

# Protect my future

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## The links between child protection and **disasters, conflict and fragility**



In the post-2015 development agenda

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### Acknowledgements

This paper was written by Janis Ridsdel of Plan International and Christine McCormick of Save the Children, with inputs from a range of child protection in emergencies/fragility experts in Keeping Children Safe Coalition, Plan International, Save the Children and World Vision. It is part of an inter-agency series on the links between child protection and major development goals. Other papers in the series address subjects including governance, population dynamics, growth, equity and health.

### Introduction

Since 2000, 2.3 billion people have been directly affected by disasters and in 2011 alone almost 200 million people were affected, including 100 million children (Gupa-Sapir, Santos and Bordre 2013). Overall, children constitute 50-60 per cent of those affected by disasters (UNCIEF cited in Children in a Changing Climate 2013). Climate change is likely to further increase the frequency, severity and unpredictability of disasters, and every year over the next decade it is estimated that 175 million children worldwide will be affected by disasters brought about by climate change (Save the Children 2009). It is estimated that the proportion of civilian victims in conflicts has risen in recent decades from 5 per cent to over 90 per cent, and at least half of these victims are children (UN 1996). Currently 1.5 billion children live in conflict affected or fragile states (OECD cited in World Vision 2012).

Conflict, disasters and fragility have devastating effects on children's lives, and have contributed to the wider global crisis in child protection. For example, children may become separated from families during crisis periods or exposed to violence, abuse and child labour as a consequence of the impact of conflict and disasters on household poverty and livelihood practices, and in conflict situations, children are often forced to join armed forces or groups (CPWG 2012; Child Soldiers International 2012). Fragile states commonly lack even basic effective child protection measures, and children are at particular risk of many forms of abuse and exploitation in such settings (World Vision 2012). Despite the heightened vulnerability of girls and boys during and after conflict and disasters, currently humanitarian action does not give adequate priority to child protection and care, a situation that reflects the broader lack of attention given to this important issue in fragile and non-fragile states. In this paper, we examine the implications of this lack of prioritisation for the post-2015 development framework, arguing that this framework must include a goal and target on child protection that applies to both fragile and non-fragile states, and makes specific reference to emergency contexts.

#### **Box 1 What is child protection and care?**

For the purpose of this paper, child protection is defined as: 'measures and structures to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children' (Save the Children 2010a).<sup>1</sup>

Child protection is closely linked to the better care of children, which involves ensuring that more children grow up in safe and caring families, or, when this is not possible, have a range of high-quality alternative care choices open to them (UN 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> This is similar to the definition used by the Child Protection Working Group, who define child protection as 'the prevention and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children' (CPWG 2012 p.13)

### The central importance of child protection and care at times of crisis and in fragile contexts

There is much evidence to suggest increased vulnerability to inadequate care, abuse, exploitation and neglect during periods of crisis and in fragile contexts. For example, in 2011, The Children's Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) was launched at the United Nation's International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.<sup>2</sup> Based on consultations with 600 children in 21 high risk countries this identified five key priorities for children-centred DRR, with child protection identified as a top priority alongside issues such as access to education, participation and community infra-structure. Following on from the development of this charter, a further 1, 299 children have been consulted in 17 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America to identify ways in which to put the charter into practice (Children in a Changing Climate 2013). During these consultations, children identified numerous ways in which child protection issues become more severe and widespread during disasters:

- In Ethiopia, children aged 8 to 12 years reported that their vulnerability to harmful traditional practices increased during periods of drought.
- In Ecuador, children identified risks related to violence and they explained the need for extra protection from violence when an emergency happens.
- In Bolivia, children said that they were afraid of abduction.
- In Nicaragua, children highlighted the lack of security for children in shelters.
- In Kenya, children also complained of abuse by adults in emergency camps

*"The first thing that needs to be ensured is the protection of children. Otherwise there will be no education or anything else." (Moges, boy from Ethiopia cited in Children in a Changing Climate p.18)*

Other research demonstrates how children commonly become separated from parents and families in the chaos that immediately follows an emergency. In one province in Indonesia alone, the tsunami caused 3000 children to be separated from their parents (DEPOS and Save the Children 2006). Separation may also increase as a consequence of the impact of emergencies on livelihoods and child care practices. For example, emergencies may increase poverty, a major driver of separation and of child labour, or may lead to the dislocation of communities and a loss of wider support networks (Plan and ODI 2012).

