

A matter of life and death

Child protection programming's essential role in ensuring child wellbeing and survival during and after emergencies

Briefing paper for child protection practitioners, donors and humanitarian decision-makers

Over the last decade, armed conflict has claimed the lives of over two million children.¹

Children are always among the most vulnerable in an emergency. When lives are uprooted, the systems working to keep children safe – in their homes, schools and communities – may be undermined or damaged. Children have specific protection needs that are not met by other humanitarian sectors.

In times of crisis, boys and girls face increased risk of all forms of violence and exploitation. They may be separated from their families, trafficked, recruited or used by armed forces and groups, come into contact with the justice system, face economic exploitation and physical or sexual abuse.⁴ Thousands of children are killed or injured every year by explosive weapons and landmines.⁵ In the longer term, children's survival and development are jeopardized as their societies' ability to invest in their future is weakened.⁶

Another 6 million have been left injured or disabled for life and one million were made orphans.²

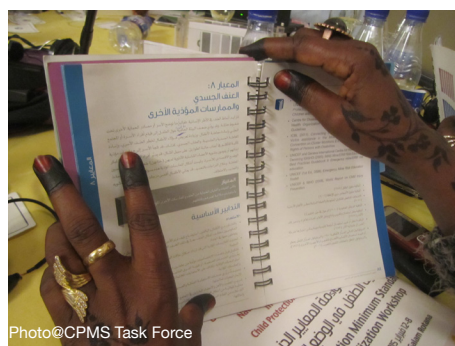
Child protection in emergencies is defined specifically as the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children during and after disasters, conflicts and other crises.⁷ It involves interconnected activities by a range of actors, whether national or community-based and/or by humanitarian staff supporting local capacities.

In disasters, death rates for children are typically higher than for adults.

ⁱⁱⁱ In the 2005 Sri Lanka tsunami, death rates for children were 4x those for adults.³

Opinion leaders understand that child protection needs are urgent.⁸ Children themselves prioritize child protection.^{9,10,11,12} Strengthening child protection systems is one of the most cost-effective ways to build resilience and promote sustainable development.¹³ Experience shows that when children are protected in an effective and holistic manner, other humanitarian efforts are more successful.¹⁴

And yet child protection remains misunderstood, underfunded and consistently deprioritized. This research attempts to understand why. It identifies ways to raise awareness of the importance, relevance and urgency of child protection in emergencies as a life-saving intervention among donors, decision-makers and practitioners.

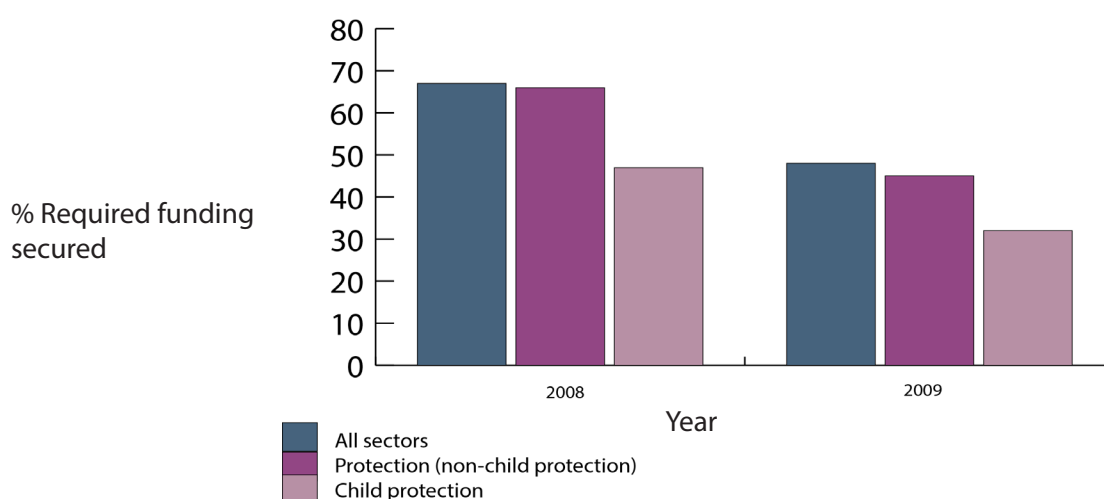




Background to this research

The global Child Protection Working Group (CPWG) commissioned this research to address the deprioritization of child protection in humanitarian action, reported year on year by child protection coordination groups and evidenced by statistics on funding and the findings of other research efforts in the humanitarian sector.

