



## **DAY OF GENERAL DISCUSSION 2008**

### **The Right of the Child to Education in Emergency Situations**

#### **WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY FOR THE COMMUNITY**

*“Issues proposed for discussion based on the experiences of SOS-Kinderdorf International in response to emergency situations, particularly natural disasters”*

#### **Summary**

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This paper presents the field experience of SOS Children’s Villages in response to emergency situations, most notably, to the December 2004 Tsunami and its effects in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand. We present a short overview of measures taken and projects completed by national associations who worked in close participation with affected communities in order to ensure the suitability and sustainability of the facilities and services. Taking certain aspects of those experiences we then, with respect to the life course of the child, make a series of observations and recommendations for the Day of General Discussion that refer to various interdependent child rights as complementary to, and supportive of, the realisation of Articles 28 and 29. We also make reference to the question of securing longer term sustainable futures for families and communities in a way that secures family livelihoods with particular reference to securing education. As a final specific point we illustrate how lessons learned in the post-Tsunami relief experience informed other emergency responses, notably in Nicaragua and Bolivia. In conclusion, we draw attention to an array of child rights which have particular relevance in emergency situations and which have implications for securing the right to education. Whilst the general principles of the CRC retain their cross-cutting applicability, other specific articles are suggested as relevant with respect to securing education, inter alia, the rights to: identity, play, food, recovery and reintegration, alternative care, and appropriate assistance to parents with respect to parental responsibilities and duties.

#### **Introduction**

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SOS-Kinderdorf International is the umbrella organisation for over 130 SOS Children’s Villages national associations worldwide. SOS Children’s Villages provides family-based care for orphans and vulnerable children who cannot remain in the care of their families. Furthermore, our commitment to providing quality care is complimented by a family strengthening programme, which targets children at risk with the intention of preventing separation. These core activities have been central to the response to emergency situations within which securing the right to education has been an integral goal. This submission by SOS-Kinderdorf International to the Committee’s Day of General Discussion 2008 on *The Right of the Child to Education in Emergency Situations* is based on field experience primarily in response to natural disasters. As such, we make primary reference to post-Tsunami responses in India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka & Thailand. Whilst this paper focuses on post-Tsunami relief we note that the lessons learned with



regards to education, for example with respect to, normalisation, psycho-social recovery, and the multi-purpose use of facilities, also informed the organisation's responses to Hurricane Felix in Nicaragua in 2007 and the El Niño flooding in Bolivia in 2008.

In the immediate aftermath, and over the years since the tsunami in December 2004, SOS Children's Villages has provided a broad range of services and practical supports for children and their families under the rubric of *Rebuilding Lives*. In addition to working with government at various levels, and developing inter-agency cooperation in relief efforts, the rebuilding lives approach took as a guiding principal the basic underlying philosophy of *working with the community for the community* to provide immediate relief, to secure temporary and permanent accommodation, and build community facilities and infrastructure, with the ultimate aim to develop sustainable futures and livelihoods.

Taking this firm participatory approach, which was made possible as SOS national associations employ only locally-based workers, allowed SOS Children's Villages to ensure that specific local requirements were both appreciated and fully respected in the planning of emergency relief and the provision of services. As such, a broad range of support mechanisms were introduced over various time frames, from immediate needs for emergency relief in the form of financial or material support or short-term emergency day-care, to the medium term requirements of temporary housing, generating income, to the longer term goals for the reconstruction of housing, schools, community/social centres, and re-establishing livelihoods for families and communities. The full scale of the work completed is summarised below.

- DIRECT EMERGENCY RELIEF for 23,000 people (start-up money, relief packages, first aid, clothing, school materials, school fees)
- 11 temporary DAY CARE CENTRES for 1,800 children
- 343 FISHING BOATS for 1,120 families
- PROVISIONAL ACCOMMODATION for 1,370 people
- Construction of 2,232 FAMILY HOUSES for a total of 11,079 people in 15 communities
- 18 MULTI-PURPOSE COMMUNITY CENTRES (for kindergartens, education courses, family advice, medical points, shelter in the case of flooding)
- 6 new SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES for around 830 children who are deprived of parental care (incl. kindergarten, social centres, youth facilities, vocational training centres)
- 3 SOS SOCIAL CENTRES and 8 FAMILY STRENGTHENING PROGRAMMES to assist and support vulnerable children at-risk of separation within their families.

