

EVALUATION OF UNICEF PROGRAMMES TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN EMERGENCIES

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Trends in the nature of armed conflicts and disasters are increasing both the scale and scope of protection issues affecting children and women in humanitarian contexts. After a decade of decline in the number of armed conflicts, since 2010 there has been an escalation in armed conflict globally.¹ By 2012, more people were refugees (15.4 million) and internally displaced (28.8 million) than at any time since 1994.² Nearly half of these people are children.³

Children affected by armed conflict are subject to a wide range of protection violations and issues. These include separation from families; killing and maiming through combat or as a result of explosive remnants of war (ERW); being recruited or abducted by armed forces or armed groups; becoming survivors of sexual or physical violence or witnessing acts of violence; being detained; and even being subject to torture. Schools and health facilities are attacked and many children's opportunities for the future are curtailed, especially in protracted contexts.

Disasters affect 10 times as many people as armed conflicts. The number of affected people has increased around sixfold since the 1970s, from less than 50 million people to around 300 million in 2010, largely due to climate-related disasters.⁴ Almost all – 97 per cent – of the people affected by disasters live in countries with medium to low levels of human development, and 85 per cent live in Asia.⁵

Disasters cause protection risks and exacerbate existing issues. They separate children from their caregivers and often result in vast numbers of families living in camps, which in turn increases the risk of violence of all types. Disasters destroy livelihoods, which can lead to an increase in child labour and early marriage as coping mechanisms. The risk of trafficking and illegal adoption also increases in the aftermath of disasters. In both disasters and armed conflicts, many children and caregivers experience stress and anxiety that can be debilitating to their development. Symptoms can persist over long periods of time if not addressed.

Child protection interventions in emergencies aim to save lives in literal terms, by reducing the risk of casualties in armed conflict and disasters, and also to preserve children's chances of having a fulfilling future. To be effective, child protection interventions need to be introduced in the immediate aftermath of sudden-onset situations and continued in the case of protracted emergencies.

UNICEF's approach to child protection in emergencies is set out in the 2008 Child Protection Strategy. Approved by the Executive Board, it is applicable to UNICEF's work in child protection globally, in all phases, development and emergency. The strategy is operationalized through the Strategic Plan⁶ and the 2010 Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs). The aim is to strengthen child protection systems, both formal and less formal, in all phases: pre-crisis, during crises and in post-crisis recovery. When conditions are stable, UNICEF's objective is to strengthen systems for the long term through support to development of policies, legislation, service delivery capacities, regulations, coordination, knowledge and data, and human resource capacities. UNICEF also supports more targeted preparedness actions. Strengthening child protection systems and preparedness planning includes fostering the resilience and capacities of children, families and communities to withstand shocks, claim their rights and strengthen community-based protection. During emergencies UNICEF aims to build on existing systems and organizations and ensure they are not weakened or bypassed. In the recovery phase, UNICEF seeks opportunities to accelerate systems strengthening (to 'build back better').

¹ SIPRI, 2013, *SIPRI Yearbook 2013*, Oslo, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute; Human Security Report Project, 2012, *Human security report 2012*. Available at: www.hsrgroup.org/human-security-reports/2012/text.aspx. Accessed 18 August 2013.

² UNHCR, 2013, *Global forced displacement at 18-year high* [online]. Available at: www.unhcr.org.uk. Accessed 18 August 2013.

³ Ibid.

⁴ EMDAT data, available at: www.emdat.be/natural-disasters-trends. Accessed 19 June 2012.

⁵ See IFRC, 2011, *World disasters report*, Geneva, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

⁶ Known as the medium-term strategic plan (MTSP) at the time of this evaluation.

In parallel to system strengthening, UNICEF's objective is to address the roots of violence in societies by promoting positive social norms. Promoting social change and challenging harmful practices is long term development work. It can address, for example, the causes of sexual violence, generalized aggression aggravated by 'gun cultures', and easy access to weapons, recruitment of children into armed forces and armed groups, and inter-communal violence – all of which are major issues in protracted conflicts. UNICEF works to address social norms and promote social change before, during and after crises and in armed conflict and disaster.