Despite an overall growth in humanitarian funding, CERF¹⁵ funding for child protection fell from US\$ 6.5 million in 2007 to US\$ 3.2 million in 2008, and then fell again to US\$ 2.9 million in 2009.¹⁶ If recorded data for child protection funding is treated separately from the overall protection cluster, in 2009 it has the second highest level of underfunding after the education sector.¹⁷



The 2008/2009 data indicates that a number of categories of child protection work are especially underfunded. These are child-focused gender-based violence projects, trafficking and migration and child labour.¹⁸ Furthermore, research shows that the voices of children are often not heard and do not influence humanitarian decision-making.¹⁹

Research objectives

The purpose of this research was to answer the question: Does child protection in humanitarian action save lives? Based on interviews with key informants, an online survey and a comprehensive review of existing literature and statistical data, three research questions were asked:

1. What are the serious threats to life and wellbeing that child protection interventions can address?
 2. What actions can child protection actors take to prevent and respond to violence against children in emergencies?
 3. How can child protection interventions be best prioritized within emergency responses and humanitarian action?
-



FINDINGS

1. What can go wrong? Violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse of children during and after emergencies

In Thailand in 2011, Tropical Storm Nalgae brought flooding to a number of regions. A child protection rapid needs assessment identified unsafe physical surroundings as the main source of worry among care-givers regarding their children.²⁰

These categories can help to explain the breadth and diversity of child protection work. It should be noted that many risks pre-exist the emergency, but are then aggravated when protection systems break down e.g. road traffic accidents. Other risks emerge as a direct result of the crisis e.g. injury from gunfire. Moreover, child protection risks should not be seen as discrete, but rather interconnected and compounding. For example, an unaccompanied girl or boy may face increased risk of association with an armed force or group. In turn, that child is more likely to experience physical and sexual violence, psychosocial distress and mental disorders. Furthermore, child protection issues should be seen as interconnected because experience shows that when children are protected in an effective and holistic manner, other humanitarian efforts are more successful. Evidence shows that deprioritizing psychosocial support, for example, may reduce the effectiveness of other humanitarian programme interventions, such as education, health and livelihoods.²⁴ It is therefore important to keep a view of the “bigger picture” and address the full range of child protection concerns in each context, rather than focusing on one or two “fundable” issues.

As of February 2015, 7,796 children have been killed in Syria's three-year civil war.²¹

Dangers and injuries

Common forms of physical danger and injury in conflicts, disasters and other crises include road traffic accidents, drowning, fire-related burns, injury caused by explosive remnants of war or landmines and unintended injury from gunfire. Medical support is needed within hours of the incident.

Almost one fifth of girls in Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince were raped during an armed rebellion in 2004 and 2005.²²

Physical violence and other harmful practices

Disasters, violent conflict, political change and periods of instability place children at increased risk of physical violence and other harmful practices. In the home, violence and abuse may occur due to increased stress caused both by the emergency and its consequences. In some circumstances, families may resort to harmful strategies as coping mechanisms, such as early marriage and female genital mutilation. Case management should take priority and start immediately. Community awareness may begin with prevention messages. Identification of vulnerable families for Cash Transfer Programmes and behavioural change interventions may come in a second phase.

In 2010, 7 years after the conflict began, it was estimated that over a quarter of Iraqi children, or 3 million, suffered varying degrees of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.²³

Sexual violence

Evidence suggests that sexual violence increases in all emergency contexts. This may be due to reduced protection mechanisms. It is also sometimes attributed to increased social and economic pressures. Consequences include injury and death, unwanted pregnancy, contraction of sexually transmitted infections, physical injuries, mental health issues, distress, and social and economic exclusion. Medical support is needed within hours. Evidence must be collected within 48-72 hours. To prevent HIV, the survivor must receive treatment within 3 days. To prevent unwanted preg-



The UN reports that over 13,000 child soldiers are engaged in fighting on both side of the conflict in the South Sudan war.²⁵

nancy (also potentially life-saving for younger girls), medical intervention is required within one week. Psychosocial support should be given early and on a continuous basis.

Psychosocial distress and mental disorders

Crises can induce severe and chronic stress -- resulting both from the emergency and its aftermath. Research shows that 'Toxic stress', where the stress response system is activated over a prolonged period, can cause problems with short-term recall, learning abilities, stress and fear responses, and the ability to control emotions.²⁹ The identification and response to suicidal tendencies is urgent. Other psychosocial interventions take longer to establish.

