CRIN NEWSLETTER

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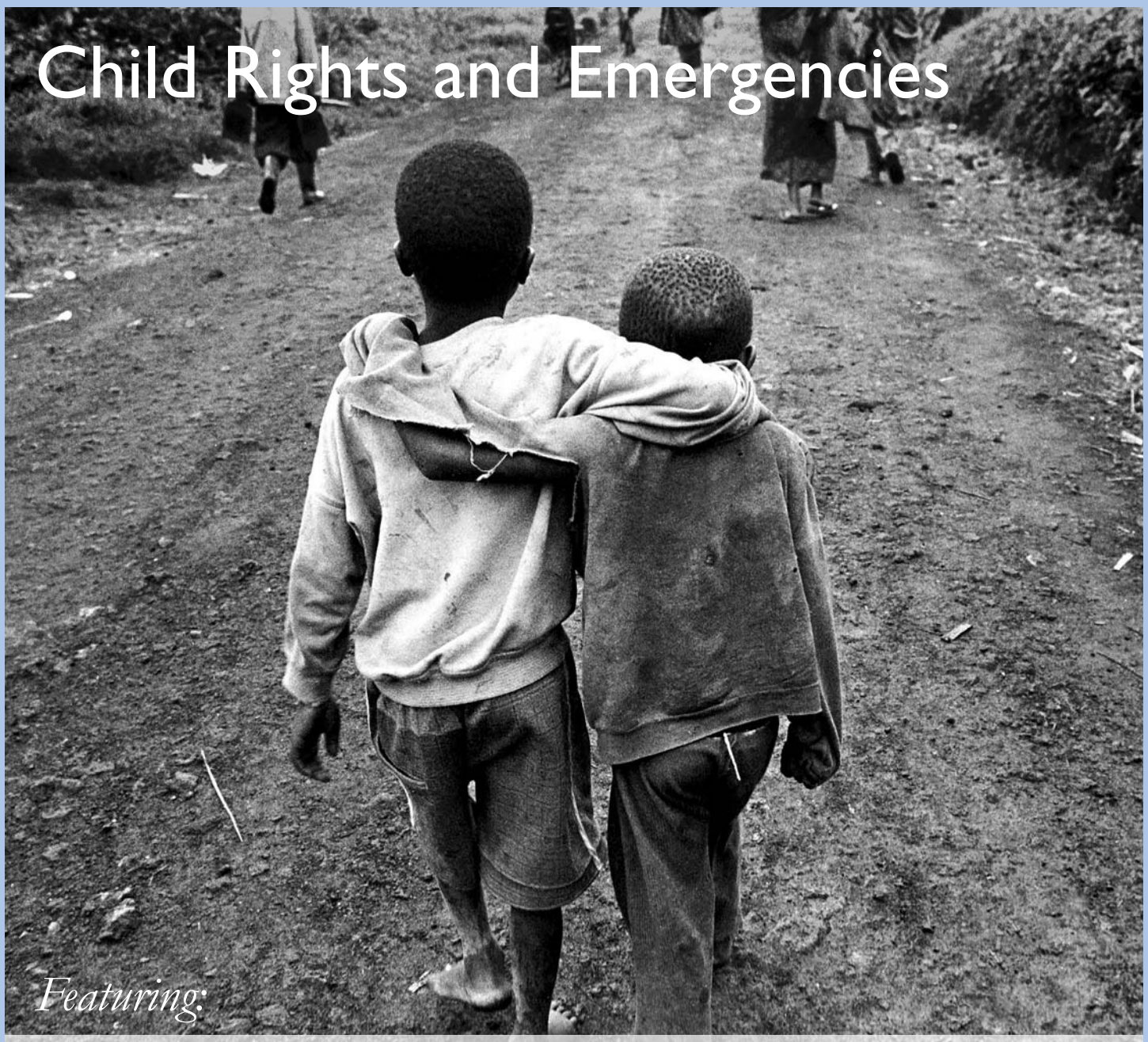

Child Rights and Emergencies

Picture: Chris Keulen/Panos Pictures

Featuring:

Rights and emergencies Hugo Slim on overcoming obstacles to rights-based thinking in emergencies

Humanitarian reform Christine Knudsen on what change will mean for children's rights

Giving young people a say Emma Roberts on child-led emergency response reviews

The Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) is a membership-driven organisation and network of over 1,700 child rights organisations around the world. It strives to improve the lives of children through the exchange of information about child rights and the promotion of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Help implement children's rights

As CRIN's next newsletter will focus on enforcing children's rights, we would like to hear from you about examples of good practice in your country. We are looking for models of laws which reflect and/or enforce children's rights. These could include:

- sections of constitutions;
- laws which establish human rights institutions for children;
- key high-level judgments;
- and examples of how the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has been used in courts of law.

Participate in the network

CRIN relies on its members to share what they are doing to promote and protect children's rights. The type of information which is vital to the network includes:

- **News** on child rights in your country, particularly about areas of children's rights you think are 'neglected' and 'new and emerging', as well as examples of how children's participation has influenced change.
- **Publications** including practical tools, lessons learned and child-friendly resources.
- **Events** such as courses and conferences on children's rights. We are particularly interested in hearing about events which are part of a wider process, such as an advocacy initiative, rather than one-off workshops, which will be followed-up with future events or reports.
- Information in different languages for our services in **Arabic**, **French** and **Spanish**.

Submit information online through the "resources" section of the CRIN website. It will then be approved by CRIN staff and displayed on the website.

Tell us what you think…

- about our website: what do you find useful and what would you like to see more of.
- about a specific item posted on the site through the "Have your say" feature.
- about our newsletters and how useful they are to you in your day-to-day work.

Contact us at: info@crin.org

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Editorial

In recent years the humanitarian community has seen an active debate about the place of human rights in emergency settings. This reflected considerable concerns about departing from a tried-and-tested set of humanitarian principles that were seen as having enabled agencies to deliver aid to those most in need. The introduction of human rights perspectives was seen as threatening some of these traditional approaches e.g. by jeopardising access to areas and people in extreme need.

For similar reasons rights-based approaches to work have, until recently, taken something of a back seat in emergency relief operations and in work in chronic emergencies. In part this arose because of perceptions that such approaches could not work in an emergency setting where, for example, there is a strong imperative to prioritise immediate survival needs and where the participation of beneficiaries was perceived as something of a luxury.

However, the last few years have been a time of reflection and learning for the humanitarian community. Some of the toughest challenges it has ever faced have brought a new will to alter the way it works: the failure to protect disaster-affected populations in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 (and the current situation in Darfur) and then the unprecedented experience of the tsunami in 2004, which affected many countries in South and South East Asia and beyond and tested the humanitarian infrastructure to the maximum.

Lessons from these experiences have fed into ongoing efforts to develop and enforce principles and standards that aim to make agencies more accountable to disaster-affected populations. These recognise their right to protection and assistance and set benchmarks for agencies to inform and consult with their beneficiaries.

This newsletter aims to reflect on some of the challenges of working within a child rights framework in emergency contexts. It draws together some lessons learned, creative ways of working, as well as practical tools and case studies for overcoming these challenges and helping children to better prepare for and recover from emergencies.

Hugo Slim spells out some of the reasons, in terms of political risks in particular, why humanitarian professionals have been slower off the mark than their development colleagues to adopt a rights-based approach to their work.

Christine Knudsen explains what the current humanitarian reform process means for children's rights and what opportunities it raises for strengthening the accountability of humanitarian agencies for the protection of child rights.

Heidi Peugeot and Fred Spielberg look at how new ideas in risk education can empower and protect children in disaster situations. In a case study, Orestes Valdés Valdés and Pedro Ferradas Manucci describe how, through the inclusion of risk education in the school curriculum, children play a vital part in Cuba's emergency response programme – a model, which they say, is ripe for adaptation elsewhere.

Erin Patrick describes the dangers that displaced women and girls face in carrying out daily household chores – such as collecting water and firewood for cooking – in conflict ravaged countries where rape and assault are used as 'weapons of war'. She underscores the international community's responsibility to protect the rights to physical and sexual integrity of refugee and internally displaced women and girls, and explains what must be done to protect these rights in the case of Darfur.

The chances of children falling into the hands of sexual predators increase dramatically in times of emergencies. Anthony Burnett and Stephanie Delaney outline some simple strategies that can be used by communities and children themselves to guard against sexual abuse and violence in all phases of an emergency. Harendra de Silva describes how drawing parallels between sexual abuse and the conscription of child soldiers in Sri Lanka has become an effective tool for child rights advocates.

A recent earthquake in Indonesia devastated the education system across a large region of the country. Deborah Haines explains how a joint effort has prioritised getting the education system back on track and enhancing it to help children prepare and recover from emergencies.

Telecommunications suppliers are teaming up with relief agencies to improve emergency responses. Dag Nielsen explains what makes these partnerships successful and explains how new technology is being developed to save lives in the future.

Alex Crawford gives some pointers for NGO media officers and the media on working together during an emergency to put children's best interests first.

Colin McCallum reveals how listening to children's own priorities for relief and recovery is helping them to overcome memories of the tsunami and describes some tools which have been developed from this experience to give children a say in wider community activities.

Finally, Emma Roberts tells us about her vision of child-led reviews of emergency responses and programmes. She outlines a way of ensuring that children – as key stakeholders – can hold agencies to greater account for their work and impact.

Jennifer Thomas

Photo: Karin Beate Nøsterud/Save the Children

Rights and emergencies: why so slow to connect?

Caution, not obstinacy, is the reason and it was a wise path to tread, argues Hugo Slim.