Two cross-cutting areas are fundamental to the strategy: (a) strengthening knowledge on child protection so that planning and response is based on evidence; and (b) convening/catalysing agents of change to ensure effective coordination and joint advocacy on key issues. Increasingly, UNICEF aims to provide an integrated response across sectors in emergencies. Child protection is well positioned to lead by providing multi-purpose centres offering protection services that link to education, health/nutrition and water/sanitation services.⁷

Along with the growth in the nature and extent of emergencies, UNICEF's mandate and responsibilities in child protection have grown in the last decade. As part of cluster lead responsibilities, under the Global Protection Cluster, UNICEF leads the Child Protection Working Group (CPWG) and, in collaboration with UNFPA, is designated to co-lead the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) at global and field levels. UNICEF also globally co-chairs and provides leadership to the Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support. UNICEF also provides leadership in many of the task forces within the Child Protection Working Group such as the task force on Capacity Building and on CFS and Community Based Child Protection.

UNICEF is also responsible for co-chairing the country task force on monitoring and reporting on the grave violations against children in armed conflict and plays a leading role in implementing the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM). The MRM is formally established to report to the UN Security Council when parties to conflict situations are listed in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict CAAC for grave violations against children. UNICEF, as a key UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, and an operational UN agency with a protection mandate, is providing leadership in the development of the Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements (MARA) on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV). The MARA was established by UN Security Council Resolution 1960 (2010) to ensure systematic gathering of timely, accurate, reliable and objective information on conflict-related sexual violence. It is the technical lead within the United Nations for mine/ERW risk education (MRE), for war-injury victim assistance and for advocacy against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

This evaluation is the first comprehensive global exercise to examine UNICEF's programme response in protecting children in emergencies. Its purpose is to strengthen child protection programming by assessing performance in recent years and to draw lessons and recommendations that will influence ongoing and future programmes. It is expected that the findings of the evaluation will inform the roll-out of the Strategic Plan 2014-2017.

The evaluation design includes country case studies analysing outcomes for children against the medium term strategic plan (MTSP, 2006-2013), the CCCs and selected evaluation questions. Twelve countries provided data for the analysis, four as case studies with country visits and standalone reports (Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC], Pakistan and South Sudan) and a further eight countries as desk studies (Afghanistan, Haiti, Myanmar, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine and Sudan). Four of the countries (Haiti, Myanmar, Pakistan and the Philippines) are disaster-affected and sudden-onset contexts while the remainder are primarily contexts of protracted conflict that include sudden-onset upsurges in violence.⁸

A total of 290 semi-structured interviews informed the evaluation across the case study countries and headquarters and regional offices of UNICEF as well as through representatives of the in-country child

⁷ A study is under way (December 2013) to strengthen integrated programming. See *Integrated programming in humanitarian action* (forthcoming).

⁸ Myanmar, Pakistan and the Philippines also have protracted regional conflicts in addition to being disaster affected.

protection working groups.⁹ Responses to questionnaires were received from seven of eight UNICEF country offices included in the desk studies and from a further 35 NGO partners. A total of 477 adolescents participated in focus groups in the case study countries (259 girls and 218 boys). In addition, multiple UNICEF and partner reports were analysed for supplementary data.

Key findings and conclusions

The summary identifies major programme successes, followed by gaps and issues, and then recommendations. Detailed conclusions relative to the evaluation objectives and questions are provided in chapter 10.

The evaluation found that the strategic approach to child protection – system strengthening in the continuum of pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis in combination with social change interventions – is comprehensive and relevant to the many different types of protection violations and issues faced by girls, boys and women in disasters and armed conflicts. However, more guidance is needed on applying the Child Protection Strategy in fragile and conflict-affected states. In addition, the CCCs are not yet in harmony with the integrated approach of the strategy. There has been much less focus in programme design on social change interventions, focused on the longer term and sustained during crises, that could help to prevent some types of violence – such as inter-communal violence, the prevalence of guns and other light weapons, and the acceptance of their use, and sexual violence – by addressing the root causes.

