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The Involvement of Vulnerable Children in Child Friendly Spaces in Aceh, Indonesia

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for a degree of Master of Philosophy in
Development Studies
Massey University
Palmerston North
New Zealand

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2008

Abstract

The negative impact of natural and man-made disasters on children is well recognized and over the years different interventions have been introduced in communities so as to address the needs of affected children during humanitarian responses. In recent years though, the rights of children in humanitarian emergencies have been addressed more intentionally than previously. This has resulted in a new type of intervention that has evolved to address the psychosocial and protection needs of children through a range of creative, informative and supportive play activities and referral services offered in disaster affected communities. The activities have been supported by a range of Non Governmental Organisations and the United Nations. Commonly called 'Child Friendly Spaces'(CFSs), these programmes are now offered in most humanitarian emergencies.

Drawing on literature from a range of social sciences and an analysis of qualitative research conducted in Tsunami affected Aceh, Indonesia, this study demonstrates that Government, United Nations and NGO stakeholders' understanding and approach to CFS programmes differs in terms of definitions of key concepts. The study also identifies the challenges in defining vulnerability at a community level and discusses whether CFS programmes do offer services to the most vulnerable children.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BRR	Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi (The Indonesian Government department responsible for Relief and Reconstruction in Aceh-Nias)
CCF	Christian Children's Fund (also known as ChildFund)
CEDC	Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances
CFS	Child Friendly Space
ESC	Emergency Spaces for Children
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAM	Gerakan Aceh Movement (Free Aceh Movement)
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IRC	International Rescue Committee
INEE	Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergencies
INGO	International Non Government Organisation
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Network of the UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
LNGO	Local Non Government Organisation
MSF	Medicin Sans Frontieres
MUHEC	Massey University Human Ethics Committee
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation (also called not for profit organisation)
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
REPSSI	Regional Psychosocial Support Network (Southern Africa)
SCF	Save the Children
SCF-UK	Save the Children United Kingdom
SCF-US	Save the Children United States
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Social and Culture Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UXO	Unexploded Ordinance
Vol.	Volunteer (in CFS programme)
WHO	World Health Organisation
WV	World Vision
WVCoord.	World Vision Coodinator (of CFS programmes)
WVI	World Vision International
WV IND	World Vision Indonesia
WV-ATRT	World Vision Asia Tsunami Response Team

Chapter One: Introducing the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to introduce and discuss the subject of Child Friendly Spaces (CFSs) in humanitarian disasters with a specific focus on Aceh, Indonesia. To position this thesis in the development studies context requires first an understanding of the role of children in development and the changes in the 1990s that brought about some increased focus on children within development practice. With this development perspective clarified, a review of the situation for children in humanitarian disasters in recent years explains the rationale behind the formation of CFSs. CFSs are a new type of intervention provided for children during a disaster response by Non Government Organisations (NGO). They first began in response to the Kosovo Refugee crisis in 1999 and have become a standard response in large humanitarian crises since.

As with most programme responses in the majority of humanitarian settings, CFSs are an under-researched topic. This emphasises the importance of this research. Only one published in depth evaluation of a CFS is available although internal NGO evaluations are regularly conducted and certainly the continued provision of CFS programmes offered by NGOs in humanitarian emergencies suggests that they are considered valuable in responding to the needs of children. This point also supports the rationale for this study.

This research is also of personal and professional interest as my background is as a humanitarian practitioner focusing on children and I have had the responsibility for developing and training others in creating CFS programmes. My practitioner colleagues affirm the need for evidence-based research of a range of humanitarian emergency interventions such as CFSs. With the increasing investment by NGOs, Governments, UN and donors in CFS programmes it is clear that research is required to investigate whether the objectives of CFS programmes are valid. Thus, the underlying aim of this thesis is to be able to use the information learned from this process to influence positive change in practice, hence improving lives for children affected by natural and man-made disasters.

Background

For decades the role of children in development was not discussed despite demographics that suggests that between 31-34%[1] of the population in the less developing world are children under 15 years of age (Population Reference Bureau 2007). Even the development agenda with its emphasis on economic development while acknowledging there were some problems with child labour, did not consider the contribution children made to the economic development of the country through the informal sector and their contribution to household income (Todaro,1989). In the 1980s the movement in development studies towards concepts such as community participation and empowerment was closely linked to women in development (Moser 1989; M., & Hougerud, A. 2005 pp. 28 – 29; Chant & Gutmann, 2005 pp. 241- 242) yet apart from some general attention to issues of education and health services for children, children were still omitted from the discussion.

