

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN POST DISASTER PLANNING

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Abstract

Disasters affect children as much as they affect the adult population. Children's increased vulnerability in the post-disaster situation and the need to protect them is yet to be included as a major part of longer term post disaster planning. The objectives of the research are 1) to examine programmes started in the wake of disasters in 2004/2005 for their strengths in the protection of children and 2) to make proposals for increasing protection of children in post disaster planning. The methodology is a mix of project visits, participatory research with children, and staff/ community interviews. The results of this research suggest ways for allocating safe and child friendly spaces for children, explaining natural disaster to children and involving children in site planning and design. The impact of the research will be to increase the profile of children's protection in post- disaster planning.

Keywords: Children; Protection; Disaster; Tsunami; Earthquake

CHILDREN AS STAKEHOLDERS

Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child guides work in almost all countries in the world. It is the world's most widely ratified convention or treaty, with all but Somalia and the US having ratified it.

Its key principles of protection, survival, development, participation, decisions being taken in the best interests of children, and non-discrimination. The rights are non-hierarchical and inderogable (one cannot be taken without the others).

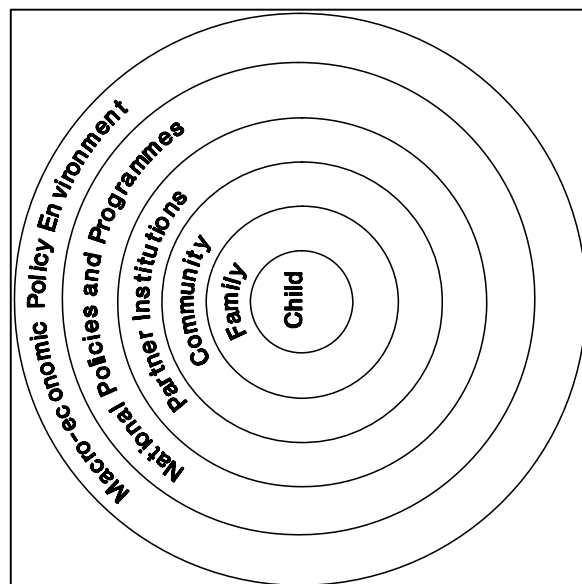
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Applied to post disaster planning, children have a right to survival after the disaster, to be protected from harm (including exploitation and abuse), to develop as normally as possible, to participate in decisions which affect them, to have things decided in their best interests rather than the interests of those taking decisions, and that children themselves, or one particular group of children (e.g. minority ethnic, children with disabilities) should not be discriminated against.

Children's rights models look at the two aspects of rights:

- rights holders (the children)
- duty bearers (those with the duty to implement children's rights)

In post disaster planning, as in other situations, there are a number of duty bearers:



This paper looks at the key risks for children after a disaster, and actions which can be taken by different duty bearers in post disaster planning to improve the protection of children, and therefore their survival, development, and participation.

KEY RISKS FOR CHILDREN AFTER A DISASTER

Health risks

Disasters present big risks for community health, and above all for children. The destruction of health care facilities, the break in cold storage chains for vaccines,

death/ injury of health care workers¹, loss of medical and vaccination records, are risks along with the increase in communicable diseases, especially ARI and diarrhoea, experienced after major disasters.

Lack of opportunities for constructive use of leisure time

A disaster can reduce children's access to youth clubs, playgrounds, organised activities, and other positive uses of leisure time. This can mean more opportunity to play in damaged / collapsing buildings, near heavy lifting machinery, and in construction sites

Environmental risks

Damaged buildings, destruction of water supply systems, breakdown in rubbish (garbage) collection, lack of toilets/ latrines, inappropriate aid, can all be risks to children's safety.



Collapsed buildings can become ideal playgrounds for adventurous children

Family stress

Families may be exposed to more stress as a result of losing property, death of relatives and friends, having to live in a very small space, worrying about when the next food delivery will be, concerned for their safety. All this can impact on children's psychosocial well being.

¹ for examples see p 12, The public health response to the tsunami, Carballo and Heal, FMR. July 2005

School drop out

After a disaster, even if schools are still accessible, children may stop attending for a variety of reasons². In Sri Lanka, children did not want to go back after the tsunami because they did not have uniform, and before the tsunami they knew they would be beaten if they attended without uniform. Children may drop out to earn money, or to stay at home to look after younger or older relatives so that other family members can earn money.