Every morning I am lucky enough to wake up and see the Salève mountain that overlooks Geneva. Legend has it that this is where Eglantyne Jebb, the founder of Save the Children, first scribbled down the five key Rights of the Child when she was walking there one day. That was in 1923, not long after World War One, and she was still thinking mainly about children living in emergency situations. But Jebb was also well aware that – as rights – these five entitlements were for times of peace as well as war.

The idea that rights-based thinking is new to emergencies is something of a delusion. Jebb's early humanitarian movement was all about rights. So too, in many ways, were the International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) earliest Geneva Conventions for the wounded in war. Indeed, Jebb insisted on having her set of children's rights signed in the same room in Geneva in which the ICRC's Geneva Conventions had been signed.

What is true, however, is that rights-based relief work took a back seat after World War Two compared to more technocratic talk of famine and medical relief. However, there was the notable exception of refugee work, which always talked of rights. It was not until the late 1980s that non governmental organisations (NGOs) and other UN agencies rejoined ICRC and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and began to talk about rights once again.

Since that time, a lot of rights advocates have found their humanitarian colleagues rather slow on the uptake and resistant to rights-based thinking and approaches at field level. Why is this? Are emergency staff dimmer than their clever development colleagues? Or is it perhaps because emergency staff are adrenalin-junkies, with no interest in the political reflection and the careful joined-up programming required by rights-based thinking?

Although these stereotypes are tempting, they are not true. Indeed, on paper at least, humanitarians have been highly organised in producing the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response to guide their own emergency work. These are all based on the notion of rights. The time it has taken to roll out a rights-based approach to field-based humanitarians is probably a sign of cautious maturation rather than complete resistance.

Humanitarians have been wise not to leap on a rights-based approach but, like a good wine taster, have been properly cautious in assessing the colour, the smell and the taste of the brew that is being offered mainly by headquarters. Has it been bottled and sold too soon? Is it really ready to drink and serve up to others?

Many emergency workers took immediately to rights. Others needed convincing and some had to pretend to be convinced when the rights-based approach was made mandatory in several NGO and UN organisations. People's hesitation probably came from five main concerns:

- Many rights-based policy documents and guides were intellectually complicated. Many humanitarians had fairly simple reasons for trying to help children which they could articulate in the simple moral categories of compassion, innocence and vulnerability. Rights-based talk has often been rather confusing, and not as emotionally or operationally compelling.

- Talking human rights seemed politically risky in many situations where humanitarians operated. There were already enough factors which might risk their access to an area or their relations with a government or rebel counterpart without being asked to frame everything as rights.

- There were no obvious operational advantages to talking rights. Nor was it clear how one worked differently with a rights-based approach. In the mid-1990s, humanitarians would ask their policy colleagues to show them the difference between a rights-based latrine and one that was not rights-based. This was the crux of the matter for many emergency workers.

- In the majority of authoritarian or traditional societies in which humanitarians worked, a political culture of human rights did not widely exist already, so that the communities and staff they worked with might be as baffled as they were about what it all meant. In a busy period of emergency work, humanitarians felt they were being unfairly asked to be political educators as well as relief workers.

- The whole rights-based agenda was seen by many to be driven by so-called policy wonks in headquarters and was not the result of empirically-based research and demand from communities at risk. Medical staff, nutritionists and logisticians could accept changes to their practice if field-based studies had proved that dry feeding was better than wet-feeding or that people really wanted mosquito nets. But, in most places, no one had asked for rights-based approaches or had proved that they worked. This was ideology pure and simple.

The dramatic exception to this cautious humanitarian approach to rights was the earlier emergencies in Central America in the 1980s. Here, all the conditions above did not apply and humanitarian agencies easily and happily became rights-based long before the wider movement started to try to influence humanitarian work in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The Central American experience suggests that the long time it has taken to connect humanitarian work with rights-based approaches in other parts of the world is indeed judicious caution and not blind obstinacy. The right political conditions are important to the success of the rights-based approach and they have not been so quickly found in many emergency contexts in Africa, Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East.

The process of discernment and maturation that has been taking place in the rights-based discussion of emergency is ultimately a wise and healthy one. Hopefully, the process has also been deeply beneficial.

Sceptical humanitarians have slowly come around to the idea, improving it as they do so. In the process, passionate advocates of children's rights have got their point across and also learned the best way to do so, coming to respect the very real obstacles to this approach in many emergencies.

Most important of all, in many countries enduring war, disaster or both, people themselves are increasingly taking up the rights approach. This means there are now greater local constituencies engaged in rights-based emergency work.

It is not surprising that all this has taken time and will continue to do so. But, if all is now well, we may have a rights-based emergency community for children in which people believe in children's rights not because of forced conversions but because of personal conviction. This is surely a sounder foundation on which to build a movement for the protection and assistance of children in war and disaster.

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Photo: Christie Johnston

Why children must remain top of the humanitarian reform agenda

Welcome reforms also bring risks of eclipsing young people. Christine Knudsen spells out how this can be avoided.

The humanitarian community is engaging in an ambitious reform initiative that has now been underway for more than a year.

The reform, which is led by the UN and NGOs in consultation with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and donors, seeks to ensure consistency and accountability in response operations, strengthen humanitarian leadership, forge stronger partnerships, and improve the timing and fairness of emergency funding.

The agenda stems largely from the Humanitarian Response Review. This was launched by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) in 2005 to assess the humanitarian response capacities of key humanitarian actors, make recommendations to address any gaps, and analyse those that appeared during responses to the Darfur crisis in Sudan.

A significant opportunity has opened up through this reform initiative to improve the protection of children in humanitarian crises, although it is one that also creates its own challenges. Children's rights as well as broader human rights are recognised and integrated as cross-cutting issues throughout the reform agenda. However, in order that the system best considers the particular threats to young people and their capacities in emergencies, advocates will be required to lobby those implementing the reform and setting the guidance for it, such as senior management in NGOs, Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) members and representatives, and country-specific humanitarian coordinators. There is a risk of a fragmented approach to child rights protection and programming as we move towards a more integrated approach that does not provide for a specific focus on young people's holistic needs.

Protection has long been seen as an area of work lacking in consistent leadership, especially in the cases of internally-displaced populations and the related issues of civilian protection in crises. However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has now committed to taking the protection lead in conflict-affected displacement, with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) agreeing to complementary leads in natural disasters.

Child protection, however, has been put forward as a separate sub-category of protection activities. This raises the question of how to link child protection into overall protection analysis as well as multi-sectoral approaches and operations. How do these concerns weigh in as a core consideration across sectors when the majority of a displaced population is almost always made up of young people?

Children and the reform agenda

Although the reform agenda does not prioritise categories or particular populations of concern, there are at least three ways in which the reform could make a difference for children – so long as we hold ourselves and others accountable.

- All sector lead agencies are now clearly responsible for ensuring that organisations give due weight to age and human rights as considerations in their analysis, needs assessment, strategy, training, advocacy and resource mobilisation. These can be seen as an important means of integrating child-rights approaches into all areas of humanitarian response, within sectors and throughout overall strategies, articulating a collective responsibility which should no longer be just confined to specialised or child-focused organisations.

- Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) are also responsible for ensuring that age and human rights are addressed in all sectors. An HC retains overall responsibility for the humanitarian response and ensures that gaps are addressed. Should issues of concern, such as child protection, not be adequately addressed, the HC should consult with UN and non-UN partners to explore better alternatives.

Photo: Tom Pietrasik

- Child protection is a specific area of concern within the protection cluster at both country and global levels. As such, UNICEF as the lead, and with support from other organisations, is responsible for ensuring that child protection is fully integrated into all protection tools and capacity-building efforts at a global level. It also must ensure that at country level all protection strategies, analyses, and advocacy take children into full account.

Fragmentation risks

While we now have a clear structure for accountability and leadership in these areas, ranging from child protection through broader humanitarian protection and the overall humanitarian response, there are still some risks in this model which require careful consideration for child rights organisations.

In this system, the child protection approach remains fragmented. This means that these mechanisms will never guarantee a consistent programming approach or even necessarily give priority to children's needs in a complex environment without strong engagement from all actors and creative approaches. For instance, education remains an issue which is considered under child protection, protection, and early recovery programming as well as potentially in all other sectors, for example health, where education is a means of changing behaviour.

Child protection is seen as a sub-category which could result in marginalisation rather than integration, focusing only on particular risk categories of separated children or those associated with fighting forces. Children and women continue to be confused with so-called vulnerable populations to the point where they are often used synonymously rather than highlighting a more sophisticated approach to protection and assessments.

In order to succeed in improving protection for children and humanitarian reform, child-focused advocates must be able to articulate child protection priorities which support the overall response rather than focusing only on specialised areas. The challenge is a dual one of sectoral leaders globally integrating children's concerns and specialists being able to frame child rights as they relate to global strategies.

Partnership in reform

Partnership is a core element of the reform agenda, with an understanding that real partnership has been lacking in many responses. NGOs, as the providers of most humanitarian assistance, must have an equal voice in improving humanitarian action along with the UN, governments and members of the Red Cross/Red Crescent movements.

But what does this partnership mean for child protection agencies? In many ways, it means rethinking how we campaign for children and how we integrate our planning. In Pakistan after the 2005 earthquake, threats of forced relocation and discriminatory access to basic services affected children, families and communities. The protection response, however, focused largely on family reunification and education while the more generalised violations received less attention, but affected children nevertheless. For child protection advocates, the task of reform may require expanding their analysis to raise questions about how the overall protection and human rights frameworks are considered in order to enhance the protection of children as well.

