

2021

COUNTRY SYSTEMS IMPACT

ZAMBIA

An Overview of System Strengthening
to Improve Child Welfare and
Protection in Zambia



INTRODUCTION



Courtesy of GHR Foundation



Courtesy of GHR Foundation

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
A Country Systems Approach to Strengthening Child Protection	3
Building on Zambia's Child Protection Foundation.....	5
Building Toward a Stronger System	7
Establishing System-Strengthening Priorities	9
A Case Study: Children in Families (CIF) in Zambia.....	11
Stronger Systems Help Build Resilience	13
Conclusion.....	15
About the Authors and Partners.....	17

NEW WAYS TO COLLABORATE AND DRIVE SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Traditional development work often results in geographically disparate projects that have limited overlap or collaboration among their activities. Donors find and fund partner organizations to address different aspects of a social issue amongst different populations. These projects impact the symptoms of issues and support individuals, but they can be less effective in addressing underlying problems.

This report examines a different approach, one that addresses the structural elements needed for sustainable, generational change (system strengthening) and invests in multiple partners working collaboratively in a single geographic area (country systems).

These discoveries and insights are based on GHR Foundation's work to improve child welfare and protection in Zambia. GHR has supported Zambia's efforts toward family-based care using a country systems approach since 2014 and will continue its support through 2026.

These are the lessons learned so far.

A COUNTRY SYSTEMS APPROACH TO STRENGTHENING CHILD PROTECTION

The Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) is transitioning away from an institution-focused alternative care system in favor of more family- and community-based care. GRZ’s child protection vision is based upon decades of evidence showing that children thrive when they grow up in family or family-like settings, and upon a strong national commitment to the well-being of all Zambian children.

In response, system actors and funders are collaborating across the child protection continuum (e.g., prevention, alternative care and emergency response) to achieve the government vision. Together, they are addressing root-cause, societal

issues that affect child safety and working to strengthen the system overall.

Unlike traditional development work, a country systems approach invests in multiple partners within a single country who understand the context and culture feeding into local issues. Program goals and ambitions are driven by the state, with system actors and funders aligning their activities in support. Funders support each partner equitably with appropriate resources and by fostering a collaborative environment between the partners. Partners commit to working together and integrating their efforts to achieve a more effective and holistic program delivery (see *Figure 1*).

What Does It Take to Change a Country System?

