Noteworthy Practices: Early Childhood Development in Emergencies
Noteworthy Practices: Early Childhood Development in Emergencies is an initiative of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development’s (CGECCD), Early Childhood in Emergencies Working Group (EEWG) and supported financially by UNICEF. The EEWG is co-convened by UNICEF and ChildFund International and includes more than 100 organizations and individuals working in early childhood, emergencies and other related fields.

The purpose of the EEWG is to analyze and synthesize information gathered from research, case studies, successful practices and tools from the fields of Early Childhood (EC) and Emergencies and to use this information to:

- Develop tools and publications and to disseminate this information for use by global actors and stakeholders in EC and Emergencies
- Advocate for improved investments, policies, and commitment to action related to young children in Emergency and Transition situations
- Inform the current gap in understanding that EC programming in Emergency situations needs to include the diverse needs of children in each phase of the emergency, transition and normalcy
- Inform capacity development of EC and Emergencies’ stakeholders to effectively act for children in these settings

Noteworthy Practices: Early Childhood Development in Emergencies was compiled by Lisa Long, Early Childhood Development Consultant in consultation with EEWG experts, and the Noteworthy Practices presented in the paper were chosen by an EEWG team after review of “best practices” which were nominated by the broader EEWG membership. Nominations were requested which:

- involved any part of or the entire continuum of preparation to recovery
- targeted a specific age group within early childhood or the entire span of 0-8 years
- involved strong collaboration with sectors such as education, health, nutrition, WASH and/or child protection
- were widespread and demonstrated in many cultures and contexts or were quite specifically adapted to a particular situation
- had a good evaluation or represented innovative thinking and broke new ground for children
OVER 42 MILLION MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN around the world were displaced by natural disasters in 2010, forced to leave their homes and cope with all of the challenges caused by sudden emergencies. A review of data from the last few decades shows that, around the globe, the number of natural disasters is growing each year and is expected to continue growing due to climate change.¹

Over 16 million children around the world in 2009 lost one or both parents to AIDS; almost 15 million of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa. The number of orphans and vulnerable children in an ongoing emergency is expected to grow as HIV incidence rates increase.² These children face daily challenges on their own.

Young children are extremely vulnerable in emergency situations. In a field which typically focuses on the three pillars of humanitarian assistance—food, water, and health—individuals working in emergencies often see a need to do more. They want to do more for very young children and their families, and they seek real-life examples of successful programming that can be adapted and put to use in their own contexts. *Noteworthy Practices: Early Childhood Development in Emergencies* presents practices of note from the Philippines, Kyrgyzstan, and Swaziland with examples from practitioners who have worked with young children and are now well placed to share lessons learned, challenges, and success stories with others working in disaster risk reduction and emergency planning and response.
THE PHILIPPINES was named among the top three countries with the highest risk of disaster in the world by The World Risk Report 20113 and Plan Philippines has been providing disaster-related services there since 2001. Plan Philippine’s story of emergency response in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) began a fresh chapter in 2009 with an unsettling observation. A Plan Philippines emergency response staff person was working in an evacuation centre where a different emergency response organization was distributing food items to victims of Typhoon Ondoy. As Plan Philippine’s newly hired ECCD advisor, she was especially keen to take note of where and how young children were spending their time after the emergency, as well as who was caring for them. On this particular day, she observed adults queuing in line for the food being distributed in the evacuation centre, and she noticed that some women and men were holding their young children with them and trying as best they could to care for their little ones while waiting in the long distribution line. The advisor realised that many of these young children did not have anywhere else to safely stay while their parents or caregivers stood in line waiting to receive their rations. But she also observed some adults with children whose behaviour made her fear that the children were being forced to wait in line so that their adult companions would receive deferential treatment and a place toward the front of the queue (since they were with young children). Whatever the case, in both situations, after long periods of waiting in line, the result was a frustrated adult with a bored, unhappy child. The advisor saw a great need for emergency response organizations to do more for young children in disasters and emergencies. She reviewed existing policies around emergency response and immediately began making suggestions for how the response system could be improved to better support young children and their parents/caregivers.

