Praxis Note No. 31

Children in Emergencies:

Improving Quality of Response through Capacity Building

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February 2007

INTRAC

International NGO Training and Research Centre

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Introduction

This note is presented by Children in Emergencies specialists at World Vision International Asia Tsunami Response Team. It discusses the increasing need for an improved response to children in emergencies and how World Vision has reacted to this through capacity building training to create a global register of skilled staff available for deployment to emergency situations worldwide. The successful impact this has had on practice is detailed. Implications for future capacity building practice, including increasing linkages between development and relief activities, and recommendations for other practitioners are also highlighted.

Why is an Improved Response Needed?

The protection of children is enshrined in international humanitarian law. Yet aid and development agencies struggle to provide adequate protection to children in emergencies — for example to prevent them from being separated from their families; to include specific items for children in distributions; to design specific programmes for children; and to prevent institutionalisation of children. Responses to big disasters, emergencies and conflicts by aid agencies, both local and international,

are struggling to cover children's issues because they do not have sufficient staff trained and experienced in child protection in emergencies.

Children under 18 usually constitute at least 50 per cent of the population affected by an emergency. Therefore, any response which does not take into account children's issues fails a substantial proportion of the affected population. The primary international humanitarian legal instrument used is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

Emergencies and disasters often occur in contexts where aid agencies have existing long-term development programmes. They may not have specific programmes for children; for instance, they may be focused on water and sanitation, or agriculture, and they may not be accustomed to dealing with issues like children who are separated from their parents, or the prevention of abuse and exploitation in food distribution.

As international agencies respond to an increasing number of emergencies around the world, there are many demands for staff qualified and experienced in dealing with children in emergencies. Yet there are very few opportunities for training and practical experience. In recent years, many

agencies have developed the concept of an emergency response team, or emergency roster. Staff involved are deployed to emergencies in the field for much of the year, usually between 50 – and 80 per cent. World Vision reacts in this way, with an emergency response team, though the team lacks a specialist responsible for issues relating to children in emergencies. When an emergency strikes, World Vision, as a child-focused agency, is under considerable pressure to find specialists in children in emergencies. There are many staff in development programmes with experience of working with children, yet they lack experience in emergencies and the specialist knowledge required.

World Vision's Response: Capacity Building for Children in Emergencies

The pressure of the tsunami response in four countries simultaneously, together with responses in Sudan, Chad, Niger and Pakistan, has stretched the human resource capacity of all relief organisations to the limit. World Vision could no longer depend on two technical advisory staff to be the sole responders to the issues facing children in emergencies. This was partly because of burnout, but also because the combination of being in the field and simultaneously providing higher-level support and advice on global issues was too great a workload. Many smaller emergencies don't yet incorporate children's issues, and there is a clear need for them to do so. Such emergencies, such as annual flooding or storms, do not attract big funds or outside expertise, yet substantial difference can be made to the

implementation of children's rights when locally based staff have better awareness of potential issues. There was clearly a need for World Vision to address these issues.

In 2005, World Vision began drawing up plans for a global register of people willing to deploy to emergency settings, to include both internal staff and outside specialists. The qualifications, skills and experience they would need, and how these could be developed, were discussed.

The two technical advisory staff drew up a list of necessary information about children for all staff dealing with emergencies, and identified the competencies related to working with children in emergencies that staff would need. A practical training programme was developed, and funding was sought. The aim of the programme was to increase the numbers of staff with basic skills in working to protect children in emergencies, by giving an overview of the components of a child-focused emergency response.

It was considered important that the programme have an element of face-to-face training, in order to give participants exposure to the culture, thinking and ways of working of people from other countries, since in an emergency they might be exposed to a wider range of people than in calmer times. In addition, in order to develop the required competencies, staff would need to work in groups and display team working abilities. The possibility of doing the training online was examined, but because of the inherent need to share experience, and to take part in practical activities, this option was not pursued.

The training programme has three components:

- pre-reading
- attendance at residential training course
- completion of assignments including training others

The pre-reading consisted of material which was information-heavy, which could be absorbed by reading, and which would otherwise have taken up valuable time in the residential course if not previously absorbed.

The residential training was focused on practical activities, mixed with technical input. Participants worked predominantly in small groups in order to mirror the effect of team working in the field. It was also important to expose participants to other cultures so that they could learn from others' experiences in the field. The training team consisted of three technical advisory staff.

To ensure that the training had an impact in participants' home offices, each had to complete two follow-up tasks in order to receive an attendance certificate. The two tasks were specifically designed to meet gaps in current provision. The first task was to train at least fifteen other people in basic child protection. The people could be staff, community members, local NGO partners or others as appropriate.

The second task was to 'child proof' the office's emergency preparedness plan. This included detailed information of the number of children in the area covered including their age and gender breakdown; where supplies for children would be sourced from and their likely cost; and previous experience of existing staff in working for and with children.

