UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Creating Safe Learning Environments:

Sharing Good Practices

UNHCR's Annual Consultations with Non-Governmental Organizations

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JRS

Jesuit Refugee Services Committee

Christian Children's Fund

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

Internation Rescue

Introduction

This document is a short compilation of good practices with regard to safe learning environments. It has been developed jointly by UNHCR, JRS, CCF and IRC in preparation of UNHCR's Annual Consultations with NGOs and within the context of the inter-agency Initiative for Safe School Environments.

This compilation does not aim to be exhaustive but rather to highlight some key areas of interventions which can contribute to enhance the protection of children and youth in and around learning environments. These areas include:

(I)   Child-centered-spaces in emergencies
(II)   Teachers and education personnel
(III)   Parents, students and the community at large

The good practices identified in the field are presented according to these three categories. All three areas of intervention should not been seen in isolation from one another but rather as interconnected interventions within an overall framework of quality education in which safety and protection are prioritized; the INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction Contexts provides such a framework. The safety and protection of children indeed has to be ensured from early emergencies, through child-centered spaces (or 'Emergency Spaces for Children') for example, to more stable situations, through the establishment of safe and child-friendly schools in protracted refugee and IDP situations, and in early reconstruction. In all phases of operations, education staff, parents, children, and the community all play crucial roles in monitoring the safety of learning and recreational environments for children.

It is the hope of UNHCR, CCF, IRC and JRS that this document will be useful for a wide range of education and protection actors beyond the specific event for which it was prepared; it will be widely disseminated, especially through the INEE network. We hope that our joint endeavour to document and share good practices will lead to further collaboration with a wide range of organizations, with the aim to ensure that learning and school environments for children affected by crises of different types are free from violence and exploitation.

Good Practices (1)
Creating Child-Centered Spaces in Emergencies

Why do we need Child-Centered Spaces?

➢ Children receive immediate protection and security in early emergencies
➢ Children are assisted to regain a sense of normalcy, stability, and hope
➢ Children engage in expressive activities, social integration, and informal education which promotes healthy development
➢ Children receive health support
➢ Children engage in cultural activities
➢ Children severely affected are referred for appropriate services
➢ Communities are mobilized on behalf of children
➢ Children's needs are able to be assessed and programmes planned on their behalf
➢ Community needs are addressed

Drawing from CCF and INEE Best Practices

Christian Children's Fund has developed the model of Child Centered Spaces (CCS) as a unique, entry-level emergency response to protect children, grounded in the INEE Minimum Standards and Best Practices, which address community participation, provision of equal access, and a secure learning environment that promotes the protection and mental and emotional well-being of learners. The purpose of the CCS is to ensure (i) a temporary measure of protection, (ii) consistency in sustained learning and structured activities, and (iii) psychosocial support. These three elements are combined to provide a holistic forum to address child and youth safety, to ease their transition back into formal learning systems, and to assist them to regain a sense of normalcy as quickly as possible. Below are some of the guiding principles to follow when establishing a child-centered space:

- *Involve the community, especially children, in CCS development and implementation*

CCSs must be established in collaboration and consultation with local actors, such as government officials, community and religious leaders, educational actors, parents, and especially children. Inviting the views and input of children, youth, and affected communities regarding how they experienced the emergency and the current situation including protection risks, and what they regard as the key networks, leaders and local resources; can form the foundation for a more effective response including activities they will respond to.

- *CCSs are best regarded as a means of engaging the community to address the protection and psychosocial needs of children*

CCSs are platforms for community mobilization and for addressing the wider processes of child protection, psychosocial support, and the development informal alternatives such as literacy or vocational training for children who cannot re-enter the formal education system.

- *CCSs should be considered a phased approach in emergencies*

CCSs may evolve over time along with the needs and priorities of the community. Three-month and six-month intervals may be useful for evaluating further steps, given the rapidly changing post-emergency environment.

- *CCSs are tailored according to the situation and cultural context*

CCSs address diverse needs related to the extent of conflict, the kind of violence experienced, the protection needs of children and youth, the level of destruction, the other services being offered, and the time-span of each emergency.