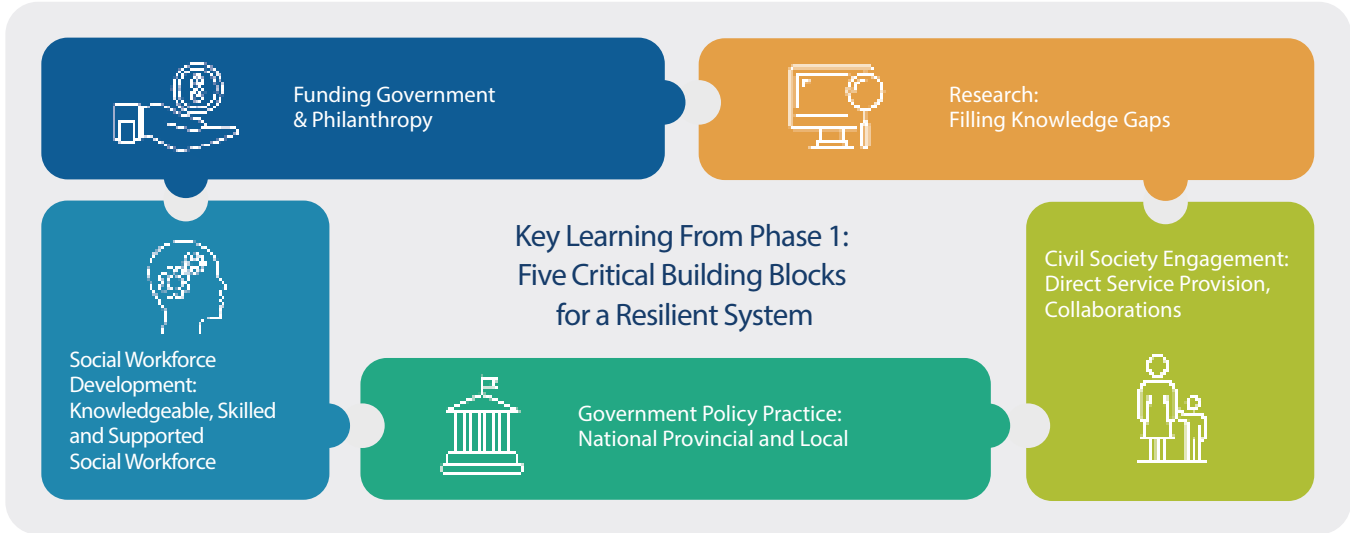


Figure 1

BUILDING ON ZAMBIA'S CHILD PROTECTION FOUNDATION

Because the government is the central actor in the Zambian child protection sector, the GRZ has a comprehensive policy framework addressing the alternative care of children. National policies outline objectives and standards to improve the quality of care for children, with the government recognizing key international laws and standards.

Within this framework, responsibility is divided among several ministries, departments, and agencies (see *Figure 2*). The Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) is responsible for implementing Zambia's National Child Policy, which means it coordinates the players and asks society to align to its priorities.

Structure of the GRZ Ministry of Community Development and Social Services



Figure 2



Courtesy of GHR Foundation

A literature review of system strengthening in child protection systems identified five essential elements of Zambia's system: government policy and practice, workforce development, civil society engagement, research and funding.

Partners working in-country uncovered additional "building blocks" for system strengthening. For example, they suggested government implementation was a distinctly different driver than government policy. Furthermore, they suggested coordination, data management and advocacy programs also need to be addressed (see *Figure 3*).

Building Blocks for System Strengthening



Figure 3

BUILDING TOWARD A STRONGER SYSTEM



Courtesy of
GHR Foundation

Zambia's infrastructure is robust but not yet fully aligned with (or organized to support) the country's desire for more family- and community-based care programs for children without appropriate care. Partners and stakeholders verified the relevance of building blocks but also identified the following current gaps.

Funding

The child protection system is severely underfunded. Consequently, many services are contingent on outside funding and support from churches, the private sector and community leaders. There is limited information to support or track expenditures across different elements of the child protection system. Funding directly impacts how effectively and comprehensively the government can implement national programs for its children. Zambia needs to prioritize and adequately fund child-protection policy implementation to standardize service provisioning.

Workforce Development

The quantity and capacity of child protection workers is insufficient. The Minimum Standards of Care adopted in 2014 was a substantial policy milestone that set minimum qualifications and job descriptions for staff and minimum standards for case management in institutional care facilities.

Juvenile inspectors are in all districts of the country and provide reports on whether facilities are adhering to the standards. The government needs help tracking the findings and building workforce capacity to follow up when standards are unmet. Periodic professional development training is needed to build skills overall. With appropriate training and incentives, volunteers could also supplement case management staff.

Civil Society Engagement and Alignment With Government

Civil society organizations are significant actors in the country's child protection system, providing needed services, establishing coordination mechanisms, and conducting advocacy and communication activities within communities. The government provides policies and standards to guide civil society programs, but its ability to collaborate on delivery for all of them is limited. As a result, some funding vehicles and programs are not always fully aligned with the government's aims and objectives. Groups of key partners must create tighter links between their efforts and government priorities and work toward strengthening the child-protection system overall, not just one element or agency.

Improved Coordination

Despite recognition and support for collaboration from GRZ, coordination at the national, district and community levels is variable. Because so many parties are involved in child protection services, sometimes there are inconsistencies in how care is delivered. More frequent and effective coordination is needed among Zambia's ministries, across national and sub-national bodies and between government, NGOs, funders and civil society organizations.