For the humanitarian reform process, the challenge will be to remember that children, as well as older people and issues such as gender and HIV and AIDS, must remain prominent considerations. The reform process gives child protection specialists the opportunity to strengthen their contacts with other sectors. No doubt seizing this chance to collaborate will help them overcome the problems and lead to a far better combined humanitarian response.

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How children can make a safer world

Heidi Peugeot and Fred Spielberg describe some smart ideas in risk education and the vital role of young people in heading off disasters.

Tilly Smith was the 10-year-old English girl who, recognising the foaming tide on a Phuket shoreline from a geography lesson at school, warned a crowded beach of the impending tsunami that struck Thailand in December 2004. No one who has heard that moving story can then doubt the importance of risk education for children.

In that instance, hundreds of people owe their lives to the fact that a teacher taught about natural disasters, one student learned, and her family believed what she said. The involvement of children in risk education, given the role that they play in information sharing within family and community, is central to mitigating the impact of disasters.

Greater suffering

Children suffer disproportionately from both the primary and secondary effects of natural disasters, ranging from physical injury, malnutrition and sickness to family separation, interrupted education and early/forced marriage. This unequal impact has been repeatedly explained in terms of vulnerability. Children tend to have less physical strength than adults, less experience, fewer financial and educational resources, no support network once separated from family, and in nearly every sense, less power than adults.

During a crisis, children often pass unnoticed in the midst of the panic, whether the cause is a flood, earthquake or volcanic eruption. Many initial reports of disaster do not even distinguish between children and adults in the summary balance of dead, injured, or displaced persons.

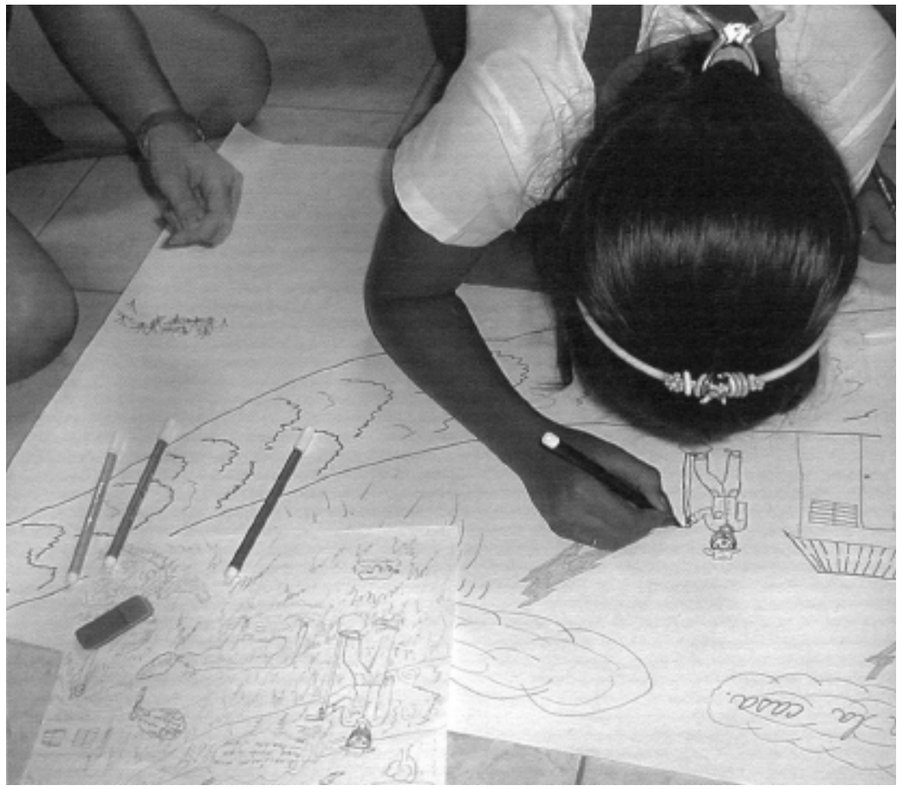

Photo: Save the Children

Yet according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which has now been signed and ratified by all UN Member States on the planet except the United States and Somalia, children are guaranteed special consideration during an emergency, in terms of health, protection, education and civil rights. Children must be assured of first priority in relief distribution, the highest level of healthcare available and the right to remain with their family, among other stipulations. How can society reconcile the gap between what has been promised and what is delivered to children? One proven technique involves increasing preparedness for disasters at the community level, teaching children about risk and making adults and authorities more aware of their responsibility toward children.

Teaching risk

Educating children about basic risks and vulnerability constitutes one of the best means of empowering and protecting them. In the mid-1990s, UNICEF and the International Strategy for Risk Reduction (ISDR) jointly developed Riskland, a colourful board game of questions and answers, used to stimulate knowledge and discussion about natural disaster risks. First tested with school children in Central America, Riskland has since been used by local communities in dozens of countries around the world, with both children and adults, and has been translated into over 15 languages, from Haitian Creole to Nepalese.

Increasingly, education ministries incorporate risk reduction into primary school curricula, teaching students about disaster risk, early warning signs and protective actions. Schools provide a natural forum for imparting knowledge and skills to a youthful audience.

Schools constitute the key piece of social infrastructure in any community, at once the safe haven for children, the provider of a crucial service and the repository of a community's future resources and survival. In both rural and urban communities, schools also tend to be the places where people of all ages converge during emergencies, rapidly converted into shelters for the homeless, the displaced and the crisis-affected in the hours after disaster strikes.

This makes it all the more vital that schools are prepared for this alternative use. In Jamaica, where serious flooding is an annual occurrence and schools are used as shelters as a matter of course, the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) and UNICEF developed in 2003 a series of guidelines for child-friendly disaster management and response, focusing on schools as shelters. Key questions were posed. Do schools have adequate water and sanitation facilities for women and men, boys and girls? Can the premises be adapted to ensure security, privacy and dignity for all? Have alternative sites of refuge been designated for the flood-affected, to ensure that children's right to education is not interrupted for longer than is necessary? Preparing schools for imminent risk reinforces the safety of the entire community.

Photo: Teri Pengilley

One of the lessons learned from recent earthquakes has been the need to construct safer school buildings. In 2001, UNICEF and local authorities in Macedonia developed a manual for seismic risk assessment, mitigation measures and emergency management for schools. This guide and assessment checklist was used in school districts throughout Macedonia in order to evaluate vulnerability and to implement subsequent preparedness activities. Initial analyses led to the creation of a CD-Rom providing a general picture of seismic vulnerability for Macedonia's entire school infrastructure, now used for planning by the government at national level.

Preparedness initiatives need to encompass all levels of community, if they are to ensure that children and families understand the simple and practical actions required to protect life and personal property in natural disasters.

One community-based preparedness project, developed jointly by UN agencies and the government of West Bengal in India following the massive flood in the year 2000, helped a number of communities to ready themselves for disaster. Using a participatory approach, each community prepared an action plan, including a village vulnerability map which identified safe places, disaster-prone areas, and families residing in each zone, as well as the number and location of the vulnerable populations such as the aged, the disabled and small children.

Each plan specified key activities that the community could undertake before, during and after the disaster. A subsequent flood in 2004 in the same area and of similar size to the 2000 disaster offered a crude comparison of before and after the project. The results demonstrated that, after the preparedness project, there were fewer deaths, reduced loss of cattle and poultry, minimal losses of key documents and children's school books, virtually no outbreak of disease, and increased self-sufficiency due to stockpiled food at household level. Local authorities are now expanding this project to other vulnerable areas in West Bengal.

These experiences constitute only a few of the many initiatives undertaken to reinforce the safety and well-being of children by bringing their perspective to bear on the issues of risk and vulnerability reduction. Virtually every community can identify such strategies, particularly through the empowerment of children as actors with basic knowledge of their community, immense creativity and the will to reduce risks. Given the resources and an opportunity to take action, children can become the catalyst of some simple yet profound strategies to make a safer world.

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UNICEF takes action to protect the rights and well-being of children and women at all points in the emergency cycle – before, during and after a crisis. For more information on UNICEF's humanitarian work in unstable situations, please contact the office of Dan Toole, Director, UNICEF-EMOPS, New York City: dtoole@unicef.org.

Cuba ready and able

An innovative project with state backing has put young people at the centre of natural disaster planning – and there are benefits all round. Orestes Valdés Valdés and Pedro Ferradas Mannucci explain a model ripe for adaptation elsewhere.

Cuba is regularly hit by hurricanes and floods, and yet the impact upon its population and environment is relatively slight compared to other disaster-prone countries.

In recent years, the Cuban government has pioneered emergency preparedness education in schools and communities to reduce the population's vulnerability to natural disasters and promote children and young people's active participation in society. It is a process that could be adapted as a model elsewhere.

The project, called 'We are Prepared, Listening to the Waters', was launched by the Cuban Ministry of Education and Cuba's Civil Defence in collaboration with other organisations, including Save the Children UK. The aim was to involve young people in risk management strategies for floods, earthquakes and hurricanes in Holguin, a province in the east of the country. Forty-two schools joined in, and the project's success has meant that local authorities and members of the community responsible for protecting the public in the face of emergencies can now call on a large number of children for assistance in times of emergency.

Most importantly, the students were involved at every stage of the design and implementation of the programme. Four groups were set up to be responsible for emergency measures and they focused on: technical risks and resources; health and sanitation; social issues in the community; and education.

Community risk and resource maps

Each team surveyed the same area to identify the environmental, social, economic and physical risks, such as the number and location of evacuation points, danger zones around schools, and houses which were vulnerable in the event of a natural disaster. They then shared their ideas, which they updated with recommendations from civil defence experts.

