



# **PARA-SOCIAL WORKER (PSW) SKILLS AUDIT REPORT**

**2017**



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA  
Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social  
Development



Under Cooperative Agreement AID-6P-A-15-00003 Better Outcomes program, the Bantwana Initiative of World Education (“Bantwana”) is scaling up proven models of comprehensive care in Northern and Eastern Uganda. Bantwana’s models address the multiple vulnerabilities of children and families and leverage integrated programming platforms to link children and their caregivers to HIV and other social protection services that are aligned with Uganda’s HIV and social protection response and the PEPFAR 90-90-90 goals.

Bantwana’s comprehensive service delivery approach is anchored in a community-based case management model developed and tested with the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD) in Uganda in 2014 with support from two USAID/PEPFAR programs. Tested by Bantwana and the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) in 2010<sup>1</sup>, the case management model anchors trained community resource persons (Para-Social Workers (PSWs) in Uganda) at the center of an integrated case management and coordinated referral network proven to increase access to clinical and social protection services by highly vulnerable children and families.<sup>2</sup>

Bantwana has refined, expanded, and is scaling up the community case management model, now made HIV-sensitive, under the USAID/PEPFAR Better Outcomes and other programs<sup>3</sup>. The 7-step model includes: case identification, case intake, case assessment, case planning, case implementation and referrals, case conferencing, and, case closure. In 2017, Bantwana commissioned the National Association of Social Workers of Uganda (NASWU) to participate in the PSW Skills Audit with the MGLSD as part of the broader Better Outcomes mandate to strengthen the child protection system in Uganda. The MGLSD is using results from the audit to refine the PSW training program and has incorporated the 7-step case management cycle and approach into the national case management handbook.

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<sup>1</sup> In Zimbabwe, the model now anchors the national case management system built over a seven year partnership between Bantwana and the GoZ with support from USAID/PEPFAR and other donors and stakeholders.

<sup>2</sup> “Integrating programming for improved child outcomes in Namutumba, Uganda,” 4Children Case Study, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Technical Assistance to roll out the case management model under the PEPFAR-supported Sustainable Outcomes, Western Uganda Bantwana Program, USAID-supported Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity (LARA) to scale up a school-based case management model; USDOL-supported Adolescent Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (AYEDI).

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## Executive Summary

The Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development (MoGLSD), WEI/Bantwana (WEI/B), and the National Association of Social Workers of Uganda (NASWU) conducted a skills assessment of para-social workers (PSWs) in five (5) districts in Uganda. The study assessed fifteen different competencies through interviews; focus group discussions; and questionnaires with PSWs, district officials, and personnel from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who work with PSWs at the community level. The cohort of 213 PSWs interviewed were predominantly (58.7%) male; and most (60%) were over 40 years of age. As a group, the PSWs were highly literate: 94% of those surveyed could read and write either in English or their local language. Most participants had some level of formal education, and most participants (71%) had worked as PSWs between 3-5 years.

None of the PSWs surveyed indicated any knowledge of a PSW job description, though 42% indicated that they follow some kind of guideline (i.e. referral books, case record, child protection guide, etc.) to perform their jobs.

The survey assessed the skills necessary to successfully perform the responsibilities of a para-social worker, including communication, case management and service coordination, advocacy, knowledge of client needs, community work, development of self and others, support of direct services, resilience, and knowledge of the social workers' code of conduct. For each category, the majority of the PSWs interviewed expressed low competency or were in need of additional training. In all functional categories, female PSWs reported lower competency than male PSWs.

- **Case management and service coordination skills:** 51% of those interviewed reported that they have little capacity to identify vulnerable groups for further assessment. More than half of those interviewed had low confidence in coordinating referrals and monitoring service plans.
- **Communication skills:** 63% reported having limited capacity to effectively conduct presentations. 46% demonstrated minimal capability in communicating and engaging clients and family members in discussions about needs, strength, goals, and services. 44% have little or no capability to engage clients in discussions about service, and only 44% have the ability to effectively share relevant information.
- **Advocacy skills:** 49% had little or no capacity to advocate for clients at community and organizational levels.
- **Knowledge of clients' needs:** PSWs reported low competence in and knowledge of human development (60%), disabilities (54%), substance abuse (51%), crisis and trauma (46%), and sanitation and hygiene (42%).

More than 33% of those interviewed were not able to recognize or address HIV/AIDS issues.

- **Community work:** Results showed that majority of participants were below average in all the categories of this skillset.
- **Supportive direct services:** 57% of participants had confidence in their abilities to provide supportive counseling, but only 44% had the capacity to refer to and participate in non-therapeutic support groups. Less than half (41%) had knowledge necessary to identify the need for specialized services.

An assessment of non-functional skills (social welfare services, organizational and leadership skills, analytical thinking, critical reflection, interpersonal skills, and inter-professional skills) showed similar gaps. Despite 3-5 years of experience, less than half of this cohort of PSWs reported knowledge of child protection policies (44%), legal framework for children with disabilities (43%), or the rights of vulnerable groups (41%).

The PSWs scored slightly higher in teamwork and leadership but identified a need for support in their capacity to work with other professionals (i.e. police, health professionals, etc.), as only 9% expressed capability in this area. Although the survey demonstrated a positive working relationship between PSWs and local government officials, the skills audit revealed an overwhelming desire to mainstream PSWs into the local government structure.

The need for expanding the cadre of para-social workers and providing more training to the PSWs also became evident: 70% reported that the current number of PSWs is inadequate. 30% felt that while there are enough PSWs, more training is needed in the areas cited above.

In conclusion, this assessment clearly showed the extent to which very critical competencies need to be strengthened, so that the PSWs are able to achieve their full potential to enhance service delivery. From these findings, it was recommended that there is need to increase and improve training; design a formal job description for the PSW; incorporate the PSW into local government (LG) structure; and increase the number of PSWs at the community level.

## 1. CHAPTER ONE - BACKGROUND

Para-social work professionals are individuals trained and skilled in social work who carry out social work duties but have not received professional certification (UNICEF, 2006). They play a critical role alongside community leaders, social workers, and other service providers in the delivery of critical social welfare services to vulnerable populations including children, youth, women, elderly, and people with disabilities.

In many communities across Uganda, para-social workers undertake voluntary social service functions such as identifying vulnerable persons; linking the vulnerable and those at risk to relevant service providers (state and non-state); supporting referrals through follow-up of cases; as well as coordinating and reporting on community wide mobilization activities in collaboration with both state and non-state actors. Overall, para-social workers fill the existing human resource gap at the community level in the decentralized local governance dispensation for service delivery.

However, documented evidence regarding para-social workers suggests that while some PSWs have benefited from trainings offered by various agencies, others have not been able to. Similarly, in spite of the higher value attached to trainings and resources invested, little information has been detailed in regard to the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed by para-social workers to successfully perform their duties. Thus, establishing the skills possessed by as well required of a PSW has remained a grey area. In such a scenario, the actors utilizing the para-social workers cannot adequately establish their competencies, knowledge, and skills needed to improve their productivity.

Consequently, the National Association of Social Workers of Uganda (NASWU) and the Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc. through the USAID-funded Better Outcomes for Children and Youth (BOCY) in Eastern and Northern Uganda program are working in partnership to support the ongoing efforts of the MoGLSD. These efforts aim to sustain the gains of the investment in the field of para-social work that have been made by previous projects relating to orphans

and vulnerable children (OVC). In order to sustain these advancements, the NASWU and Bantwana Initiative collaborated to administer this para-social work skills audit in five (5) selected districts in Eastern, Central, and Northern Uganda.

### **1.2 Purpose of the study**

This research takes the form of a skills audit and focuses on para-social workers: the community-based cadre of the social service workforce. The study aimed to highlight the critical skills and knowledge aspects related to para-social worker in order to assure high performance. It sought to better understand the current status of para-social workers, in terms of the required knowledge, experience, skills, and competencies for their position.

This study provides baseline data to guide training and development strategies and is designed to assist stakeholders in identifying areas where training needs require further investigation. The use of a customized generic competency framework as a foundation should facilitate the clarification of training needs.

In terms of the broader context, this skills audit aims to communicate the critical skills of PSWs necessary for sustainable growth and development. This audit can be seen as part of the initiative to ensure that the national skills development efforts support para-social workers' skills growth and their professional career path.

