Protection of Children from the Ground Up: Enhancing Localised Approaches in Conflict and Crises

Background Paper for the 2025 Annual Meeting for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

UNICEF/Zagout

ABOUT THIS PAPER AND THE 2025 ANNUAL MEETING

This paper aims to support the upcoming discussions during the 2025 Annual Meeting for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Based upon over 225 responses to the *Annual Meeting Theme Survey*, this year's theme focuses on localised approaches to child protection in conflict and crises. For more information see the call for abstracts here: https://alliancecpha.org/en/2025-annual-meeting.

It begins with briefly introducing the focus of this year's theme, providing key definitions and concepts being used in the paper, and defining three focus areas within the broad spectrum of approaches that facilitate localised, ground-up child protection. These are:

1. Strengthening context-relevant and community-owned child protection
2. Strengthening local systems and actors, including leadership
3. Child and community engagement in project cycles to facilitate accountability

It then explores the three areas of focus in more depth - outlining challenges, opportunities and enabling factors, as well as offering case studies of relevant practice in child protection. Each section ends with questions for further exploration and discussion.

While the challenges and opportunities explored in this paper's section on strengthening local systems and actors may serve to strengthen both community-owned child protection and child accountability. An analysis of these intersections has not been made, as this is an emerging area of discourse.[1]

The paper has been developed to provide an initial exploration and framing of the meeting theme; encouraging and enabling meeting participants to reflect further together. It will be used to inform future policy and the upcoming refresh of the Alliance strategy in the areas in focus within it. The focus areas and the key questions posed throughout the paper are intended to provide suggested topics for exploration and discussion, rather than being exhaustive.

The Meeting will provide a safe space for presenters and participants to discuss their work, knowledge, and expertise on the meeting theme. Participants may wish to explore other relevant topics such as decolonisation, anti-racism, feminist intersectional approaches, and addressing the legacies of colonialism, neocolonialism, coloniality, as they relate to child protection in humanitarian action. This paper introduces various approaches that, along with others to be explored at the meeting, provide potential solutions to address prevailing power imbalances.

Quality abstracts from national and regional NGOs from the 'majority world' will be given preference over those from international organisations. Abstracts from international organisations that highlight the engagement of community, local and national actors in humanitarian action are desirable over those that do not.

INTRODUCING GROUND-UP APPROACHES TO CHILD PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

The number and severity of humanitarian crises are escalating, including armed conflicts, climate change-induced disasters, infectious disease outbreaks, and displacement. As a result, children are facing increased violence, abuse, and exploitation.[2] These crises amplify risk factors and disrupt the protective factors in a child's ecosystem—such as consistent and responsive caregiving and access to education—leading to increased vulnerability and risk. They can overwhelm humanitarian capacities at all levels, with local systems often bearing the brunt, whether through communities fracturing during displacement, or child protection systems under strain to meet increasing needs.

Under stable conditions, families, communities, and children often play a central role in ensuring child protection and well-being. They can also access local and national formal protection services when needed.[3] During crises, effective, child protection interventions should take into consideration the different levels of the socio-ecological model.[4] This includes strengthening communities and local child protection systems,[5] and implementing community-owned interventions.

International child protection actors can play a crucial role in responding to urgent, life-threatening needs - such as sexual and gender-based violence, family separation and worst forms of child labour including recruitment into armed forces and armed groups - when national resources are overwhelmed. However, the international systems set-up to enable these efforts can risk overriding the importance of working within and through the ecological model, contextual realities and specificities and existing systems.

Therefore, even when additional external capacity is required to respond to escalating needs, it is important to incorporate a holistic-ground up approach to the extent possible.[6] This includes interventions that develop links with existing processes and structures, are founded on community-led action with reliance on local resources from the start,[7] include children in decision-making, and in which communities take ownership of child protection issues.[8]

The Annual Meeting of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action 2025, *Protection of Children from the Ground Up: Enhancing Localised Approaches in Conflict and Crises* will explore how the Child Protection in Humanitarian Action sector can do better in protecting children from the ground-up and adapt its ways of working accordingly. The meeting will spotlight existing efforts to enhance the effectiveness of child protection prevention and response strategies, particularly those that strengthen—rather than undermine—the child, family, community, and local child protection system elements of the socio-ecological model.