Government Implementation

GRZ has made impressive strides in policy developments and created an institutional framework to support children. Implementation, however, has been challenging. Standards are established, but there are not enough resources to enforce them or hold organizations accountable. IT infrastructure, transportation and staffing are all inadequate for the implementation tasks to come (e.g., developing an emergency foster care system, expanding social welfare memoranda and enforcing standards of care). Zambia needs more funding and comprehensive guidance on how to implement its policies to achieve formal and standardized referral pathways.

Data Collection and Information Management

The country's current project-based approach to data management is ineffective for planning, decision-making, monitoring and evaluation. Inability to track individual cases and inconsistent case follow-up hinder service delivery and program and policy development. Moreover, less than half of Zambia's districts are digitized, and available tools are not fully utilized due to data security and privacy concerns. There is also a shortage of funding for equipment to collect and store information, and staff lack

capacity to record data. Zambia would benefit from standardized data collection tools and harmonized data management systems. Some of the data gaps are being solved by a new electronic case/information management system at MCDSS. System improvements and training are currently underway.

Advocacy

Government, civil society organizations and faith-based groups have the potential to increase advocacy and hold systems accountable for prioritizing and provisioning family- and community-based care for vulnerable children within the child protection system. Campaigns on children's rights to education, child safety (especially for girls) and female empowerment could sensitize the community to important child protection issues. In 2021, Zambia elected a new president, Hakainde Hichilema. It is an opportune time to amplify advocacy, engage with new political leaders and hold them accountable to campaign promises and political will to support the child protection sector.

©UNICEF/Zambia/2021/Mulikita



ESTABLISHING SYSTEM-STRENGTHENING PRIORITIES

All the building blocks of the child protection system are important and closely connected. However, stakeholders note government implementation requires immediate attention, with two factors having the greatest impact: funding and social workforce development. Tackling these two issues could have positive, compounding effects on the entire system.

Funding

Lack of funding is a major and urgent issue. In 2018, five social assistance programs addressed a caseload of roughly 4 million people — nearly a quarter of Zambia’s total population, according to data from the World Bank and Oxford Policy Management (OPM).

Heavy workloads and limited access to resources are daily challenges for government social workers and make it more difficult for them to effectively do their jobs. Therefore, the government relies on civil society organizations (with varied capabilities and levels of expertise) to assist in caring for children and accounting for their status within the system.

The significant reliance of child protection services on alternative funding sources weakens accountability and hinders both implementation and oversight.

Social Workforce Development

At this time, Zambia does not have enough staff to perform the level of social welfare work that is needed. It needs more social welfare officers at the

district level, more volunteers from the community and clearly delineated responsibilities and training for all.

MCDSS is responsible for implementing the country’s National Child Policy but only has enough resources to employ a few social welfare officers per district. Staff are overwhelmed by their responsibilities. Furthermore, some officers are not fully trained on national policies or guidelines, and it is unverified how standards and policies are enforced. Since 2019, two public universities have conducted in-service trainings to build capacity and standardize the provision of reintegration, alternative care and case management. The partnership has yielded results, but more professional development is needed to match the nation’s demand for skilled social welfare workers.

Strengthening the Entire System

Working on all nine building blocks of Zambia’s child protection system collaboratively and simultaneously amplifies the impact of each partner. It is complex and time-intensive work but not impossible.

By strengthening systems instead of addressing symptoms, system actors and funders can affect large-scale, even revolutionary change — not just a checklist of outputs or timeline-based goals. The impacts of system strengthening can be monumental, even if “projects” are less results-oriented.

Why? Because system strengthening attempts to untangle history and traditional power structures, replacing them with more collaborative, adaptive and sustainable practices. For example, a system-strengthening approach to child protection can simultaneously support children at risk of being separated from their families as well as those already in need of alternative care. It can also:

- **Promote family as the best context for child rearing**
- **Prevent situations that might result in child-family separation**
- **Ensure that alternative care settings meet appropriate standards**
- **Respond quickly and appropriately when intervention is necessary**

When partners reinforce each other’s efforts under the leadership and direction of the state, they maximize the overall funding impact. The sum of each grant portfolio becomes greater than its parts.