In addition to the regional overview above<sup>1</sup>, SOS Children's Villages also supported the reconstruction, furnishing and materials for primary schools at Ban Taly Nok, Thailand, and Lambada Lhok, Indonesia, and the reconstruction of a state-run secondary school for 1758 students at Kalmunia, Sri Lanka. As stated above, whilst SOS Children's Villages has worked to

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<sup>1</sup> Working with the Community for the Community – SOS Kinderdorf International

provide a range of emergency measures and interventions relevant over the short, medium and longer term, direct and indirect support for the realisation of the right to education can be considered as a central theme throughout. Education, broadly defined for children of all ages, was therefore neither treated in isolation nor regarded as an add-on to emergency relief's better established pillars of support for health, shelter and food but as an integral part of the Rebuilding Lives programme.

## **Experience, Observations and Topics for Discussion**

### ***Birth Registration & Identity***

During post-tsunami relief work conducted through SOS Family Strengthening Programmes and delivered through SOS Social Centres in North Sumatra, Indonesia, it became apparent that many children were without legal papers. In this particular context it was noted that birth certificates are not automatically issued by the Indonesian authorities and consequently the organisation assisted families in acquiring this important documentation.

In this, and other contexts of catastrophic disaster, we can also speculate that, in addition to the non-issuance of documentation experienced in this case, any pre-emergency lack of effective registration systems which overlook or exclude vulnerable populations and also the physical loss of existing documentation all have implications for establishing and/or preserving a child's identity<sup>2</sup>. This, in turn, has implications for State obligations to provide systematic and effective registration mechanisms<sup>3</sup>. Whilst effective registration has broader implications for child protection and other issues, we note particularly for this Day of General Discussion, that documentation and identity are important considerations in securing the right to education and equitable access to educational provision both in the short and long-term.

Furthermore, whilst effective registration helps secure the right to education, consideration should also be given to discussion on how emergency education interventions, and other emergency programmes, inter alia, for health, food distribution, can, through effective inter-agency co-operation, support, promote, or facilitate effective registration of all children who require it.

### ***Young Children***

The committee has provided interpretation and guidance on the right to education, as elaborated in Article 28, stating that this right applies to all children from birth<sup>4</sup>. This in the circumstances of emergency situations emphasises the potential for responses to work with interdependent rights considerations between education, child protection issues, and the particular vulnerabilities

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<sup>2</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – Article 8.1 'preservation of identity'

<sup>3</sup> CRC – Article 7 'registration and name'

<sup>4</sup> CRC – General Comment 7 - para.28



of young children<sup>5</sup>. In response to these issues, SOS Children's Villages provided a variety of interventions, again, over the short and medium to long term.

For example, in Singaravalen village, Tamil Nadu, India, short-term emergency day care was established in temporary structures, to provide a child-friendly space that met a variety of needs. As a site for the provision of education, such day care was equipped with educational materials and staffed by local teachers and other support workers. At this and other sites with the longer term development of SOS Activity Centres at Pudukuppam and Akkampettai, attention was also given to the provision of a wide range of educational toys and games. In addition to materials, various group and individual activities such as story-telling, art, singing and rhymes were encouraged and facilitated by qualified pedagogues. Whilst this usage of sites specifically provided early childhood education these sites also provided multi-purpose opportunities; as safe spaces for children to play<sup>6</sup>, served as an opportunity to provide basic health care, gave the opportunity to provide young children with a nutritious meal<sup>7</sup>, and made counselling available to facilitate psycho-social recovery where required<sup>8</sup>.

Educational and protective provisions also provide interesting examples that might inform discussion on how to make best use of available and limited spaces. For example in Sri Lanka, SOS Children's Villages established temporary support for kindergartens in the form of medium term funding, but with the clear intention of handing them over to the community. These kindergartens were set up in various locations which served as community-based Child Protection Centres Community Centres, Activity Centres, or were SOS-run Social Centres. All of these sites served multiple purposes in addition to supporting young children. For example, providing, study support for children of all ages, adult education and training, delivering family strengthening programmes, and, vocational training for adolescents, to make best use of available, and often limited, facilities and resources<sup>9</sup>.