The first level of training covered the basic issues and increased awareness of these issues. However, it did not address participants' skills and knowledge in a field context, nor did it cover issues in depth. As a result, the technical advisors identified that a second level of training would be required, targeted at those who would be likely to be the direct responders to children in emergencies.

The second level of training was held in Pakistan, with a field visit and workshops in Islamabad. The course went into greater depth than the first level, and included additional topics such as children in armed conflict. Prior to the course, participants' managers had to agree to their being part of the global register and potentially being deployed for up to two months in a 12-month period.

The second level of training attempted to mirror, as much as possible, the conditions of a deployment. Participants were accommodated in a basic hotel and had to share rooms. They were encouraged to use their initiative to solve problems, rather than relying on course facilitators. The field trip exposed them to rough terrain, use of translators, working in inhospitable conditions, long walks in mountainous areas and interaction with children and the community. They carried out practical tasks in the field including focus group discussions and assessments. The practical tasks were useful for the host office as well as for the participants, as the communities had just relocated (or were about to relocate) from camps to their original locations.

During the course, the participants had to complete a number of tasks. They had to rate their own knowledge and experience in the key areas covered by the course prior to the start; rate their knowledge after each session; collect evidence of displaying competencies in specific areas; and complete an assignment involving development of a concept paper, budget and logframe. This mirrored a field situation where staff find themselves occupied all day and have to work at odd hours to meet demands by funders. It was also designed to show who had the skills in writing technical documents and who would need support to do that in an emergency.

The first round of training attracted 56 participants in April 2005. The second round attracted 35 participants. The programme was run in Latin America for 22 staff from Central America in June 2006, so all the materials were translated into Spanish. In total, staff from more than 45 World Vision entities attended. Their roles in the organisation included sponsorship, communications, long-term development, human resources and emergency specialists. We felt very successful in attracting such a wide range and large number of participants.

Fourth, fifth and sixth rounds of the level 1 programme are running in Nairobi, Singapore and the UK in November, December and February 2006–7.

Difficulties and Constraints

Some participants in level 1 of the training did not always display the skills and attitudes that are necessary in an emergency situation. They had the knowledge, but for example did not necessarily work well in a team. To combat this, for level 2 we developed a way to identify the competencies necessary to work in the field on children in emergencies issues, including both technical skills and general skills such as team building, cooperative working and cultural awareness. We also developed a method to assess these during the training.

In terms of planning, because the second level of training relies on holding the workshop in a place with emergency children's programmes in place, it is unlikely that we are able to predict where the next disaster will be at the time of training design and budget submission. This impacts upon the cost of airfares and accommodation, as well as the overall planning process.

Effecting change more widely within World Vision International was also a challenge. The office responsible for deploying staff in the largest emergencies has yet to take on board and embed the messages from the training.

Some of the reasons for the difficulties in effecting change more widely in an organisation the size of World Vision International include:

- the size of the organisation (22,000+ staff) in nearly 100 offices;
- turnover of those who have been trained;
- the organisational review currently underway in World Vision;
- the federal model of partnership to which World Vision ascribes; and

- the lack of specialism by the organisation on a limited number of areas in emergency response.

What Was the Impact?

Practice and response towards children in emergencies has been demonstrably improved in four emergencies since the training, including those occurring in the Philippines, Romania, East Timor, and Indonesia. These were small-scale emergencies where World Vision traditionally would not have included specific attention to children's issues.

In February 2006, a mudslide in St Bernard in the Philippines killed more than 1000 people and displaced many families. Local staff from World Vision Philippines, who had attended the training on children in emergencies, were deployed to the area. They assessed the situation for children, set up child-friendly spaces where children could play safely, and established a child protection network with other players including the government and other NGOs.

The spring of 2006 saw devastating floods sweep across Eastern Europe. World Vision's programme in Romania is providing assistance to affected areas there. One of their key activities is re-establishing a kindergarten in an area where displaced people have relocated to. This is being implemented by staff who attended the training.

Two child-friendly spaces were set up in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in response to the May 2006 earthquake. In East Timor, in response to recent conflict-related internal displacement, two mobile health clinics now have mobile child-friendly spaces accompanying them. We were able to use the pool of newly trained staff to respond to this crisis. This enabled them to increase their experience in a different country, whilst boosting the capacity of the response in East Timor. From this, we also learnt which aspects of the training needed improving in order to prepare staff better for deployment.

The training has also had a significant impact on World Vision's internal thinking and activities, although this took some time. The standards and issues raised in the children in emergencies training have been incorporated into generic relief training which every World Vision office should undergo.

The organisation has also shown a long-term commitment to improving the response to children in emergencies through securing funding for it. Various projects and regions have included the training in proposals for funding, indicating that we have demonstrated that it is useful, possible and practical. World Vision International also established a dedicated budget line for children in emergencies to fund some of the core activities of the training courses.