Strongest Together

To trace social issues back to their roots and repair cracks in well-intentioned systems that allow issues to perpetuate, system strengthening calls for all

actors to consider their role and linkages within the bigger picture. Protecting children means strengthening their schools, their home lives and even the income security for their families. It is a tall order — and not something any agency or willing and motivated government can manage alone.

This is the point of country-specific system strengthening. To achieve sustainability, governments should take the lead in providing care for children, but they often need help. By working together, partners and funders can build capacity, fill gaps and fortify relationships across the entire child protection system. With stronger connections across the system, governments can deliver a more cohesive approach to supporting vulnerable children and families.

Working in concert strengthens the entire system, not just its parts or its most urgent shortcomings. This requires governments, partners and funders to rely upon and maintain strong relationships to holistically surround children with protection — and strengthen their chances for longer-lasting, more meaningful support.

©UNICEF/Zambia/2021/Mulikita



“When partners reinforce each others’ efforts under the leadership and direction of the state, they maximize the overall funding impact.”

A CASE STUDY: CHILDREN IN FAMILIES (CIF) IN ZAMBIA



©UNICEF/Zambia/2021/Mulikita

GHR envisions a world in which all children — especially those at risk of losing or without parental care — are living in stable and nurturing family (or family-like) environments. Its Children in Families (CIF) initiative funds organizations that strengthen family cohesion, reduce the number of children in orphanages and transition children who are separated from their families into stable home environments.

Beginning in 2014, GHR elected to invest in a country systems approach to strengthen child

protection in Zambia, following a child protection vision established by the GRZ. GHR hypothesized that building the capacity of multiple, coordinated partners under the direction of the GRZ would result in more meaningful and lasting change.

GHR selected Zambia as a focal country and commissioned a landscape analysis to identify key players and prospective partners, including large NGOs and smaller, community-based agencies. GHR mapped its partners to essential elements that were identified for system change (see Figure 4).

GHR Partners’ Alignment With Systems Change Building Blocks

	Workforce	Civil Society	Government	Funding	Research
Alliance for Children Everywhere	✓	✓	✓		
Catholic Medical Mission Board	✓	✓	✓		
Catholic Relief Services		✓	✓		
Save the Children	✓	✓	✓		✓
Zambia Association of Sisterhoods	✓	✓	✓		

Figure 4

In one aspect of their work, GHR’s CIF partners concentrated their child protection efforts in the Lusaka District. Together, they worked toward:

- **Finding permanent placements for 200 children so they could leave orphanages**
- **Integrating service delivery and creating a model for the GRZ to replicate in other districts**
- **Mobilizing the social welfare workforce around government policies and practices**

Collaboration with MCDSS was central to grantees’ work, with CIF partners offering a “menu” of services the government could choose from to support children at risk of losing — or already living outside of — family care (see Figure 5).

The partners’ biggest priority was increasing the capacity of Zambia’s social welfare workforce, and to keep more children in families, they also targeted family preservation and family reintegration.

©UNICEF/Zambia/2021/Mulikita



Structure of GHR Partners’ Collaboration

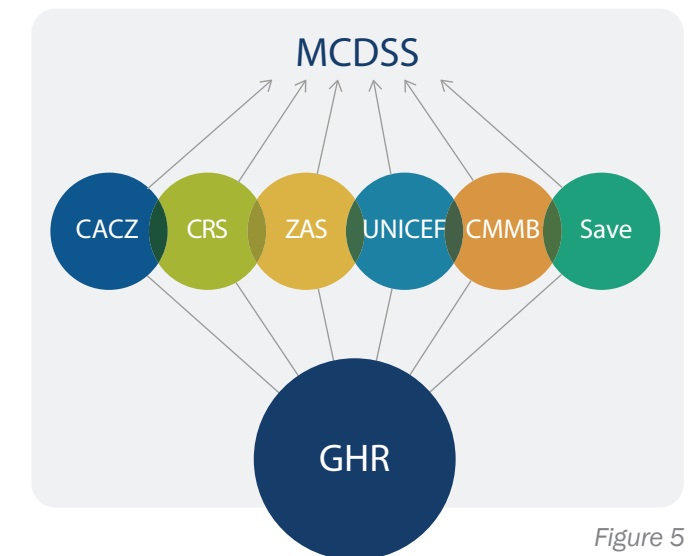


Figure 5

To this end, they were able to achieve a memorandum of understanding with MCDSS for alternative family care and staff secondment. CIF partners also trained public and private service providers across the district.