### **1.3 Objectives**

The primary objectives of this audit were to:

- i. Administer a skills assessment/audit to collect data on para-social workers in the five (5) districts to establish their profiles (biodata, roles, skills, level of training, support needs, reporting line, mentorship, career growth, etc.)
- ii. Identify skills gaps amongst the para-social workers in the sample districts
- iii. Make recommendations to improve the skills and knowledge of the para-social workers in order to improve their performance; and



- iv. Develop a web-based data system for recording the profiles of the para-social workers

### 1.4 Scope

This skills audit covered para-social workers across five (5) districts in Uganda (Kamuli, Mayuge, Gulu, Omora and Mityana). This study entailed conducting a skills gap analysis for para-social workers. Recommendations for addressing the findings of the skills audit are included after the statistical analysis of the audit. A web-based database has been developed with the profiles of all of the participating para-social workers.

### 1.5 Overview of the research process

The research process followed is depicted in Diagram 1 below.

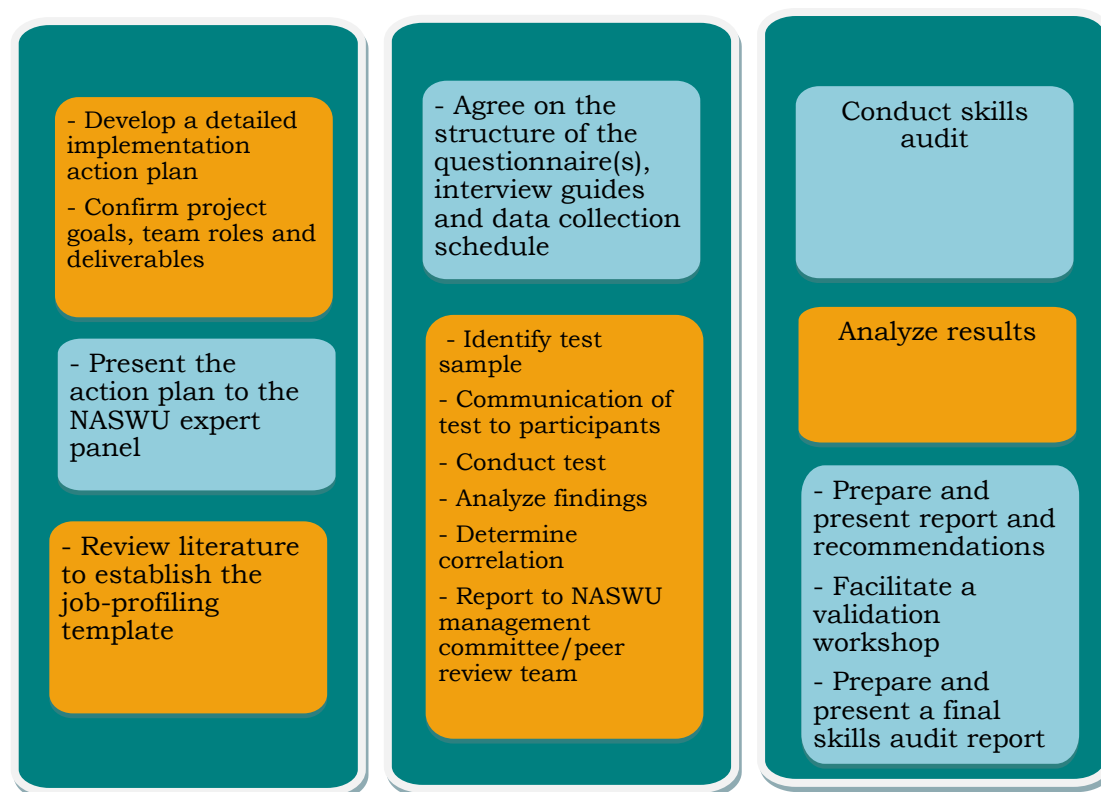


Diagram 1

### 1.6 Structure of the report

The structure of the report is outlined below.

- Chapter 2: Presents the project design and methodology that was applied in the study
- Chapter 3: Presents an overview of the key findings of the study

- Chapter 4: Presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study

## CHAPTER TWO - METHODOLOGIES, TOOLS AND PROCEDURES

This section explains how the audit method was decided and the final design of the data collection tools and analysis thereof.

### 2.1 APPROACH

MoGLSD, Bantwana and NASWU undertook the project with the assistance of a consultant. The decision to adopt this consultative approach was made in order to utilize the expertise of others in the areas of design and administration.

One of the first steps included setting up different consultative levels. These included a task force set up by MoGLSD, a NASWU technical committee, LG district officials, and representative of NGOs at community levels. These different consultative levels were viewed as an important way of gaining support for the project and its outcomes. They also contributed valuable expertise to the skills audit project. Interactive sessions focused on:

- The most suitable design or methodology to be employed for the purpose within the context;
- The essential content for the questionnaires;
- The desired climate for the research; and
- The most suitable process for reporting findings, including the benefits of one-on-one feedback and/or focus groups.

The second step included identification of the appropriate knowledge and skills areas relevant to the para-social work position. The Global Social Service Workforce Alliance competency menu for para-social workers was modified to generate a competency menu with supporting definitions that are generic to the para-social work job at operational/strategic levels. This information was used to compile a framework describing the skills, knowledge, experience, and qualifications required for the para-social work role.

The objective was to use a competency menu, listing the competencies that are important for the effectiveness of a para-social worker, in order to assess the availability of requisite knowledge and skills and to provide a foundation for

determining development needs. The competencies were described in such a way as to capture the following information:

Critical Strategic Skills Priority Areas	Description of skill	Indicator used to measure the skill
Functional specialist competencies	Refer to the competencies of specialist knowledge and skills relating to a particular work function.	
Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to communicate with individuals, families and other workers clearly, sensitively and effectively, applying a range of best evidence-based methods of written, oral and non-verbal communication and adapt these methods to match the client's age, comprehension and culture.</li> <li>- Ability to create and maintain helping relationships.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicate with individuals, families and other workers within their unique cultural context, including local customs and language</li> <li>- Engage clients and family members in discussions about needs, strengths, goals and services</li> <li>- Effectively use verbal and written communication</li> <li>- Listen effectively</li> <li>- Effectively conduct presentations</li> <li>- Effectively share relevant information</li> </ul>
Knowledge of case management and service coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to collaboratively assess the needs of the client and the clients family, when appropriate and arrange, coordinate, monitor, evaluate and determine a package of multiple services to meet the clients specific needs.</li> <li>- Ability to connect individual with services or/and resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify vulnerable groups and their families for further assessment and referral for services</li> <li>- Conduct a strengths-based, psychosocial assessment of client and family needs and existing resources</li> <li>- Participate in development of basic service plan</li> <li>- Implement and coordinate related referrals and services using a case management approach</li> <li>- Conduct ongoing monitoring of service or care plan implementation</li> <li>- Participate in case closing process to determine client's achievement of goals and readiness for transition</li> </ul>
Advocacy skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to work with communities, teams, and organizations to create awareness and advocate for individual clients or the community on identified problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advocate for clients at the community and organizational levels</li> <li>- Act as a change agent with clients and their families</li> <li>- Develop or participate in actions plan to advocate for clients, families or community</li> <li>- Implement services to ensure protection of vulnerable children and other populations</li> <li>- Create awareness on identified social problems issues</li> </ul>
Application of basic knowledge of human development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Basic knowledge of human development including child development and psychosocial well-being to individuals and families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know the rights of child, young people, families and other vulnerable groups</li> <li>- Recognize and address substance use issues</li> <li>- Recognize and address HIV/AIDS related issues</li> <li>- Address the specific need for support of individuals with disabilities, including children and their parents and other caregivers</li> <li>- Aware of knowledge on home,</li> </ul>

		<p>sanitation, nutrition and hygiene</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aware of psychosocial functioning and related support and coping skills</li> <li>- Knowledge of crisis and trauma in assessment and service planning</li> </ul>
Community work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with community leaders and representatives of different groups to conducting outreach and case identification, identify services vulnerable groups, encourage and support community participation in planning, dissemination of information, policies and programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conduct outreach and case identification to document status of children and other vulnerable populations</li> <li>- Work with community leaders and representatives of different groups</li> <li>- Identify services for individuals and groups at risk of violence, abuse, or exploitation</li> <li>- Encourage and support community participation in planning</li> <li>- Disseminate information and policies and programs</li> <li>- Participate in implementing community level household economic strengthening and financial support activities</li> </ul>
Developing self and others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to identify training or learning opportunities and develop needed skills for future development of self and others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify future training or learning opportunities</li> <li>- Implement a plan for future development of self</li> <li>- Manage stress and emotions through practicing self-care routines and limit setting</li> <li>- Identify and address one's own values and potential conflicts as relates to clients and their families</li> </ul>
Supportive direct services (ability to)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify the need for specialized services based on assessment including child or adult protection and psycho-social support services, acute mental health needs, parenting skills, substance use, and crisis and trauma interventions</li> <li>- Provide supportive counseling</li> <li>- Refer to and participate in non-therapeutic support groups (including facilitation if specifically trained in group work)</li> </ul>
Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to demonstrate high degree of persistence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Persist in the face of challenges, setbacks and adversity</li> <li>- Manage strong feelings and impulses</li> <li>- View oneself positively and confidence in your strengths and abilities</li> <li>- Make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out</li> <li>- Develop strong and supportive links with other that foster trust</li> <li>- Set firm physical and emotional boundaries between work and home life</li> </ul>
Values and social work code of conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Values are those important principles that guide behavior and culture within the profession</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Code of conduct of social work</li> <li>- Values and principles of social work (Human dignity and worth, Social justice, professional integrity)</li> <li>- Duties and responsibilities to the Principles of SW</li> <li>- Ethical practices and responsibilities</li> </ul>

