

## A community-led approach to child protection: inspiration and learning for intercultural education

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Photo: Caroline Veldhuizen, South Sudan

Globally, about 1 billion children experience physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect on a yearly basis. In humanitarian contexts – including armed conflict, political unrest and natural disasters – violence against children exacerbates as new risks arise and pre-existing protection mechanisms weaken.

Violence adversely impacts children's (mental) health, development and wellbeing.

When we as child protection practitioners, working for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), engage with communities to help them keep children safe, we aim to build our interventions on cultural beliefs, values and practices. In reality however, we often enter communities with a final project plan in our back pocket, developed with limited in-depth understanding of the context. The plan describes which harms to children we would like to address and how we intend to do so. Two global interagency evidence reviews have questioned the effectiveness and sustainability of this way of working.

In response to this challenge, Save the Children and War Child Holland developed an approach that puts communities in the drivers' seat: they identify and prioritise local harms for children; they decide on local actions to address those using their own capacities and resources; and they reflect on progress and changes in the lives of children. Our role as external NGO is to facilitate the process. Because the community-led action draws on a communities' own ideas, creativity and motivation to protect children, they are likely to be more sustainable.

The backbone of this facilitation approach is a set of soft skills, which allows child protection workers engaging with the communities to be humble, listen and learn deeply, build trust, encourage inclusion and challenge own assumptions and beliefs. The approach is currently being piloted in Colombia, Niger, Mali, Mozambique, Lebanon, Egypt, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia.

Participants will be invited to engage in reflective exercises, triggering learning processes for intercultural education.

*To engage deeply with communities in an effective way, we first need to become aware of what we each bring psychologically to the community. Each child protection worker enters the community with a host of assumptions, beliefs, knowledge, values, expectations, attitudes, and behaviors, and these shape the ways in which we engage with community people and in turn are seen by local people.*

*"We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are" – Anais Nin (1903 - 1977)*