Noteworthy Practice: Take stock of where you are.

In consultation with the ECCD Council of the Philippines and UNICEF, the agreed first step was to take stock of what global and Filipino research says about supporting young children in emergencies. There was also great interest in finding out the status and capacity of existing early childhood programmes serving young children, in order to respond to any gaps or weaknesses that might be found through the capacity...
Noteworthy Practice: Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) in Disasters was developed by a team from De La Salle University and validated by the Philippines National ECCD Technical Committee. It has been pretested in three different communities and contexts in the Philippines (rural, urban, and conflict affected) and is ready for use by community-based groups supporting local ECCD programmes. The goal of the tool is to assess the community’s capacity to deliver ECCD programmes and services before, during, and after disasters and/or armed conflict. Over time, the capacity assessment tool will map out existing ECCD services and capacity of service providers, parents, children, and community members to provide ECCD services before, during, and after emergency situations in every village of the Philippines. The information from this mapping exercise will then provide a baseline from which the ECCD Council can develop a strategy on how to strengthen emergency preparedness for ECCD in communities across the Philippines. The results from the assessment tool will also become the basis for a set of ECCD policy recommendations to national and local government units.

The instrument is meant to be self-administered and to guide facilitation of capacity assessment discussions between and among stakeholders and service providers in three sectors of ECCD: (1) health and nutrition, (2) education, and (3) social protection and other social services. The assessment tool is available in three different versions to accommodate English, Filipino, and Waray speakers. Each version is divided into three sections, one for each sector: health and nutrition; education; and social protection and other social services. Within each sector section, detailed questionnaires and checklists ask respondents (1) about their knowledge of laws relative to ECCD and disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM); (2) what specific programmes and services are delivered on a regular basis and which services are typically disrupted during times of disaster and/or armed conflict; and (3) for an inventory of resources available in the community which deliver programmes and services specific to each of the three sectors in DRRM. The education sector inventory also divides questions about resources into sections specific to preparation (those educational resources available prior to disaster and/or armed conflict situations), response, and recovery and development phases of an emergency.

Noteworthy Practice: After taking stock of where you are, address gaps and lessons learned.

Since 2007, the Philippines government had taken a great step forward for young children in emergencies by including the ECCD kits as part of their distribution list for humanitarian responses. While this was a significant addition for improving the daily experiences of young children in disasters, upon talking with those living and working in the disaster-affected areas, it was noted that the materials distributed were very heavy for community facilitators to use, especially in remote rural areas where children’s day care centres had been completely destroyed. Plan Philippines developed a lightweight, waterproof, mobile and culturally appropriate “Big Blue Bag.” Each and every item included in the bag was carefully selected, not only for its educational value for young children, but for its weight, so that early childhood educators (in most cases women) could easily carry the bag from one camp site to another as they worked with children displaced by natural disasters. Prior to its distribution, day care workers attended a one-day orientation on the proper use of the Big Blue Bag.

Even if their daycare centre had been destroyed and all teaching and play materials lost, early childhood educators in remote areas could welcome young children and continue to facilitate structured learning through play, with the help of the Big Blue Bag. Such early learning could take place immediately after a disaster wherever the children were located. This could be in safe spaces for children in evacuation centres or in any other designated place for young children within shelters, community centres, and so on.

Plan conducted an evaluation of the Big Blue Bag in 2012 which found that teachers appreciated both the training that came with the bag and the contents of the bag itself. Some recommendations were made to improve the bag, such as including local story books that depict Filipino culture and ensuring that safety measures are taken with some of the gross motor activity items, such as the skipping rope, parachute, foldable tunnel, and small air pump. Recommendations made to improve the bag have led to a joint effort between Plan and local governments, specifically the municipal social welfare and development departments, to address and tweak the Big Blue Bag as necessary to make it even better.
What’s in the Big Blue Bag?
• pocket chart
• black board (12” x 24”) with alphabet
• coloured chalk
• white chalk
• 6 cloth flip charts on colours; shapes; numbers; parts of the body; weather, days of the week, and months; and emotions
• skipping rope
• parachute play
• foldable tunnel
• inflatable balls
• small air pump
• hand bells
• maracas
• velcro flannel board
• 2 felt board stories
• alphabet hand puppets
• cloth masks on fruits and vegetables
• 10 story books
• garden tool set
• toolbox set
• doctor set
• teacups and utensils set
• small clay
• wooden puzzle
• plastic building blocks
• plastic nesting cups
• plastic shape sorter