In programme implementation, UNICEF has led the child protection sub-cluster or working groups in information sharing, preparedness measures and increasing rapid assessments. This has contributed to good results achieved against MTSP areas and CCC benchmarks. Strong results were found in reunifying separated children, providing psychosocial first aid, preventing the recruitment of children, supporting release and reintegration, and in mine/ERW risk education. The weaker areas identified were in monitoring, reporting and advocating on grave violations beyond recruitment (killing and maiming, abduction, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and humanitarian access) and in working to prevent violence against girls, boys and women. Data and case management remain weak and are an impediment to clearly demonstrating outcomes of programming. This in turn is a factor in the inadequate funding base to child protection in emergencies.

Key programme successes identified against the MTSP and CCCs are:

1. A significant percentage of separated children have been reunified in fast-onset humanitarian contexts (upsurge of violence or natural disaster).

Where reunification data were available, they revealed that an estimated 79 to 100 per cent of separated children have been reunified (or cases closed¹⁰) in a sample of contexts.¹¹ A caveat on these statistics is that the total number of separated children may not have been accurate in all cases, given the weaknesses of case management systems. The aim is to rapidly reunify children, within 48 hours to 2 weeks, but data were weak and not available on the speed of reunification. Reunification rates were much lower in countries where children had been separated for much longer periods, for example, 31 to 37 per cent in Sudan/South Sudan.

⁹ Child protection working groups are established at country level to bring together NGOs, UN agencies, government representatives and other partners such as academics to coordinate on child protection preparedness and response and develop joint tools and guidelines. When an emergency leads the Resident Coordinator to recommend activation of sectoral clusters, the child protection working group in-country functions as a sub-cluster of the Protection Cluster.

¹⁰ Cases can be closed if, for example, children are separated from their usual caregivers but are living with extended family in satisfactory circumstances.

¹¹ DRC, Myanmar, Pakistan and Philippines.

2. UNICEF-supported psychosocial interventions are reaching significant numbers of children in complex settings.

UNICEF intends to provide safe access for children to socialize, play and learn. UNICEF-supported psychosocial programmes reached between 8 and 13 per cent of affected girls, boys and women in sample contexts of disasters and conflicts. Assessed against UNICEF Country Office targets, however, the percentage reached is much higher, ranging from 84 to 297 per cent of target.¹² The numbers reached varied from 22,300 conflict-affected girls and boys in South Sudan (12 per cent of the total) to 200,000 girls, boys and women in Pakistan (8 per cent of the flood-affected children). These statistics do not include the contributions of partners in child protection sub-clusters to psychosocial programming, so a higher total percentage of affected populations was reached. A key strength identified in the evaluation is that UNICEF has focused on outreach to hard-to-reach groups (the poorest people, ethnic and religious minorities, isolated populations, people with disabilities), and mobile outreach has been effective in increasing coverage. Costs per person of such services tended to be low (\$10 to \$45 per person over several months). Two external evaluations found significant improvements in some aspects of well-being through participation in psychosocial programmes, more so with younger children than adolescents.¹³

3. UNICEF provided reintegration support to the majority of children released from armed forces and armed groups through formal channels.

The aim was to provide boys and girls released from armed forces and armed groups with family reunification or foster care and assistance with reintegration through, for example, education, vocational training or business start-up support. Across seven countries in the evaluation, 4,475 released boys and girls across six countries received such support through UNICEF programmes in 2012. This represents the majority of children released through formal channels.