Early warning system

Participants learned about the environment and weather patterns. This enabled them to set up 12 monitoring stations and radio links which could send information to the civil defence teams. This provides a potentially life-saving lead time of three hours, so villages can be warned of impending floods and evacuate more promptly.

Control barriers

Youth teams were given training about bamboo flood control barriers. They learned that bamboo helps to protect communities from flooding, prevents erosion and enriches the variety of plant growth. Some local farmers use land by the river to graze cattle and plant crops, so the groups organised activities so the community could learn about the importance of reforestation and how this was ultimately in their interest.

Educational campaign

Participants made proposals about how disaster risk management could be included in school curricula. They also launched a community education campaign to target those most at risk. Young people and the elderly are often considered to be highly vulnerable in times of natural disasters. However, in this project, it was men aged 18 to 40 who were identified as most likely to lose their lives because of the risks they took searching flood waters for possessions and animals and delaying

evacuation so they could protect their belongings.

Health

The groups were trained in basic first aid and set up teams to treat minor health problems. During an actual emergency this would allow doctors and nurses to focus on more serious cases. Entertainment groups were also formed. Their role is to provide music and dancing to reduce stress, in recognition of the importance of psychological as well as medical care in helping people overcome natural disasters.

Evaluation

The evaluation, which was based on participatory discussions, involved teachers, members of the community and one young person from each of the 42 participating schools and was carried out at every stage of the project.

Based on evaluations, a set of recommendations were developed and these included:

- incorporating a gender focus from the outset so that boys and girls are given equal opportunities to participate at every stage of the project.
- including disaster risk management in school curricula
- encouraging children and young people's participation in planning and monitoring and evaluation – taking into account their different abilities
- establishing indicators to measure the impact on the target communities.

For more information about this project in Spanish, visit:
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=10582&flag=report

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The Sphere project and handbook

Accountability lies at the heart of the Sphere project, an initiative taken by a number of humanitarian NGOs along with the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies.

The Sphere project was launched in 1997 with the aim of improving humanitarian agencies' accountability to their donors and beneficiaries. It commits NGOs to a set of principles and minimum standards that crisis-hit communities have the right to expect.

These rights-based principles and standards for disaster response, developed by over 400 organisations in 80 countries, are contained in Sphere's *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response* handbook. The principles are based on international humanitarian and human rights law, refugee law and the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief*.

The importance of taking special measures to ensure that children are given protection and assistance is highlighted as an issue that has an impact in every emergency. Children often experience the most harmful effects of emergencies. The handbook therefore stipulates that children's particular views and experiences should be taken into account whatever the situation, whether it be emergency assessments, humanitarian delivery, or monitoring and evaluation.

The Humanitarian Charter

The Humanitarian Charter emphasises that the primary responsibility for guaranteeing the right to protection and assistance in emergencies falls to States. Should States be unable or unwilling to provide such assistance, they are obliged to allow humanitarian organisations to provide this.

The Charter outlines the core principles for humanitarian action in situations of armed conflict and natural disasters. These include the right to life with dignity; the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, as stated in the Geneva Convention of 1949 and its Additional Protocols of 1977; and the principle of non-refoulement – the right of refugees not to be sent back to a country where their lives or freedoms are in danger.

Minimum Standards

The Minimum Standards aim to shape humanitarian action in five key sectors. Each standard has technical indicators to measure how that standard has been fulfilled.

The five key sectors covered in standards and technical support include:

- **water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion:** waste disposal, drainage
- **nutrition:** food security and nutrition standards, assessment standards. Nutrition and food security are a practical expression of the right to food, whereas the food aid standards are more operationally focused
- **food aid:** planning, distribution and management
- **shelter, settlement and non-food items:** the return to and repair of damaged accommodation, temporary planned or self-settled camps
- **health services:** systems and infrastructure, control of communicable and non-communicable diseases.

The handbook's guidance notes include advice on practical dilemmas and gaps in knowledge. All these areas are interrelated, and it is recommended that each chapter should be read in the light of the handbook as a whole.

The first Sphere handbook was published in 2000. The latest edition, published in 2004, covers recent technological developments and feedback from agencies that have used the earlier version. It also includes food security as a sixth, additional sector, describing a situation where people live free from fear of hunger or starvation. A further chapter has been included on common process standards that are relevant to each of the technical standards. These include participation, initial assessment, response, targeting, monitoring, evaluation, aid worker competencies and responsibilities, and the supervision, management and support of personnel.

The handbook can be downloaded from http//www.sphereproject.org

The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – International (HAP-I)

The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – International (HAP-I) was born as a self-regulatory body to improve humanitarian agencies' accountability to their beneficiaries. Following extensive consultation, HAP-I has developed a Standard for informing and consulting disaster-affected populations through a set of principles and performance benchmarks that agencies voluntarily sign up to. HAP-I also manages an ongoing process of research and consultation which works to develop and maintain principles and standards of accountability, and to support humanitarian agencies in complying with these.

HAP-I was established in 2003 by a small group of agencies to implement the lessons learned from its predecessors, the Humanitarian Ombudsman Project and the Humanitarian Accountability Project, among other quality and accountability initiatives. HAP-I currently has 14 full members.

HAP-I is one of several moves taken in response to an evaluation of the international response to the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. This sparked discussions about the humanitarian community's lack of accountability to their beneficiaries generally. Humanitarian actors have considerable power to make decisions that affect the lives of large numbers of very powerless people. But this power can be exercised poorly or – even worse – misused (as in the case of the widespread sexual abuse of women and girls by UN peacekeepers and other humanitarian actors). HAPI, through its principles and standards, seeks to ensure that humanitarian agencies use their power responsibly.

Other initiatives which came out of the evaluation include the Sphere Project and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).

Organisations which join HAP-I must demonstrate that they meet the following performance benchmarks:

1. Establishing a humanitarian quality management system
2. Transparency
3. Enabling representatives of beneficiaries to participate in programme decisions
4. Evaluating and improving the competencies of staff
5. Implementing accessible and safe complaints handling procedures
6. Making continual improvements in their humanitarian quality management system

Under each benchmark, the Standard defines requirements that must be met by the agency, with suggested means for verification of each.

For more information about HAP-I, visit: http://www.hapinternational.org

Running the gauntlet: everyday risks for women and girls

Just keeping the home going can be a dangerous business for many refugee and displaced women and girls. Erin Patrick explains its direct connection to wider issues and what must be done to protect those at risk.

A pile of firewood for cooking may look pretty simple, but contained within is a much bigger human story that links directly to major issues about protection and the unique needs of refugee women and girls. Searching for cooking fuel – women and girls' work – is a high-risk activity in conflict zones where rape and assault are routinely used as weapons of war.

Protection lies at the heart of the international responsibility towards all refugees, and few needs are as fundamental as the right to physical integrity – that is, to be protected from physical and sexual abuse and exploitation.

Much progress has been made in recent years in combating gender-based violence (GBV), particularly against displaced women and girls. Fundamental to this has been the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women* (1991), the 2005 InterAgency Standing Committee (IASC) *Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings*, and the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*.

These guidelines set out the rights of refugee and internally displaced women and girls to physical and sexual integrity, and the responsibilities of the humanitarian community to protect those rights. By and large, these rights and responsibilities are now well established and, among the humanitarian community at least, widely agreed upon.

But how far do these responsibilities extend? That women and girls should be protected against assault by strangers or military officials is little questioned, but acceptance that they should also be protected against domestic assault is a more recent development. Agreement that they should be protected against rape is at the core of all protection guidelines. However, protection against sexual exploitation or coercion struggles to get wider hearing. Despite barriers, however, these concerns have made their way on to the international agenda and even become the subject of new guidelines.

Other areas are not making such headway. For example, what about protection needs during the day-to-day activities necessary for survival? Again, on the surface this seems quite evident: if an activity is necessary for the *most* basic of all human rights – the right to life – then individuals should be protected while doing it.

Given that women and girls are typically responsible for carrying out most of these activities, such as cooking, child-rearing and basic health-care, they therefore require this additional layer of protection from those authorities tasked with protection responsibilities.

In refugee and IDP situations, where national governments are absent or otherwise unwilling or unable to protect, these responsibilities become those of the international humanitarian system.

The sheer scale of the protection need, however, as well as constant funding shortfalls, staff shortages, reluctant national governments and confusion around the mandates of individual agencies, has, in most cases, prevented this from happening. Every day, therefore, displaced women and girls are at risk when performing the most basic of household chores, including the collection of water and firewood for cooking.

Nowhere is this risk more apparent than in the deserts of Darfur, in Sudan, where women and girls – often as young as seven – walk for several kilometres into the war-torn countryside surrounding the camps in a daily search for firewood. Precise figures are difficult to come by, but the International Rescue Committee recently reported upwards of 200 assaults in one month against women and girls in a single camp. Over the course of the now three-year-old conflict, therefore, it is not hard to calculate that thousands of Darfurian women and girls have been traumatised by sexual assaults.

Two million people have been forced from their homes because of this conflict, which shows few signs of ending. In this situation, direct provision of cooking

fuel is not a long-term answer, given the scale and insecurity involved, along with the region's size and lack of water and roads.

Direct supply can and should only be considered as a short-term or emergency intervention. However, what is also crucial is the long-term safety and security of millions of women and girls. They need physical protection strategies, alternative fuels and fuel technologies and fuel-efficient stoves. Cooking techniques must be developed and, together with the equipment, widely promoted by both protection and assistance actors.