Non-functional specialist competencies	- Refers to the general knowledge and skills that support the a para-social worker to perform their functions	Indicator used to measure the skill
Social welfare service legal framework	- Basic knowledge of social welfare service legal framework (i.e. child protection legal framework )	- Social welfare legal framework - Child protection legal framework - Legal framework for children with disability - Rights of vulnerable groups - Ability to apply knowledge of legal and ethical guidelines
Organization and leadership skills	- Time management, prioritization, counseling, teamwork and record management	- Time management - Prioritization - Teamwork - Record management - Conflict resolution - Flexibility
Personal competencies	- Refer to individual characteristics / attributes	
Analytical thinking	- Improve problem-solving, coping, and development capacities of individuals and communities.	- Problem solving - Creative and innovation skills - Individual judgement - Identify issues requiring guidance and clarification
Critical reflection	- Ability to reflect and practice purposively	- Self-reflection (why I do what I do) - Empathetic reflection (understand people from different cultural and different backgrounds) - Reflective communication (open to discussion and challenge about my opinions)
Interactive competencies	- Skills relating to people and systems	
Interpersonal skills	- Ability to build relationships with individuals, families and communities in order to work collaboratively	- Work in partnership - Support development of others - Build and maintain professional relationships
Inter-professional skills	- Ability to work with others professionals effectively to do a competent job	- Work with other professionals effectively to do a competent job - Effective multi-agency working methods

### Competency rating

In describing the above competencies, one needs to consider whether the competency reflects knowledge, skills, and experience in relation to the following levels:

- **Full capability** means the participant meets and sometimes exceeds challenging standards, expectations, and goals. Accomplishments show competent skill, ability, and effort.
- **Capability** means that the participant meets minimal standards, but falls short of expectations. Needs improvement and more exposure to the skill.
- **Some capability** means the participant does not meet job requirements and is considered unsatisfactory. Thus further skill development is required.

- **No capability** means that the participant does not have any skills. Thus comprehensive skills development is required.

## 2.2 Process followed in selecting the audit method

To select the most suitable methodology for this research, the project team commenced by exploring literature on similar studies; the role and importance of para-social workers in social welfare services; the role of PSWs in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups; and various aspects of skills audits. Effort was also made to define the information that was being sought in more detail. The project team identified four categories of methods that could be employed to administer the study. These include:

- Competency assessment/exercise;
- Self-analysis questionnaire;
- Highly structured competency interviews

In determining the most suitable method, the following factors were considered: resource requirements (time, cost, labour intensity) and, most importantly, the ability of a method to gather as much of the required information with sufficient validity and reliability. The NASWU technical team provided valuable input on the suitability of these methods within the context.

## 2.3 Development of instruments

Once the method had been identified, a framework for the questionnaire was developed. Once the framework was confirmed, the above-mentioned competencies (see competency menu) were used to design structured questionnaires for a skills assessment process. These instruments included both qualitative and quantitative elements. The content of the questionnaires was tested and also piloted within the project team prior to being finalized. All questionnaires sought to elicit information on the current skill sets of para-social workers using a combination of qualitative and quantitative questions.

## **2.4 Ethical considerations**

This section covers the potential ethical issues of social research that are inherent in studies of this nature and the attempts made to mitigate these issues in the design, administration, and reporting (Babbie & Moutan, 2008).

### **2.4.1 Voluntary participation**

- This research required that the participants reveal personal information, and required that the information be revealed to a stranger. Therefore, it was very important that the PSWs participate in the study voluntarily.
- To address this concern, the research was only conducted among those who were willing to, and who voluntarily participated in this study. The research team ensured that each participant was clear on the purpose and scope of the study and was aware of the composition of the research team and the purpose of the study.

### **2.4.2 Anonymity and confidentiality**

The clearest concern in the protection of the participants' interests and well-being is the protection of their identity. If revealing their responses would harm them in any way, adherence to this norm becomes all the more important. Identities should remain undisclosed, and responses should remain confidential. To address this concern, the research team guaranteed confidentiality, and participants were informed that their identities and respective responses will be known only to the research team and all documentation will be stored securely at the completion of the research report.

### **2.4.3 Analysis and reporting**

The way in which a researcher reports and presents their findings is of the utmost importance for their validity. To address this concern, the researcher adhered to the highest possible technical standards in this research and has presented the findings fully without altering the data or findings in any way. The initial findings were discussed in a focus group with a cross section of the study participants in order to validate the findings. The focus group participants were

also asked to add commentary to the findings, provide development suggestions, and comment on constraints and enablers.

## **2.5 Data collection**

### **2.5.1 Set climate for the project**

Prior to executing the exercise, the consulting team set out to create a positive climate for the project. This was done through activities such meeting with key individuals to gain buy-in for the project and briefing MoGLSD and LGs officials on the project. This process of communication and encouraging participation continued throughout the project until the conclusion of the data collection phase.

### **2.5.2 Study design**

The skills audit employed a mixed approach of both qualitative and quantitative research design. The qualitative approach supported the construction of social reality, allowing construction of meanings in a given context. It is interactive, interpretive, flexible as well as sensitive to context. While the quantitative data enabled the rating of skills, providing numbers of para-social workers in regard to competencies, required training, and skills. The audit also benefitted from a mix of exploratory and descriptive designs. The former helped in obtaining insights into the unknown as well as supporting familiarization with basic facts, settings, and concerns as well as generating new ideas that may not be captured on set. It also helped in answering key audit questions, such as, “Which skill sets are required by a para-social worker currently and in the near future? What skills do they currently have? What are the anticipated training needs?” The latter facilitated in describing the competencies required by para-social workers.

### **2.5.3 Sample**

In selecting participants for the skills audit, a purposive sampling procedure was applied. Such sampling is useful in selecting a section of the research population, which in the researcher’s judgment will provide the most useful information for the study (Babbie & Moutan, 2008). In this regard, official communication was sent to SPSWOs, DCOs, and CDOs in all the selected districts informing them of the study. A communication channel was established with the district officials who mobilized all the identified participants of the study.



In conducting the study, the following two categories of participants were selected:

- The first category was comprised of district officials and officials from NGOs who work with para-social workers at community level.
- The second category comprised of para-social workers who work at the community level.

#### **2.5.4 Data Collection process**

As with most skills assessments, eliciting responses from multiple participants requires much effort and follow-up activities. To encourage participation as far as possible, the data collection process ran as follows:

- **Invitation of participants**

Bantwana and SPSWOs were required to provide specific details of all participants per sub-county. These details included name, location, telephone address and any other details required to provide specific information, such as gender, years of working as a PSW. The CDOs then used the information to invite all participants to participate in the survey. They were given survey instruments and asked to perform the self-audit. The process was structured in a way that a participant could only submit an instrument once in order to ensure data-integrity.

- **Follow up activities**

In order to maximize the response rate, the CDOs contacted participants directly. Follow up calls were made to ensure that responded to the exercise. These phone calls resulted in an increase in the number of completed questionnaires.

- **Data collation**

A template was designed for summarizing the responses for each participant, and the responses were populated onto the summary sheets as questionnaires were returned to the project team. Once

the surveys were completed, the data was analyzed and reports were generated to identify scarce skills areas.

## **2.6 Data analysis**

Each participant's assessment was not treated as a separate piece of information; rather, the information was compared overall so that all data received through questionnaires were used. The process of analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data is provided below.

### **2.6.1 Analysis of quantitative data**

The quantitative data was processed using SPSS statistical package version 20. This approach allowed analysis of data using frequencies, comparisons, and correlations. Averages across rating categories were also averaged for an overall indication on each item and construct.