It will highlight efforts to prioritise the lived experience and leadership of affected populations and community, local and national actors—their priorities, and their expertise in protection actions.[9] This includes through community-level child protection interventions, meaningful participation of children,[10] their families, and communities throughout the humanitarian programme cycle to ensure

accountability,[11] and a focus on capacity strengthening and sharing. These considerations will be grounded in the realities of humanitarian action and its evolving nature.

As we progress towards achieving higher levels of community ownership and local leadership in our child protection actions, we need to consider what obstacles need to be overcome and the approaches that need to be adopted. For this reason, the meeting will centre the value of ground-up approaches - including approaches led and owned by community, local and national actors - for contextual relevance, impact and sustainability.[12] It will also address the challenges faced by those implementing these approaches.

The meeting will feature actions already taken by communities and local actors as first responders, including their roles in contexts not typically recognised as 'humanitarian settings' but affected by crises. This can encompass contexts experiencing crises such as climate-induced disasters or Infectious Disease Outbreaks and/or where international humanitarian coordination[13] is not activated, as well as ongoing crises in countries not officially recognised as humanitarian by governments or the international community.

The crucial role of families, communities and local leadership, alongside context-relevant and community-owned responses, aligns with efforts over the past decade to promote localisation of humanitarian action. Initiatives such as the Grand Bargain 2.0[14] and the Charter for Change[15] reflect this shift, while movements like Pledge for Change[16 and] RINGO Re-Imagining the INGO[17] aim to address power imbalances through decolonisation initiatives.

The meeting's themes and topics also align with the [Alliance 2021-2025 strategy,](18) which includes an expanded understanding of localisation focussed on:

- Fostering and promoting greater action on the sharing and shifting of power, influence, and leadership with community, local, and national organisations;
- Promoting the importance of and facilitating opportunities for direct and flexible funding for community, local, and national CP organisations;
- Encouraging meaningful and principled engagement with community, local, and national actors, recognising them as equal partners in the development and contextualisation of CP standards, guidance, tools, and interventions;
- Creating and expanding equitable opportunities to share, exchange, and showcase learning, knowledge, and expertise;
- Improving and expanding the accessibility and diversity of learning opportunities that strengthen CP technical expertise and grow institutional capacity.[19] As well as an emphasis on child and community led and driven child protection and accountability to children.

Important Concepts and Definitions

In drafting this paper, a number of Alliance and non-Alliance papers have been consulted, to inform working definitions to frame its content.

Community, local and national organisations or actors: The Alliance Strategy refers to 'community, local and national organisations' or 'community, local and national actors' throughout. It states that, "References to community and local actors within the strategy are broad and inclusive. They refer to any group working on child protection or humanitarian issues (as cited in text), be they formal or informal groups, State actors or civil society, those working on development, humanitarian, peacebuilding, or the nexus."[20] When referring to community / local / national organisations and actors, in this paper we are largely referring to formal registered entities and their staff and professionals, and government personnel and employees.

Community: The Alliance's Community-Level Child Protection Theory of Change considers together "all actors present in a community, including children, caregivers, extended family members, community leaders including religious leaders, organised community groups (i.e., women's groups, adolescent clubs), etc. [...] consider[ing] children's participation and contribution to be an integral part of a community process".[21] Therefore, this paper will use the term 'community' to refer to children and their communities, including those less formal actors in a community such as those acting in a voluntary capacity, as described above.

Community ownership refers to "the extent to which communities have strong concerns about children's issues, see work to support vulnerable children as their own, take primary responsibility for the success of that work, and engage in self-motivated action to improve children's lives".[22] In some humanitarian settings, challenges exist in achieving community-led and community-owned processes.[23] As such, the Alliance refers to achieving higher levels of community ownership; a term used (instead of community-led or community-owned) to recognise the different types of community-level child protection programmes and the challenges associated with achieving community-led processes in some humanitarian settings.[24]

Child protection system. Child protection systems can be seen to encompass laws, policies, regulations, governance, coordination and services; As well as human and financial resources, data and evidence, and child and community participation.[25]

'Shifting power'. The process of addressing the power imbalance between international, national, and local actors and ensuring that the representation, participation, and leadership of local and national actors, and communities is increased within key humanitarian coordination and decision-making spaces,[26] in a way that promotes humanitarian principles and principled humanitarian partnerships.[27] This includes, but is not limited to, addressing the legacies of racism and colonialism

in humanitarian action,[28] re-evaluating knowledge production processes so that they are more locally driven and informed, and redirecting international funding toward local and national organisations.[29]

Localisation. Comprehensive definitions of localisation, such as those by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee,[30] Start Network,[31] International Council of Voluntary Agencies,[32] and Network for Empowered Aid Response[33] view progress towards a more localised humanitarian response and preparedness as multi-faceted, complex, and occurring across different levels[34] and dimensions.[35] The framing of localisation within the Alliance strategy is noted above.