Civil society engagement was the second focus area. Partners coordinated with one another to advocate for family strengthening, to prevent family separations and to support MCDSS as it developed national child protection systems. Zambia now has a technical working group dedicated to alternative care.

CIF partners also helped MCDSS adjust its operations to overcome COVID-related restrictions. Tech support enabled caseworkers to reach children and connect them to parents or guardians during the pandemic and helped children access remote learning and mental health resources. Through partnership, MCDSS was able to develop an online rapid assessment tool to collect data from child care and correctional facilities during the pandemic.

Working together, multiple individually funded partners coordinated their efforts to reintegrate nearly 100 children. They continue to support GRZ-led systems to sustainably strengthen child protection.

STRONGER SYSTEMS HELP BUILD RESILIENCE



Courtesy of GHR Foundation

The pandemic increased the number of vulnerable children and families, and it continues to stress an already-stretched government and civil society. Many children lost their support network, the impacts of which are still evolving. In Zambia, as in other countries, the pandemic and its effects persist, with no clear end in sight.

Prevention and response services have remained overburdened during the pandemic, creating a significant backlog of child protection cases for registration and follow-up. Restrictions continue to affect caseworkers' abilities to visit households, and placements into alternative care have been delayed due to COVID-driven health and safety protocols.

The government infrastructure was ill-equipped to handle the many impacts of COVID-19, and the burden of additional health and safety requirements has depleted already limited funding. NGOs saw their funding diminish, too, in many instances redirected by funders to support healthcare systems in Zambia or elsewhere.



©UNICEF/Zambia/
2021/Mulikita

What Can Be Learned From This Crisis?

To stabilize the essential framework of the child protection system and minimize future shocks, GRZ and MCDSS can:

- 1. Prioritize government policies and government financing to be more adaptable.** This includes redirecting contingency funding to respond to unforeseen circumstances and creating procedures to clear funding from donors in a timely manner when it is desperately needed.
- 2. Evolve social workforce support as crises evolve.** District- and community-level officers and volunteers need more training — and more relevant training and support — to adapt to social shocks more appropriately.
- 3. Assess emerging needs on the ground, and respond immediately.** During the COVID-19 crisis, many children became orphaned. To help them receive care in time, the child protection system needed stronger referral pathways, including links between the health and social welfare systems.

The challenges posed by COVID-19 are not unlike the issues Zambia faced before the crisis: targeted funding, social workforce support and coordination. Therefore, any effort to strengthen these foundations will support the child protection system overall and its ability to withstand future crises.

Pandemic Impacts

Because of its worldwide impact, the COVID-19 pandemic must also be considered alongside other elements for system strengthening.

The World Health Organization estimates 1.8 million Zambians became infected with the virus between March and September 2020, with new waves hitting the country in 2021. As of December 2021, only about 5 percent of the Zambian population has been fully vaccinated.

More than 4.4 million children and adolescents have experienced prolonged school closures during the pandemic, which increased their risk of dropout, sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy and child marriages. Researchers with Imperial College London estimate that more than 7,000 children in Zambia have experienced orphanhood due to a COVID-19-related caregiver death since April 2020.

According to the International Monetary Fund, Zambia's GDP contracted 3.5 percent in 2020, while food prices rose sharply, causing strain on households. The national poverty rate increased 2 percentage points in one year and rose more drastically in rural areas, where more than half of Zambians live.

GRZ established an Emergency Cash Transfer program funded largely by donors to help its most at-risk districts and reached approximately 3 percent of the population before ending in early 2021. Because of the pandemic, government debt increased from 77 percent of GDP in 2018 to 118 percent of GDP in 2020. In November 2020, GRZ defaulted on a debt repayment, which will limit its access to future financing and its ability to issue additional public aid.

