



CPMS MAINSTREAMING CASE STUDIES SERIES

Child Protection and Distribution

Help Desks: multi-sectoral support during distributions in the Nepal earthquake response

In emergencies, girls and boys face increased risk of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. The way in which humanitarian aid is delivered can further increase these risks. Children may be exposed to harm during the chaos of a distribution or at water points or experience abuse in cramped evacuation centres. Sometimes harm is caused directly due to humanitarian workers' actions or non-actions. Many threats to the safety and wellbeing of children can be mitigated or even eradicated through timely and sensitive provision of humanitarian aid across all sectors. All humanitarian actors have an important contribution to make to the protection and recovery of children.

*To mainstream child protection means to ensure child protection considerations inform all aspects of humanitarian action. It also minimizes the risks of children being violated by programmes designed without proper consideration for children's safety or wellbeing. **Mainstreaming child protection is an essential part of compliance with the 'do no harm' principle that applies to all humanitarian action.**¹*

Going beyond mainstreaming, integrated programming allows for actions between two or more sectors to work together towards a common programme objective, based on an assessment of needs. Where integrated child protection programming is not possible, child protection mainstreaming is essential. This case studies series looks at both examples of integrated programming and mainstreaming and the CPMS mainstreaming standards are applicable for both.

On the 25th of April 2015, at 11.56 Nepal Standard Time, an earthquake of 7.8 magnitude caused severe destruction in Nepal. Two weeks later, another earthquake with a 7.3 magnitude struck, causing further devastation. A total of 8,891 people were confirmed dead, 605,254 houses destroyed and 288,255 houses damaged.

In the first phase of the response, Plan International (Plan) Nepal distributed emergency shelter, hygiene kits, and food items across five districts.² The distribution teams were often the first responders to arrive in the isolated mountainous villages and had to deal with a lot of requests for assistance by the community. The establishment of Help Desks at all distribution sites enabled initial and later strong collaboration between distribution and child protection staff, allowing a joint holistic response to the broad needs of children and their families.

This case study describes a process involving distribution and child protection staff, which began with a simple idea to respond to the needs of affected people and slowly grew into an essential component of the services and support offered to those affected by the earthquake. It yielded a number of

¹ Child Protection Working Group, *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: Briefing note to ensure child protection mainstreaming*, "Standard 26: Distribution and Child Protection", 15 December 2014, <http://cpwg.net/minimum-standards-topics/mainstream>.

² Plan International, *Nepal Earthquake – One Year On*, <https://plan-international.org/nepal/nepal-earthquake-one-year-on>.



unanticipated benefits which highlight the significant value that collaboration between different sectors brings to all humanitarians involved and, ultimately, to the communities, families and children that are assisted.

This case study was written on the basis of interviews with Anita Queirazza, Global CPIE Specialist, Plan International.³

How the process began – Distribution colleagues ask for assistance from Child Protection actors

Distribution efforts were one of the urgent priority actions in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and Plan Nepal began organizing mobile distribution sites in 5 priority districts. It was often at these sites where affected communities had their first interaction with humanitarian actors. Access to reliable information was crucial in the aftermath of the disaster, to help people to protect themselves, access humanitarian services and take decisions. Information commonly sought related to distributions (date and location), eligibility of services, support from government and humanitarian agencies, and who to contact for support.

“Often, a strong working relationship with colleagues from other sectors is key because you’re exchanging information and sharing ideas.”

During distributions, Plan’s teams were inundated with requests by affected communities on where families could get support for their children on various matters (e.g. health, education, psychosocial support) and on how vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, pregnant women and girls could access services despite their reduced mobility. In addition, community members were raising a lot of concerns with distribution teams around the registration process, eligibility criteria and the entitlement to distributed items. Due to overcrowding, community members could often not assist in demonstrations provided by distribution teams on how to use distributed items such as water purification tablets, so they sought direct support from Plan Nepal’ staff.

In addition, parents who came to the distribution sites with their children, were concerned that they had to keep an eye on their children while at the same time queuing up for the distribution of relief goods and paying attention to messages given by field teams. Lastly, community members, including children and adolescents, were asking questions to comprehend the nature of the earthquake and the consequent aftershocks, and wanted to receive tips on how to stay safe.

Distribution teams were quickly overwhelmed. Unable to collect and respond to all concerns raised in a structured and organized way, the distribution became chaotic and slow.

Following the above situation, distribution teams reached out to child protection colleagues and asked whether it was possible to collaborate to ensure distribution efforts were safe and

³ Conducted on 16 and 23 May 2015.



accessible for those who needed it the most, with a particular focus on children, and to provide multi-sectoral support to affected communities.

An idea begins to evolve – The Help Desk Concept

Collaboration in Kathmandu between Plan International’s managers and different technical advisors from different disciplines (child protection, distribution and accountability) resulted in an idea inspired by the humanitarian response in the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan: the establishment of Help Desks.

The Help Desks were established alongside distribution points in order to offer community members a space where they could gather to receive relevant information, referral to available support services and psychological first aid as well as provide feedback and raise concerns on relief work. It provided a safe space for children, offering recreational activities and awareness raising. Their parents could access parenting sessions and information on how to care for and protect their children after the disaster. Initially the Help Desks were operated by Plan Nepal’ staff. They were later replaced by trained community volunteers, supervised by the local partner agency and technically supported by both Plan and the partner.

In the first phase of the emergency response, Help Desks were placed at all distribution sites.



Later, after most distributions ended, the Help Desks were moved to other central places in the community such as the village administration office or main transportation hubs, which were high risk areas for trafficking. Once set up, the tasks undertaken and services offered by the Help Desk staff and volunteers quickly grew because they were extremely well received by affected communities.