- *CCS activities are specific to different age groups and try to reach all children*

CCSs usually facilitate different activities based on children's developmental level. Age appropriate activities are organized for 0-3 year olds with their parents, pre-school age children 4-5, school age children 6-12, and youth ages 13-18.

- *Training and support is necessary for CCS facilitators to maximize their effectiveness and programme quality*

Training should specifically address the protection of children through agreement on Codes of Conduct and Child Protection Policy, how to conduct guided activities with children in an open space, and a plan for carrying out activities. As a specific issue, staff should be sensitized towards screening for vulnerable and at-risk children and referring them promptly to the appropriate services.

- *Follow-up training is critical to deepening knowledge of child protection and addressing shifting priorities in the programme*

Training can help to refresh knowledge, address changing situations, or target particular areas of child protection or programme management. Ongoing training, support and supervision of adults conducting CCS activities can assist to troubleshoot problems as they arise and to plan how to meet unique local needs and concerns.

- *Regular on-site monitoring protocols should be built into programme design to adapt to changing needs*

CCSs are largely staffed by community volunteers; regular programme monitoring is necessary for effective programmes. Monitoring child protection issues and psychosocial support inputs frequently and regularly allows for changes in prevalence and types of issues children are facing to be noted, thus enabling programme flexibility to respond to specific needs in the target community as they change over time.

- *Research should be conducted periodically to document the impact of one's programming.*

Even if one samples a few country programmes and learns what works well and what needs improvement, the process of ongoing learning and programming adjustment is itself part of effective practice.

How do we know that Child Centered Spaces have a Positive Impact?

The quality, safety and impact of Child Centered Spaces should always be assessed on a regular basis. CCF has conducted two impact studies in Uganda and Indonesia, which were aimed at answering the following fundamental questions:

➢ Do child-centered spaces protect children from risks and threats in their environment?
➢ Do child-centered spaces improve children's emotional well-being?
➢ Do child-centered spaces improve children's social well-being?
➢ Do child-centered spaces increase children's knowledge and skill levels?

Preliminary Findings for Gulu, Uganda (children 3-6 yrs.)

- *Decreased Sexual Exploitation*

The prevalence of several forms of sexual exploitation reduced, including rape, the use of young girls to procure customers for sex workers, the viewing sexually explicit acts by sex workers, and exposure to sexually explicit videos.

- *Decreased Road Accidents*

Young children left alone can run out to the road where there is much traffic.

- *Decreased House Fires*

It was reported that some children who were left alone at home would attempt to cook using kerosene, and start house fires. Since the CCSs began, most of the children attend the CCS instead of staying home alone, and thus are not cooking while unsupervised.

- *Decreased Abduction of Children*

Children left alone are sometimes "taken" by others in the camp who keep them at their houses for several days and then demand money from the child's family for feeding and caring for them.

- *Siblings of CCS Children Attending School*

Older siblings of children in CCSs attend school. They do not have to care for their younger siblings while their parents work. In the Pakwelo Primary School in Unyama camp, attendance had gone up nearly 50% from 2005 to 2007.

- *Decrease in Injuries*

Children not in CCSs suffer more injuries from stepping on and playing with dangerous objects, such as metal sheeting, nails, and broken glass found in the camp, picking up "warrage" containers (local alcohol) and sucking on them, as well as finding and blowing up used condoms as balloons.

- *Decrease in /Illness*

Children who become sick while at the CCS center are now identified by the Community Activity Leaders and taken to the clinic for proper treatment.

- *Increased Self-Confidence*

Children entering primary school from the CCSs are more confident in the classroom. In interactions with adults, they are more self-assured, and not as shy or afraid to answer questions in class.