STRENGTHENING CONTEXT-RELEVANT AND COMMUNITY-OWNED CHILD PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Strengthening context-relevant and community-owned child protection is crucial to improving child protection outcomes and sustainability of interventions

International (and some national) non-government organisations have long established and supported different community-based committees or groups as a core activity for community engagement in humanitarian responses. The child protection sector has made significant progress in promoting more community-designed and -led processes in recent years. However, many interventions continue to use externally driven, top-down approaches.[36] This may undermine the existing capacities of communities and diminish their sense of ownership over the interventions.

Strengthening context-relevant and community-owned[37] child protection is crucial to improving child protection outcomes. In humanitarian settings, non-formal local actors—including children, families, communities, and leaders like elders, teachers, or religious figures—are important parts of child protection systems. They are often the first to work to prevent and respond to child protection concerns.[38] Strengthening communities and local child protection systems[39] through community-owned interventions can help enhance the contextual relevance, continuity, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability of programmes, while enhancing accountability to affected populations.

Community-level approaches support community members in protecting children and ensuring their right to healthy development.[40] These approaches require a thorough context analysis and a deep understanding of community needs and practices. Greater efforts are required to build a common understanding and promote best practices amongst humanitarian agencies to achieve higher levels of community ownership in protecting children within their communities during crises.

Localisation is seen by many local organisations as a way of rethinking the humanitarian sector from the ground up and building on the preexisting knowledge and strength of communities affected by crises, recognising that most assistance is already provided by these actors.[41] Community-owned, sustainable interventions can also help support affected communities in preparedness, response, recovery and even after the withdrawal of international actors after a transition into the development phase of a crisis by working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.[42]

Case Study: SEEDS - Context-relevant and community-led child protection in Colombia

Seeds[43] is War Child Alliance's and Save the Children's community-led approach to child protection, which aims to nurture community ownership to keep children safe by shifting power to communities. As the community-led action draws on communities' own ideas, creativity and motivation, there is greater potential for sustainable and effective action.

In Colombia, War Child Alliance piloted Seeds in Bogota's outskirts, Chocó and Guajira, with Indigenous communities displaced from Venezuela. Rather than acting as an expert and 'capacity builder', War Child Alliance entered the communities to listen and learn about their child protection practice and needs, using deep listening, effective communication and facilitation skills. Strong community ownership was achieved through:

- the leading role of motivated community volunteers,
- time spent to conduct a deep context analysis using participatory methods,
- the community-led development of an action plan based on the communities' child protection priorities,
- the inclusive implementation of this plan using own local capacities and resources,
- continuous community reflection through inclusive dialogues on progress and its results in the lives of children.[44]

Guiding questions for abstracts and discussion

Strengthening context-relevant and community-owned child protection

How have efforts to better understand and adapt to context-specificities, including deep listening and reflection with the community, led to better child protection outcomes?

What role could the local and national private sector and academic institutions play in child protection interventions in humanitarian and fragile contexts?

STRENGTHENING LOCAL SYSTEMS, INCLUDING LOCAL ACTORS, IN HUMANITARIAN CHILD PROTECTION AND INVESTING IN LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Reinforcing the child protection workforce through a capacity-strengthening approach can lay a foundation for context-relevant actions

Protecting children necessitates substantial investment in individuals and systems across all levels of their social ecology. This includes a principled, competent, and well-supported child protection workforce. In some humanitarian settings, the strain of a crisis, coupled with escalating needs, can overwhelm community, local and national actors, limiting their ability to address child protection risks and reduce vulnerabilities. Strengthening child protection systems involves capacity strengthening and sharing involving community, local and national actors.[45]

While shortage of skilled social-service workforce is a global reality, it becomes even more critical to invest in this workforce in conflict and crisis situations, where child protection needs are significantly heightened.[46] However, the assumption that local staff lack capacity can lead to a devaluation or lack of recognition of local skills and competencies.[47] This narrative often results in localisation efforts focusing disproportionately on *'capacity building'* rather than adopting the capacity-sharing approach that would facilitate a greater transfer of power.[48] A balanced approach that values and invests in local expertise and knowledge, while addressing resource and training gaps, is critical to support sustainable and effective child protection systems and local organisations that support them.