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children's Fuel and Firewood Initiative aims to do exactly that. Over the coming year, the initiative will be working on pilot programmes in Darfur and Chad to promote information-sharing about new fuels and fuel technologies as well as ensuring the sustainability of promising protection strategies – such as the African Union-supported firewood patrols.

For far too long, the issue of safe access to cooking fuel has been confined to the sidelines of international humanitarian response. If Darfur has taught us anything, it is that cooking fuel is anything but a side issue. It is an integral part of any effective protection strategy, and crucial to the safety and security of millions of displaced women and girls.

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Photo: Caroline Irby

Chaos, children and the sex abuse dangers

Emergencies and disasters breed special conditions that increase the risk of young people falling prey to sexual predators. A new practical guide shows how being prepared can substantially reduce those threats, say Anthony Burnett and Stephanie Delaney.

The immediate impact of a natural disaster or conflict is injury and death, but for children and young people another danger lurks close behind.

While sexual abuse, violence or exploitation can happen in any situation, the risks increase dramatically in times of chaos. The reasons for this include changes in the physical environment, children being left without appropriate care and supervision, and sometimes the desperation, frustration or unscrupulousness of adults. It is during the confusion of conflict situations and natural disasters that children and young people more than ever need to be protected and their rights upheld.

Risky conditions

The chances of children being sexually abused and the protection they might expect depend on a variety of factors.

The nature of the disaster itself is, of course, significant. In a long-standing conflict, children are exposed to very different risks than they are in a rapid-onset emergency, such as an earthquake. Complex humanitarian emergencies, often where naturally occurring disasters combine with civil conflict, lead to high levels of danger and deprivation and result in children being vulnerable to multiple, related risks.

Generally, the inequalities and discrimination that existed before are magnified in disasters and emergencies, unless measures to counter those are put in place. In practice, this means resources must be available to a society's most vulnerable members.

The actions of those involved in relief and assistance has an impact. Lack of security in camps due to poor design and supervision arrangements, unfair distribution of relief supplies, and inadequate attention to the particular needs of children can all contribute to making children's lives more difficult.

Without viable means to keep themselves, children and young people are more likely to be coerced into prostitution in exchange for money for essential needs such as food, protection and shelter. It may also be a way of escaping immediate troubles by obtaining passage across borders or into other safe or protected places. In such circumstances, some adults may also see economic opportunity – to traffic children.

The abuse by NGO workers, peacekeepers and others in positions of authority, such as camp leaders (most recently highlighted in various African countries), has long been documented. During a conflict, sexual violence has been identified as a 'weapon of war', including girl children being 'married' to influential and militia leaders in order to protect themselves and their families.

Photo: Dan White

A wide variety of visitors pour into an area following an emergency or disaster on relief or assistance missions, which inevitably widens the potential for sexual exploitation. Construction teams, volunteer relief personnel or sex tourists, for example, may take advantage of the situation in order to gain access to children who are less supervised and therefore more vulnerable to sexual violence.

Education and the means to earn a living are most important, as is a community's need to understand what is required to protect children. The degree to which societies are willing to prepare for disasters and have child protection plans ready all affect what then occurs if the worst happens.

Children's guide

All children are vulnerable to sexual violence, but some are more at risk than others, for example those without parents or trusted adults to care for them, those with special needs and those from marginalised groups such as minority ethnic, tribal or religious communities. A major element of the work of protecting children in emergency situations is that done with communities and children beforehand. Much of the responsibility to protect will fall to grassroots operations, the local community and children themselves. This is especially vital during the first 48 to 72 hours, or until it is safe for aid agencies to move in.

There are adults who can support children, and a main activity should be to strengthen these informal help networks. Children can also be helped to support each other, and taught the skills of how to keep themselves safer.

Training the community and organisations in child protection, ensuring child-safe recruitment practices are in place and teaching children safety skills can all be done in advance. After an emergency, protection committees in camps and villages and the designated child-safe spaces should be set up immediately, together with referral mechanisms for reporting situations of abuse.

Abuse can have a long-lasting and dramatic impact upon a child. When this has occurred, it is important to provide the victim with the necessary support and care, including medical and psychosocial, as well as long-term support, to help aid recovery and reintegration. In addition to action being taken against the perpetrators where possible, mechanisms to prevent similar incidents from occurring should be put in place. This includes reviewing reports of abuse in order to identify key contributing elements, such as time and location.

In response to numerous requests, last year (2006) ECPAT International published a practical guide for local and community-based organisations, *Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence in Disaster and Emergency Situations*. This provides information about what can be done to protect children before a disaster strikes, in the immediate aftermath and in the longer-term reconstruction phase. It includes recommended actions and key considerations for dealing with sexual violence or sexual exploitation.

While other material does exist, it tends to focus on the situation of women rather than specifically children, and largely overlooks the case for boys. Such material is aimed more at policy makers and international organisations rather than providing practical advice for grassroots organisations and local communities who are in direct contact with children.

Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence in Disaster and Emergency Situations can be downloaded from:
http://www.ecpat.net/eng/pdf/Protecting_Children_from_CSEC_in_Disaster.pdf

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Fighting with facts

Drawing parallels between sex abuse and the conscription of child soldiers has become a powerful way of persuading people not to permit the use of young people in conflict. Harendra de Silva explains how this is being achieved.

Academic research looks a pretty weedy sort of opposition when pitched against military might. But for those fighting the use of child soldiers in conflicts it is proving a considerable weapon in the campaign to prevent this form of conscription.

Hundreds of thousands of young people have been co-opted into wars over the years. In the 1980s it was widely held that children who fought alongside adults were heroes and martyrs. They are still often depicted as being somehow braver than grown-ups.

The advent of lightweight, cheap but deadly automatic weapons, which can be easily handled, paved the way for women and children to take their places on battlefields. Child conscription is a planned political and military strategy fuelled by a ruthless logic. Children are often more useful than adults because they can be more easily manipulated and are more vulnerable to idealistic appeals; they are economical because they don't have to be paid as much, or indeed often anything at all, and they eat less; training and maintaining discipline over young ranks are also easier.

There are many siren voices, including those in the West, that justify or manipulate conflicts that employ children. There are also those among the international community that tacitly justify it on grounds of poverty, hunger or lack of education. Diaspora populations in Western countries who support a conflict may also turn a blind eye to child conscription or may even justify it as heroism or martyrdom. Therefore, it is not always easy to convince communities that conscription of any child is wrong.

During efforts in the 1990s in Sri Lanka to find a definition of childhood sexual abuse, a telling link was uncovered between that and the situation of child soldiers. Young people cannot volunteer, even if they appear to want to do so, for sexual relations or for participation in armed conflict for one compelling reason. They are unable to comprehend such complex acts, which even adults find difficult to understand (at least the adults are supposed to).

At that time, no parallels existed between conscription and child abuse as described in medical literature. There were documented instances in international magazines and video documentaries of child conscription in Sri Lanka for the conflict.

The decision was made to document the use of child soldiers in Sri Lanka and also establish the ways in which they were abused. This research was based on children who had surrendered and it led to two new definitions of child abuse.

The first centred on the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in an armed conflict that they do not truly comprehend, to which they are unable to give consent, and which adversely affects their right to unhindered growth and identity as children.

The second describes how, when an adult persuades a child to commit suicide – an act the child cannot comprehend – for personal, social, economic or political reasons that the child cannot understand, that persuasion constitutes a form of child abuse that may be called 'suicide by proxy'.

These definitions were the most useful key when lobbying against the use of children in war. Interestingly, supporters of conflicts are often blind or in a phase of denial of conscription, but often sensitive to issues of child abuse. When conscription is convincingly shown to be parallel to child abuse, justifying the process becomes much, much harder or impossible.

After the research findings, the next stage was to launch a campaign, targeting academics and professionals both locally in Sri Lanka and internationally with presentations to academic bodies and scientific publications. This was followed by contacts with child rights activists normally working in the field of child abuse but also including those working in conflict zones. Some of these included academics and professionals sympathetic to the rebel groups and the conflict itself.

The issue was taken up by the Sri Lankan press and radio and television chat shows where telephone questioning or live audiences were extremely useful in driving the message home. Some of the lectures and newspaper articles were published on the Internet and spread more widely among interest/advocacy groups. A book against conscription was published in English, aimed at academics, professionals and the expatriate community in Sri Lanka, some of whom were and still are sympathetic to the rebels' armed struggle.

A song against conscription and sung in a relevant local language was recorded by an ex-child soldier, and then distributed on cassette and compact disc. A video docudrama was produced on the issue of conscription using a rights-based concept. Careful precautions were taken not to make political accusations, which included not identifying ethnic groups or political groups by name.

However, in spite of these precautions, unknown elements sabotaged the public broadcasts after the first broadcast, and the original broadcast-quality recording was stolen. But this was overcome by the mass production of CD videos which were distributed free to organisations, including community and NGOs, which showed them to small community groups. At the same time, politically motivated groups also took advantage of the abusive nature of conscription to lobby the community against the armed factions. This too may have had an impact on the campaign.

The decision by the armed forces to reduce attacks on civilians has also helped change attitudes towards conscription. Although previously parents voluntarily handed over children to fighters, today young people are taken by force. Parents, in spite of being threatened, now protest against the coercion of children.

But the battle to keep young people safe is far from over. The campaigning must be maintained, not just to end the conscription that still continues, but to deter any potential groups that may in future push for armed struggle against the government.

