

RISK-INFORMED PROGRAMMING IN EMERGENCIES AND HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

BACKGROUND

As humanitarian emergencies around the world grow in frequency, duration and severity, the need for global investment in risk mitigation and proactive preparedness becomes more profound. With less than 1 per cent of official development assistance spent on preparedness for disasters, and over 80 per cent of humanitarian aid driven by the needs of people affected by conflict, it is imperative [to shift the focus from response to prevention](#).¹

To sustain the tremendous progress of recent decades, a concerted focus on strengthening risk analysis and on building resilience of health systems and communities must be prioritized in every global agenda. When incorporated into humanitarian programmes, risk-informed programming alleviates suffering and establishes more sustainable development.

RISK-INFORMED PROGRAMMING IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

During crises such as armed conflict and natural disasters, infrastructure is destroyed, health and other essential services are disrupted, and populations often undergo forced migration. In 2018, there were [31 million displaced and 13 million refugee children](#).² Notably, children are

disproportionally affected by displacement due to crisis and disaster, and more vulnerable to social and health risks that impact their well-being, development, and survival, accounting for 50 per cent of all refugees.

Often crises are difficult or impossible to anticipate. Regardless, the adversity and repercussions of a crisis can be reduced or prevented with context-specific, risk-informed programming. This approach [strengthens resilience](#) by identifying and addressing the root causes and drivers of a community's risk, such as vulnerability, lack of capacity and exposure to various shocks and stresses.³

At the heart of risk-informed programming is a robust multi-hazard risk analysis, conducted jointly by partners, to identify the threats a community faces. Equipped with an understanding of the hazards that impede children's well-being and development, governments and partners are better positioned to design and adapt programmes that promote risk reduction, resilience and peace. Among these strategies, it is also important to have practical knowledge on how to improve preparedness capacity and successfully develop initiatives in humanitarian settings.

It is in this context where implementation research (IR) is important in bridging knowledge gaps, identifying programmatic challenges and solutions, and using this information to both

optimize the development of initiatives as they happen, as well as to apply these lessons learned in the planning and development of related programmes elsewhere.

THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on many aspects of society, ranging from unemployment to the disruption of essential health services, threatening to unravel the hard-fought gains in health achieved during the last several decades. The pandemic has also underscored the critical role of emergency preparedness so that the global community is better equipped to face future health threats and avoid preventable morbidity and mortality.

UNICEF'S RESPONSE

UNICEF recognizes that the suffering, loss and damage incurred by violent conflict, disasters and the compounding effects of climate change, health epidemics or economic shocks can be reduced. To support the realization of children's rights, and reduce, mitigate and manage risk, UNICEF programmes work to build national and community capacity, design systems capable of withstanding unanticipated shocks, and implement programmes that put children at the centre. **By pre-emptively addressing the threats caused by crises**, communities are better equipped with the skills to anticipate, prevent, manage and overcome the compounding shocks and stresses inflicted by emergencies.⁴

Crises can disrupt the health services, care, and social support that are critical to ensure that every child's right to grow up healthy and protected is fulfilled. UNICEF is working to strengthen shock responsiveness at a systems level, ensuring that programmes are child sensitive and informed, and adapted by risk.

The proportion of UNICEF country offices that meet the organization benchmarks on implementing risk-informed programming has steadily increased from 16 per cent in 2016, to 27 per cent in 2017, 37 per cent in 2018, to 41 per cent in 2019. In 2019, a total of 57 countries reported having developed **child-sensitive risk-management plans nationally or locally to address risks**, including those of disaster, climate change, conflict and public health emergencies.

UNICEF has collaborated with partners to develop the Guidance for Risk-Informed Programming (GRIP), a package of general and sector-specific guidance modules that propose a methodology for conducting child-centred risk analysis and leading a collaborative process to design or adapt programmes to further risk reduction, resilience and peace. GRIP is a tool to strengthen the interconnectedness of development, humanitarian and peacebuilding programming.

In Sudan, which is facing recurring climate-related disasters and associated disease outbreaks, UNICEF and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) contributed to a new integrated approach to climate resilience development and water resources management in Darfur and the eastern states.

The four main elements of GRIP contribute towards achieving collective outcomes in fragile and crisis-affected contexts:

- Respond to emergencies in a way that strengthens capacities and existing systems;
- Implement development programmes based on risk assessments that build resilience, and reduce risk for communities by strengthening social service systems most subject to shocks and stresses;
- Be prepared for residual risks with contingency plans, prepositioned supplies and hiring responders;
- Converge different sector's programmes in geographical areas for populations of greatest vulnerability and lowest capacity.

In public health emergencies, UNICEF and partners aim to employ risk-cognizant programming, which leaves communities, community platforms and health systems with a better ability to withstand immediate and long-term needs, including those that arise in crises. UNICEF builds resilience in communities through employing the following activities:

- Conducting multi-hazard risk analyses;
- Developing programmes and tools to prevent, mitigate and respond to identified risks, e.g. outbreaks; strengthening diagnostics, surveillance and training of healthcare workers on infection, prevention and control and rapid response; and training public health officers; and
- Designing and/or adapting health services to emergency contexts, e.g. use of e-Health tools; strengthening community healthcare systems; conceiving contextualized guidelines and processes; and identifying appropriate indicators for monitoring.

UNICEF has a mandate that integrates development and humanitarian programming, and is thus present before, during and after a crisis, engaging at every stage of the humanitarian-development continuum. With the frequency and magnitude of emergencies increasing, UNICEF relies on its extensive institutional experience in operating in fragile, conflict-affected and risk-prone contexts to help communities withstand the shocks and stresses of disasters.

UNICEF is active in over 190 countries and regions around the world, working in more than 40 countries/geographical areas⁵ that are considered emergency and fragile contexts, with special emphasis on the most vulnerable regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.



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- ¹ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Guidance on Risk-Informed Programming', New York, April 2018.
- ² UNICEF, 'UNICEF data: Child displacement', <<https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/>>, accessed 15 January 2021.
- ³ UNICEF, 'Guidance on Risk-Informed Programming', New York, April 2018.
- ⁴ UNICEF, 'Humanitarian Action Global Annual Results Report 2019', New York, June 2020, p.16.
- ⁵ UNICEF, 'UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children 2021', <<https://www.unicef.org/media/88416/file/HAC-2021-overview.pdf>>, accessed 15 January 2021.

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