Equitable partnerships in knowledge-sharing and capacity exchange between community, local and national organisations, authorities, and international actors should be reciprocal and focus on complementarity.[49] Community, local and national organisations and authorities affected by crises already possess relevant skills, knowledge and capacity to cope with, respond to and recover from crises.[50] Building upon the unique strengths of community, local and national actors, and contextual expertise across different settings is essential to ensure sustainable and effective humanitarian responses.

In child protection work, cultural appropriateness, sensitivity, and context specificity are essential. Community, local and national organisations that are well integrated into their communities are better equipped to develop and implement culturally relevant approaches to prevent and respond to child protection risks. This ultimately enhances the appropriateness and effectiveness of humanitarian response.[51] Building equitable partnerships between all humanitarian actors, including communities, alongside thorough contextual analyses, can lay a foundation for context-relevant actions that strengthen, rather than undermine, existing local capacity.

Guiding questions for abstracts and discussion

Strengthening local child protection systems and actors, including leadership

How can we facilitate more equitable partnerships to strengthen (or support) local actors in humanitarian child protection and shift power to them?

How can a 'ground-up' approach to child protection ensure timely and effective responses, and how have communities, governments, and local organisations acted as first responders for child protection during crises?

How has strengthening local and national child protection systems led to stronger child protection outcomes during crises and stronger, more sustainable systems post-crisis?

To what extent are child protection actors engaging diverse national and local actors, including child and women-led groups, or those representing or led by vulnerable and often excluded groups such as persons with disabilities, refugees, and LGBTIQ+ individuals?

Power imbalances and colonial legacies can pose a challenge to progressing ground-up child protection and need to be further addressed

The humanitarian system is inherently unequal, with the majority of resources and decision-making resting with donors and some implementing agencies (mainly UN and INGOs), rather than the affected populations. The system operates within a humanitarian business model that often emphasises individual, organisational mandates over collective impact, incentivises competition between organisations rather than collaboration, and prioritises the self-sustainment of international actors over sustainable and responsible exit plans.[52] In such a system, space for the context analysis and collaboration that is so crucial in child protection is limited.

Other systemic challenges include structural racism.[53] As well as the colonial and neo-colonial history and legacies of humanitarian action. These legacies are often reflected in a Eurocentric interpretation of progress, a preference for knowledge and solutions originated in the West,[54] the apolitical, historically, and geographically neutral view of aid, and even the use of the term 'aid' itself.[55] Contextual understanding and cultural competency are still frequently overlooked in humanitarian assistance.[56] With interventions often based on approaches developed in the minority world and translated into local languages, sometimes lacking robust cultural competency[57] or the integration of local and Indigenous knowledge. In the CPHA sector, efforts have been made to contextualise global tools[58] and adopt consultative approaches. For example, the Primary Prevention Framework for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action emphasises participatory analysis of risks and protective factors within communities, engaging children, families, and community members to develop community-informed programmes[59].

However, within a system that is not inherently designed to prioritise local knowledge and contributions, these efforts may have limited impact on transforming humanitarian ways of working.

In the past decade, broad, inter-institutional commitments have emerged to promote localisation and decolonisation within development and humanitarian action. Some of the commitments include reflecting on the legacies of racism, colonialism, and imperialism in humanitarian action;[60] reevaluating knowledge production processes; redirecting international funding toward local and national organisations;[61] increasing local ownership and leadership in responses;[62] and increasing influence of local and national organisations in decision-making processes that can impact them.[63] Nevertheless, there continues to be a need to shift more power, resources, and leadership to local and national actors, including children and their communities, which is in line with decolonising the sector in a way that promotes humanitarian principles and principled humanitarian partnerships.[64]

Examples of Capacity Sharing Efforts at the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

The Alliance's strategic priority on localisation has an objective of expanding opportunities to share, exchange, and showcase learning, knowledge, and expertise between a range of actors across the child protection sector. The Alliance has progressed towards achieving this through recent initiatives including a French-language webinar series co-created with and led by local NGOs.