Recommendations to Practitioners

Through the experience of implementing and adapting the training, there were a number of lessons learnt and issues highlighted which we would encourage other practitioners to take into account when considering capacity building for children in emergencies. Capacity building through training

courses can be an effective means of improving the quality of response in an emergency if the following points are followed:

- The success of the training programme depends on the commitment of participants and their managers to implement what they have learned, and to release them for future deployment. To ensure this, participants need to fund part of the costs themselves in order to ensure that their home office is committed to their attendance.
- Participants need to have clear follow-up assignments and activities to ensure that there is clear, visible and lasting impact from their training
- A practical component is essential at the higher level — without this, participants may never see a disaster area before being deployed. Even though the situation was artificial, the field component helped participants think through their feelings in relation to working in disasters, and allowed for assessment of their skills in key areas.
- While the practical component was extremely valuable, it brought with it an impact on the communities we visited, and the World Vision office had to cope with the logistics of a large number of visitors. It was sadly fortuitous that there was an appropriate, accessible emergency with an existing children's programme to visit.
- Applied learning through case studies, participants' sharing of their experience, and above all, the field component, is key to participant satisfaction and development of knowledge and skills.

- Participants should be from a range of different countries in order to share and learn from alternative experiences.
- Be clear about the competencies participants are expected to develop, how they will demonstrate them and how you will assess them.
- Be aware that participants have different learning styles, and balance theory and practice accordingly.
- Read the literature about taxonomy of learning and be clear which domain you are targeting your training at, and the level of it. Bloom's taxonomy is one of the commonest models (Bloom et al., 1956).

Implications for Future Practice

Building the capacity of existing staff is a sustainable and cost-effective way to increase the quality of response to children's issues in emergencies. The budget of the four training courses for over 100 people was the same as the cost of financing one emergency response staff member for six months. Five staff who have attended level 2 and who have worked in one or more emergency are now being trained as trainers for level 1, and are being monitored for the fourth, fifth and sixth rounds of training. Trainers at level 2 need to have considerable practical experience to draw on, so it will take some time to build more trainers at this level.

The training has enabled there to be a clear quality control on those placed on the global register. In order to have their names on the register, staff must have

passed level 2, and have been recommended for deployment. Not everyone who completes the training will necessarily be ready to be deployed to emergencies outside their own countries. However, they can make a substantial difference in their own countries.

The training itself, and the model we used, has helped reinforce the links between what are often seen as two separate spheres of work — relief and development. The first staff to respond in a crisis are usually the local staff, who are often development minded. Only after at least 24 hours will specialist relief staff arrive. However, it is the initial activities which are most important for issues such as preventing separation of children from their families and mitigating the effects of disasters. Lives will be saved in the first hours by children knowing how to react to emergency situations —for example to stay away from rising floods and to go to higher ground. Local staff need the knowledge and awareness to ensure this happens. A member of staff who helped run a children's club before a disaster can utilise this structure and, for example, organise games and activities for children whilst their parents are at a food distribution. Working in relief has to be seen to integrate development principles.

This, therefore, requires careful analysis of the target group for the training, since if relief teams are targeted to the exclusion of all other groups, the relief effort will not be part of an integrated development plan. Other actors who influence programming for children in emergencies (and who therefore should be considered for training) include local programme staff, communications and media teams, and those who manage gifts in kind programmes.

This capacity building initiative has also highlighted the role of emergency response teams in providinglonger-term support to programmes which they set up.. Children in emergencies technical advisory staff have traditionally provided this support even after they have left the programme and returned to their regular jobs. In contrast, in World Vision's previous model, once an emergency response team member leaves, they don't return to see the programmes they designed, or to look at longer-term issues. The work of the technical advisory staff in providing both emergency and longer-term advice has shown the value of ongoing support, as well as enabling good programme development and adjustment of the model.

The training programme has reinforcing the concept of a continuum of development in which both relief and development are fully integrated. furthermore, this experience has served to question the value of one-off training courses where there is no clear commitment to putting the training into practice.

The programme was initially funded as a pilot focusing on staff from tsunami-affected countries. The training materials and overall programme were developed through support from the Asia Tsunami Office.

Following the demonstration of the effectiveness of the training, the organisation committed funds to repeating the training the subsequent year, and regional offices began to budget for the training themselves.

The most encouraging factors have been the number of staff who apply for places, their offices' willingness to support them financially and most of all, the support from World Vision's regional offices, which have written the training into their plans and budgets.

The constraints are at a macro-organisational level and impact the organisation's response to the biggest emergencies, rather than the regional-led responses.

There are also implications for donors. Training for children in emergencies must be included as a line item in budgets, for example, or in food programmes targeting children, and should be worthy of funding on its own merits. Line items on child protection training have been deleted from multilateral funding applications by the donor. The model of a relief register of staff within an organisation appears to be a feasible one.

It is possible to create a solid, generic training programme which provides skills and knowledge to use in any situation. The model could be replicated in World Vision in different areas such as health or sponsorship operations, and equally, it could be adopted just as successfully by other organisations.

Reference

Bloom, B. S. et al. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals: Handbook 1 cognitive domain*. New York, NY: Longmans, Green and Company.