Domestic child labour is a major problem in Haiti, with up to 225,000 children aged between five and 17, mainly girls, virtually living as slaves.²⁶

Children associated with armed forces and groups

Associated children may face sexual exploitation and violence (both girls and boys), detention for engagement in conflict, threats to life, possible injury and exposure to explosive remnants of war. They are also deprived of education and parental care. Vulnerability is ongoing even after release or escape, as formerly associated children may lack education or be rejected by the their families or communities, potentially leading to secondary exploitation. Immediate action is needed for the registration and referral of formerly associated children as they may have sustained physical injury. Psychosocial support is especially urgent for this group.

Child labour

Child labour, especially in its worst forms, increases in all emergency contexts. Families face lost livelihoods, educational possibilities are disrupted and protection mechanisms may be eroded by displacement or separation from caregivers. Working children, especially those in 'hidden' jobs such as domestic labour, face great risk of abuse and exploitation. Community awareness and advocacy with governments and trade unions may wait until later in the early recovery phase of the humanitarian response.

An estimated 400,000 to 500,000 children were lost or separated from their families during the 1994 Rwandan genocide.²⁷

Unaccompanied and separated children

Unaccompanied and separated children lose their primary protection mechanism, increasing the likelihood of negative social, psychological and economic impacts of emergencies. Children may be abducted into forced labour, conscripted into armed groups or forces, or trafficked. Separation from adult carers may reduce children's chances of accessing humanitarian aid and services. Research demonstrates long-term psychological impacts.³⁰ A correlation has been found between separation from caregivers and death.³¹ Separated, unaccompanied and orphaned children must be registered and details of their separation documented as soon as possible.

Since the second Intifada in 2000, over 5,500 Palestinian children have been imprisoned by Israeli authorities for alleged security offences.²⁸

Justice for children

Boys and girls in prison may face diverse forms of violence and threats to their wellbeing, including ill-treatment, sexual abuse, torture, physical violence, abuse and death. Within conflict settings in particular, when justice systems are weakened



2. What can be done? How can child protection actors prevent and respond to violence against children in emergencies?

Advocate	Advocate with governments, donors, parties to conflict, those planning and implementing programmes in other sectors and other high-level actors and decision-makers. For example, child protection actors may advocate against the use of orphanages and international adoption in response to humanitarian crises, because lessons learned from around the world demonstrate that girls and boys are usually far safer and better cared for in a family environment in their own communities.
Raise awareness	Raise awareness on child protection concerns targeting beneficiaries, the wider population, parents, and communities. For example, child protection actors may work with local communities to develop public awareness campaigns against child trafficking during and after emergencies. ³²
Behavioural change	Promote behavioural change and implement activities to develop life skills for children and their families. Activities to build resilience and enable better prevention and response to child protection concerns. For example, child protection actors may support parents raising children in difficult and stressful circumstances with positive parenting programmes, promoting alternatives to violence discipline to help keep children safe. ³³
Build capacity	Build capacity for key workers and service providers at national, regional, local or community levels on child protection issues. For example, child protection actors may pilot training programmes for local social workers to provide supportive care to children and their caregivers.
Alternative or interim care	Develop, support and monitor alternative or interim care for separated, unaccompanied or orphaned children or those needing alternative arrangements for their safety. This includes children requiring temporary care after release from armed forces or groups, or from detention.
Case management	Lead case management whereby vulnerable children are identified and referred to essential services (medical support, interim care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, safety and security, etc.) accompanied by a trained caseworker.
Social activities	Provide structured social activities for children, facilitated by adults from their own community. ³⁴ This may include child friendly spaces and other psychosocial support activities. Child friendly spaces are environments in which children can access free and structured play, recreation, leisure and learning activities. Other psychosocial support activities that child protection actors may deliver, in collaboration with the wider humanitarian community, include mass communication about positive coping methods, the activation of social networks such as women's groups and youth clubs, and psychological first aid.



Community based child protection mechanisms

Support and develop community-based child protection mechanisms, understood as networks or groups of individuals operating at the community level who work in a coordinated manner towards child protection goals.³⁵ Such mechanisms may be indigenous or externally initiated and supported.

