] specifically address issues to do with the humanitarian needs of children." – UNICEF

Neither the NDOC nor the NDMA consider protection - let alone child protection - a sub-sector. No dedicated focal persons focus on child protection, as the role of those institutions merely consists in collecting and coordinating the overall response. Child protection considerations must therefore be shared by stakeholders in other sectors. Thus, the protection sector was tasked with identifying entry points and lobbying for the representation of CPiE priorities by the two major emergency coordination lead agencies. As outlined by the Action Plan, strengthening coordination for CPiE in Kenya concretely meant ensuring that existing government-led emergency sectoral coordination structures for non-refugee contexts include issues of child protection in deciding priorities and related allocations, while the CPiE Working Group continues ensuring adequate coordination among the various partners and sectors.

In response to the CPiE gap in Kenya's humanitarian coordination mechanism, the NDOC, supported by UNICEF, advocated for the creation of a dedicated unit within the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection to address the humanitarian needs of children in emergencies. Thus, the Strategic Interventions Section was established within the Department of Children's Services of the State Department of Social Protection. The Department of Children's Services is primarily responsible for CPiE. Powerful in terms of mandate, it plays a convening and advocacy role at the inter-institutional level for the promotion of CPiE-related issues. For example, the Strategic Interventions Section successfully lobbied for the inclusion of child protection considerations into the NDMA's two yearly assessments for short and long rains. Emphasising governmental commitment to the issue, its team has been not only maintained but increased over the year, now counting with five experts at the Secretariat level. Within the Department of Children's Services' deliverables is the drafting of the Operational Guidelines for Child Protection Practitioners in Kenya, described in the following section.

Operationalisation of CPiE

“The results have been positive in terms of acceptability of the document because it reflects what happens within the community and is something that they can identify with. That policy will guide the processes up to the sub-county level.” - Department of Children’s Services

Thus far, most efforts at improving the CPiE response have been directed toward advocating for coordinated approaches and building capacity across governmental bodies from the national to the local levels. The results of this work are apparent in the form of national preparedness plans and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), which are critical to ensuring that all emergency response sectors are sensitised and empowered to address issues of CPiE.

The *Operational Guidelines for Child Protection Practitioners in Kenya* are a set of guidelines intended to streamline the way officers in the community respond to CPiE.⁶ Intended as an action-oriented reference guide for both child protection actors as well as officers in other sectors (Education, Health, Nutrition, etc.) who handle child protection issues, the guidelines have been positively received by local stakeholders thus far. These operational guidelines are key to the sustainability of CPiE coordination mechanisms and represent a critical entry point to strengthen integration between sectors. They also serve to operationalise CPiE so that county-level officials, can be quickly oriented to minimum preparedness actions and reference materials specific to child protection.

Government officials recognise that expertise lies among child protection officers and volunteers on the ground and are keen on passing power into local hands, exemplified by their engaging of regional, county, and community-based child protection officers in the SOP development process. The Department of Children’s Services invited local officers to adapt, contextualise and validate CPiE action plans and SOPs based on their experiences in the field, demonstrating localisation in practice. To build on these efforts and further harvest local knowledge, the Department of Children’s Services can establish a structured processes through which local NGOs and community-based officers are invited to lead the conception, development and dissemination of ongoing CPiE preparedness plans and guidelines.

National, County, & Community Capacity Building for CPiE

“It is our strength as a department that we have our officers all the way from the county to the sub-county. At the community level, we have child protection volunteers who liaise with the sub-county children’s officer whenever issues affect children” - Department of Children’s Services

Localisation efforts in Kenya have proven particularly effective in building the capacity of local actors through many national and regional trainings. The Kenyan government and its partners have also focused on ensuring issues of child protection are represented in the communities by training volunteers to advocate for and ensure child protection is a key component of the emergency response at the local level, and linking partners to local children’s officers when needed. For example, the Department of Children’s Services established a free child Helpline which allows reporting of child related cases from the community without cost. Because it is anonymous, many community members are encouraged to report cases without fear of intimidation, victimization or threats

6 Guidelines forthcoming

from perpetrators. The Children's Bill (2021), which is at its final stage of enactment, also advocates for CPiE.