### **2.6.2 Analysis of qualitative data**

Thematic analysis was conducted for the qualitative data. Firstly, the data was combined for all participants. This data was then analyzed per question across all other comments, and then across all self-comments with the intention of identifying themes.

### **2.6.3 Focus groups**

Focus groups were used as an additional method of validating and enriching the data that was collected. These were conducted after a provisional analysis of the data. One focus group was run per sub-county. During the focus groups sessions, the background to the research was presented for each group

## **2.7 Validation**

After analysis and evaluation, reliability and credibility of the data was ensured by cross checking with stakeholders at various stages. The participants examined the results with respect to the elements of the skills audit

### 3. CHAPTER THREE – SKILLS AUDIT FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the Para-social worker skills audit. The findings are intended to show the distribution of skills across the surveyed Para-social workers. In exploring the distribution of skills the study sought to provide an insight into the levels of competence across a full range of a Para-social worker competency menu.

#### 3.1 Profile of para-social workers surveyed

This skills audit surveyed a total of 213 para-social workers. Kamuli district contributed 33% of the sample, 23% of participants were from the district of Mayuge, Mityana PSWs comprised 20% of the participants, and Omoro and Gulu each contributed 12% of the total number of PSWs surveyed. The composition of the para-social workforce surveyed is predominantly male 58.7% compared with 41.3% of the participants being female. The statistics also reveal that while Kamuli has a fairer distribution between male and female, the rest of the districts surveyed have predominantly male para-social workers (see figure 1 below). Though extra gender roles were reported in the Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) as the main reason for the variation, it is important to consider more women for recruitment and retention. This ensures that vulnerable groups (especially children) who are using the service have access to high quality services with gender choices in caregivers.

District	Male	Female	Total (by district)
Mayuge	31	18	49
Kamuli	37	33	70
Mityana	26	17	43
Omoro	16	10	26
Gulu	15	10	25
<b>Total (by gender)</b>	125	88	

Figure 1

Further analysis revealed that out of the total number of participants, the majority (84%) were married. 8% of participants were single, 6.1% widowed, and 2% were divorced. It was also revealed that para-social workers surveyed are predominately above 40 years of age (60%), followed by 17% in the age

bracket of 31 to 35 years, 8% between 36 to 40 years, and 5% between 18 to 25 years.

### Literacy level

In respect to assessing literacy levels, an overwhelming majority of participants (94%) could read and write either in English or their local languages. However, 5% of PSWs surveyed could read only, while 1% could neither read nor write (see figure 2). Those that could neither read nor write were from Gulu and Omoro districts. Further analysis revealed that though the majority of para-social workers surveyed could read and write, most of them do not possess the skills necessary to effectively write reports (functional literacy). As indicated by one of the CDOs, most para-social workers encounter major challenges when attempting to write activity reports. As one observer noted:

*"These para-social workers can effectively tell you about the cases that they handle, but should you tell them to write them down, that would be the beginning of their problem, because most of them cannot write clearly. I always fail to read and comprehend what they write, so I think it's important to train them on report writing."*

The bar graphs below show the distribution of literacy levels across the para-social workers surveyed:

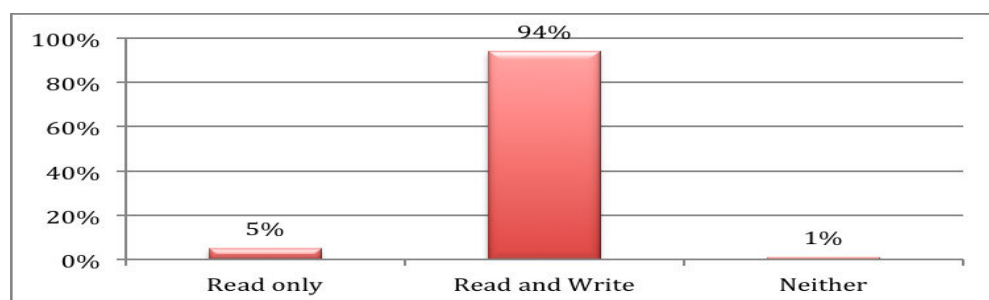
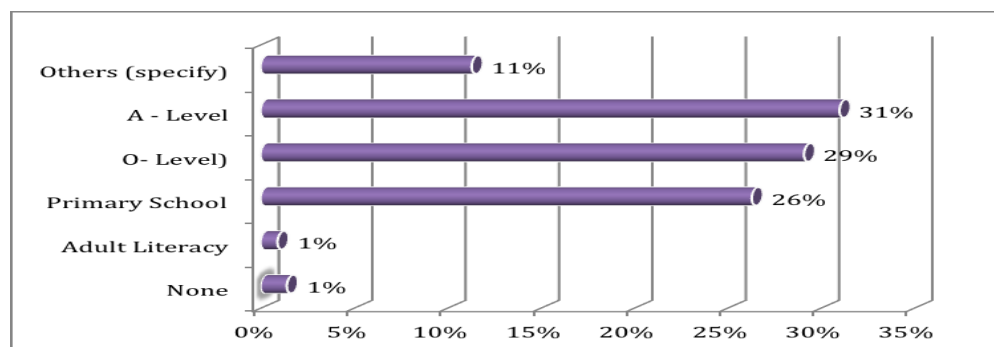


Figure 2

### Level of education

While many participants did not have high levels of education, the skills audit found that most participants had at least some formal training. Of the surveyed participants, 31% had attained A - Level, 29% had attained O – Level, 26% had completed primary school, Those who could neither read nor write were from

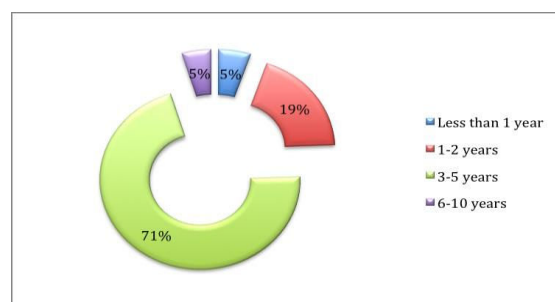
Gulu and Omoro Districts. It's important to note that 24% reported to have attained further tertiary qualification. Of those with a tertiary qualification, 1% of those surveyed possessed a university degree, while 70% have diplomas and 20% have certificates. Further analysis revealed that the majority of those with tertiary qualification were from the districts of Mityana (38%) and Mayuge (29%). The bar graphs below show the distribution of levels of education across the surveyed participants.



**Figure 3**

### Number of years working as a para-social worker

The participants were asked to quantify how long they had worked as para-social workers. This allowed the study determine their depth of experience, therefore capturing skills, experience, and confidence the participants may have. Statistical analysis indicates that majority 71% of the surveyed participants have worked as para-social workers between 3 to 5 years, 19% have worked between 1 – 2 years, 5% between 6- 10 years, and 5% of surveyed PSWs had been in the position for less than a year. Of those with less than a year were majorly from Gulu and Omoro. The below chart below indicates the distribution of participants by number of years working as a para-social worker.



**Figure 4**

## Major clients handled

According to the ratings, para-social workers appear to focus on children as their primary clients. The majority of PSWs (154 (40%)) reported that they handle a range of children issues, followed by women and adolescent girls 66 (17%) and 58 (15%) handling family issues mainly domestic violence. The graph below shows the breakdown of clients handled by para-social workers who participated in the survey. One participant said:

*"I handle so many child-related cases like child abuse, defilement, child labour, school dropout and so many others, but it is hard. For example: some parents in this community overrate the age of their children to marry them off and get bride wealth and when you interfere it brings a lot of hatred to us as para-social workers".*



Figure 5

In regard to services provided, statistics in this report indicate that para-social workers surveyed mainly offer guidance and counseling (42%), followed by child protection services (22%), case management (18%), psychosocial support (16%), and financial training and parenting (2%).

## Job descriptions

Out of the many para-social workers surveyed, none reported any knowledge of a job description for para-social workers. This suggests low levels of knowledge and confidence regarding the main duties and responsibilities that are involved in the para-social position, which could affect their ability to perform the kinds of tasks associated with the job. Nonetheless, 42% reported to follow some guides while performing their job. Of those who use guidelines, 54% reported to use referral books, 27% use case record books, while 18% use the child protection

guide while offering services. This indicates that a standard job description is required to boost the confidence and capacity of para-social workers.

### 3.2 CURRENT SKILLS AND SKILL GAPS

The skills audit measured para-social workers on a set of functional and non-functional skills to determine their level of competency.