In 2024, the Alliance's Learning and Development Working Group co-developed and organised with locally-led NGOs a French-language webinar series on child protection programming in West and Central Africa. This series provided a unique platform to explore current achievements and challenges in the region, while offering valuable insights into ongoing programs. Conducted entirely in French, the webinars aimed to foster meaningful discussions and collaboration among participants. The themes were determined collaboratively with LNGOs, and the content was led by LNGOs.

Equitable partnerships are critical to shifting power and enabling a more sustainable, cost-effective and context-appropriate child protection response

All actors in the humanitarian space have a responsibility to promote, model, and monitor principled partnerships between local, national, and international organisations and agencies which are equal, transparent, results-oriented, responsible, complementary, and long-term, according to the Principles of Partnership.[65] The equal participation of community, local and national actors is essential to strengthen accountability to affected populations and to ensure the relevance of assistance and protection interventions.[66] However, partnership-building is often reactive, shaped by the urgency of humanitarian

action, with ad-hoc interactions that consume significant time and resources and lack systematic approaches.[67]

Equitable partnerships mean that all humanitarian actors identify their added value and work on the basis of complementarity. International actors should support local and national partners based on demand, not supply, through longer-term strategic partnerships tailored to partner needs.[68] In such partnerships, community, local and national actors are treated as equal partners. Agreements clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of both parties. Risks[69] are shared, and mitigation measures including safeguarding measures, are mutually set.[70] These partnerships also involve community, local and national organisations taking the lead in setting priorities that are responsive to the needs, priorities, ideas and solutions of their communities, designing activities, implementing projects, and evaluating outcomes.[71]

Furthermore, equitable principled partnership can involve providing support for local capacity strengthening and sharing, prevention, preparedness, and recognising the role of local and national grantees as equal partners rather than implementers.[72] This approach aims to reduce cases where intermediary agencies or companies act as substitutes for local organisations. Such practices often treat local organisations as subcontractors or employees, controlling funding allocations, and excluding them from direct engagement with donors.[73]

Guiding questions for abstracts and discussion

Strengthening local child protection systems and actors, including leadership

What is the impact of community-owned, community-led, and/or locally-led action on child protection, including sustainability of positive outcomes?

How have we, and could we, connect the local to the global for strengthened child protection outcomes?

How is the concept of 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' being translated into action within humanitarian child protection? For example, the principle of 'subsidiarity' that decisions are taken as close as possible to where they would take effect.

Humanitarian funding models and investments in local actors are currently not enabling ground-up child protection

Quality funding, that is predictable, multi-year, and flexible, is vital for agencies to implement context-relevant approaches which have higher levels of community ownership or leadership. Conducting context analyses and maintaining sustained engagement with communities requires time and is an iterative process. Adapting humanitarian funding to improve its quality is crucial. Additionally, diversifying the donor base for humanitarian child protection is an urgent priority.

To enable more ground-up implementation and sustainable interventions, it is critical to build evidence on the outcomes of investments in institutional capacity for local and national child protection organisations, such as those supported by the Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility. [74] This should be complemented by piloting and sharing lessons on localised funding models, as described below.

Humanitarian funding remains concentrated among a limited number of agencies and INGOs,[75] with the proportion of direct funding being passed on to local and national organisations remaining low.[76] As major government donors reduce budgets in 2025 and beyond with fewer resources,[77] shifting funding from international to local intermediary structures can support cost-effective programming,[78][79] and a more cost-efficient humanitarian response overall.[80]

Localised funding models should also include increased funding directly allocated to local civil society organisations (see Case Studies below). Simplified application processes that account for linguistic diversity, long-term grants, flexible funding models, collaborative donor efforts, and equal donor-grantee partnerships can be effective strategies for localising funding.[81]

Case Studies: Innovative Child Protection Funding Frameworks for Equal Partnerships and Shifting Power in Humanitarian and Fragile Contexts