During the 1980s some child focused organisations and then the United Nations (UN) addressed their concern a focus on children's rights and in 1989 nation states were encouraged to be signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). The signing of this Convention by nearly all nation states resulted in the issue of children attracting more attention by Governments and Civil Society. The signing of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the increased political attention to children affected by armed conflict added to the issues of children in humanitarian disasters and development being rendered more visible.

While humanitarian practice has expanded in its focus on children, much of this can be attributed to the human rights movement that has challenged practitioners to work in different ways and become involved in changing systems and structures addressing rights beyond that of survival. Alongside the rights movement, the expansion and sophistication of communication systems in more recent years has resulted in public access to detailed information including images of children affected by humanitarian crises around the world, particularly conflict. This in turn

[1] 31% if including China and 34% excluding China Population Reference Bureau

has highlighted the psychological and social needs of affected populations and their need for protection.

It is in this context that the range of child focused interventions in humanitarian emergencies have expanded from providing care to orphan children or providing vaccinations to children and nutritional feeding projects to programmes that now involve child focused NGOs in a wide range of activities. These activities include the tracing and reunification of separated children as well as preventing the separation of children during and after humanitarian crises (ICRC, UNHCR, UNICEF, World Vision International, Save the Children UK. & The International Rescue Committee. 2004). Other activities include the creation of education in emergencies programmes as well as projects focusing on the care and protection of child soldiers, child labourers and sexually exploited children (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2004; MacLeod & Toms, 2006). One of the most significant issues that has captured the attention of the public and humanitarian industry are activities that address concerns of trauma in children.

Regardless of this expansion of activities or increased concern, most of these activities have been developed in an ad hoc fashion by a range of NGOs – both local and international - and while an attempt to create standards for practice in some aspects of these responses there remains the challenge of monitoring the standards and holding the NGO and UN community as well as governments accountable to them.

Child Friendly Spaces were promoted first in 1999 during the Kosovo Refugee Crisis in Albania. A UNICEF official suggested that NGOs could create a space in communities for integrated child-focused activities that might be needed in situations of humanitarian crisis to respond to children in a holistic way – the concept Child Friendly Space thus emerged (MacLeod, 1999). The concept of the CFS was agreed to by child focused NGOs and since 1999 most large humanitarian responses have included the provision of CFSs in communities.

The core components of a CFS include the involvement of the local community, the provision and support of a protective environment for children, referral

systems for children and their families to access basic services needed during an emergency and activities that address the psychosocial needs of children by focusing firstly on play and creative expression and secondly through the creation of routine. The inclusion of all children, including the most vulnerable was promoted (MacLeod & Toms, 2006; Save the Children USA, 2007).

As time passed, different NGOs began using different names other than CFS but the core components of a CFS remained unchanged. At the field level during emergencies CFS is still a common term used even though in July 2007, a global taskforce of international NGOs and UN agencies introduced the term Emergency Spaces for Children (ESC) (Save the Children USA, 2007). Nonetheless, I have chosen to use the CFS term for this thesis as I remain uncomfortable with the term ESC. This is due to my commitment to encourage connections between relief and development programmes. It is my opinion that the ESC term implies that these spaces are only set up in emergencies and have a different philosophy than that of children's programmes that are set up in development settings. I believe that CFSs can also continue as communities transition into longer term development programmes and while the activities may change, the philosophy of CFSs in terms safety, creative expression, play and inclusion of vulnerable children can remain. Furthermore, such programmes are also needed in development settings.

While the name given to CFS programmes is not constant, CFSs continue to be created. A large number of CFSs were introduced in response to the Asian Tsunami of 2004 that devastated large areas of coastline in Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India. As a result of the Tsunami, the largest humanitarian response in history was launched (Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2005) and in relation to CFSs the context has provided NGOs with a plethora of learning opportunities.