#### 3.2.1 Functional skills

Functional skills were assessed in this survey and were measured using attributes such as communication skills; case management and service coordination; advocacy skills; knowledge related to clients' needs; community work; developing self and others; supportive direct services; resilience and the social workers' code of conduct. The responses to these attributes are as discussed below.

##### i) Communication skills

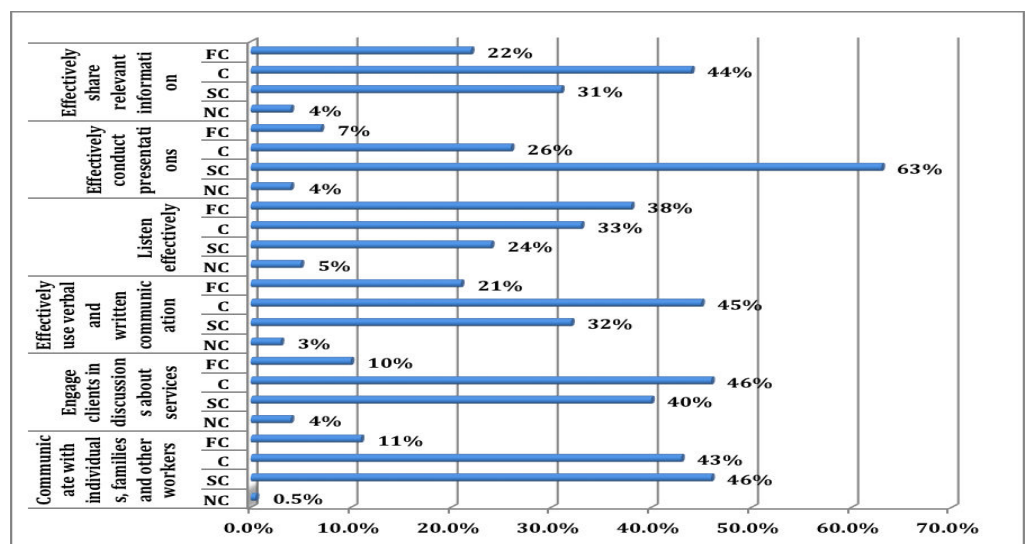
While many participants did not have high levels of education, the skills audit found that most of them had some competency in communication skills. Most reported having learned these skills through experience, being self-taught, or being shown by others. One participant noted:

*"I have grown up in a political kind of life, and in politics communication is key, so I always try to teach myself on how to speak well in public."*

However, further training around communication skills is still necessary as 63% of participants reported to have little capability to effectively conduct presentations; 46% demonstrated minimal ability to communicate and engage clients and family members in discussion about needs, strength, goals and services; and 44% have lacked the capacity to engage clients in discussions about service. Only 44% have the capability to effectively share relevant information.

The analysis also revealed that women were less competent in the categories measured as compared to their male counterparts. The averaged results discussed above do not reflect levels of competence and skills development across para-social workers. These low levels of competence indicate that further

training and follow-up is necessary. Figure 6 breaks down the numbers of participants with various levels of skills and knowledge competencies in communication.



FC=Full capability, C=Capability but need more exposure to the skill, SC=Some capability but further development required, N=No capability

Figure 6

## ii) Case management and service coordination

The findings of the skills audit suggest that further skills training and development in case management and service coordination is also required as only an average of 6% of the participants reported having full capacity in all the categories identified in the skillset. Findings indicate that 46% and 15% have little or no capacity to participate in the case closing process respectively, though 31% have some capability. One of the participants boasted of her capacity to follow cases to closing by sharing:

*"I handled a case of defilement where a 17 year old boy defiled a 6 year old girl but I followed up to court and now the boy is on remand. I counseled the girl and will continue to follow up until she is psychologically better."*

Further analysis shows that 51% of participating PSWs have minimal capacity to identify vulnerable groups for further assessment and their competency to conduct strength bases bio-psychological assessment is limited (49% expressed capability). Results indicate that although both male and female PSWs are lacking in this skillset, female PSWs were far less knowledgeable than their male counterparts.



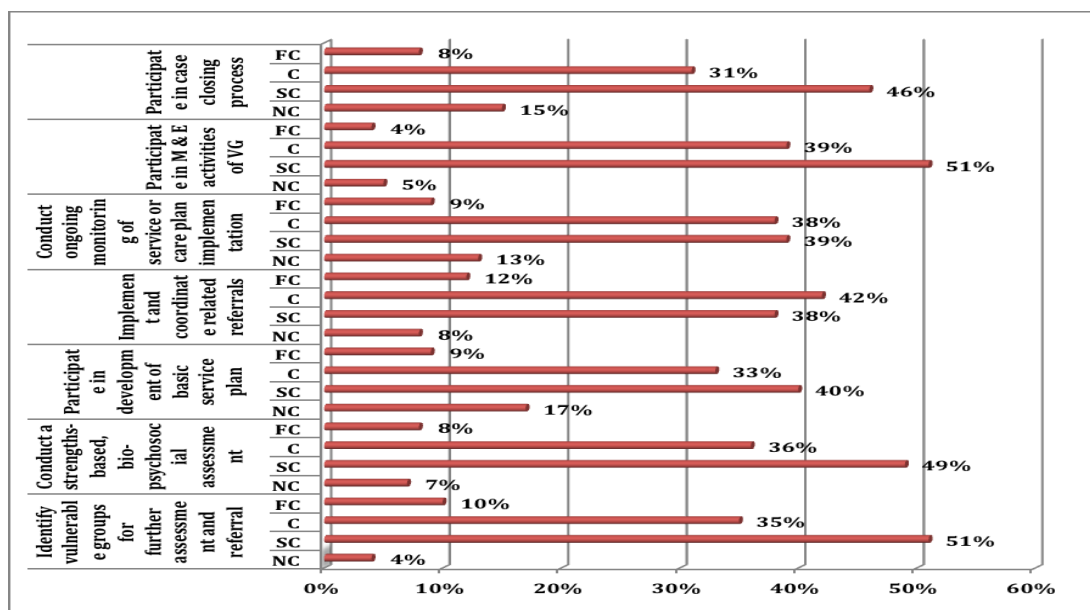
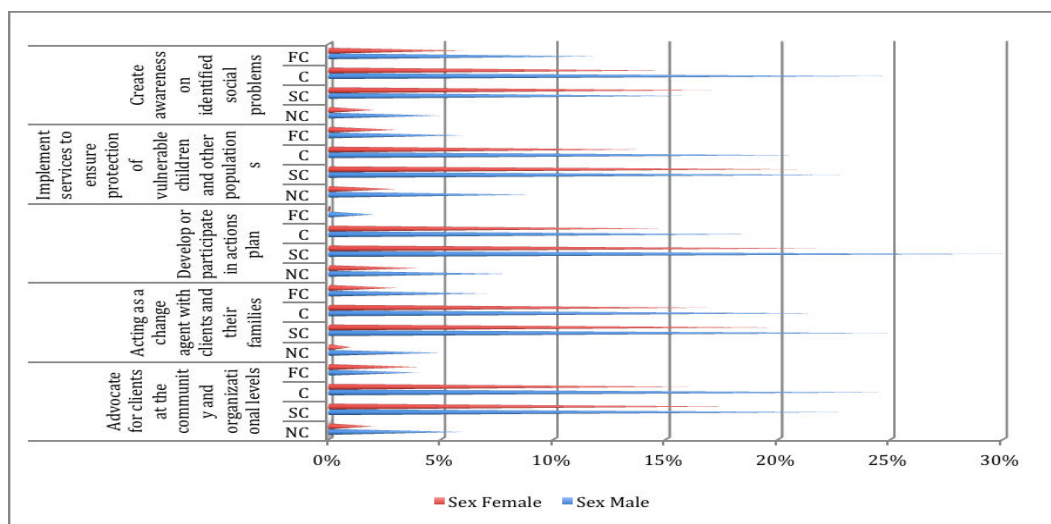


Figure 7

### iii) Advocacy skills

Para-social workers surveyed showed extremely low levels of advocacy skills as measured by the skills audit. Findings reveal 49% of the surveyed participants have little or no capacity to advocate for clients at the community and organizational levels, 64% do not have the competency to develop or participate in action plans for advocacy purposes, only 41% and 45% have some capacity to create awareness on the identified social problems and act as change agents respectively. Furthermore, 56% have little capability to implement services that ensure protection of OVCs while only 8% have full competency on the same. Results indicate that although both male and female are not fully aware and are not able to fully apply the required knowledge, female PSW were far less knowledgeable than their male counterparts, as shown in figure 8. These responses indicate a need for further skills development, training, and support in all of the identified advocacy skills sets.