### ***School age children***

The question of re-establishing or normalising school routines specifically, and educational provision generally, has various aspects that present implications for structure, curriculum, and, not least of all, for the psycho-social development and self-reliance of children and young people.

Structural considerations related to the general conditions of the educational environment are highlighted across the post-Tsunami relief work conducted by SOS Children's Villages. Securing access to education and the general environmental conditions for educational services, (for example, the recruitment and/or training of educators, good lighting, proper seating, suitable ventilation, and a blackboard) for both temporary provision and future reconstruction were therefore considered as both short and long-term priorities.

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<sup>5</sup> CRC – General Comment 7 – para.36

<sup>6</sup> CRC – Article 31 'right to play'

<sup>7</sup> CRC – Article 24c 'adequate nutritious food'

<sup>8</sup> CRC – Article 39 'recovery and reintegration'

<sup>9</sup> CRC – Article 4 'use of resources'

The importance of re-establishing the curriculum is particularly exemplified in this quote from colleagues in SOS Children's Village India who note "*the regular curriculum in schools however, has not commenced in a structured way, children show less enthusiasm as they are not gainfully engaged*"<sup>10</sup>. In India concerns for continuing and/or completing education, delivered through a multi-purpose activity centre at Keechakappum, were addressed by the provision of evening study support for children of all ages, from Grades 1 to 10 across a range of subjects like English, Maths, Science, and Accounts, they provided opportunities for expression and cultural activities through Music & Dance. For the youth particularly this sort of support was specifically intended to ensure timely completion of the national exams. Furthermore, in this particular example, and with respect to the question of active engagement posed in the previous quote, the participation of educated youth was also specifically sought to assist teachers in the education of the younger children.

In Indonesia strategies to build a bridge between curriculum and psycho-social considerations included youth-educator *discussion groups*, which were established outside of school time to allow for broader discussion of other issues consequent on the emergency situation; impact home life, school life, or other concerns presented by adolescents. In Sri Lanka these links between formal education and the lived experience of adolescents were emphasised by the implementation of a programme of '*Education for Life*', intended to empower youth through the development of skills of decision-making, negotiation, and encouraging healthy life choices.

### ***Future Perspectives & Vocational Training***

Relief efforts, beyond formal education, to address the needs, capabilities, and future perspectives of young people and adolescents also provide insights into the need for both specific skills and the development of life skills, as well as to the question of taking a broad view of education with respect to developing positive perspectives for the future.

In India, for example, older boys and young adults were enrolled in a 3 month course on motor boat mechanics and received, on completion of the course, their own tool kit. Whilst such courses had specific relevance to the skills necessary to participate in the local economic culture of these fishing communities, such training was also not viewed in isolation and was seen to offer broader educational opportunities. As such specific links were established between the provision of such courses through tie-ups with both local industry and polytechnics to allow beneficiaries the chance to develop their skills further. In addition to these opportunities courses were provided to deliver training in computer skills which held similar links with industry and further education. For example, in this particular case, SOS Children's Villages India subsidised, otherwise expensive, computer training on the Tally accounting and book-keeping software package.

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<sup>10</sup> SOS Children's Villages India – internal communication

On the broader question of empowerment and supporting the development of a sense of purpose mentioned above how educated youth acted as important facilitators in the education of younger children. In addition to this specific example, and referring particularly to relief efforts in Sri Lanka, the perspectives and local knowledge of youth were actively sought as ‘consultants’ and local experts. From the post-Tsunami relief experience, and the leadership roles which young people played in that experience it is suggested that the question of providing training and support for local youth as future leaders in such communities is one of key long-term strategic importance.