1. The **Global Fund for Children (GCF)'s RECARGA Program** is a funder collaborative effort that supports a cohort of 12 civil society organisations in Guatemala and Honduras with flexible annual funding, including for institutional strengthening.[82] GFC emphasises that flexible funding, especially with multi-year investments, is crucial as it allows for a more holistic, long-term investment. GFC acknowledges that local leaders best understand their community's challenges and complexities, and to effectively strengthen local leadership, funders should inquire about their needs and support their agendas.[83]

2. Founded with the support of the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) and UNHCR, the **Global Refugee Youth Network (GRYN)**,[84] a global network of young refugee youth leaders, supports refugee youth-led organisations (RYLOs) through capacity strengthening, networking and advocacy, as well as funding and capacity strengthening to strengthen community-based, refugee youth-led initiatives' child protection responses.[85] In 2022 and 2023, GRYN funded 22 RYLOs, 41 projects respectively, for a total of $170,000 in 15+ majority world countries with the support of WRC. Some of the child protection interventions engage children and youth in sports as a way of fostering social cohesion and integration (Union Sportive des Jeunes Réfugiés in Morocco); support young refugees living with disabilities to achieve self-sufficiency (Kalobeyei Umoja Association in Kampala, Uganda); enable education on sexual and reproductive health rights (MonyQadow, Kakuma/Dadaab/Nairobi Kenya) and offer entrepreneurial and business mentorship along with mental health counseling to support adolescent mothers with young children (MonyQadow, Kakuma/Dadaab/Nairobi Kenya).[86]

Guiding questions for abstracts and discussion

Strengthening local child protection systems, including engagement with the private sector

What is the role of the private sector and local businesses as potential funders of local and national organisations and to become partners in the protection of children in the face of crisis and conflict?

What is the role of private sector and local businesses in the prevention and response to child protection risks?

How can the humanitarian sector maximise the benefits of localising funding, such as cost-effectiveness, while mitigating the risks and challenges (including corruption, fraud, and the insufficient capacity of smaller organisations to manage large grants) to make localisation a reality?

STRENGTHENING CHILD AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN CHILD PROTECTION TO FACILITATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Ground-up approaches, including child participation, enable quality, accountable child protection

In humanitarian settings, children's rights, views, protection needs, and capacities must be integrated throughout the humanitarian programme cycle,[87] including through child-friendly consultations and feedback mechanisms. The right of children to participation, grounded in their rights to be heard and to have their views given due weight in decisions affecting their lives, is one of the core guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).[88] Participation models can be seen as a continuum based on how meaningful and consequential they are, ranging from 'non-participation' models marked by manipulation and tokenism,[89] to consultative (i.e., adults seeking children's views) to collaborative (an adult-initiated partnership) to child-led (children initiate activities and are involved in decision-making).[90] To be meaningful and ethical, participation must be transparent and informative, voluntary, respectful and relevant to children, child-friendly, inclusive, supported by trained facilitators, safe and sensitive to risk, and accountable.[91] Organisations must ensure that children's views are conveyed to decision-makers, seriously considered, and acted upon when appropriate,[92] with a robust feedback loop in place.

Accountability to children extends beyond their participation. One of the most difficult yet crucial aspects is to close the feedback loop in a timely way with children and families who gave input.[98] Accountability to children encompasses nurturing children's resilience and agency, shifting power dynamics and facilitating the mechanisms and processes that enable children to hold others to account.[99] Working closely with community, local and national organisations, including child youth-led organisations can be effective in moving beyond information sharing and towards creating locally relevant and impactful systems. Through such systems, children can collaborate with adults in decision-making and improve service provision by strengthening existing practices and mechanisms.[100]

Positive steps in localising humanitarian child protection coordination further promote accountability to children and families

Achieving the principle of subsidiarity, where decisions are taken at the closest possible level to the affected population and communities,[101] includes recognising children and adolescents as capable of self-protection and contributors to protection actions. It also involves investing in harnessing these contributions to improve the quality of responses. Strengthening coordination mechanisms and responses, including local leadership, is crucial to achieving localised approaches and accountability. Actors within local child protection systems can improve accountability mechanisms by ensuring that they are contextually relevant and inclusive. In some settings, they can also help strengthen trust between communities and service providers.[102]