CONCLUSION

Governments, civil society partners and funders all have the same desire for Zambia’s children: to ensure they are safe, supported and well cared for. By adapting the traditional engagement process to collectively support local leadership ideals, system actors and funders can drive more meaningful and sustainable work for the communities they support.

Concentrating energy and resources into a single country brings societal challenges into clearer focus. When issues are experienced in context, they are understood more completely and accurately. At that point, partners and funders can help communities pursue culturally rooted solutions instead of just driving down related statistics.

Societal issues are not simple. Each one is entangled in history, culture, policy, behavior and more. To enact sustainable change, multiple partners must work across systems holistically and resolve to strengthen each interconnected part together. Country systems engagements and system strengthening require new thinking, unique partnerships and a renewed commitment to relationships and the common good.

To learn more about a country systems approach to impact and system strengthening, visit GHRfoundation.org. Questions from and conversations with individuals, nonprofits, funders and others who want to adopt this innovative approach to philanthropy are welcome.

Methodology

GHR commissioned OPM to assess its country systems approach in Zambia. This summary is based on the findings of OPM’s report and highlights broad challenges and opportunities that are relevant to all stakeholders in the Zambian child welfare and protection sector.

OPM evaluated the suitability of the country systems approach, identified priority areas for intervention and systems change, and collected and validated narratives about progress toward key milestones. OPM also reviewed stakeholders’ priorities for improving child protection systems.

OPM’s assessment was based on literature and evidence reviews and workshops with GHR grantees and country-level consultants. Two virtual workshops were held, and OPM interviewed key stakeholders from government, civil society and donor organizations to develop a case study for each country. The case studies included primary data on the child protection system, as well as the opinions and perspectives of 15 stakeholder-informants from each country.

GHR initiated a country systems approach in Zambia in 2014, and OPM assessed data available through 2020, conducted workshops and interviews during the first half of 2021 and published its findings in September 2021.

Research Limitations

Workshops were conducted in English with collaboration software leveraged to maximize participation. Still, definitions and interpretations are context-specific and, thus, a research limitation.

The COVID-19 pandemic was evolving at the time of the study and made it challenging to assess system needs in their entirety. The full impacts of the pandemic on child protection systems are still unknown.

When needed, OPM integrated partner reports to create a “big picture” of each country’s child protection system.



Courtesy of GHR Foundation

“

To enact sustainable change, multiple partners must work across systems holistically and resolve to strengthen each interconnected part together.

”

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND PARTNERS



Courtesy of GHR Foundation



©UNICEF/Zambia/2021/Mulikita

GHR Foundation

GHR Foundation is a hope-fueled global funder that exists to serve people and their limitless potential for good. In collaboration with partners and communities around the world, GHR reimagines what is possible to accelerate progress on global development and family strengthening, education, Alzheimer's disease, racial equity and more. In 2021, GHR awarded more than \$40 million in grants.

To learn more about GHR's system strengthening or country systems approach, visit [GHRfoundation.org/children-in-families](https://ghrfoundation.org/children-in-families)

Oxford Policy Management

OPM is committed to helping low- and middle-income countries achieve growth and reduce poverty and disadvantage through public policy reform. It seeks to bring about lasting positive change by using analytical and practical policy expertise. Through a global network of offices, OPM works in partnership with national decision-makers to research, design, implement and evaluate impactful public policy.



©UNICEF/Zambia/2021/Mulikita

In Gratitude and Solidarity

We sincerely thank the various individuals and communities across Zambia who contributed their time and invaluable insights to this work. This project and report would not be possible without their collective vision and desire to strengthen community-driven efforts for the care and protection of vulnerable children and families.

GHR stands in solidarity with the many community organizations and local leaders of Zambia. The foundation celebrates their collective leadership and is humbled by the opportunity to resource, collaborate with and learn alongside these partners. Thank you.

NEW WAYS TO
COLLABORATE
AND DRIVE
**SYSTEMIC
CHANGE**