Livelihoods

Improve livelihoods. This area of work encompasses actions taken by governments, donors and implementers to improve livelihoods, where “livelihoods” refers to the capabilities, assets and activities required to make a living.³⁶ Activities may include: microcredit, skills training, agricultural interventions and cash transfer programmes (cash transfers/grants – both conditional and unconditional, cash for work and vouchers).

Mainstream

Mainstream and integrate child protection objectives into other sectors’ programme activities.³⁷ Includes supporting other sectors to consider the views of children throughout the project cycle; enabling actors to adapt services and material delivery to the needs of children; training other sector staff on child rights, child safeguarding and child protection. This includes sectors with an immediately apparent interest in child protection, such as education, but also other sectors such as WASH, health, camp management and others.

Monitor

Monitor child protection activities. In certain contexts, child protection actors gather data on the killing or maiming of children; recruitment or use of child soldiers; attacks against schools or hospitals; rape and other instances of grave sexual violence; abduction and denial of humanitarian access. In other settings, the systematic monitoring of child protection concerns enables child protection actors to identify and understand patterns of violence, exploitation and abuse.

Family tracing, reunification and reintegration

Family tracing, reunification and reintegration. In times of crisis, particularly when associated with sudden or mass population movements, a significant number of children become separated. UN agencies, governments and NGOs have developed interagency procedures to return children to their families. For example, UNICEF has developed a smartphone app called RapidFTR to synchronize lists of separated family members.³⁸ It has been used to track and reunite unaccompanied and separated children after disasters such as Typhoon Haiyan and the refugee crisis in South Sudan.



3. How to prioritize child protection interventions within emergency responses and humanitarian action?

Child protection saves lives, now and later. Some events require action within six hours.

Where the term “life-saving” is understood to denote actions either preventing death or serious injury immediately or in the longer term, the findings of this research clearly illustrate the life-saving nature of child protection programmes in humanitarian situations.

The urgent and life-saving nature of child protection is made clear by the fact that some events require action within six hours in order to avoid the worst outcomes. This affords a helpful basis for prioritization of child protection actions, consistent with the principle of “life-saving” and the humanitarian imperative.

Need to consider long-term health and wellbeing outcomes.

Nonetheless, while not all the negative outcomes of child protection needs are immediately life-threatening, there is a need to consider the long-term health and wellbeing outcomes of issues such as distress, separation, association with armed forces and groups. Exposure to adversity is known to have detrimental impacts on individuals, families and wider societies, potentially exacerbating and maintaining conflict, perpetuating cycles of poverty and reinforcing family and community instability.

Better collaboration, tools and indicators to enable prioritization across the humanitarian response.

There is a need for cross-sector initiatives with shared methodologies to enable prioritization across all elements of the humanitarian response. Using adapted prioritization tools and processes from those sectors that usually secure greater funding may benefit child protection by enabling other sectors and overall humanitarian decision-makers to better understand the choices being made within the child protection sector. Having an established prioritization process, a ranking tool and surveillance indicators would enable child protection to be more systematic. Going a step further, developing joint vulnerability criteria across sectors may improve interagency and intersectoral referral of cases, as well as ensuring the mainstreaming of child protection in other sector plans.

All necessary resources: financial, human, technical and material.

Prioritization is about getting the necessary resources – financial, human, technical and material – to establish child protection programming from the outset. Funding streams need to be predictable and reliable. Short-term funding may weaken implementation and make some activities untenable, such as one-to-one support for vulnerable children through case management services. Furthermore, child protection must be provided with sufficient human resources, not only finances. This requires long-term investment on behalf of agencies. They must ensure they have deployable staff with appropriate levels of technical expertise and seniority to enable the management and implementation of humanitarian responses.