*"During drought periods, we sell firewood. It takes an hour to collect the firewood and then another two hours to walk to Lalibela. And we go at 4.00 am, even 3.00 am. And if we don't manage to sell the firewood in the morning, we will have to stay in the market all day and it stops me from going to school. " (Melkam, schoolgirl, 14 years, Lalibela, Ethiopia cited in Plan 2011 p. 12)*

Conflict situations commonly expose children to violence. Between 2010-2012 there were 20 countries that used children in their armed forces or groups, with children engaged as either soldiers or in other roles, such as cooks, porters or the 'wives' of commanders (Child Soldiers International 2012; International Bureau for Child Rights 2010). In 2008 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the UN Population Fund recorded nearly 16,000 cases of sexual violence against

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<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.preventionweb.net/files/globalplatform/childrencharter.pdf>

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women and girls. The Lancet has reported that nearly one fifth of all girls were raped in the greater Port-au-Prince area during armed rebellion in 2004-2005 (cited in Save the Children 2013).

Responses to emergencies may inadvertently increase children's vulnerability; for example, if food is distributed in a chaotic manner this can push children apart from their carers (Save the Children 2004). Well-meaning agencies may also establish residential care facilities or promote inter-country adoption, in the belief that this is necessary for the new influx of 'orphans.' In reality, children separated by emergencies often have parents or extended family members who could care for them, but have either lost children in the chaos surrounding an emergency or placed them in residential care or for adoption in the hope that it will lead to a better life (Save the Children 2010b). Such practices can lead to negative consequences that last long after the end of an emergency period. For example, the tsunami in Indonesia led to the building of many new 'orphanages', many of which still existed years later, despite the fact that placing children in such facilities can be extremely detrimental to child well-being and development (EveryChild 2011; Martin and Sudrajat 2007; Save the Children 2010b).

Girls may be especially vulnerable during emergencies. For example, research in Bangladesh and Ethiopia has shown how the risk of sexual violence and early and forced marriages is reported to increase for girls during and after disasters (Plan 2011).

*"I know two girls who were raped going to fetch water. When you go far and there are not many people around, it happens." (Endager, 16 year old, girl, Lasta District, Ethiopia cited in Plan 2011 p.16)*

*"After cyclones, families think their condition is worse and send their daughters to get married. Almost 50% of girls drop out of education because of early marriage. In very remote villages, it is probably more 70 to 75%." (Young girl from Barguna, Bangladesh cited in Plan 2011 p.19)*

The girls and boys who are most affected by protection issues during emergencies are typically the most vulnerable and marginalised children in the community, such as children with disabilities, children from ethnic or religious minorities, children without parental care, and children from the poorest segments of society (Morgan and Beherendt 2008).

Child protection violations not only have immediate and life threatening consequences for girls and boys, but may also impact on the resilience of communities and their ability to cope with emergencies. As has been widely demonstrated by other papers in this series, children who are inadequately cared for or protected may suffer from developmental delays and long term physical and mental health problems, and be less well educated than their peers (BCN et al 2012; Kaplan and Jones forthcoming). These effects often last well into adulthood, and those who have been maltreated as children may therefore be less well-equipped to cope with the negative impacts of emergencies and climate change.

Fragile contexts may be defined as situations where governments cannot or will not fulfil their responsibility to protect and fulfil the rights of the majority of the population (World Vision 2012). Fragility is often closely inter-linked to emergencies with periods of crisis commonly followed by periods of fragility, and extended periods of fragility often preventing communities from having the capacity to deal with crisis. Research by World Vision in five fragile states demonstrates amplified child protection risks in such settings, including high risk of early and forced marriage, sexual



abuse and child labour. These child protection violations are commonly linked to weakened social fabric, and the limited capacity of families, communities and governments to protect children (World Vision 2012).