### ***Income & Livelihoods***

The primary objective of SOS Family Strengthening Programmes is to identify the most vulnerable children and families and support them through educational, health, nutrition, and other measures, towards self reliance. In directly facilitating access to educational opportunities these programmes have, as a short term measure, provided vulnerable families with small grants to purchase educational materials and to cover school entrance fees<sup>11</sup>. However, looking to the longer term sustainability, for example, empowerment programmes delivered via the SOS Social Centre in Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu (India). In this case in particular, women-headed households were provided skills training intended to assist these mothers to generate sufficient income for them to provide adequate care and ensure the education of their children. For example, women received skills training in tailoring, candle-making, and mushroom cultivation, with the objective of supporting these women to work together in collective self-help groups who then received micro-financing to maximise income.

The issue of restoring livelihoods and also securing local food supplies is further emphasised by the organisation’s decision to support the delivery of 343 fishing boats across the region which, as each boat is shared by a small group of families, has had an impact on some 1,120 families. Securing incomes means that parents are better empowered to fulfil their primary duties and responsibilities<sup>12</sup> to provide a safe secure and supportive environment for child development, and to provide an appropriate standard of living<sup>13</sup>. In this case, this represents an element of *appropriate assistance* and therefore the financial security to enable parents to ensure their child has access to school.

Restoring livelihoods therefore empowers families to stand on their own and enables them to ensure that the costs of uniforms, books, school fees, and other educational materials are not hindering the fullest possible participation of their children in educational opportunities. Due consideration is required regarding appropriate support for the educational potentials of family environments; the support for parents as *first educators*<sup>14</sup>; and the aspirations of parents with regards to the educational attendance, achievement and outcomes for their children. For

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<sup>11</sup> CRC – Article 27.3 ‘state obligation for appropriate assistance to parents – material and/or financial’

<sup>12</sup> CRC – Article 18 ‘respect for parental responsibilities and duties’

<sup>13</sup> CRC – Article 27.2 ‘parental responsibility to secure adequate standard of living’

<sup>14</sup> CRC – General Comment 7 – para.29

example, as one widowed mother benefitting from a family-strengthening programme in India points out '*I want [my daughter] to study to the maximum and earn for herself*'.<sup>15</sup>

### **Beyond the post-Tsunami experience**

The question of the broad range of measures that can both support education and be supported by multiple use of centres is emphasised by emergency relief work conducted other emergency responses by other national associations. In Nicaragua, following Hurricane Felix in 2007, the SOS Children's Villages Nicaragua worked in close inter-agency collaboration with various local NGOs, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF. In addition to material issues and the distribution of educational 'backpacks' to provide educational supplies to 17000 children, these collaborative efforts implemented an *Educational Bridge* programme with the dual intention of both normalising the educational situation towards the end of the school year and making use of the school environment as a site for psycho-social recovery. This approach was implemented using the CARROUSEL methodology, which firstly seeks to establish normal life for children at school whilst linking adults to child rehabilitation processes, then makes use of suitably trained teachers and community leaders to conduct follow-up for a minimum of three months after the emergency. Furthermore, in response to the El Niño flooding in Bolivia in 2008, two emergency community childcare centres were put in place for as long as was necessary. In addition to ensuring education through the provision of qualified pedagogues and educational materials, these child friendly and protective sites were also used to provide nutrition and basic health care, including first aid.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this short paper we have drawn on specific experiences and reports from various emergency relief efforts of SOS Children's Villages national associations in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Nicaragua & Bolivia. Whilst the overall scope of those efforts is broad we note that securing the right to education has been a key component throughout, from the basics of securing the identity of the child to securing a sustainable and self-reliant future for families and communities. Whilst considerations relevant to both articles 28 and 29 have been the foundation for this paper we also stress the interdependency of an array of children's rights. We note specifically the cross-cutting nature of the CRC's general principles, as expressed in Article 2, 3, 6, 12, but also emphasise interdependent articles that have important implications for this discussion on securing education in emergency situations, inter alia, Articles 4, 7, 8, 18, 20, 24, 27 and 39. In presenting these recommendations we have discussed specific examples from with respect to particular age-groups of children. From birth, particularly with respect to effective registration, via preparation for an independent future by securing quality education or vocational skills for children of all ages, and beyond to securing family livelihoods as a key environment supporting educational aspirations, aims, attendance, and outcomes for all children. We look forward to a broad, inspiring, and productive Day of General Discussion.

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<sup>15</sup> SOS-Kinderdorf International India – internal communication