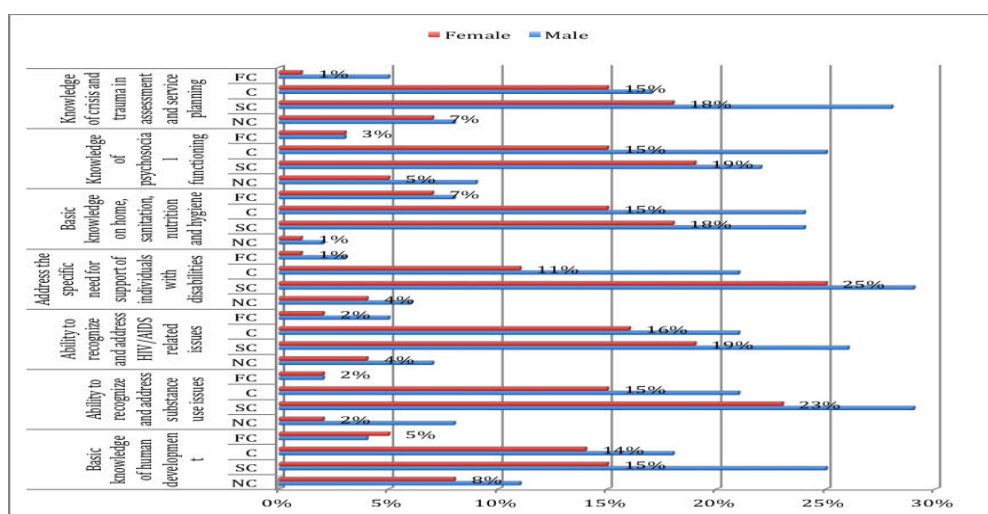


FC=Full capability, C=Capability but need more exposure to the skill, SC=Some capability but further development required, N=No capability

Figure 8

#### iv) Knowledge related to clients' needs

The findings on the ability to apply knowledge related to clients' needs, revealed that 60% of the participants surveyed lack competent knowledge about human development, 54% have little knowledge on addressing specific needs of individuals with disabilities, 51% can not adequately recognize and address substance abuse, 46% know less about crisis and trauma, 42% are unable to apply knowledge of home sanitation and hygiene, while 37% are not able to recognize and address HIV/AIDS related issues. It is important to mention that less than 5% of the surveyed participants had full knowledge on issues concerning clients' needs. As a way of comparison between male and female PSW on the said attributes, results indicate that although both male and female are not fully aware and able to apply the required knowledge, female PSWs were far less knowledgeable than their male counterparts as shown in figure 9.

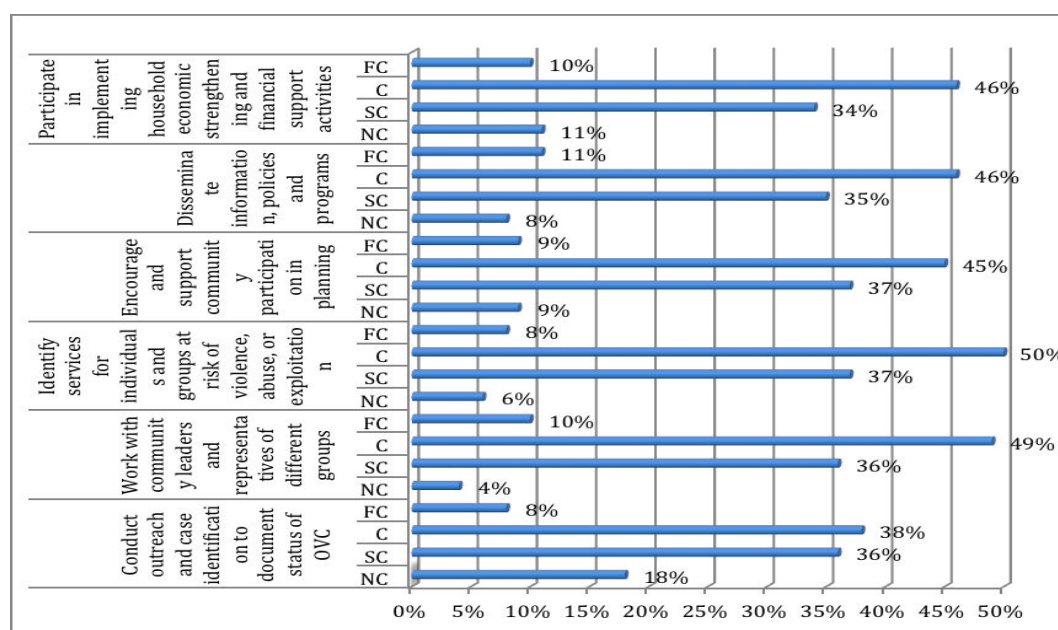


FC=Full capability, C=Capability but need more exposure to the skill, SC=Some capability but further development required, N=No capability

Figure 9

### v) Community work

In regard to community work, the survey results showed that majority of participating PSWs were below average in boosting household incomes (46%); disseminating information, policies and programs (46%); encouraging and support community participation in planning (45%); identifying services for vulnerable groups (50%); work with community leaders (49%); as well as conducting outreach and case identification for OVC (38%). It is noted that less than 10% of the participants had full knowledge on the attributes measuring community work.



FC=Full capability, C=Capability but need more exposure to the skill, SC=Some capability but further development required, N=No capability

Figure 10

Relatedly, when attributes of community work were further scaled in relation to gender, results showed that although male para-social workers were slightly better than the female, all PSWs scored far below average (31%).

### vi) Developing self and others

Developing self and others was another framework used to measure the skills of para-social workers. The findings on this attribute portray that 37% of the participants had some knowledge to identify future training opportunities; 44% could implement a plan for future self-development; 45% were able to manage stress and emotions; and only 42% had the ability to identify and address one's

own values and potential. Such statistics portray that a bigger percentage of the PSWs surveyed on average (50%) lacked the required skills for self-development.

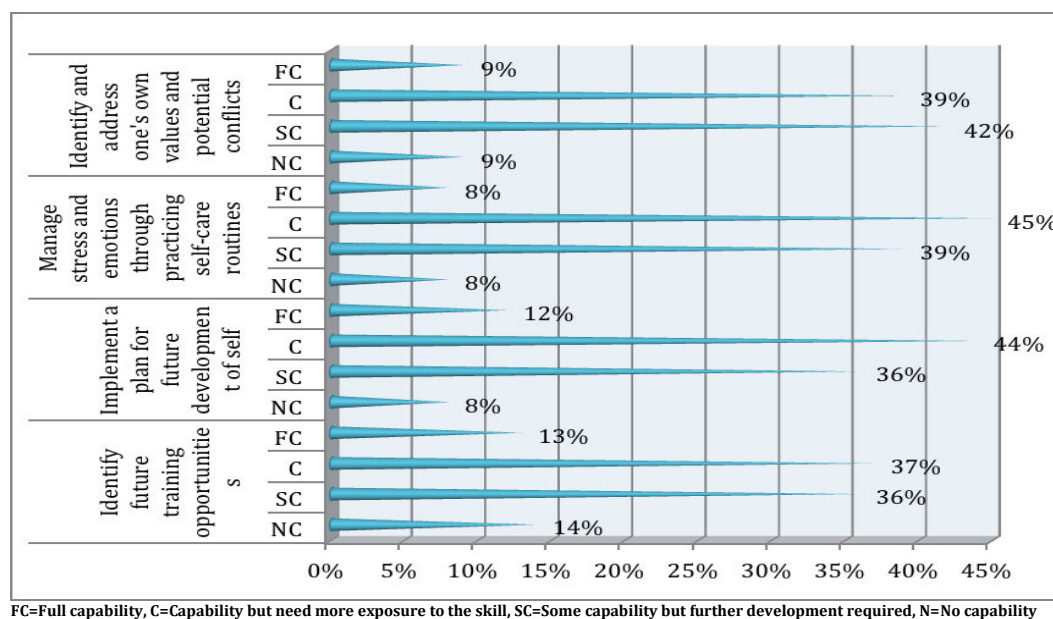
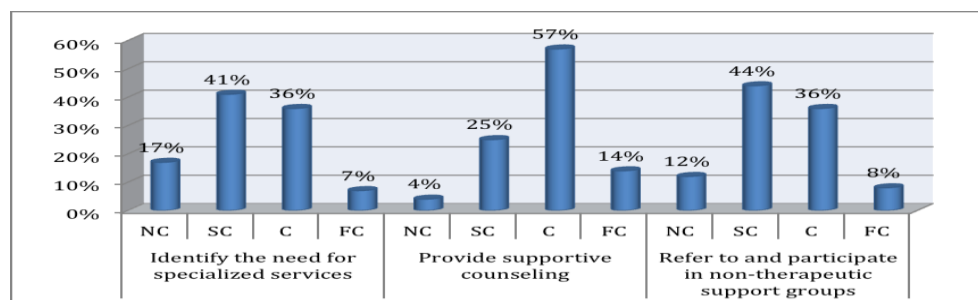


Figure 11

Similarly, both male and female PSWs were not able to develop themselves since all their scores on the above attributes were minimal.