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Resources on children and armed conflict in Sri Lanka

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Sri Lanka (December 2006)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=12245&flag=report

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (November 2006) *Child Recruitment in South Asian Conflicts; a comparative analysis of Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh*
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=11652&flag=report

International Bureau for Children's Rights (July 2006) *Making Children's Rights Work: country profiles on Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Vietnam*
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=9548&flag=report

Technology takes on relief role

The latest communications can transform the quality of emergency responses and the rights of those most affected. Telecommunications supplier Ericsson describes its creative partnership with major agencies and what exciting developments the future holds.

In emergencies, communications are often the first thing to break down, yet they are vital for teams on the ground so they can operate effectively and remain in touch with the outside world. Because of that, fruitful partnerships between relief organisations and telecommunication companies are now being forged.

One such example is Ericsson Response (ER), which collaborates with the UN, NGOs and the private sector to provide communications in relief operations. This usually involves mobile phones with satellite links to the Internet. The improvements are two-fold: support can be delivered more quickly and the relief effort is better coordinated.

Recent emergencies where Ericsson has played a part include Lebanon, where its partner Télècoms Sans Frontières, made Internet and telephone facilities via satellite available for aid workers in war-torn Beirut last year. In Pakistan after the earthquake in 2004, Ericsson set up online networking tools, such as an intranet, for UN agencies, including UNICEF, to link staff to their head office in New York.

Dag Nielsen, Director of Ericsson Response, explained how the operations work.

What does Ericsson actually do when a disaster strikes?

Ericsson provides volunteers and equipment, carries out research and development and acts as a global advocate to raise awareness about disaster response. In the past, we have provided mobile communication to refugee camps during the Kosovo crisis, reinstalled damaged equipment and provided tents to earthquake victims in Turkey, as well as phones to flood victims in Vietnam. In Kabul, we set up a Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) network to help connect all relief workers and Afghanistan's interim government. ER distributed free mobile phones to about 500 people, relief workers and government officials.

When does Ericsson respond?

Ericsson Response will only participate in humanitarian relief operations. Disaster relief operations classified as military or peacekeeping operations are not part of the Ericsson Response Programme.

Who pays for the programme?

All equipment and personnel are provided free of charge from Ericsson's central budget. If non-Ericsson providers are involved, they sometimes want their costs covered, but this is not always the case.

How do you plan this programme? Do you wait to be approached by a potential partner when an emergency strikes or can you plan in advance?

Ericsson has agreements in place with partners. These agreements define the procedures for the operations. It also has a disaster preparedness programme, with equipment and technically skilled people who are ready to go out and identify needs and develop technical proposals.

Who can be a partner?

Partners are usually UN agencies, major relief organisations and other private sector organisations, but Ericsson's services are open to all agencies working in a disaster-affected area.

What does the aid community need to think about or do to maximise the service from Ericsson?

Firstly, it needs to be aware of our services and contact us in the field. Partners usually decide how the system should be used in the disaster area. They do not need to prepare anything, but it is useful if they bring their mobiles with them, as Ericsson sometimes only provides access to the GSM network, not mobile phones.

What is the future for donors and communications, and what new technology is coming up that may be used in the future to save lives and ease suffering in emergencies?

With the new generation of 3G satellite mobile phones, Ericsson will be able to provide a full IT/Internet service as well as the traditional mobile communication. In areas where ER does not operate there are a number of applications available, or in the process of being developed, such as sniffer robots looking for survivors in earthquakes and various early-warning systems.

How does smart use of technology relate to or improve rights?

Without communication, the possibilities for democracy and human rights are very poor. Communication is one of the bedrocks to ensure these. The development of communication for all is very important to Ericsson, including in poor rural areas – for example, in Africa where this was not feasible before. We are looking at new ways to implement and operate mobile systems, both from a technical and a business point of view. This will definitely boost both human rights and economic development for the poor.

To find out more about Ericsson Response visit: http://www.ericsson.com/ericsson/corporate_responsibility/ericssonresponse

Covering Emergencies – How the media sees it

Alex Crawford is Sky News TV Asia Correspondent. She has covered a number of disasters such as the New Orleans hurricane, the tsunami, the Pakistan earthquake, the Iraq war, and many others.

When reporting on children, Alex Crawford says she goes to great lengths to ensure the children she interviews are treated with dignity and compassion – while also knowing full well that the children that are depicted in distressed situations arouse emotion and compassion from the public.

Alex Crawford believes that for many journalists, NGOs and aid workers are a great source of inspiration and are some of the most hard-working and selfless people. However, sometimes it can be frustrating when aid workers have a warped view of the media: all they do is get in the way, they do not respect children's rights, and they simply use aid workers to get a good story.

She says she believes it is possible to be ethical and still feature children in reports – and thinks it is, in fact, sometimes necessary – to get a truly accurate picture of the truth.

Based on her role as reporter for television news and her experience of working alongside emergency personnel from both NGOs and UN agencies, Alex Crawford gives us some tips on how she thinks NGO media officers and journalists can best work together.

Some pointers on how to engage with the media:

1. Build up a relationship with reporters. A good story (which tells the truth and gives an accurate picture) will be so much better if NGO and reporter are working in tandem.

2. Try to understand the media's agenda. Your agenda and the media's may not necessarily merge. The reporter might have been given an assignment by head office or a free brief.

3. Trust. Most reporters want to produce high-standard work and value accuracy. Their reputations are at stake after all.

4. Avoid too much product placement.

5. Be very organised on your press visits and make sure you deliver on the promises you make. Some NGO representatives sometimes promise the world but once on the ground, they are not always able to deliver. This can lead to disappointment on both sides.

6. In the field, do make time for the media. Reporters and photographers are not there to irritate and get in the way. They are there to inform and tell the world what is happening in often far-flung areas and in difficult conditions.

Alex Crawford was trained in newspapers, then spent many years working for the BBC both for radio and television. After working briefly at TV-am, she joined Sky News in 1989. She is based in New Delhi, India. Contact: Alex.Crawford@bskyb.com

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Learning how to move on

When an earthquake in Indonesia savaged communities, people joined forces to put schools first. Deborah Haines explains why that was so important and the legacy it has created.

Within 24 hours of the earthquake striking in central Java May last year, Save the Children's emergency programme swung into action. Underpinning it was Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), namely the right to education.

This was the first such disaster in this part of Indonesia and those tremors dramatically changed the lives of some 200,000 young people.

Snapshots of the widespread damage captured the devastation: the ruins of what turned out to be 130,000 Javanese homes, people clearing the debris, food and medical supplies being trucked to hard-hit areas, and people helping the injured or building make-shift shelters from tarpaulin and salvaged wood.

The education system, of course, was hit too. Among the destruction were schools, colleges and universities – central and vital parts of young people's lives in times of stability, and just as much so during an emergency. Over 1,000 schools were either destroyed or damaged beyond repair or in a state where serious efforts were needed to restore them to a minimum standard so children could use them at a time when they most needed to.

In addition to the obvious structural damage, teaching and learning supplies were ruined, administrative structures destroyed along with water and sanitation systems, and of course the homes and lives of many who used these facilities and kept them running.

Given the scale of physical destruction, the Education Directorate and many supporting agencies quickly began to collect the figures: numbers of school buildings destroyed and the extent of damage to school furniture; the quantities of emergency teaching and learning supplies required to resource all affected schools – especially as national examinations were due to take place one week after the disaster. Fortunately, schools were closed at the actual moment because of summer holidays, but they were due to open on 17 July – the beginning of the normal school year. Estimated numbers of child and teacher casualties began to emerge by the third day.

The staggering number of children and young people whose education was affected as a direct result of this disaster led the government of Indonesia, Save the Children and other agencies to prioritise education as part of the disaster response. Without an immediate intervention, education would not have resumed as quickly as it has.

Along with other international agencies, Save the Children began immediate dialogue with the affected communities and the government on how to work together to find the best solutions as quickly as possible for restoring education processes and how best to address the emerging issues for children, teachers and other education staff.

The coordination process of tent distribution was not without challenges, but soon meant that all schools in need of emergency shelter, teaching and learning supplies and basic classroom resources, were prepared for the new school term. This was an important, very visual sign that children's right to education was a priority for the government, communities and supporting agencies.

Local communities and the Directorate of Education also recognised the children's need to be able to process what had happened and express their feelings to others. The psychological well-being of children was soon highlighted. The government sought support for addressing children's psychological needs, including the importance of play and a learning environment that would enhance children's recovery.

Soon it proposed a revised structure to the normal day, with more time allocated in each school to support that psychosocial recovery. Children have a right to play and recreation, as described in UNCRC Article 31. But formulating it as an official part of the government emergency response gave teachers vital flexibility and independence to introduce more play, allowing them to engage with children in recreational activities during the new school term.