References

1. UNESCO, (date unknown) Children victims of war and disasters.
2. As above.
3. UNICEF Evaluation Office (December 2013) Evaluation of UNICEF Programmes to Protect Children in Emergencies: Synthesis Report.
4. Risks as outlined in Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, CPWG 2012.
5. UN Mine Action Service, Annual Report 2013.
6. David Steven (2014) If not now, when? Ending Violence Against the World's Children. New York: New York University Center on International Cooperation.
7. CPWG, 2012.
8. Fenton and Bernard Van Leer Foundation (2013) Communicating about violence in the lives of young children. http://www.fenton.com/files/fenton_bvlf_report.pdf (Accessed 5 May 2015)
9. Save the Children and Norwegian Refugee Council (2014) Hear it from the children: Why education in emergencies is critical.
10. Children in a changing climate coalition, with Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNISDR and World Vision (2013) Towards the resilient future children want : a review of progress in achieving the Children's Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction.
11. ChildFund Alliance (2013) Children speak about being free from violence and exploitation.
12. ChildFund Alliance (2014) Children's priorities for the post-2015 development agenda.
13. David Steven (2014) If Not Now, When? Ending Violence Against the World's Children. New York: New York University Center on International Cooperation.
14. Theresa S Betancourt (2015) The Intergenerational Effect of War, JAMA Psychiatry. Published online January 7 2015.
15. The Central Emergency Response Fund is a standby fund established by the United Nations to enable more timely and reliable humanitarian assistance to survivors of disasters and complex emergencies.
16. As child protection is "hidden" under the overall Protection Cluster funding reporting, the most recent data on the details of financing for child protection in emergencies is that compiled in 2007 – 2009 for the report "Too Little, Too Late." This funding pattern goes against the trend of overall CERF funding, which increased dramatically in 2008 and then decreased in 2009. See Sarah Lilley, Johanna MacVeigh, Christine McCormick and Misty Buswell (2011) Too Little, Too Late: Child protection funding in emergencies, commissioned by the Child Protection Working Group of the Global Protection Cluster.
17. As above.
18. As above.
19. Save the Children and Norwegian Refugee Council (2014) Hear it from the children: Why education in emergencies is critical.
20. Child Protection Sub-Cluster, Thailand (February 2012) Child Protection Risks due to Flooding in Thailand October-December 2011: Inter-Agency Child Protection Rapid Assessment Report.
21. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (2015) Available at: http://www.syriahr.com/?option=com_news&nid=16470&Itemid=2&task=displaynews. Accessed 10 April 2015.
22. Véronique Aubert with Alison Holder (2013) Unspeakable Crimes Against Children Sexual violence in conflict, Save the Children.
23. War Child (2013) Mission Unaccomplished: Iraq Statement Report: 10 Years On.
24. Theresa S Betancourt (2015) The Intergenerational Effect of War, JAMA Psychiatry. Published online January 7 2015.
25. UNICEF (July 2015) South Sudan Protection Cluster: <http://cpwg.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/08/Protection-Trends-Paper-No-5-July-2015.pdf> [accessed: 21 September 2015].
26. Sarah Tyler (13 January 2015) Haiti Earthquake: Five Years On, available at: <http://blogs.savethechildren.org.uk/2015/01/haiti-earthquake-five-years-on/>, Human Rights Watch, World Report 2012: Haiti, available at <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/haiti>, [both accessed on 6 February 2015].
27. Joanne Doyle (2010) Misguided Kindness: Making the right decisions for children in emergencies, Save the Children.
28. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (September 2011) Working Paper No.3: Children and Justice During and in the Aftermath of Armed Conflict.
29. Harvard Center on the Developing Child (2014) Tackling Toxic Stress.
30. Interagency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (2013) Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit.
31. As above.
32. Immediately after the tsunami in Indonesia, UNICEF and child protection partners introduced community based patrolling and deployment of police officers and social workers at most commonly used exit points and trafficking routes to help minimize the illicit movement of children. See UNICEF EAPRO (2009) Child Trafficking in East and South-East Asia: Reversing the Trend.
33. See International Rescue Committee (2014) Parents Make the Difference: Findings from a randomized impact evaluation of a parenting programme in rural Liberia.
34. For further details see: IASC (2007) Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, and IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, the global Child Protection Working Group, and the global Education Cluster (January 2011) Guidelines for Child Friendly Spaces in Emergencies: Principles for Child Friendly Spaces in Emergencies.
35. Alyson Eynon and Sarah Lilley (2010) Strengthening National Child Protection Systems in Emergencies Through Community-Based Mechanisms: A Discussion Paper, and, Mike Wessells (November 2009) What Are We Learning About Protecting Children in the Community? An interagency review of the evidence on community-based child protection mechanisms in humanitarian and development settings.
36. CPC Livelihoods and Economic Strengthening Taskforce (August 2011) The Impacts of Economic Strengthening Programs on Children.
37. See Child Protection Mainstreaming Briefing Notes, CPWG (2014). Available at http://cpwg.net/minimum_standards-topics/mainstream/ (Accessed 6 June 2015).
38. UNICEF (2013) RapidFTR, An app for reuniting families in disaster situations.