### vii) Supportive direct services

Para-social workers were further surveyed on their ability to offer supportive direct services. The results revealed that 57% of the participants could provide supportive counseling, 44% had some capacity to refer to and participate in non-therapeutic support groups, and 41% had some capacity to refer to and participate in non-therapeutic support groups. This further reveals that there is need for more interventions to equip PSWs with the required skills to effectively act in their roles. In relation to gender, there was no significant variation in the skill sets between male and female PSWs.



FC=Full capability, C=Capability but need more exposure to the skill, SC=Some capability but further development required, N=No capability

Figure 12

**viii) Resilience**

Furthermore, resilience was used as another measure of PSWs' skill levels. The findings show that on some aspects like viewing themselves positively and confidently (45%), making realistic plans and taking steps to bring them to fruition (47%), setting firm physical and emotional boundaries (41%), as well as identifying strategies to ensure quality work (45%), some PSWs were capable. However, only 14% displayed the ability to develop strong and supportive links with others; 11% can manage strong feelings and impulses; 9% meet program deadlines and are able to re-prioritize projects to incorporate additional demands without difficulty; while 7% were fully equipped with skills to persist in the face of challenges, setbacks, and adversity. Again, there is no major variation between male and female PSWs regarding their skills on fostering resilience.

**ix) Social workers' code of conduct**

PSWs surveyed were asked to rate themselves on their basic knowledge of the social workers' code of conduct. The results revealed that none had very high levels of knowledge on the code of conduct, while only 4% of the total participants possessed a high level of knowledge. The vast majority of participants (52%) lacked any knowledge. These low levels of knowledge could affect the quality and the way para-social workers offer services thus a critical area for training.

### 3.2.2 Non-functional skills

Non-functional skills were also assessed in this survey and they were measured using attributes such as social welfare services, organizational and leadership skills, analytical thinking, critical reflection, interpersonal skills as well as inter-professional skills. The responses to these attributes are discussed below.

#### i) Social welfare services

The findings on social welfare services revealed that 52% of the PSWs surveyed were aware of the social welfare legal framework, 44% were knowledgeable on child protection, 43% were familiar with legal framework for children with disabilities, 41% were aware of the rights of vulnerable groups, while 39% had some knowledge on legal and ethical guidelines. Despite some knowledge, the average results do not reflect required levels of competence and skills within each of the categories in the skillset. Male participants were slightly more aware of the legal issues compared to their female counterparts.

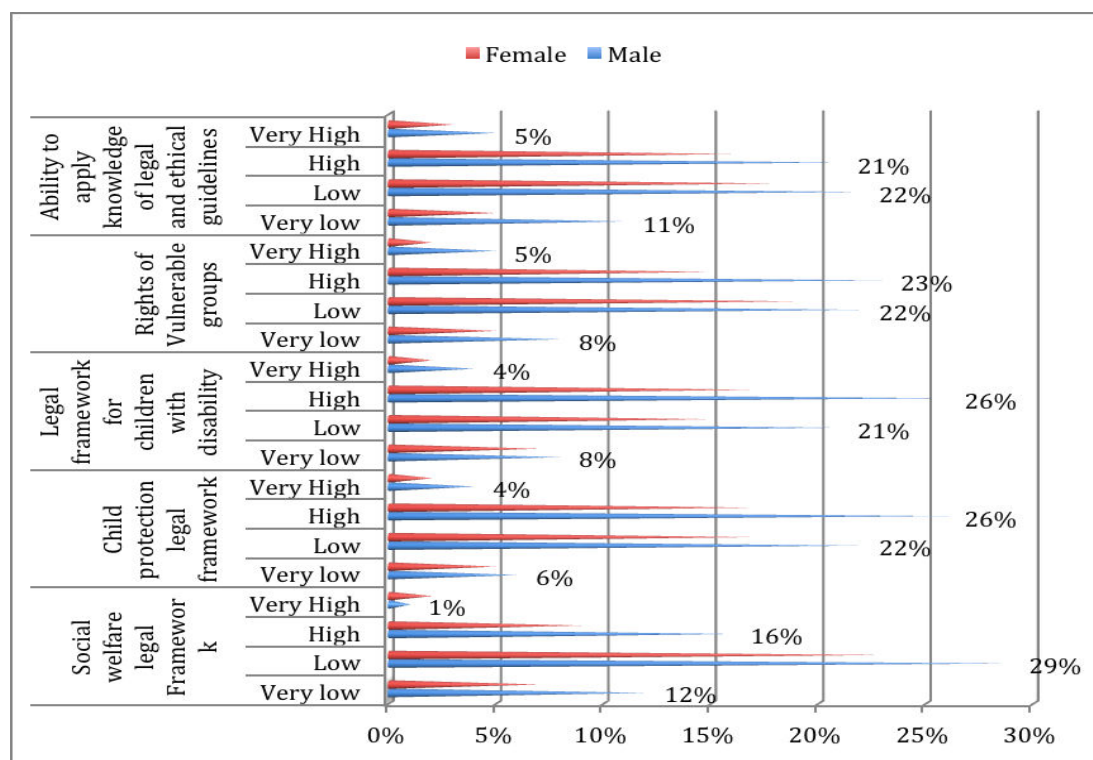


Figure 13

#### ii) Organizational and leadership skills

In the case of organizational and leadership skills, the study portrays that PSWs do possess some required skills. 63% of the surveyed participants rated



themselves highly capable of teamwork; 59% on record management; 54% on conflict resolution, prioritization, and flexibility; while 43% reported skills of time management. Since most of these skills can be acquired through mentorship and role modeling, it is probable that PSWs were able to score highly. The averaged results, however, still do not reflect the required levels of competence and skills within each of the categories in the skill set. A comparative analysis of male and female PSWs revealed that male PSWs were slightly better than females.

### iii) Analytical thinking

The findings on this aspect showed that majority of the PSWs surveyed had an average score of 55%. For instance, in respect to specific attributes, 62% scored high on identification of issues requiring guidance and clarification, 57% on creative and innovative skills, 52% on problem solving, as well as 50% on individual judgment. In respect to gender, though men had a higher score on identification of issues requiring guidance and clarification, on average there was no significant variation.

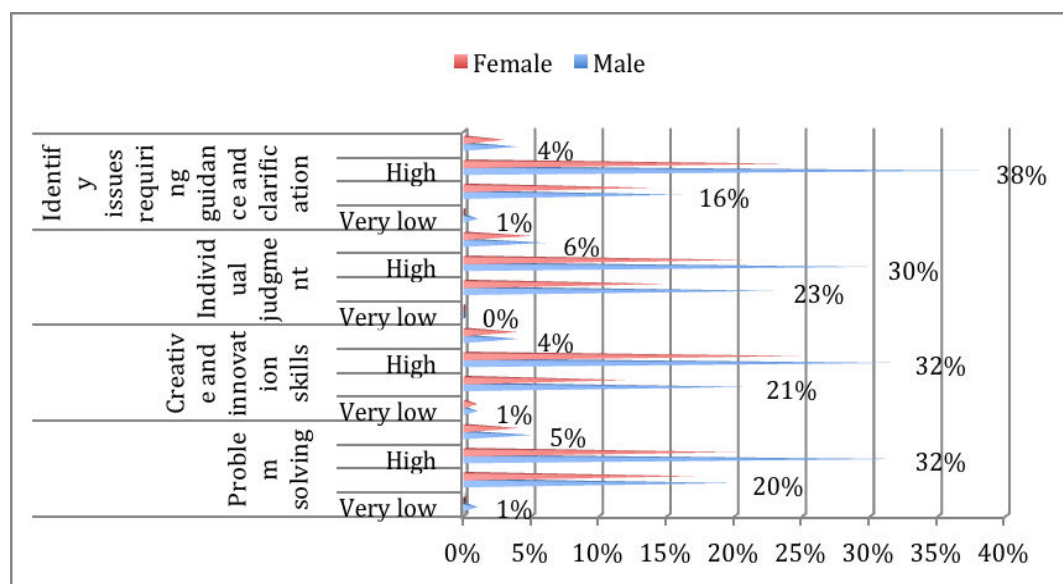


Figure 14

### iv) Critical reflection

The component of critical reflection as a measure of non-functional skills was rated on three attributes. The findings show that 46% of the participants were relatively capable to conduct self-reflection, 55% could carry out reflective communication, while 59% were able to empathetically reflect (understanding

people from different cultural backgrounds). It should be noted, however, on average only 10% of the participants could score very highly on these attributes.