- *Increased Happiness and Decreased Worries*

Children who attend CCSs were described as being happy because they had a place to play, were with other children, and could learn. Caretakers also reported that these children have significantly fewer worries than children not attending CCSs. In addition, the establishment of CCSs has improved the well-being of their caretakers. Caretakers report that they worry less about their children

- *Increased Positive Relationships with Peers, Caretakers and Community Members*

Children in CCSs play together more cooperatively in small groups, (including outside the CCS). Children attending CCSs also share with other children more than non-CCS children. CCS children communicate more with parents (especially mothers), telling them about the stories, songs, and new words they have learned in the CCS.

- *Increased Social Well-Being of Parents*

  Parents reported that they had more social interactions with other parents as a result of the CCS.

- *Decreased Aggression*

  Children in CCSs display less confrontational and aggressive behavior with their peers.

- *Increased Hygiene Skills: Latrine Use and Hand Washing*

  Children from CCSs have learned how to use the latrine and as a consequence they are exposed to less *excrement and less sickness.*

- *Increased Cognitive Skills*

  Children from CCSs have achieved certain cognitive skills, including "counting" and reciting the alphabet and were reported to be better acclimated when they enter primary school. Children in the comparison group have not had this opportunity.

Preliminary findings Aceh, Indonesia (children 6-17 yrs)

- *Decreased Exposure to Drugs (Marijuana)*

Caregivers reported that children who went to CCSs were involved in activities and kept busy, so they were not bored and not as easily drawn to bad influences. Focus groups with youth in the comparison community confirmed that they "had nothing to do" much of the time.

- *Increased General Well-being Over Past Year*

From the one-on-one interviews with caregivers, more caregivers from the CCS communities than those from the comparison community reported that their children were doing better than 1 year ago. Less fearfulness, fewer worries, less unhappiness, less restlessness, fewer psychosomatic complaints, and less nervousness were reported than the previous year. Other findings were specific to age: less fighting was

reported for older children attending CCS (but not for younger children), while better control of temper and less fidgeting was manifest for younger CCS children (but not for older children).

- *Increased Happiness*

Eighty-three point three per cent of caregivers of children from the comparison community reported their children were sometimes or frequently unhappy, depressed, or tearful, compared to 24.4% of caregivers in CSS communities.

- *Decreased Fearfulness*

In focus group discussions, mothers reported that their children were not as fearful as they had been immediately after the tsunami, especially with regards to threat of another Tsunami or storm. More importantly, they stated that the CCS had helped their children overcome fears.

- *Decreased Worry*

According to caregiver reports, children from the CCS communities displayed fewer worries than children from the comparison community. Children who attended CCSs reported worrying less frequently than children from the comparison community.

- *Increased Social Integration with Peers*

Children attending CCSs reported playing more with peers than did children from the comparison community. This was evident in two variables – reported solitary behavior of children by caregivers and frequency of playing with peers as reported by children. Large differences were reported for both age groups of children regarding solitary behavior.

- *Decreased Fighting*

Children from the CCS communities reported that they are less likely to argue or fight than children in the comparison community.

Emergencies, such as armed conflict and natural disasters, pose enormous challenges to families and communities to care for and protect their children. CCF's emergency approach through Child Centered Spaces engages communities to create safe spaces for children and youth to play, socialize, learn, and express themselves in a caring, supportive, and normalizing environment. As evidence from the impact study remains anecdotal, preliminary findings suggest that the development of Child Centered Spaces mitigates against the numerous risks to children (ages 6-17) in emergency environments and can increase social and emotional well-being. Additionally, the study suggests that CCSs can promote positive coping mechanisms through the development of stronger relationships with peers, caretakers, and community members and can lay the foundation for skills and values for a child's healthy development. CCF is currently writing a Child Centered Space Manual, which will be published in 2008. Based on the knowledge, experience, and lessons learned from Child Protection specialists implementing CCSs worldwide, this manual offers practical guidance on setting up Child Centered Space's in emergency settings and can be shared with other agencies at their request.

Good Practices (2)
Creating Safe and Healing Schools

Roles & Responsibilities of Teachers and other Education Personnel

Why focus on teachers and other education personnel?