Child labour

Reduced family income, the opportunity to work in construction projects, the need for girls to stay at home and care for younger/ older relatives and other factors can contribute to an increase in child labour after a disaster.

Separation from parents and carers

Separation can occur because a disaster happens during the day when children are at school or with friends or carrying out chores and parents at work. After the disaster, one group cannot find the other. For the youngest children who do not know their names or details, family tracing may be particularly difficult. Forced separation occurs when families are separated for example because one member has to go to hospital, or in a different situation when people are being transferred from one location to another and family groups are separated.

Abuse/ exploitation in the community or by aid workers

Abuse and exploitation exists in all communities and it does not cease because of a disaster. The influx of strangers into a community may include those with bad intentions as well as good.³

Recruitment to the fighting forces

In areas where children under 18 are recruited to armed groups or fighting forces (government or militia), increased recruitment is a risk after a disaster because schools and other activities which occupied children in the day (and kept them safe) have been destroyed. The impact of a disaster on family incomes may also lead to pressure on young people to join armed groups.

Trafficking

After a disaster, children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for a number of reasons: their family incomes may be reduced; there may be more strangers in

² for example, see <http://www.unisdr.org/eng/mdgs-drr/dfid.htm>

³ See www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk_cache/scuk/cache/cmsattach/1550_unhcr-scuk_wafrica_report.pdf -

the community; promises of education and material support may be alluring when everything has been lost.⁴

Inappropriate placement in orphanages/ institutions

After a disaster there is often a rush to take children whose parent(s) has (have) died out of their communities and to place them in institutions/ orphanages. Research has shown that no institution can provide the same attention that a consistent carer in a family based situation can.⁵ Taking children out of their home communities, extended family and away from their friends at a time of crisis is not usually in their best interests.

Early marriage

In some societies, early marriage can be an increased risk after a disaster. This was seen in some tsunami affected cultures, especially where benefits were given to separate households and there was an incentive to subdivide households to smaller units to receive more benefits.⁶



Inappropriate aid in Pakistan (October 2005) collected in the streets and became an environmental hazard.

⁴ <http://www.basiced.org/factsheet.html>

⁵ David Tolfree (1995) *Roofs and Roots: The care of separated children in the developing world*, London, Save the Children UK.

⁶ Field reports, Sri Lanka February 2005



Children in Bam, Iran, play on a homemade see-saw (following the earthquake of December 2004). Obvious nearby hazards are the pile of bricks in the background, the collapsing house, and the metal frame in the trees.

ACTIONS TO PROTECT CHILDREN AFTER A DISASTER

Assessment of the situation

A clear assessment focusing on the specific risks and threats for children after a disaster needs to take place as soon as possible. This would include the number of children who have been separated from their parents, the number of children who are without adult caregivers, how many children were injured or killed in the location, the number of children without access to water, shelter, food, health care and education. Too often assessments simply count the number of children and do not look at specific concerns such as the number with disabilities, minority groups or particular issues faced by girls including threats of assault.

Ensuring that communities, aid workers, local volunteers, military, rescue teams, medical staff are aware of threats and risks to children, both pre-existing and new

If these groups are not aware of the issues, they may contribute to exposing children to risk. For example children may be moved from one place to another without their parents, and with no identification, so that once in the new location, no-one knows who they are. If local volunteers are not aware that traffickers may prey on vulnerable children, they may not tell children to be careful about going away with strangers.

Ensure right to survival is protected- food, shelter, water for families

The immediate life threatening issues faced by children have to be mitigated, and then the right to survival met through provision of food, water, sanitation, and shelter targeting all children including those with disabilities or from other vulnerable groups.

Provision of safe places for children to gather and play after disasters

As soon as possible after a disaster, when immediate survival needs have been met, children's development needs can be addressed. It is important to try to provide a safe place for the children of the community to gather, to play, to meet old friends and make new friends (particularly where some children have died and some have been displaced to other locations). Education is likely to be disrupted and so children who formerly went to school may not have that opportunity for some time. Therefore in the day, they need safe places to go, and activities to participate in.