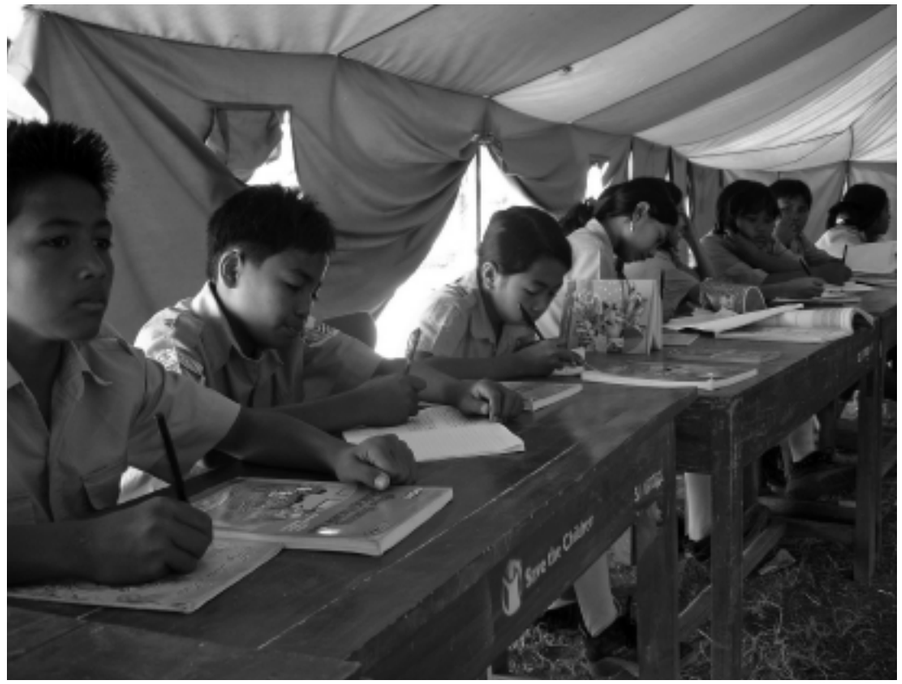

Photo: Kullwadee Sumnalop/Save the Children

Within the first month, Save the Children and its local partners hosted a workshop for 640 teachers which looked at the importance of post-disaster play, and the teacher's role in making this happen. Teachers were also helped to produce a booklet for gathering these ideas and sharing them with other schools. This work has also led to the introduction of a referral system, where children with special needs are identified and supported.

Given the closeness of Mount Merrapi and its temperamental activity in past years, there has always been a degree of emergency awareness and preparedness in the area. However, after the tragic event in May, knowing exactly what to do and what not to do when disaster hits, has now become an integral and important part of people's lives, especially for the school children of Yogyakarta and Klatten – the two most affected areas.

The teachers' workshop also explored the causes of earthquakes, the best ways for children to learn about them, and survival techniques – the dos and don'ts when earthquakes occur. Save the Children worked closely with teachers and government officials, which has led to mainstreaming this work on preparedness into the curriculum.

More recently, teachers have developed 19 integrated lesson plans across all subject areas and are now in the process of piloting these with their pupils. This is currently being carried out at provincial level, although it has the definite potential of becoming a national level initiative. This would ensure that all school children across Indonesia can access the crucial information and learning that affects their ability to protect themselves and others, rights spelled out in Articles 13 and 28 of the UNCRC.

Knowing and understanding such important, life-saving information and using it to create survival skills can help restore and build confidence – for both adults and children alike. Teachers' and children's participation in developing emergency preparedness resources and procedures have been integral to the success of this initiative. The ongoing tremors in Java are frightening experiences for many, but children and teachers report that knowing what to do gives them a sense of strength and direction.

Children's views in Java are also guiding the response and future activities. On a monthly basis, children in 12 of the schools supported by Save the Children are participating in an activity that monitors their general well-being and sense of happiness as time passes since their school re-opened.

A monitoring tool was first designed to highlight the rate of children's recovery – with the expectation that as time passed, children would report feeling happier, more often at different times of day. However, Shirley Long, Emergency Education Officer currently based in Java, explained: "Given the regular, ongoing tremors, we can see from children's responses just how fragile their emotions are…we clearly see the mood change after each tremor." This does, however, help teachers to tailor the school experiences to better meet the emotional needs of the children.

More than five months on from the earthquake, Save the Children's education programme in Java is moving towards longer-term recovery, and is being extended for a further 18 months. As it prepares to hand over the programme activities to local partners, another exciting dimension to the work is taking place with the formation of children's councils, introducing a greater forum and voice for children, as outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC. Emergency preparedness with teachers, children and their communities continues as they also work together to install more hardy, locally made school shelters to deal with monsoons.

Save the Children has advocated for the replacement and expansion of schools, rather than the merging of schools, so that the quality of teaching and the class sizes are not compromised. Despite the fact that some schools have had to merge, resulting in increased class sizes, the government has now rebuilt more than half the schools with good, solid structures. Save the Children continues to support the schools with temporary school structures made from local materials where these are needed.

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Giving children's talk a chance

Amazing insights and far-reaching repercussions for project work have emerged after young people were able to open up about life after the tsunami in 2004. Colin McCallum reports.

Responsibility and accountability shape the post-tsunami work carried out by the international children's agency Plan, which continues to support more than 350,000 children and families living in 500 affected communities across India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

The media's criticism of the tsunami aid's effectiveness and the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition's (TEC) report reinforced the importance of backing communities' own relief and recovery priorities rather than those of aid agencies.

The same points have been repeatedly highlighted in other assessments, including Plan's *Children and the Tsunami*. As Plan supports the rights of children, the task was to determine whether if what had been done was actually in their best interests. Clearly, the way to do that was to listen to them. So over the past 18 months the agency has been talking to young people, trying to understand how they have been affected, and piecing together their impressions of post-tsunami activities.

The main point to emerge was that children wanted to overcome the memory of the tsunami, get back to normal, and be informed about and involved in the recovery efforts.

Overcoming memories of the tsunami

In Sri Lanka, psycho-social support for children in schools took the form of happy–sad letterboxes. These have helped teachers, counsellors and Plan to address many issues facing children across the Hambantota district in Sri Lanka.

A concern raised time and again by children, who poured out their thoughts through the boxes, was the desire for a school 'happy day'. This was a time when they could break from formal education to play and enjoy other activities such as drawing, drama, music and sports. The therapeutic benefit of this time out for children recovering from the tsunami cannot be underestimated. The schools took warmly to the idea, and Plan has since been supporting happy-day activities in tsunami-affected schools throughout the district.

The project has also proved to have a wider use, as it has now developed from a psycho-social tool for tsunami response to a common tool for listening to children. Many issues have surfaced – from abuse or neglect in the home or school, to lack of basic services and violations of children's rights. Based on the experience of this project, Plan is now establishing a children's telephone hotline with Child Helpline International. The happy–sad letterbox will continue to be used in areas lacking telephone networks.

In Thailand, psycho-social support has adopted a more mobile approach. During its first year of operation, trained staff with three brightly coloured vans have visited 28 primary schools and met over 2,000 children. The project has so far identified 162 children needing more individual attention – whether medical or social – and referred them to appropriate institutions for treatment. Plan and other child protection organisations also assist the provincial offices of the Ministry of Development and Human Security in strengthening one-stop crisis centres in the project areas, with special emphasis on protecting children. Now children and adults alike can report any case needing attention, or simply consult professionals with worries and concerns that they might have.

In Aceh, Indonesia, children experiencing family problems, child abuse, violence, or other concerns, already have a 24-hour telephone hotline that enables them talk to someone about their problems. Children who feel they have nowhere else to turn can call the free number where trained, experienced and compassionate staff will comfort and advise them. The hotline is supported by Plan and a range of other organisations, and is an effort to create a protective environment for children living in post-conflict and post-tsunami surroundings.

Returning to normal

House construction, one of Plan's major responses to the tsunami in Sri Lanka, may seem, on the face of it, unrelated to children's well-being. However, when asked, most children wished for a safe home with privacy.

With a glut of agencies providing temporary shelters, Plan immediately opted for permanent housing and community rebuilding as part of an overall response package designed to help as many children as possible return to normal.

Hundreds of families have been helped to rebuild and replace their destroyed homes. For children, this has resulted in new bedrooms, clean toilets, smoke-free kitchens and safe places to do homework or play with friends – all of which affect their lives and well-being.

In Aceh, Plan's contribution to permanent housing was to fill the gaps left by others. Initially, only school building projects in the Leupung neighbourhood were designed, as it appeared housing had been taken care of by other NGOs. However, in some cases, the construction never started. Plan is currently building 162 houses in the district with a partner, Habitat for Humanity.

Photo: Dan White

Informing and involving

As they aired their views, children's strong dissatisfaction with adults emerged. They felt grown-ups had failed to inform them of what was happening, involve them in the recovery, or even acknowledge their ability to cope. Their frustrations were compounded by what they perceived to be the unfairness of aid, and the fact that they had no outlet to speak about these things so that anyone would notice.

For Thai children, the exclusion of migrant workers and minorities in Thailand was one of the biggest perceived failures of post-tsunami aid. The children knew why; the migrants were not considered Thai. But to the Thai children there was not, and should not have been, any distinction.

Plan's earlier decision to carry out school-based activities inadvertently excluded the children of migrant workers and minority groups unable to attend official Thai schools. However, as part of its commitment to act on children's recommendations, this is now being addressed. Support is now being given to nine learning, and two pre-school centres in Thailand catering for 335 Burmese children and run by the Myanmar NGO Grassroots Human Rights Education and Development Council.

In addition, Plan works with the Thai Law Society and Ministry of Education to promote and achieve the Thai government's recent policy of providing access to education for migrant children and others. Hopefully, this policy and campaign will start to bear fruit so that migrant children will receive a proper education in emergencies and normal times alike.

In India, too, children expressed empathy toward lower-caste children who suffered in the tsunami, but received little attention or assistance. Plan has experience with marginalised groups and works with partners that fully understand the situation of their communities in their struggle with the Indian government for equal rights.

In Aceh, health issues in temporary shelters remain a great concern. Plan has adopted a successful system of involving children in public health matters that has been practised throughout other regions of Indonesia. In Mesjid Raya neighbourhood, school-based health promotion is underway in six primary schools, with 120 students already trained as junior medical doctors.

In all four countries, Plan has initiated child media projects that enable children to voice their opinions. These bring young people together with media professionals to produce relevant and appropriate materials. Children have learned where to find the information needed, as well as analysis and production techniques.

