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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COMMUNITY BASED- APPROACH TO CHILD PROTECTION

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ABSTRACT

Communities play a vital role in preventing and responding to the risks children face in most humanitarian settings, they organize themselves in several ways to protect children who are at risk. In situation of displacement, community networks may at times be disrupted or changed due to a significant and abrupt change. Such changes and disruption weaken the ability of the community to protect children. At times risk originates from the community members making them a source of risk.

Keywords:

Community, Humanitarian, Children, Risk, Protect, Responding.

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INTRODUCTION

Community is understood in different ways depending on the way how people view the globe. However, numerous communities can be presented in the similar geographical area. Children and families are identified with type of communities they belong to. Such as those who share social and cultural values and those who live in a specific geographical area. While community- based refers to practice / institution and approach. Practice / institution defines an organization created and controlled by people for their benefit. Usually, such organization is either a traditional one or is a group designed organization to help its members meet basic needs and further their common interests for self-help group and community development. However, in community- based child protection the concept refers to a core element that involves a network, group of individuals at community level working in a coordinated manner to protect children from harm. There are also child welfare communities and religious groups that support orphans and other vulnerable children with use of traditional processes for responding to violations against child protection.

The Identified Impacts of Maltreatment on Children: The consequences of child maltreatments extend from harm to children's physical, cognitive and emotional development than can lead to death. This includes low self- esteem, aggressive

behavior, difficult interpersonal relationships, poor school performance, depression experiences leading to suicide. Emotional Abuse for example destroys children's confidence and self- esteem, leaves deep psychological marks that can last a lifetime.

Community- based Approach: In community-based approach community members protect children and ensure their right to health advance, while humanitarian actors seek to understand the existing community capabilities that promote the right of children, their safety, development, well-being and involvement. This includes initiatives, processes and networks that are led and organized by the members of the community and the children themselves. However, community-based approach requires understanding of the total context, prioritization of the needs and understanding of the existing practices. The context meant in this paper includes behaviors, norms and beliefs that influence the way that communities perceive and address childhood, child well-being and child protection. This approach helps to determine the most relevant and appropriate means to support and strengthen positive strategies and necessary social norms to constructively address negative norms within the community. ¹Evidence on the

¹Inter-Agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection, Child Protection Working Group, b2024

ground proves that humanitarian actors entirely rely on what we call top- down approaches that they implement in the community without the community involvement to the decisions that concerns them, this act has weakened the existing community's protection capabilities. Hence, the best thing is to implement all these approaches to strengthen the existing community protection capabilities.

Supportive Community Processes: In supportive community processes agencies have to build on the community-based resources as a commitment to child protection and support the existing capacities, and processes to prevent and respond to child protection risks or violations. It is necessary that agencies should avoid to introduce unfamiliar processes, concepts that can weaken the existing community-based effort, resources leading to unsustainability of the goals intended to attain.

In addition, outside actors should be aware of the diversity in the communities and take into account the so-called community dynamics and conflicts. Therefore, child protection at community level should include efforts to attain social cohesion and conflict – prevention activities.²

Community Engagement: Usually, community- based approaches are effective and sustainable when communities realize that it is going to meet their collective responsibilities to children. This means that agencies should work with different community members to allow them prioritize their concerns, propose solutions and mobilize necessary resources as well as promoting culturally sensitive approaches to align with international legal and human rights standard.

Child Participation: In fact, children are always creative, resourceful and perceptive, and the ethical involvement of children supports for effective programming, therefore, the external agencies should understand the local dynamics within children's participation in the community processes to prevent potential risks and facilitate children 's safety, voluntary and effective participation. Participation must be sensitive in terms of rights of children at risk and face discrimination.

Capacity Development: For capacity building to be effective it must be inclusive, accessible, culturally, and developmentally focusing on gender appropriate and age issues. Participatory method should be used to build on the local understanding of child protection concepts and ensure for a genuine inclusiveness. Effective capacity building is a continuous process that involves engagement for a long time period, with coaching, monitoring and be connected to other effective sectors.³

Necessary Child Protection Measures or Actions: The goal of child protection is to promote, protect and satisfy the right of children to protect them from abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation. It is necessary process that ensures supportive and caring environment to promote their development and realization of their rights. Child protection is involving all children not only those identified as at high risk of rights, violation and those living in a vulnerable situation. This means that child protection is concerned with preparedness,

prevention, response and recovery actions effective to secure their protection from negative impacts.⁴

Preparedness: Preparedness in this paper is characterized as measures that are of an active, continuous and anticipatory nature, it describes a set of measures that minimizes the adverse effects of child abuse, harassment, discrimination and so forth. However.⁵ Preparedness requires local actors to work with children and other stakeholders to identify the potential benefits and risks of involving external actors in child protection, particularly concerning sensitive issues. Develop strategies to minimize any identified risks and avoid exposing community members and children to harm. Mapping of existing community- based child protection capacities, interventions and risk factors.

Prevention: Prevention measures need building of a relationship with the local civil society organizations, religious and traditional leaders and other influential community members to monitor and support children and families at risk. Support for effective community-based information sharing and dialogue on child protection that uses appropriate technology and language as well as translation. Support children to identify potential child protection risks and protect themselves and other children.

Response: Response in this paper means working with the local government to strengthen and create a sustainable links between communities and formal and informal child protection organizations in a long – term services. Support community members to identify children who are at risk and refer them to service Centre for case management. Facilitate the creation of space within community awareness activities for children and groups who are at risk of discrimination. Using methods for engaging children with disabilities to identify protection strategies for the improvement of child risks and provide feedback during and after the response. Provide related support to community -based alternative upkeep (care) to prevent harm and encourage supportable solutions.

Alternative Care Options: There are several alternative care options that actors of child protection should choose based on the individual child's choice, child interests determining his or her safety.

Family- Based Alternative Care: In case kinship care placement is not possible in the child's interest, then foster care should be considered, but should not replace support to children's families and never be the only alternative care option. The available foster care should reflect the needs of the child and the required duration care should be temporary care, short- term care or long- term fostering care. However, the community should always be consulted on the best place to Foster children. Family – based care cannot be considered in case families are not able to care for additional children, fostering care placement are culturally unacceptable, a child stays in one location for rapid tracing, and security issues require the child's placement to be in a secured location.

Long- term Alternative Care: The decision on the long-term care should be made through a judicial, administrative and a

²Wessels, M., A., Toolkit for Reflective practice in supporting community – led child protection process, child resilience alliance, New York, 2018

³ Field Guide to Strengthening Community Based Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019

⁴ <http://resourcecentre.savehealthchildren.se/node/3250>

⁵ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2000

recognized process and should be based on an assessment of the child's best interests.

Residential Care: Residential care covers several types of immediate care that involves temporary shelters, provisional care Centers, small group homes and institutional care. It is important to know that residential care should be a last resort for shortest period when all family – based care options have been discovered unavailable. However, residential care facilities should be regularly supported and monitored to meet minimum standards of care and child friendly protection processes. Also, children with special needs are likely to be placed in residential care where there is need for maintaining regular contacts between the child and family to make sure that the child is reunited with the family and ensure that community- level services are in place or available.⁶

CONCLUSION

In conclusion community members bear the responsibility of protecting children and ensure their right to health advance, while humanitarian actors pursue the understanding of the existing community capabilities that promote the right of

children, their safety, development, well-being and involvement, including initiatives, processes and networks that are led and organized by the members of the community and the children themselves. However, this effort requires understanding of the total situation, giving priorities for the needs and understanding of the existing practices within the community setting.

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