#### **v.) Interpersonal and inter-professional skills**

In respect to interpersonal skills, the findings illustrated that there were some skill deficiencies. For instance, only 54% of the PSWs are able to support the development of others, 49% have the ability to build and maintain professional relationships, while 47% can work in partnerships.

Similarly, PSWs registered low levels of competency in regard to inter-professional skills. Results from the survey showed that only 9% were fully capable to work with other professionals, while 4% could effectively work across agencies. The remaining percentage of participants had little or no capacity in the skill sets. Their lack of ability was partially blamed on the attitude and behavior of other professionals with whom the PSWs worked. As noted by one of the participants:

*"I try sometimes to use the little knowledge I have to work with police and LCs, but they never support you. They instead interfere with your work. I reported a case of defilement, but the police, my LC1, and some family members connived and got the culprit released. The child was left with no hope. And when I tried to intervene again, I was threatened and insulted. So I gave up. It is very hard to work with those other professionals."*

### **3.3 Skill shortages**

Assessment of the adequacy of the current number of para-social workers indicates that majority of the participants surveyed (70%) reported that the current number is inadequate, compared to 30% who reported otherwise. Of those who pointed to the inadequate number, majority suggested an increase by 5 to 20 para-social workers per sub-county. The remaining 30% noted their belief that performance-related issues should not be attributed to a lack of PSWs, but rather to the lack of support received by current PSWs. One participant expressed:

*"Ever since I was recruited and trained, I have never seen again any of those who recruited and trained me. They have never been to follow up to determine whether I put in practice what I was trained on. Now why would you even recruit more paras? For what?"*



### 3.4 Training needs assessment

The survey revealed that the majority (84%) of the surveyed participants have received some sort of training, compared to the 16% who reported to not have received any form of training. Of those who did receive training, 58% reported receiving training on child protection, 15% on HIV, 8% on domestic and gender based violence, 7% on para-social work, 6% on trauma healing and counseling, 3% on record keeping, 1.3% on women leadership and parenting respectively, and 0.7% on economic strengthening and empowerment and girl child education. It was, however, reported that most of the training was received years ago. Given this fact, one participant indicated that periodic refresher trainings are necessary:

*"I attended training on child protection 3 years ago, but if you ask me what I learned, I don't remember many of those things. First because it has been long, second I don't practice, three I didn't understand well during the training."*

Para-social workers surveyed in the skills audit clearly highlighted their need for further skills development and training in all of the identified skills sets.

### 3.5 Support from LGs

Para-social workers were generally impressed with their working relationship with the local government officials. The majority of those PSWs surveyed (52%) rated their relationship to be good, while others felt that there is need for improvement. In regard to whether PSWs surveyed received any support from local government, 51% reported receiving support, while 49% denied any support. Of those who reported support from LGs, 44% reported receiving technical support, as compared to 7% who were offered logistical support. They noted that additional support is needed while conducting their duties, reiterating that more emphasis should be placed on logistical (31%), administrative (27%), technical (22%), as well as financial support (20%). This skills audit revealed an overwhelming desire to mainstream para-social workers into the LG structure. One participant said:

*"It is very important if there is a structure in the LG where we can fall in and can formally do our job. I love volunteering as a para-social worker but it is very demotivating when I don't have anyone to report to on the challenges and progress of work."*

Another participant said:

*"There is need for formal identification. Currently no one recognizes us because we don't have identity cards. Even when I try to do work at the community sometimes I am challenged to identify myself. One gentleman who had defiled a child asked me, "Who are you and who do you think you are to interfere in issues that do not concern you?" He promised to hurt me badly if I continued following the case."*

When asked on what could be done to improve their performance, the majority of PSWs expressed a need for bicycles for transport; umbrellas; and clear bags to keep records, rain coats, and general allowances. One participant mentioned:

*"This sub-county is very big, sometimes I am called to intervene in a case which is very far from where I live so I have to walk there. Sometimes it's raining, and sometimes I don't have money for boda boda, so the whole process is very challenging. Though this job is voluntary, we really need support."*

## 4. CHAPTER FOUR – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Conclusion

The skills audit results presented here are derived from a survey completed by the two-hundred and thirteen (213) para-social workers and twenty-eight (28) district and NGO officials. This skills audit sought to examine the skills, experience, knowledge and overall competency of para-social workers within in five (5) districts in Uganda. A custom-designed assessment with quantitative as well as open-ended qualitative questions was conducted to elicit this information. Results were then further explored, validated, and expanded upon during focus group sessions.

The feedback and results from the survey, as well as the information provided through the focus group discussions, indicate that para-social workers have low levels of competence within each of the measured skill sets. This is the case even where participants had received some training in particular skill categories. Some of the participants demonstrated a distinct lack of knowledge and competency in all the skill sets measured.

In summary, this assessment clearly demonstrates the extent to which critical competencies need to be strengthened so that the PSWs can achieve their full potential to enhance service delivery.

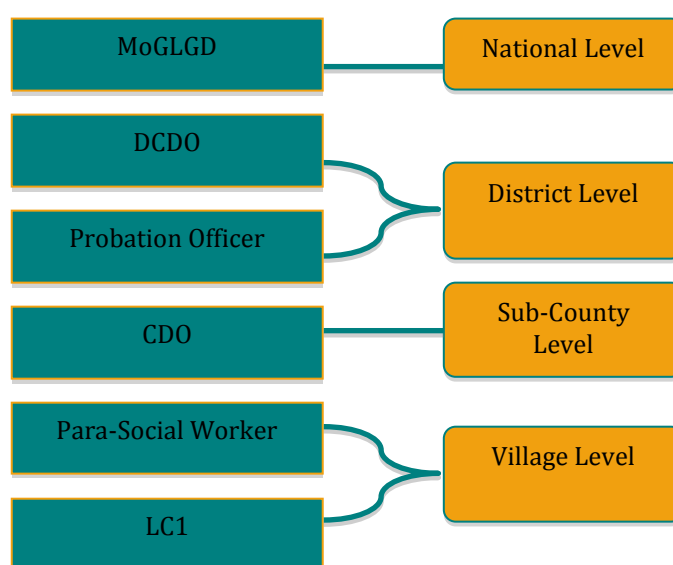
### 4.2 General recommendations

A thorough analysis of the findings has revealed that the following recommendations should be put in place to remedy the skills deficiencies:

- **Increase/improve training:** The skills audit clearly indicates an urgent need of further training and skills development addressing all the skillsets assessed (both functional and non-functional). The training should aim at producing well-rounded para-social workers, capable of handling a range of social issues at the community level.
- **Design formal job description:** There is also need to develop a clear job description for para-social workers that outlines the duties and responsibilities involved in the para-social work position. This would

create clarity on the work and boosts the confidence and capacity of para-social workers.

- **Incorporate into LG structure:** Sustainability of para-social workers should become part of the design in the local government system. It is crucial to mainstream para-social workers in the LG structure. This will give them legitimacy and clear channels of reporting, thus enhancing their performance and their sustainability. Issues of motivation and logical support can be addressed within the system. The proposed structure is illustrated below:



- **Increase number of para-social workers:** There is also an urgent need to recruit more para-social workers in order to address the current shortages. This will reduce the overload hence enhancing performance.

#### 4.3 Recommended areas for inclusion in the para-social work training manual

Training para-social workers will be critical in filling the skill gaps identified in this skills audit. Consequently there is need to shift the training from only content-based (what should be done) to skills-based (how the para-social workers can effectively do their work). Building their skillsets is a more comprehensive and sustainable way of enhancing their performance. Below are the proposed areas of inclusion.

- A standardized para-social worker job description
- Clearly defined roles of all officers in the proposed para-social work structure
- A template for reporting
- A module on communication skills
- A module on advocacy skills
- Understanding domestic and gender-based violence
- Understanding and addressing substance use
- Community work
- Social work code of conduct
- Social welfare legal framework
- Organization and leadership skills (record management, teamwork and conflict resolution)
- Interpersonal and inter-professional skills