Research Objectives and Questions

With the dearth of literature and evidence based research on children in humanitarian emergencies the possible topics for this thesis were endless. As a humanitarian practitioner, the choice of CFS focused research was needed to

improve practice and so eventually, through a process of consultation, the topic was confined to the exploration of issues related to whether CFS programmes actually provide protection to the most vulnerable children. Specifically, did vulnerable children even attend CFS activities? In order to answer this question a series of underlying issues needed to be explored in literature and with research participants. First, there were questions about what theories and frameworks led to the development of CFS programmes. As goals of a programme influence the choice of activities and measurement of success, it was important to know from a range of stakeholders whether the goals or activities in a CFS were the same or different. So the question first needing to be asked, was how do people and organisations define a CFS? Literature also suggested confusion over definitions of protection, child rights and vulnerability and so these concepts were explored with participants in this study. The second issue to be explored was the reasons for attendance and non-attendance by children to a CFS and programmatic issues influencing this. Once this was understood then it was possible to reach the third research question about whether CFS programmes do involve and protect vulnerable children.

To summarise, the research questions were:

1. To understand what the key stakeholders define as the purpose of the CFS and what definitions they give to some of the key concepts underpinning the CFS;
2. To establish what the key stakeholders understand to be the reasons for attendance or non-attendance at CFSs;
3. To clarify the key stakeholder perceptions of vulnerability and whether they believe vulnerable children attend CFS activities.

An additional research objective exists: it is one that cannot be met directly through the presentation of this thesis but one that will be highlighted in Chapter Four focusing on the action-research approaches. The objective of research using this approach is that it contributes to change in practice. Therefore an objective is to share this research with the wider humanitarian community for consideration

in further child focused responses. This will be done through the writing of a separate learning paper for the humanitarian community.

Research Location

As mentioned briefly CFSs in Tsunami affected Asia is a rich context to learn from. This thesis is focused on the most severely affected location of the Asian Tsunami – the province of Aceh in the country of Indonesia. An estimated 160,000 died and 350,000 people were displaced as a result of the Tsunami (Inter Press Service, 2005; Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator, 2005). Children under the age of 18 years represented a significant percentage of the target population of the humanitarian response and while the usual sectors of health, shelter, water and sanitation as well as the food and non-food sectors focus on meeting the survival needs of children, only a handful of organisation focus on specific services to children particularly in relation to their rights to protection, development and participation. Approximately 400 NGOs responded to the emergency in Aceh (The Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency in Aceh-Nias, 2005). Most child focused organisations commenced with the provision of CFS activities throughout the Tsunami affected areas of Aceh Province and it was these key stakeholders who were an integral part of the field research. Now that the background rationale for the research and the associated questions have been made clear the structure of the thesis will be outlined.

Thesis Structure

As noted, *Chapter One* provides an introduction to the thesis.

Chapter Two provides a review of literature related to key topics in relation to CFS and the chapter is divided into two main parts. Part one reviews the role of children in the history of development theory and essentially highlights the invisibility of children in development theory that existed basically until the development of the child rights framework that emerged in the 1990s. This development theory section also analyses certain concepts such as vulnerability commonly referred to in literature when speaking about children. Part two of this chapter then moves to centre specifically on the practice of children in development. Focusing on what literature is telling us about meeting the

psychological and social needs of children affected by humanitarian emergencies, this provides a core justification for the setting up of CFSs. This discussion includes information on debates regarding psycho-social approaches versus the trauma approach to children as well as the role of play for children affected by disasters.

Chapter Three introduces readers to the history of CFSs from the practitioner's perspective. The chapter is divided into a number of sections. It draws on my personal as well as other documented knowledge of the history of these safe spaces for children that are provided in humanitarian disasters. The first section begins with a definition of a CFS so as to provide a framework for the rest of the chapter. The second section describes the driving forces that resulted in the formation of the spaces with a description of the lessons learned about protection and care of children in the humanitarian crises in Rwanda in 1994. The chapter then transitions to a third section by providing a description and discussion of the first CFSs initiated in the Kosovo Refugee crisis in 1999. The fourth section of the chapter highlights the few documented accounts of CFSs in other humanitarian crises. In particular it focuses on identification of challenges and lessons learned in relation to CFSs. The fifth section of the chapter positions the location of this thesis by focusing on Aceh, Indonesia and describes a brief history of the conflict there, an overview of the 2004 Asian Tsunami and the response to children affected by it through the development of CFSs. Finally, readers are provided with an update of global developments in relation to the formation of CFS since the Asian Tsunami of 2005.