- Teachers are at the 'frontline' of child protection and well-being, with hours of daily contact with students, and frequent contact with parents
- They often have status and respect in the communities
- Through actions and attitudes they have great potential to work to ensure safe schools - for children and colleagues
- Teachers are powerful figures in the lives of children
- Children care a lot about teachers, their behaviours and attitudes
- Yet there are many common teacher behaviours and actions which upset students and which compromise their well-being

Drawing on Promising Practices: How can teachers be encouraged and supported to create safe, healing classrooms?

There are multiple strategies that can be used to improve teacher support and development opportunities, and especially to orient them more towards student protection and well-being. The INEE Minimum Standards highlight a number of important steps in the category of Standards: Teachers and other Education Personnel. These relate specifically to: recruitment and selection (Standard 1), conditions of work (Standard 2), support and supervision (Standard 3). These Standards are complemented by Standards in the category on Teaching and Learning, especially on training (Standard 2).

Key Minimum Standards recommendations include:

- Transparent, participatory selection processes
- Clear job descriptions which outline full responsibilities
- A code of conduct, developed with teachers
- Fair, acceptable and sustainable remuneration scales
- Regular assessment, monitoring and support, including, if needed, psychosocial support and guidance
- High quality, relevant and up-to-date training, with follow-up

The International Rescue Committee's (IRC) Healing Classrooms Initiative has been working to promote safe, healing learning environments, especially through innovative approaches to teacher development. These approaches are more holistic, they focus on the 'whole child' and the 'whole teacher' and encourage teachers to act as leaders and advocates for child well-being. The 'promising practices' piloted in country programmes in Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Guinea, Sierra Leone are now being

institutionalized within IRC's education strategy and introduced into all programmes, as well as into programming tools such as monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

IRC's strategies include:

- *Professional orientation for new teachers grounded in concepts of child protection and well-being*

We draw on experience in Herat, Western Afghanistan, working with new and under-educated teachers in community-based schools. Many of them are mullahs, with a very limited idea of what it means to be a teacher or of ways of creating a positive learning community for students. A tailored training was developed which initially focused on professional identity and leadership in the community for children's rights and well-being. The training also focused on simple routines and classroom management techniques with which the teachers can help the children feel part of a class and of a learning community. This initial orientation to teaching is considered so important and effective in terms of impacts for children that it is now being scaled up to be provided for all new teachers in community-based schools.

- *School-based trainings to follow and complement workshops*

At the same time it is also understood that one-off workshops do not ensure change in teacher actions and behaviors. Trainings should be supported by very hands-on, classroom-based training, especially for new and inexperienced teachers. IRC's Healing Classrooms Initiative has shown that classroom-based trainings should not be solely focused on subject teaching, but also on classroom management and organization techniques, such as calling the attendance register out loud; they should be tightly connected to the content of the workshop, and planned ahead of time. Classroom observations and supervision visits can only provide meaningful feedback to teachers at a later stage, once they have really had a chance to try out and practice new techniques.

- *Explicit attention to gender dynamics in schools and classrooms, as experienced by teachers and students*

IRC's experience, especially in Sierra Leone and Guinea, demonstrates that creating safe, healing classroom environments requires explicit attention to the power dynamics between male and female teachers as well as between male teachers and female students. We cannot expect the presence of women in a school to automatically create more gender-responsive environments and in some ways we may even reinforce negative gender stereotypes if assumptions are made that women will automatically protect girls. Careful gender training is required for all teachers and other education personnel, which addresses their own gender identities (masculinities and femininities), assumptions, and focuses on how they can work together to create safer and more conducive learning environments for boys and girls. Specific attention is required to ensure that women's status in schools (for

example as 'classroom assistants, pre-school or lower grade teachers, teachers of 'soft subjects' such as languages and arts), does not undermine the messages that girls and boys, men and women have equal potential and that all of these positions in schools are important. Specific opportunities may also have to be provided to upgrade women's skills and to support their capacity development.