Photo: Plan International Nepal staff organize a parents’ awareness raising session on child trafficking

Staff and volunteers were linked to all Plan’s humanitarian response programs including child protection, distribution, shelter, water and sanitation in the community, and as such they were involved in one-on-one discussions with community members, focus group discussions, children’s activities and sensitization sessions.



Distribution and child protection actors start to jointly provide services to affected communities

In the early stages of running the Help Desks, activities were designed and planned by child protection and distribution staff together. Activities however were mainly implemented by community volunteers supervised by child protection staff. Gradually, distribution staff began to take a more active role in the provision of Help Desks services. For example, they were mobilizing groups of men or women to organize demonstrations on how to use distributed items. They were organizing informative sessions on Plan's overall response and ongoing relief work in the village. Information was provided in written form on pamphlets and large posters, as well as verbally through group meetings. Under the technical leadership of child protection staff, distribution staff also got involved in organizing recreational activities with children and hygiene sensitization sessions for adolescent girls and actively linking families with protection concerns to child protection staff.

Building ownership amongst other sectors – The Planning workshop

Given the progressive and significant growth of the volume of work in the Help Desks, Plan Nepal Emergency teams decided to organize a planning workshop. Emergency response managers, different sectors' specialists including child protection, distribution, WASH and shelter, and accountability officers gathered to define the scope and the objectives of the Help Desk, how to best run them and roles and responsibilities.

The planning workshop fostered a positive atmosphere of collaboration and a sense of joint ownership. Because staff from different sectors had been involved in determining its use, they understood the added value of the Help Desk for affected communities as well as for their own interventions.

Subsequently, a toolkit was prepared with key standardized messages to convey to communities, activity guidance and tools to be used. This was followed by training for all local partner staff and community volunteers who were also oriented on the Help Desk and its key activities.



Help Desks become integral part of Plan International's relief work

Help Desks became an essential component of distribution interventions. In the daily planning, each distribution team was paired up with child protection community volunteers in charge of Help Desks and assigned a specific site. Information and recreational material was prepared and

organized alongside distribution items.



Information sharing between distribution, child protection staff and feedback officers happened regularly through discussions around activities progress and challenges. During daily team meetings, an agenda point was devoted to the implementation of Help Desks.

Photo: A Nepali mother gets familiar with Child Protection’s Information Education Communication material during a parenting session, Plan International.

This information sharing was essential to drive the response forward in a more targeted and effective way. In addition, feedback reports were regularly provided to Help Desk’ staff who, based on emerging concerns or recurring themes, adjusted messages and reinforced awareness raising and were able to better support those particularly vulnerable.

This phase allowed different sectors teams to fully grasp the way each sector operates, its approaches and challenges. This understanding revealed to be essential for child protection actors to advise distribution colleagues on the best actions to undertake to ensure protection outcomes for children and their families are achieved through distribution interventions.

Government and Communities take over

After two months, distribution efforts began to be scaled down. The Help Desks became a key service in the community and local authorities, having been involved in the implementation of Help Desks, saw the value in establishing a more permanent forum where relevant Help Desk activities could continue. The fact that the Help Desks had already been run and supervised by community members, ensured that their knowledge and experience did not get lost and enabled continuation of services without change of staffing. Some village authorities decided to make the Help Desks part of their permanent community services. The Help Desks were installed in the local government offices and used to disseminate key information and to promote protective practices such as birth registration and marriage registration to prevent issues such as early marriage. Help Desks were also moved close to main transportation hubs, which were the main areas to detect and intercept trafficking of girls and boys.

In the first six months, 42 Help Desks were established and provided information on humanitarian services and child protection in emergencies to 56,352 individuals including 44,008 children. The Help desks supported 22,865 vulnerable children and adults directly in accessing humanitarian services. Specialized referrals were made for 843 vulnerable girls and boys, in the areas of child protection, psychosocial support, and healthcare assistance.

Lessons Learned

Child Protection Mainstreaming is a process of listening and mutual understanding

Child Protection mainstreaming in any emergency is not about using a prescriptive approach, telling other sectors how to integrated child protection considerations into their responses.



Mainstreaming starts with listening and taking the time to understand the work of colleagues in other sectors and the challenges they face. At the same time other sectors can be supported to understand the various risks children face in a given context and appropriate responses. From here, child protection staff and other sectors could take the time to jointly identify instances where humanitarian workers' actions or non-actions exacerbate risks or cause harm, as well as tailored ways in which child protection issues could be addressed.

Working physically together

Building strong collaboration with actors from different sectors is key to successful mainstreaming. Rather than seeing child protection mainstreaming as something other sectors need to do, creating dialogue and joint ownership is crucial. But developing joint messages and tools is often not enough. Ideally staff are enabled to work physically together, creating opportunities to learn from each other while doing relief work and to build each other's capacities and mutual understand, moving gradually to the point where other sectors are able, willing, and empowered to consider child protection needs without the actual presence and support of child protection staff.

Child protection mainstreaming ensures a holistic response meeting the needs of children and their families

Humanitarian actors' work tends to be segmented according to sectors. However, children and their families have holistic needs, which require support by a range of humanitarian actors. The Help Desks offering cross-sectoral activities ensured that a variety of risks and needs of children and their families were addressed.

Invest sufficient time in ongoing training and on-the-job coaching

The concept of the Help Desks was new to both Plan International Nepal and their partner. It therefore took time to develop all programming guidelines, training materials, key messages and other tools for the Help Desks. Initially evaluations with distribution staff and community volunteers showed that they didn't know what information they were supposed to deliver. They had very little knowledge on child protection, no access to education and communication (IEC) materials and they didn't know what or how to record feedback. With additional ongoing training, supervision and intensive support in the first weeks of the response the capacity of the key implementers was strengthened and improved. This allowed distribution staff and community volunteers to slowly master the Help Desk interventions.