Similar to a model used by the Ministry of Health to train a cadre of community health workers throughout different localities, so far, 100 volunteers and other frontline workers (e.g., police, community leaders, etc.) have been trained on child protection using a curriculum hosted by the Department of Children's Services and the Kenyan School of Government: the National Social Welfare Workforce Curriculum. The curriculum aims to equip these frontline workers with fundamental child protection skills and contribute to the professionalisation of child protection services through qualification. The volunteers span community leaders, retired civil servants, and recent college graduates in various social sciences. They act as both community-based advocates for CPiE and bridges between local NGOs and child protection officers. Some of their specific functions include providing first aid, gathering data, advocating for CPiE, and making referrals to other sectors. These volunteers fill gaps in the child protection workforce across counties with large geographies, working to address children's issues alongside the government and other partners.

Although the COVID response posed new challenges for coordination, the child protection response to an emergency in an urban informal settlement of Nairobi in 2019 demonstrated that child protection frontliners had clear protocols in place and were providing an efficient response. Community-based volunteers have played a key role, even more evident since the COVID crisis, as they have been able to mobilise and efficiently identify and refer child protection cases. During the covid response, about 350 volunteers acted as a bridge between children in need of protection and the child protection officers, demonstrating the advantages of this decentralised model in promoting a localised approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Significant progress has been made since 2018 to bring CPiE to the forefront of the humanitarian response and strengthen coordination between national, regional, and local officers as well as between emergency response sectors; however key actions can be taken to further move the localisation agenda forward in Kenya.

Center Local Voices

National and international actors recognise that child protection expertise lies among community officers who see and address child protection risks first-hand, whether in emergency or non-emergency settings. The Kenyan constitution requires public participation in the formulation of laws and policies. Thus, field level CPiE stakeholders have a right and an obligation to contribute to policy formation. We recommend the following actions to foster fruitful partnerships between national, regional and county-level stakeholders:

“We actually realised that within the community, there are child protection committees...that are actually the eyes at the community level when it comes to addressing children’s issues, not only during emergency situations but also in situations where there’s a violation of the children’s rights.” - Department of Children’s Services

County Child Protection Officers

- **Leverage convening and influencing role for CPiE.** The focus of coordination efforts should be shifted on connecting field- and county-level officers to strengthen coordination for CPiE. A convening of officers from emergency and non-emergency sectors (i.e., Education, Nutrition, Health, etc.), where child protection officers can collaborate with other sectors and discuss strategies to streamline child protection within existing systems may also facilitate intersectoral coordination for CPiE. See Recommendation #2: **Foster Intersectoral Coordination & Build on Existing Emergency Response Systems** for more details.
- **Partner with other counties seeking to develop similar policies for CPiE.** Despite being semiautonomous, counties should not have to work in siloes when developing similar initiatives for CPiE. County governments interested in creating child protection policy should partner to identify areas of overlap and collaboratively develop guiding frameworks. County children’s officers and other stakeholders in the children’s sector have a role in participating in this process.

National & Regional Governments

- **Base national and regional strategies on local experiences of frontline child protection workforce.** Create a systematic process whereby local child protection officers have a seat at the table during the development of CPiE plans and can brainstorm around key issues alongside county, regional, and national stakeholders. This may come in the form of an annual review process or regional consultations where frontliners from across the country are invited to share field stories which, in turn, inform priority-setting, budgets, and decision-making at the county, regional and national levels. While the government leads policy development, local stakeholders should have a say in their shared vision for CPiE.
- **Empower child protection officers to advocate for CPiE needs in the community.** The national government should intentionally create space for local actors to advocate for CPiE in their communities. County Steering Groups for Climate Emergencies maintain open memberships where all interested stakeholders are expected to self-identify and contribute, providing an opportunity to promote intersectoral coordination on the ground. Encouraging child protection officers to actively participate in these meetings would secure CPiE on the county agenda and enable leveraging of existing resources. Furthermore, the overall decentralisation process presents an opportunity to continue empowering local bodies to develop their own tailored approaches to CPiE.