Commenting on the experience, Suriya, a 12-year-old boy from Kamala, a village in Thailand said: "It was an amazing opportunity. We had an intensive training course, and learned how to use digital and video cameras, and to organise our thoughts into something that other people could understand. We then prepared short scripts for video and films."

Suriya and his group also took photos of their village and school. "We made postcards out of them," he explained. "The photos were for us to keep, but now we can also tell the outside world what has happened and what we have been doing."

There are other problems that children indirectly associate with the tsunami, such as incidents of drug use and child abuse that have increased in their communities. Children like Suriya think they can help solve these problems by using the media project as a starting point.

Almost two years on, Plan is seeing the long-term effects of its programmes on children. As these have developed, so has the relationship with the children. The trust they now demonstrate makes them able to talk, through casual chats, discussion groups and the helplines, about their fears and suggest ways the agency can improve its activities.

And as the relationships have flourished, so too have the children. Their creativity and resilience are boundless as they use the different means now open to them – youth clubs, drama, photography and film-making, to express how they are coping and what things matter most to them.

Colin McCallum works for Plan's Media Office in London.

This article was written with information from Plan's report *Tsunami 18 Months After*, published by Plan's Asia Regional Office. For more information, contact: Farrah Easton at Farrah.easton@plan-international.org

Photo: Dan White

Ask the children – and learn

Young people should have a bigger say in reviews of emergency responses – and programmes will be all the better for it, argues Emma Roberts who describes how a new way of working in Indonesia will increase accountability.

Humanitarian agencies routinely undertake evaluations of their work, including that carried out in emergencies, but the findings are rarely, if ever, taken back to the communities involved.

For too long, the emphasis has been on our donors when it comes to considering accountability for our programmes. These are the governments and other institutions as well as supporters, in the case of Save the Children UK those who give generously for children across the world.

The evaluations are both internal and external. Reports from these are shared with donors and often with our colleagues to enable peer review and to exchange best practice.

While accountability to those who provide the resources for our programming is not wrong, this approach ignores a key group – children. Their opinions are equally important when developing emergency responses. This is because, for us, children of all ages are the target group for our many interventions.

Too often it appears that we take the easy way out when planning and implementing programmes, by assuming that our staff, in partnership with parents and community leaders, know what is best for children. After all, we have been setting up and running emergency response programmes for some 85 years so surely, the reasoning goes, we know what people want. Perhaps we do, but that's hardly the point. When a family is affected by disaster, they don't lose their ability to think for themselves, and they don't suddenly become passive victims, despite so often being portrayed as such in the media.

However, the situation is changing. The most recent revision of the Sphere project, a set of principles and standards for disaster response, includes minimum standards for participation, and certainly within Save the Children, child participation is an integral part of our programme planning and implementation. When it comes to evaluations, however, we have been a little slower to encourage beneficiaries to participate – other than by supplying information.

Save the Children, along with a number of other organisations, is now working towards becoming much more accountable to beneficiaries. This is happening through the development of a set of standards, part of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – International (HAP-I).

Once these have been established, agencies will be expected to comply with them and will be held accountable. The standards ensure that all beneficiaries are well informed of agencies' plans and practices and are able to make informed decisions when working with them to plan humanitarian responses. Beneficiaries will also be able to provide feedback to agencies on their continuing work by putting in place clear processes for handling complaints and beneficiary consultations.

For Save the Children, the emphasis is on getting more children of all ages involved at every stage of programme planning, implementation and evaluation.

Children take the lead

One example of this is a project led by children which will hold a review of its emergency work in Indonesia. The team will work with a group of children affected by both the Nias and the Yogyakarta earthquakes. The intention is to develop a set of indicators that they, the children, feel is appropriate to use to measure the impact of our programmes. The young people will be encouraged to tell us what they consider a 'good' and 'effective' programme. They will be asked to tell us whether or not we targeted the right groups of children and whether or not our interventions were what, in their opinion, they really needed following the earthquakes.

The children will then be provided with audio-visual equipment and encouraged to go out into the affected communities and ask other young people and their families how well they think Save the Children has done in meeting the needs of these two communities. In this way, the children most affected by both of these emergencies will have a chance to tell us whether or not we got our response right and whether we really met their needs when providing emergency assistance.

Photo: Teri Pengilley

We believe that this review will complement the continuing monitoring and evaluation work that we have undertaken in both these programmes. It will also give us a very different perspective on our response, which will serve us in good stead in future interventions. It is hoped that child-led reviews will become a routine part of our monitoring and evaluation work.

Within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12 calls for children's voices to be heard and states that all children who are able to form their own views have "the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child". Children should also have a right to seek, receive and impart information. It is, therefore, to this end that Save the Children is working to ensure that children participate in all aspects of our work, including the evaluations of our programmes.

Calls are growing for greater accountability and a need to not just implement high-quality programmes, but also to demonstrate accountability to both donors and beneficiaries. Save the Children will continue to use creative ways of ensuring that our key stakeholders – children – are able to hold us to account for the work that we do.

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Resources

International standards

Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, ALNAP (1997)
www.alnap.org/

International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society, *Code of Conduct for Disaster Relief* (1995)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=1822&flag=report

The Good Humanitarian Donorship website
www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org

The Humanitarian Accountability Project, HAP-I (2001)
www.hapinternational.org/en

The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response – 2nd edition (2004)
www.sphereproject.org/

Lessons learned

Hart, Jason, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford in association with INTRAC *Children's Participation in Humanitarian Action: Learning from zones of armed conflict* (February 2004)
http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/PDFs/Childrens%20Participation%20Synthesis%20Feb%202004.pdf

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies INEE, *Implementing Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies: Lessons from Aceh* (December 2005)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=6900&flag=report

Plan International, *Children and the Tsunami* (December 2005)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=6775&flag=report

The Lancet, *Children's Rights in Emergencies and disasters* (February 2006) Vol. 367, Issue 9511, pp. 698-699
http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S014067360668272X

UNICEF, *Adolescent Programming in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations* (May 2005)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=6809&flag=report

UNICEF, *Growing the Sheltering Tree – Protecting Rights Through Humanitarian Action* (2002)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=3014&flag=report

UNICEF, *Voices of Hope: Adolescents and the tsunami* (January 2005)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=6392&flag=report

Toolkits

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), *Tools to Help Implement the INEE Minimum Standards* (November 2006)
http://www.ineesite.org/page.asp?pid=1056

International Save the Children Alliance, *Child Rights Programming – How to apply rights-based approaches to programming – 2nd edition* (February 2006)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=7306&flag=report

Mahoney, L., Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, *Proactive Presence: Field Strategies for Civilian Protection*, Geneva (2006)
http://www.crin.org/docs/HD_proactive_presence.pdf

Slim, H and Bonwick, A, ALNAP, *Protection: A Guide for Humanitarian Agencies*, London (2005)
http://www.crin.org/docs/alnap_protection_guide.pdf

UNICEF, *Emergency Field Handbook: A guide for UNICEF staff* (includes CD-Rom) (November 2006)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=11281&flag=report

UNESCO, *Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction* (August 2006)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=9624&flag=report

UNICEF, UNICEF *Humanitarian Principles Training: A child rights protection approach to complex emergencies* (October 1999)
http://coe-dmha.org/unicef/unicef2fs.htm

ECPAT International, *Protecting Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Violence in Disaster and Emergency Situations* (June 2006)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=8553&flag=report

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), *Ensuring a Gender Perspective in Education in Emergencies* (February 2006)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=7328&flag=report

Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Guidelines for Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings: Focusing on prevention of and response to sexual violence in emergencies* (September 2005)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=11064&flag=report

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Right to Education During Displacement – A resource for organisations working with refugees and internally displaced persons* (August 2006)
http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=9671&flag=report

Other useful websites

Aid Workers Network
www.aidworkers.net

AlertNet
www.alertnet.org

Disasters Emergency Committee
www.dec.org.uk

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
www.ineesite.org

Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN)
www.irin.org

Inter-Agency Standing Committee
www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
www.ochaonline.un.org

Relief Web
www.reliefweb.int

Information

The Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) is a membership-driven organisation and network of more than 1,700 child rights organisations around the world. It strives to improve the lives of children through the exchange of information about child rights and the promotion of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A website
Updated regularly, the website, which is a leading resource on child rights issues, contains references to thousands of publications, recent news and forthcoming events as well as details of organisations working worldwide for children. The site also includes reports submitted by NGOs to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

CRIN also hosts the websites of: The NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children (ENOC), the Better Care Network (BCN) and European Children's Network (EURONET).

An email service
Distributed twice a week, CRINMAIL provides regular news bulletins about child rights issues, as well as information about new publications and forthcoming events.

A newsletter
Published yearly, the Newsletter is a thematic publication that examines a specific issue affecting children.

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Bookmark CRIN's website to learn more, or email us to contribute news or information.

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Previous issues

CRIN Newsletter 12, March 2000: Education;

CRIN Newsletter 13, November 2000: Children and Macroeconomics;

CRIN Newsletter 14, June 2001: The Special Session on Children;

CRIN Newsletter 15, March 2002: Mainstreaming Child Rights;

CRIN Newsletter 16, October 2002: Children and Young People's Participation;

CRIN Newsletter 17, May 2003: Children's Rights and the Private Sector;

CRIN Newsletter 18, March 2005: Rights Based Programming with Children: an introduction;

CRIN Newsletter 19, May 2006: Children and Violence;

CRIN Newsletter 20, February 2007: Child Rights and Emergencies.