### A lack of prioritisation given to child protection in fragile states and in humanitarian action

Despite the devastating impacts of emergencies on children's protection, there is much evidence to suggest that child protection does not receive the recognition it deserves in humanitarian action. For example, the Hyogo Framework, which is the standard-setting international agreement for Disaster Risk Reduction efforts, describes guiding principles and actions within five priority areas, so as to build the resilience of communities and reduce disaster losses. While the report calls for the inclusion of training in disaster risk reduction within school curricula, there is no specific reference to child protection in the Hyogo Framework (UN 2005).

Child protection is also amongst the lowest-funded sectors in humanitarian action. Analysis of projects funded through the CERF (Central Emergency Response Fund) and of projects included in Consolidated (CAPs) or Flash Appeals shows that a substantial proportion of child protection projects do not get the funding they request, with child protection the second most under-funded sector after education. Overall, child protection receives only a fraction of the budgets allocated to other sectors. In 2009, funding for education through CERF and CAPS was \$144 compared to just \$41 million for child protection. There is also some evidence to suggest that child protection funding is going down (CPWG 2011).

The lack of funding for child protection in emergencies is mirrored in child protection response during 'normal' periods in both fragile and non-fragile states, with government departments responding to child protection amongst the least well-resourced in the world (BCN et al 2013a). Research in five fragile states demonstrates how whilst three out of the five states did have a strong legislative framework on child protection, low resource allocations and an inability to use resources allocated due to challenges such as poor security, led to extremely ineffective child protection systems in all five countries. Instead, communities relied on customary laws which do not always prioritise children's best interest, and patchy Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) provision, which often did not extend outside of urban centres (World Vision 2012).

### Appropriate responses to child protection in emergencies and fragile contexts

The evidence above demonstrates the essential importance of well-funded efforts to respond to child protection in all settings, including emergencies and in fragile contexts, where children are at greater risk of exploitation, abuse and neglect, and capacity to respond to this risk is diminished. Such efforts must be grounded in the development of strong child protection systems, which include laws, policies and services across all social sectors, including social

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welfare, education, health, security and justice, to prevent and respond to child protection risks. In developing strong child protection systems able to cope with emergencies and fragility, it is essential to:<sup>3</sup>

- **Ensure appropriate laws and policies are in place:** Develop comprehensive policy frameworks on child protection, which are sufficiently resourced. Ensure that all countries have disaster risk reduction and resilience plans which reference child protection. Lobby governments to ratify and implement relevant treaties and laws, such as those which outlaw the recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups.
- **Include a focus on prevention:** For example, work with families and communities to develop risk reduction plans. Register births to help assist with later family-tracing efforts. Understand why and how children are being recruited into armed forces or groups and work to address root causes. Ensure that peace building efforts maintain a focus on prevention and the elimination of all forms of violence against children.
- **Build a workforce that is able to protect children:** Ensure that there is a pool of child protection specialists, and that all actors have adequate skills and knowledge on child protection to be able to respond during times of crisis (key skills include fundamentals of child development and wellbeing, family tracing and reunification and the provision of basic psycho-social support). Review, develop and enforce codes of conduct for humanitarian staff, and put in place strategies to respond to any allegations of misconduct. Risk-assess humanitarian aid and ensure that it is delivered in a way that does not put children at risk.
- **Empower local communities:** Do not underestimate the role of local communities in protecting children, and include local community-based organisations and community leaders in emergency preparedness and response. Recognise that in fragile states the absence of state provision means that communities commonly rely on informal structures and customary law to respond to child protection. Build on good practice that exists, but work to change values and poor practice that harm child well-being.
- **Mainstream child protection in other sectors and with other related issues:** Collaborate with staff working in areas such as health and education to ensure that they can adequately support the protection of children during emergencies. Ensure that other sectors work to prevent child protection violations (e.g. by teaching children about violence/encouraging peace-building within schools). Train the police and armed forces in child protection. Recognise that processes and interventions to respond to gender-based violence are often similar to those that respond to child protection and create effective synergies.
- **Recognise long term impacts on children:** Acknowledge that the negative consequences of emergencies on child protection can last for many months, if not years. This includes responding to the long term consequences of traumatic events on children's psychosocial well-being.