World Vision, along with other major aid agencies, advocates for the provision of child friendly spaces (CFS) after a disaster. CFS are places which are physically safe- from collapsing buildings, falling masonry, floods, and which are designated for children. Often a tent or other building is erected. The community, along with aid agency staff, work with the children to design and implement activities such as sports, art and craft, reading, and of course play. Where possible a playground is put up near the site. However this is often difficult in the early weeks when site allocation is still fluid. There are a number of variations on the programme design. Some CFS focus on child to child health promotion, others can be sports focused, or arts focused. The models tend to evolve locally dependent on interests, talents and adult support.

The standards which should be expected include:

- an area where children feel safe
- provision for girls and boys
- provision for children with disabilities to be included
- open for activities at regular times
- liaison with other providers of services



A child friendly space

But the community must be involved in design of facilities: for example in Sri Lanka, one of the child friendly spaces' playgrounds was adult dominated because adults had nowhere to gather and talk. Also adults like sitting on swings as much as children. So community participation in design, and in awareness of need for all groups to have public spaces to gather, is essential. In communities where there is very little for children, it's also important to check the amount of equipment which should be supplied.

The CFS model provides an entry point to working with communities. Other activities can use the CFS as a starting point- for example public health information dissemination on handwashing or promotion of breast feeding. The CFS are usually staffed by members of the community. They receive training in working with children in a participatory way (as needed) and on how to deal with the issues children may be facing as a result of the disaster.

Providing time and a place where children can learn about what happened in a disaster is also important, as well as learning about how to deal with the impact. Immediately after the tsunami, many children were scared that another tsunami would come. Picture boards and discussions were used to help children understand that tsunamis are very rare. Following the earthquake in Pakistan, CFS are being used to teach children basic health and hygiene such as washing their hands after using latrines, and how to avoid hypothermia.

Because staff in the CFS know the children with whom they work, they are able to identify children who are struggling or in difficulty, and to refer them to social workers or to appropriate agencies. For example, a child in Pakistan was referred to a special fund for assisting earthquake victims when staff found out his parents couldn't afford the transport to hospital in Islamabad for follow up appointments. This sort of assistance is only leveraged by knowing the communities.

The community relationships built up through this type of programme post disaster provide a mechanism for consulting the whole community, including the children. Parents' meetings are held regularly in CFS programmes, and they can be used to consult parents on siting of new homes, whether they are receiving appropriate aid, or what their vision of a new community is.

On the surface, a CFS may seem to be a basic type of kindergarten or youth centre, but underneath, there is probably much more going on.



In Hambantota, Sri Lanka, the roundabout got overused!

INVOLVING CHILDREN AS STAKEHOLDERS: DIFFERENCE TECHNIQUES TO TAKE CHILDREN'S VIEWS INTO ACCOUNT

Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth⁷ is a manual which provides many useful examples of how children's participation in community design and

⁷ David Driskell (2002), *Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth*, London, UNESCO

implementation can improve their lives. Although not specifically aimed at the post disaster situation, the techniques described therein are applicable in post disaster reconstruction.

The key techniques which can be used are:

Interviews (structured and unstructured) with children, but also with parents, officials and other adults in order to explore their views about children's lives.

Focus group discussions allow a group of children to give their views. Those running the sessions (whether adults or children) need training and skills in group management. Care has to be taken not to allow any one person to dominate.

Mapping allows children the opportunity to draw their current community, to indicate where they spend time, and to show which places are viewed as safe and which places are viewed as not safe.

Drawings with explanations provide children with a tool to express their views of an area at present, their views of how it should be in the future, and their favourite types of place or activity.

Where time and conditions allow, photography or art projects where children take photos of or draw their current environment and then report on the changes needed, and what needs to be replicated after the disaster, are often useful.

Transect walks⁸, where adults and children walk through an area, noting usage, conditions, people, issues in different areas of a community provide an opportunity for planners to understand the issues from a children's perspective.

Principles which should be observed:

Non-discrimination: ensuring that all groups of children, including girls, minorities, those with disabilities including learning disabilities, children who work, and other hard to reach groups have the right to participate and to give their views. The time that this will take, and the skills necessary to ensure children who want to contribute can. Modifications such as picture forms (for children who can't read), translation to minority languages, changing to an accessible location, may have to be made.