In the child protection sector, more than 50% of the membership of many coordination groups are local and national actors. Cluster co-leadership between international and local and national actors fosters stronger engagement, greater representation of diverse stakeholders, and better coordination outcomes.[103] Cluster coordinators have a responsibility to promote, model and monitor principled partnerships and seek representation from diverse races/ethnicities, ages, disabilities, sexual orientations and gender identities.[104] To ensure accountability to affected populations and to guarantee a humanitarian response that is relevant, timely, effective, and efficient, community, local and national actors must be involved in coordination as decision-makers. Furthermore, affected children and communities must be consulted in their actions.[105]

Case Study: Children's Feedback for Accountability in Child Protection

In consultations between World Vision International (WVI) Field Offices and children living in developing and humanitarian settings, many provided detailed feedback on how they would like WVI to continue strengthening reporting and referral mechanisms for children to use when they experience or observe child protection violations.[106] Their suggestions included raising awareness, creating safe spaces for children, and strengthening child protection referral and response systems. They suggested that these mechanisms must be much more child-friendly and use various coordinated methods for children to report, depending on their situation and comfort level. According to them, it is not enough that these mechanisms simply exist; intentional efforts must be made to socialise and train children and parents on how to use them effectively. This may include how to use referral mechanisms, how to protect others, defend peers, and stay safe online. In these consultations, children also mentioned that participation enabled them to protect themselves and others from violence better.

Guiding questions for abstracts and discussion

Child and community engagement in project cycles to facilitate accountability

How have children, communities, and local and national actors led and collaborated in advocacy for the protection of children?

What is needed to facilitate child and community engagement in project cycles to achieve accountability to children?

How do child protection and other sector actors engage and support the leadership of children, communities, and local actors in child protection programming?

End Notes

1 https://alnap.cdn.ngo/media/documents/HARNESSING_EVIDENCE_AND_LEARNING_FOR_PEOPLE-CENTRED_HUMANITARIAN_ACTION_s9E0zrc.pdf

2 https://alliancecpha.org/en/annual-meeting-2024/background-paper

3 Page 165. https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/cpms_2019_final_en.pdf

4 Pages 40, 79, 135, 194. https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/cpms_2019_final_en.pdf

5 Page 36. https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/adapting-to-learn.-learning-to-adapt_july-2016.pdf

6 Pages 8-11. https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/wessells_-_community_child_protection_guide_final_full_1_0.pdf

7 Page 323. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.04.006

8 Pages 10-12. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0145213415001246?via%3Dihub

9 Page 11. https://shop.icrc.org/professional-standards-for-protection-work.html?___store=en

10 Page 3. https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/basic_requirements-english-final.pdf/

11 Pages 40, 79, 135, 194. https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/cpms_2019_final_en.pdf

12 Page 3. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/IASC%20Discussion%20Paper_AAP%20Localisation%20Nexus%20links%20and%20opportunities_28_June_2024.pdf

13 Through OCHA (including the Child Protection Area of Responsibility) in situations of internal displacement and UNHCR for coordination in refugee settings.

14 https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain

15 https://charter4change.org/

16 https://pledgeforchange2030.org/pledges/

17 https://rightscolab.org/ringo/

18 https://alliancecpha.org/en/alliance-strategy-2021-2025

19 ACPHA's Localisation Advisory Group - ToRs (Internal document).

20 Page 35. https://alliancecpha.org/en/alliance-strategy-2021-2025

21 Page 3. https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/Theory%20of%20Change_CCP.pdf

22 Page 11. https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/wessells_-_community_child_protection_guide_final_full_1_0.pdf

23 Page 4. https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/Theory%20of%20Change_CCP.pdf

24 https://alliancecpha.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/Theory%20of%20Change_CCP.pdf

25 https://bettercarenetwork.org/library/social-welfare-systems/child-care-and-protection-system-reforms/child-protection-system-strengthening-framework-for-action

[26] Page 10 of full report. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/operational-response/iasc-guidance-strengthening-participation-representation-and-leadership-local-and-national-actors

[27] https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2021-12/Principles%20of%20Partnership%20%28by%20Global%20Humanitarian%20Platform%29.pdf

[28] Pages 20-33. https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/time-decolonize-aid/

[29] Pages 12-15. https://odi.org/en/publications/interrogating-the-evidence-base-on-humanitarian-localisation-a-literature-study/

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