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<sup>3</sup> Taken from CPWG 2012; Save the Children 2010c, Tanner et al 2009 and UNCIEF 2007

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- **Recognise children's role:** For example, children can contribute to risk assessments by identifying social and natural hazard risks, are effective communicators of risk to their communities, have unique insights into how emergencies impact on their lives, and have a right to participate in decisions which may affect them.
- **Ensure adequate coordination among agencies:** This should be between government, UN and non-governmental bodies and between those working in child protection and other sectors. This is to prevent gaps or duplication in services to children and helps ensure interventions are carried out in accordance with agreed minimum standards. Here it is important to identify a lead agency and to ensure that other agencies are responsive and supportive. In fragile states, the lack of effective government may mean that NGOs play a particularly important role. However, mechanisms must be put in place to ensure accountability and oversight.
- **Monitor child protection violations and document effectiveness of response:** Monitor and report child protection violations to provide evidence to highlight the severity of the problem and track changes. Ensure that promising practices are identified and shared between child protection agencies and other partners.

## Integrating child protection in development, fragile and emergency contexts

The rising number of predicted emergencies<sup>4</sup> suggests that any efforts to protect children must encompass a degree of investment in emergency preparedness and response, including investments in early recovering and reconstruction efforts. Evidence on child protection risk in fragile states suggests that child protection must also be a key component of actions to reduce fragility. However, whilst children's vulnerability to abuse and exploitation may increase during times of emergency and fragility, it is also important to recognise that such problems exist at all times (see box below). Addressing the root causes of these issues (see box below), and building strong child protection systems is likely to be more effective during periods of relative stability than simply responding at times of crisis.

The child protection response during emergencies must also include a consideration of the longer term consequences of any actions taken to ensure broader benefits to child protection systems. It is essential that responses build on and strengthen existing child protection efforts and do not create parallel systems, and that the long term ramifications are considered. The example provided on the establishment of harmful institutional care following the Asian tsunami highlights the importance of thinking ahead (see also Save the Children 2010d).

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<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/foresight/our-work/policy-futures/disasters> ,



### Box 2 The global crisis in the protection of children

Up to 1.5 billion children experiencing violence each year (Pinheiro 2006), 150 million girls and 73 million boys who are raped or subject to sexual violence (WHO 2000), and 115 million children engaged in extremely harmful forms of work (ILO 2010). Rising numbers of children are being placed in harmful residential care in many settings (EveryChild 2011), and there are 215 million children involved in harmful forms of work (ILO 2010). This crisis may be attributed to a range of factors, with evidence from other papers in this series suggesting that the low prioritisation of child protection by governments, the extremely weak governance of the child protection sector, and global trends such as climate change, rising migration and urbanisation are all partly to blame (BCN et al 2013 a/b).

## Conclusion and recommendations

Millions of children are affected each year by conflict, disasters and fragility. These children experience heightened exposure to abuse, neglect and exploitation, and child protection is commonly identified as a top priority amongst children in conflict and disaster affected communities. Yet, child protection is amongst the least well-funded sectors in fragile states, and is not routinely included in humanitarian action. The abuse, neglect and exploitation of children during periods of emergency or in fragile contexts is part of a wider crisis in child protection, which must be responded to by developing strong child protection systems able to cope at all times. These findings show a clear imperative for including a goal<sup>5</sup> on child protection in the post 2015 development framework which would apply to fragile and non-fragile states, and include specific reference to child protection in emergency settings. For example:

*All children live in a life free from all forms of violence, are protected in conflicts and disasters and thrive in a safe family environment*

This goal could be accompanied by targets designed to monitor the strength of child protection systems in emergency and non-emergency periods, and in all contexts, including fragile states. For example:

- Halve the number of children who are subject to sexual violence and abuse of any form
- Halve the number of children subjected to violent discipline at home
- Halve the number of children unnecessarily living outside family care
- End the placement of all children in harmful institutional care
- End the worst forms of child labour

This goal could also be accompanied by targets designed specifically to assess the situation in relation to emergencies. For example:

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<sup>5</sup> This goal and targets are adapted from the goal and targets developed by Save the Children (2013). Some additional example targets have been added by other members of the inter-agency group

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- End child deaths from armed conflict
- Halve disaster mortality rates and disaster-related loss (with data disaggregated by age and gender)
- All nations to develop disaster risk reduction and resilience plans (which include reference to child protection)

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