4. The MRM and action plans are prompting the release of children from armed forces and the prevention of recruitment

The aim was to establish the MRM in all countries listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict and to advocate for time-bound action plans to address the violations. The MRM has been established in all listed countries and UNICEF is co-chair (with the Humanitarian Coordinator) of the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) in each country. Advocacy by the CTFMR with armed forces has led to signed action plans in seven of the eight countries in the evaluation, and five of these were signed or revised in 2011/2012. Advocacy in the eight MRM countries in the evaluation resulted in the release of 2,064 children in 2011/2012 and to rejection of 1,379 children from recruitment through age screening.

5. UNICEF's programme response to violence has been extensive and effective through multi-sectoral support, especially in contexts of highest incidence of violence.

The CCC benchmark is to prevent and address violence, exploitation of abuse of children and women, including gender-based violence (GBV). UNICEF reached very large numbers of GBV survivors with multi-sectoral support (medical, psychosocial, reintegration, legal) in some countries, especially those with the highest incidence of GBV. This includes DRC, with 39,000 children and women survivors between 2009 and 2012, and Somalia, Myanmar and Pakistan. In one group of 3,000 survivors, 56 per cent had received treatment within 72 hours of the incident.

¹² 84% of girls and 90% in the relief phase of the floods in Pakistan, 2012; 297% of target in South Sudan and 87% of the target in Colombia (see Country Case Studies for this evaluation).

¹³ One was held across CPWG partners implementing psychosocial programming in the State of Palestine led by UNICEF and the other in Colombia on a large psychosocial 'Game of Peace' programme. Improvements were found in engagement in the home, community/social relations and problem solving although less improvement was found in resilience and reducing troubling thoughts and feelings. See section 4.5.

6. UNICEF work in mine risk/ERW risk education is successful in reaching its targets

Between 76 and 124 per cent of target populations had been reached by mine/ERW risk education in 2012 across the countries in the evaluation, with numbers reached spanning from 45,000 to 175,000. In addition to raising awareness of risks and teaching children and their families to live safely in areas contaminated by explosive remnants of war, in two countries systems were established to educate people on how to report sightings of suspicious objects. This led to the safe removal of 2,359 potentially dangerous objects.

7. UNICEF is rolling out systems mapping with a view to plans for longer system strengthening, while leadership of the child protection sub-clusters/working groups is strengthening preparedness.

UNICEF is rolling out mapping of all components of child protection systems and is supporting governments and partners to develop plans to strengthen systems in the long term. To strengthen preparedness and coordination, UNICEF is leading child protection sub-clusters or working groups in 10 of the 12 countries evaluated, with the specific aims of improving information-sharing, undertaking preparedness planning and implementing joint rapid assessments. Partners believed that UNICEF had strengthened information sharing, and joint tools and standard operating procedures had been developed in most contexts. Seven of the 12 countries had developed preparedness plans and UNICEF had led inter-agency rapid assessments in 6 countries.

Gaps or weaker areas in programming

1. Advocacy using MRM data has been strong on recruitment, but there has been less emphasis on the other violations. Advocacy with armed groups is a gap.

While CTFMRs have been effective in advocacy with armed forces on preventing recruitment and on the release of children, there has been much less advocacy on the other grave violations: killing and maiming, abduction, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and humanitarian access. Further, only one action plan had been signed with an armed group (26 armed groups were listed in the countries in the evaluation), although they are now the main perpetrators of recruitment and other grave violations. Negotiations are ongoing with armed groups but this area needs to be given greater emphasis by UNICEF and CTFMR partners.

2. Conceptualization of system strengthening in conflict-affected and fragile states needs to be further developed.

While system strengthening for the long term coupled with preparedness in child protection is appropriate to all contexts, more conceptual thinking is required on approaches in conflict-affected and fragile states. Three aspects were outlined in the evaluation. First, where all systems are extremely weak (such as Afghanistan, DRC and South Sudan) it may be more realistic to focus state system strengthening efforts on the strategic functions of the state that cannot be provided by non-state actors (such as justice and security) to avoid further strain on weak systems. Second, in some states (including those classified by the World Bank as having more effective governance, such as Colombia and Pakistan¹⁴), there were issues of the coverage of protective services, especially in areas most affected by armed conflict and largely controlled by armed groups. Third, there are questions as to the most appropriate approach to child protection system strengthening where the state itself is a perpetrator of violence.