- *More holistic support for teachers that includes training and other elements such as teachers' meetings, other classes, advocacy on compensation, and other conditions of work, as well as complementary work with communities and authorities to promote enhanced, multi-dimensional support for teachers.*

IRC's Healing Classrooms Initiative has also identified important linkages between teachers' own identity, their motivation to become and remain a teacher, their own sense of well-being, and their capacity to respond to children's needs for safety, security and protection. We have seen in Ethiopia, for example, that teachers were motivated by learning opportunities focused on quite different, general topics, not directly related to the school, such as international development, languages, and leadership. In Guinea we have seen the potential of far more participatory approaches to consulting and working with teachers in the development of new education policy and programmes. Related to the point above, this has also been particularly important for female pre-school teachers in Ethiopia. In Pakistan new initiatives are now underway to encourage communities to be more proactive in their support for teachers who come from outside their community. Asset-based assessments will be used to help communities identify the different resources available and the many different ways in which they can support teachers.

Good Practices (3)
Empowering the community to prevent violence in school

Why is involving parents and students important?

- Parents and students know what is happening within and around the school: they can facilitate the identification of specific protection risks related to the school environment.
- They often know what type of responses and protection strategies can be best adapted to the local social and cultural context and they can help identify and mobilize resources within the community.
- Through parent-teacher associations or community education committees, parents and the community at large can play a crucial role in monitoring the safety of the school environment.
- Their participation in education planning is essential to create a sense of ownership and to build consensus around codes of conduct, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms.
- Yet, parents, students and the community at large are often not empowered enough to effectively take part in the decision-making process at the school level.

Drawing on INEE Minimum Standards and good practices

There are multiple strategies which can be used to empower the community and involve them in the protection of the school environment and its surroundings. The INEE Minimum Standards highlight a number of important indicators and activities in the first category of Standards which includes community participation. This category includes:
- Ensuring community's participation in prioritizing and planning education activities as well as in identifying responses and resources
- Ensuring children and youth are involved in the development and implementation of educational activities
- Enhancing training and capacity-building opportunities for children, youth and parents, to manage education activities
- Mobilizing community resources to strengthen access to quality education in safe learning environments

Within the inter-agency Safe Schools Initiative, UNHCR and JRS have conducted several missions to identify good practices in countries which have been challenged with violence in refugee schools. Some of the findings of these missions are summarized below. They indicate some of the possible strategies to empower children and parents, and to enhance their participation in creating safe learning environments.

How can students be empowered?

- *Enriching the curriculum with life skills education*

In many countries, the curriculum has been enriched with life skills education on HIV/AIDs, SGBV, peace education and/or basic hygiene at primary and post-primary level. This has proven to be an effective way to ensure all students can be sensitized on a number of issues. In Malawi and Namibia, JRS has for instance provided in-service training to teachers to ensure they could incorporate key subjects in their classes. As a result, student boys and girls were all very aware of the dangers of trafficking, SGBV and HIV/AIDS as well as of reporting and referral mechanisms. Teachers were also able to mainstream peace education into the main curriculum, which was extremely useful for students to overcome cultural, language and social differences among them and to resolve peer-to-peer disputes in a peaceful manner.

- *Sensitizing and empowering students through girls and boys clubs*

In Namibia, girls and boys clubs were established at the school level for primary and secondary school-aged children to sensitize them on their rights and prevent early pregnancies and girl's school drop-outs. These clubs were functioning via a mentoring system, and incentives were also established to encourage children, especially girls, to participate. Life skills messages were conveyed through recreational, cultural and sport activities, which were an excellent way for children to learn about children's and women's rights as well as other subjects, including HIV/AIDs prevention, peace education, reproductive health, etc.. Messages on codes of conduct were also disseminated to sensitize children on the good behaviour one should have within the school environment and the community at large (ie: respect, solidarity, etc…). It appeared that the clubs played a significant role in reducing early pregnancies although they were sometimes conveying values to which religious leaders within the community were opposed.