⁸ for a good description, see <http://pcs.aed.org/manuals/cafs/handbook/sessions10-12.pdf>

Participation by choice, rather than by compulsion. No child should be forced to participate. Children should be told what will happen to the information gathered, how it will be used, and what their role is in post disaster planning.

These techniques were used in reconstruction of a school in Aceh. Children had died at the school because a perimeter wall collapsed in the tsunami. The children (and community) wanted some means of keeping the children safe inside the school grounds, marking where the school land was, but yet didn't want another wall because of the tsunami. Discussions led to the construction of a fence which wouldn't hurt anyone if it fell down.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS IN POST DISASTER PLANNING WHICH IMPACT CHILDREN

Sphere standards⁹

The Sphere standards contain the minimum standards which can be expected in disaster response. All the major NGOs and UN agencies have agreed to implement them. "Children" is a cross cutting issue in the handbook, which covers:

- Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion
- Food Security, Nutrition and Food Aid
- Shelter, Settlement and Non-Food Items
- Health Services
- *Children*
 - o Special measures must be taken to ensure the protection from harm of all children and their equitable access to basic services. As children often form the larger part of an affected population, it is crucial that their views and experiences are not only elicited during emergency assessments and planning but that they also influence humanitarian service delivery and its monitoring and evaluation. Although vulnerability in certain specificities (e.g. malnutrition, exploitation, abduction and recruitment into fighting forces, sexual violence and lack of opportunity to participate in decision-making) can also apply to the wider population, the most harmful impact is felt by children and young people.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is considered to be an individual below the age of 18. Depending on cultural and social contexts, however, a child may be defined differently amongst some population groups. It is essential that a thorough analysis of how a client community defines children

⁹ <http://www.sphereproject.org/>

be undertaken, to ensure that no child or young person is excluded from humanitarian services.

World Vision

World Vision's soon to be published manual on child protection in emergencies¹⁰ also provides guidance on protecting children, and sets guidelines and standards for emergency response. These are based on inter-agency¹¹ principles.

EXPERIENCES IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES IN PROTECTING CHILDREN

Gender: in many countries women do not mix with men, and older girls are separated from boys. Girls in an Islamic area of Sri Lanka were struggling with the heat in their new houses because they had been constructed so that people could see in from the outside. This meant they needed to cover their heads in the house. Had full consultation been carried out on house design, this might have been avoided.

Disability: Pakistan had people with disabilities before the earthquake. The attitude in rural areas towards them wasn't very positive. The creation of a whole new generation of people with disabilities presents challenges in construction, income generation, and above all, societal attitudes. How we reconstruct and take their views into account can contribute to positive change. On the other hand if we don't take their views into account, we can contribute to reinforcing pre-existing prejudices.

Indonesia: after the earthquake in Nias, much reconstruction was needed. The local community was fearful about outsiders coming in to work on construction and harming women. It was agreed that local staff would be used as much as possible to mitigate risks to women and children from men being away from home for a long time.

World Vision has a standard that all contracts must include an agreement by contractors not to exchange sex for aid, not to abuse beneficiaries, and to report any concerns. If they infringe the agreement, their contract is terminated.

Much of the post disaster reconstruction work involves "cash for work" or "food for work" programmes. It is important to note that these can provide benefits for families such as increasing family income for food and education, but also risks, when children are left alone without carers, or children are encouraged to

¹⁰ title not finalised yet

¹¹ The Inter agency Working Group on Separated Children includes UNICEF, UNHCR, ICRC, IRC, SCF and World Vision

participate in the programmes. Careful monitoring and work with the community is needed to ensure that children do not get exploited or put at risk.

CONCLUSION

Disasters affect children as much as they affect the adult population – some would argue even more so than adults. Children's increased vulnerability post-disaster to protection issues is yet to be included as a major part of longer term post disaster planning.

Nearly all governments have committed to base their laws on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children's rights' models view children as active participants in their own lives in all situations, rather than as passive victims of. This positive view of children, and the contribution they have to making their own lives and communities better, whilst not taking away from adult responsibilities, is important for post disaster planners to note.

This paper offers insight into specific challenges facing children post disaster, what is being done in the field to address these and areas that post disaster planners, as duty bearers need to consider carefully and intentionally in order to address the rights of children.