3. Prevention of violence against children and women has been weaker than response.

More investment has been made in response to violence and other protection risks than to prevention. This is particularly the case regarding the direct protection risks raised by children and women in this evaluation, such as violence and the risk of violence when collecting firewood/water; sexual violence around water and sanitation facilities in camps; generalized threatening behaviour where law and order are weak; addressing the prevalence and social acceptance of guns; disorder and violence around

¹⁴ See annex 3 on countries in the evaluation by classifications of disasters/armed conflict, development status and governance.

distributions; and being caught in shelling and crossfire or in floods. The evaluation identified some examples of approaches demonstrating that creative thinking and participation by affected communities in seeking solutions can lead to practical and viable approaches to prevention.

4. Systematic interventions aimed at social change are essential but need to be extended.

Systematic interventions with measured outcomes aimed at social change, based on an analysis of the root causes of issues, have been relatively weak in the context of protracted armed conflicts. Long-term programmes have addressed female genital mutilation/cutting and early marriage, and more recently programmes have been introduced on peacebuilding and addressing sexual violence. However, these types of programmes need to be extended to address other complex issues in armed conflict, such as prevention of recruitment, inter-communal violence and the prevalence and social acceptance of guns. This is long-term work to be undertaken in more stable periods and sustained during crises.

5. Data management and case management remain very weak.

Disaggregated data are essential for evidence-based planning and for monitoring results and outcomes, but it was found to be weak at most levels. Case management for beneficiaries of programmes supporting individuals (e.g. separated children, survivors of GBV) was also weak. Strengthening data overall requires significant capacity-building investment with partners, as they are the primary producers of data.

6. Funding for child protection is insufficient to provide adequate leadership and maintain an adequate programme response.

Half of the countries in the evaluation received less than half of their appeals, and some received less than 30 per cent, with no evident distinction between disasters and armed conflicts. Funding shortages have resulted in cuts in essential programming, which is a risk to children. For example, mine/ERW risk education has been scaled down in some countries even as child casualties are increasing; services to survivors of sexual violence have reductions; and UNICEF has not been able to fulfil all commitments made under MRM action plans, which is a risk both to children and to UNICEF's reputation. UNICEF has also found it difficult to provide sub-cluster coordinators with the required technical capacity and field experience, putting the quality of leadership at risk. Further, investments in capacity-building with partners will be constrained, yet this is still a high priority.

Recommendations

Recommendations are structured around five strategic areas and programme planning and equity issues. They are addressed to UNICEF HQ, regional office and country office levels. Chapter 10 provides details on how each recommendation should be implemented. The upcoming Strategic Plan for 2014-2017 provides an opportunity to integrate some of the proposed strategic directions proposed by the evaluation.

1. Further develop inter-agency human rights-based advocacy in all contexts but especially where the state is a perpetrator of violence and where armed groups are in control. In addition, engage further with the rule-of-law-and security sector agenda and address impunity with reference to violence against children in armed conflict and disasters.
2. Strengthen the prevention of violence, including sexual violence and other forms of GBV against girls, boys and women in emergencies using social change interventions (longer term) and community alert/response systems during crises.
3. Strengthen data management, case management, evidence building and use of data for advocacy and programme management, and accountability to affected populations and to demonstrate outcomes to donors.
4. Invest in increasing funding for CPIE. Demonstrate to donors a greater emphasis on providing evidence of outcomes and on prevention.

5. Analyse the application of the Child Protection Strategy in fragile and conflict affected States and harmonize the CCCs to the CP Strategy.
6. Strengthen the inclusion of children with disabilities, reported as the group for which UNICEF had placed the least emphasis on identifying and addressing barriers to inclusion.
7. Together with international NGO partners, invest in medium term, systematic capacity-building of government and national NGO partners in CPiE, with an emphasis on data management and quality CPiE programming.