- *Student participation*

In some countries, students were participating in Parents-teachers associations (PTAs) at the secondary level. Students were represented in all meetings and involved in the decision-making process. Students were also involved in monitoring the school's safety: monitors were appointed in each classroom as well as at the gate to monitor discipline and security. Including students in the decision-making process as well as in the monitoring mechanism is crucial to ensure the safety and quality of the school environment. They should also be involved in the development and dissemination of a code of conduct (CoC) for their teachers and for themselves. Focus group discussions can, for instance, be organized around the CoC and students can be asked to draw posters (on what constitutes good/bad behavior in class), that can then be posted in each classroom.

Students' opinion of the quality of support services should also always be sought.

- *School-based income-generating activities*

Schools often engage in school-gardening activities to introduce children to farming, but also to generate an income to be used to purchase school materials. However, children are rarely involved in the management of this activity and they can sometimes be exploited by education staff and PTAs as cheap labour. In Namibia, JRS has initiated a school-based income-generating activity, which is to be managed by the students themselves. A small shop is based in front of the school where children can learn basic management and numeric skills. The benefits of this activity are divided between the student associations and the school. Contrary to school-gardening, this activity was managed by the students themselves, which protected them from the risk of exploitation.

- *Counseling students*

In Malawi, JRS established a counseling mechanism to follow-up on child drop-outs and find a solution either for reintegrating them into the school system or referring them to another alternative form of education. This mechanism was extremely useful not only to release the teacher from the additional task of providing psycho-social support to students, but also to support and empower the children, by helping them to access educational opportunities.

How can parents be empowered?

- *Empowering parents*

Parents are usually involved in school matters through participation in the construction of infrastructures and/or in financing community-based schools. Apart from these aspects, getting parents involved in school matters outside of PTAs is often even more difficult than mobilizing PTAs. Parents are usually occupied with providing for their basic needs or some may be illiterate and feel ashamed to participate in school meetings. There is often an significant power imbalance between them and the teachers, both in terms of social and economical status.

To address this issue, a number of organizations have established literacy classes for adults as well as income-generating activities to empower parents. Yet another way to empower parents and to provide them with appropriate information is an open-day event, several times a year, where all parents are welcomed in the school to meet with their children's teachers and all the education staff. In Malawi, this practice has had significant positive results: it has encouraged parents who were previously ashamed to be more involved in the school environment to discuss with teachers and have a sense of ownership around the education of their children.

- *Creating a sense of ownership around the need for safe schools*

Parents and the community at large should be sensitized about children's rights and on the need for safer schools. One way to do this is to organize group discussions within the community to identify local perceptions of violence as compared to international standards and to define local ways to promote the safety of children in and around the learning environment. All community members should be involved in such discussions, including religious leaders, women's committees and youth leaders; and a common understanding of child protection should be reached so as to create a sense of ownership.

- *Empowering Parent-teacher associations*

Parents should always be represented in the monitoring of education activities and in the decision-making process. In many countries, they are represented by a parent-teacher association. PTAs are however not always functioning or representative and it is often difficult to mobilize them and to ensure their participation in education meetings. One way to involve PTAs in ensuring safe school environments is to sensitize them on the importance of having safe school environments and create a sense of ownership through continuous dialogue and discussions. PTAs should also be systematically included in the development of a code of conduct for both teachers and students, as well as in the development of responses and referral mechanisms to create linkages between the school and the wider local environment. In Malawi for instance, JRS has asked PTAs to provide comments on the CoC. This has in turn created a real sense of ownership around the CoC and all parents agree on the manner in which it should be enforced.

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For more information, please contact:

- **CCF**

*Wayne Bleier***:** Child Protection Specialist**.** E-mail waynebleier@ccfusa.org
Keri McGeehan: Child Protection Associate. E-mail: kcmcgeehan@ccfusa.org

- **JRS**

*Christine Bloch***:** E-mail**:** christine.bloch@jrs.net

- **IRC**

 *Jackie Kirk***:** E-mail: jackie.kirk@theirc.org

- **UNHCR**

 *Eva Ahlen***:** Senior Education Officer. E-mail**:** ahlen@unhcr.org