Chapter Four examines issues of methodology in the field research and the wide range of issues related to the ethics of doing research. Firstly, the background of why the research was focused on Aceh, Indonesia and my journey of involvement in the research process is presented. This section of the thesis explains that qualitative research methods were chosen to provide in depth understanding of the perceptions of CFS programmes from a range of humanitarian industry stakeholders and also from the community accessing the CFS services. The humanitarian research participants were selected by my contacting all NGOs in

Aceh at the time of the research who were known to be involved in CFS activities and requesting the participation of one representative with knowledge of CFS programmes (or the equivalent programme with a different name) in a semi-structured interview. Government and UN organisations with some responsibility for CFS activities were also identified as key stakeholders. Finally, the CFS Coordinators at the field level and the community volunteers were identified as being key informants also. It was feasible in the timeframe given to interview a range of NGO, UN and Government stakeholders and World Vision CFS coordinators and volunteers. Additionally, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with community members who had a World Vision CFS programme in their community were conducted. This community-based research was funded and facilitated by World Vision. During the design process, it was decided to separate the World Vision funded and facilitated community-based research from the research that involved my semi-structured interviews with key humanitarian industry stakeholders, also funded by World Vision.

Consideration of ethical standards was a critical part of this thesis and in particular the research component. Thus the second section of the chapter focuses in considerable detail on ethics starting with an overview of the approval process from the Massey University Ethics Committee then moving to ethical considerations related to three significant principles of ethical practice – avoidance of conflict of interest, beneficence (doing good) and doing no harm. One of the key ethical considerations was related to my dual roles in this process - that of humanitarian practitioner and as a Master's student. Additionally, the research and my leave from my career to be a fulltime student was funded by World Vision and this raises questions surrounding conflict of interest. While it could be argued that my strong links with World Vision pose a serious conflict of interest, this section of the thesis argues that there are benefits to this connection, provided autonomy in reporting of the findings is maintained.

Chapter Five describes and summarises the qualitative data on CFS programmes. There are two data sets being described in this section and in the following chapter. First, the humanitarian industry stakeholder interviews which will be

referred to as 'primary data' and then the second set of data which is the qualitative information resulting from the World Vision community-based research which will be referred to as 'secondary data'[2]. World Vision has given permission for use of this data. The consolidation of responses from the semi-structured interviews is divided into three main themes. First the definitions and descriptions of key terms such as CFS, child protection and child rights. The second research theme focuses on participant perceptions of why children came or did not come to CFS activities. The same questions about reasons for attendance were asked during the World Vision community-based research and so these results are included in this section. The third research theme is focused on the research question as to which children were considered to be vulnerable in the Acehnese setting and whether these vulnerable children attend CFS activities. The results of the question of vulnerability provided interesting considerations for future programming.

Chapter Six discusses the research findings and compares and contrasts it with the CFS philosophy and development literature and draws some conclusions from this analysis. This chapter is divided into the three themes based on the research. The first Research theme discussed the terms CFS and child rights. This section highlights correlations between literature and the background to CFSs with the findings of the research in Aceh. The second research theme focuses on the perceptions of the children's motivation for attending or not attending CFS programmes. There is no specific literature or previous data to compare the findings of the research in Aceh, however literature provides some support and guidance in analyzing the Aceh research findings. The final and third research theme focusing on the definitions of vulnerable children raises questions about what literature states about vulnerability and the cultural understanding of vulnerability in Aceh. Finally, the perceptions of whether vulnerable children attend CFS activities is analysed and gaps in knowledge from the humanitarian

[2] The terms primary and secondary data used in this thesis are used loosely and aim to differentiate the research designed conducted and analysed only by this author (the primary data) with the community-based research conducted by World Vision but designed, introduced, tested and consolidated by this author in collaboration with a number of World Vision staff (the secondary data). I was not involved in the actual focus group discussions in the community and therefore did not conduct the research myself.

industry are highlighted. From the analysis of the qualitative data and review of literature and CFS background information there are a number of areas that are highlighted for further research and for humanitarian practice review.

Chapter Seven reviews the thesis and research objectives. It provides specific recommendations for future research and humanitarian practice in relation to child focused programming in emergencies. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main contributions this thesis has made to development thinking and the planned process for integrating the recommendations into humanitarian practice.