- **Review existing roles of child protection workforce and consider redistributing responsibilities among local actors.** Child protection officers are currently overstretched with duties and understaffing presents a problem at many levels. Government officials should work with local partners to review the current workload among CPiE staff and identify ways of distributing responsibilities across existing systems to avoid duplication of efforts. They may also consider creating a dedicated focal point who, on a full-time basis, works with the Department of Children's Services to better mobilise resources, engage with partners, and champion CPiE. This role may be best managed by local actors, while coordination continues to lie at the regional/national levels.

International Community

- **Organise peer exchanges between local child protection officers across different regions or countries.** Many countries are engaged in similar efforts to localise CPiE and more broadly, humanitarian coordination. A cross-country platform to share challenges, promising strategies, and lessons learned could be set up to facilitate communities of learning and foster dialogues that disseminate best practices for localising CPiE. Consider organising periodic courses to build capacity of frontline CPiE officers based on locally-identified issues.
- **Set aside dedicated funds to support local and regional child protection initiatives.** Mobilise funds and allocate them exclusively to local initiatives. Allow counties to advocate for their needs and budget according to their stated priorities in relation to CPiE. Let county-level policies and legal frameworks feed into budget allocations for CPiE.
- **Reflect on role in perpetuating power dynamics in child protection.** Evaluate role in decision-making processes – are international actors making decisions that could be made by local stakeholders? For decisions that must lie with the international bodies, are local voices feeding into these decisions? Consider how international bodies can shift power into local hands and how CPiE governance might be decentralised such that local actors guide strategies for CPiE.

Foster Intersectoral Coordination & Build on Existing Emergency Response Systems

Although the national government has made significant strides in terms of advocacy of and capacity-building for CPiE, emergency preparedness and response systems can be further built upon by integrating child protection into existing sectors. While each sector is aware of child protection issues, they do not necessarily call on child protection officers when they are needed. County-level children's officers are national government employees (as opposed to county ones), meaning that they are embedded in the national budget and thus, somewhat disjointed from county-level emergency response bodies. Linking them to county governments would grant them access to the resources, networks, and knowledge on the ground, leading to a more coordinated response.

"I think that's the challenge we are still facing, in spite of the resource on strengthening coordination...everybody knows what they need to do, how they need to do it, but they [cannot] do it alone. They need to bring other people." - UNICEF

Child Protection Sector

- **Collaborate with other emergency sectors to identify ways in which child protection can be further integrated within the emergency preparedness and response framework.** Every emergency sector's work relates to child protection in some way, from school closures to water access during droughts. The Department of Children's Services along with county-level child protection officers have an opportunity to improve coordination for CPiE by working directly with other national and county-level emergency response actors, such as the NDMA at the national level and Education and/or Nutrition at the county level. This may mean conducting joint needs assessments, harmonising emergency plans, and/or sharing data across sectors. For example, prior to implementation of surveys, each sector might collaborate on data collection and analysis, or consider utilising existing relevant data from other sectors. It benefits every sector to create a shared pool of human resources and tap into each other's capacity, technical skills, and data.

County Governments

- **Synergise development and humanitarian work streams.** Strengthening intersectoral coordination would help bridge the gap between emergency preparedness, response, and recovery work. Kenya has protracted or slow onset situations, meaning that most officials are working on development, with emergency response being a very small component activated only during crises. Investing more in preventive measures would cultivate a more efficient CPiE response, where every sector is primed on their core functions and prepared to reach across the aisle to achieve common goals for child welfare before, during, and after emergencies. Acknowledging that funds are required to foster coordination across sectors, advocacy for increased budget allocation for CPiE from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection would enhance preparedness and response services by the Department of Children's Services during emergencies.

"We have been getting stronger and more coordinated. I see more and more partners getting to know their role and responsibilities and really stepping up when the situation demands so." - UNICEF

CONCLUSION

Overall, Kenya's Action Plan has successfully increased awareness of CPiE as a critical function, built the capacity of officers and volunteers from the national government down to communities, and institutionalised CPiE through the creation of dedicated coordination bodies. Authorities are still in the process of operationalising CPiE coordination through the roll-out of the newly developed operational guidelines. The pending challenges facing Kenyan authorities include strengthening intersectoral coordination and propping up local efforts to streamline CPiE. Kenya's strengthening of CPiE coordination presents useful lessons regarding the potential challenges and promising approaches to localisation that may inform other countries seeking to implement or sustain similar initiatives.