Children’s Pack (20-30 children’s packs are included in each Big Blue Bag, depending on the number of children enrolled in the daycare centre)
• bag
• sketch pad
• colouring book
• 3 jumbo pencils
• 1 sharpener
• 8 crayons
• eraser
• toothbrush
• toothpaste

• soap
• face towel

Facilitator’s Pack
• small notebook with pen
• large marker
• name tag with ID holder
• small whistle
• round-tip scissors
• masking tape (to write children’s names on, to serve as their name tags)
• first aid kit
• small belt bag

Noteworthy Practice: Never underestimate the importance of play.

“Mommy, I will play first! [The] toys are beautiful!”—Reaction of young Annichah, a 3.5-year-old in the Philippines, to the new play and education materials distributed to her day care centre after an emergency.

Plan focused on the development and distribution of the Big Blue Bag and other ECCD materials because they recognise that play is critical to a child’s early growth and learning, across all developmental domains. Plan and other organizations working with young children advocate that activities for young children be centred around active play and interaction between children as well as interaction between children and adults. Parents, teachers, and others caring for young children should be supported to understand (1) the importance of being responsive and sensitive to the children’s needs; (2) ways to care for younger children; and (3) the critical role of play in children’s development and learning. Teachers of young children also need skills to guide children’s play when appropriate.¹

In times of crisis, play can serve as a safe way for children to practice and solve real-life problems. Children can experiment with new outcomes as they try to make sense of past events and the world around them. Through play, children attempt to reenact, and control, events without actual consequences from their play behaviour.² Play may also be helpful in
building a child’s feelings of inner control, self-worth, self-esteem, and trust.

**Noteworthy Practice: Be observant and use lessons learned to make ECCD programming even better.**

Tropical storm Washi swept across the Philippines in December 2011 with torrential rains resulting in flash floods and devastating mudslides. More than 1,000 people were killed and thousands more were left homeless. Due to overwhelming need, many communities had not received the ECCD Kits or Big Blue Bags, and Plan was very aware of the importance of getting children playing again to help reduce the stress of the disaster. They were especially keen to help children under six because they saw that these young children were not being included in the emergency education response plans for older children. Preschool play and educational materials which had been available were completely destroyed by the storm, and some daycare workers were victims themselves, losing loved ones and/or being displaced by the terrible floods and mudslides.

To address all of these critical needs, Plan quickly organised a workshop for daycare workers on how to make toys out of recycled and found materials. The workshop emphasised the importance of play for young children in emergencies and encouraged the daycare workers not to wait for the ECCD Kits or Big Blue Bags (which were in high demand) before resuming their educational activities with children. Tents were provided to teachers whose daycare centres had been completely destroyed. As expected, the teachers learned many new techniques for making toys from found and easily available materials, but several unexpected lessons emerged from the workshop as well.

While the purpose of the workshop was to make toys for play and psychosocial first aid for young children, *the workshop itself became psychosocial first aid for the daycare workers.* When they saw each other at the workshop, it was the first time most of the daycare workers had seen each other since the storm had ravaged their communities. Their eyes and hands were focused on the toys they were making, but quietly, stories were shared, tears fell, and laughter could even be heard. Teachers shared their personal experiences of their own tragedies or the loss of their young students and their families. They spoke of some of their fellow daycare workers who had not survived the storm. The teachers began to open up and share their own worries, fears, and hopes for the future. Even though it was not one of the workshop’s goals, the time the daycare workers spent together became an art therapy session. In this way the workshop provided critical care for the caregivers who are sometimes forgotten in the rush of emergency response. One workshop organiser observed that teachers may have shared their feelings and experiences so openly and willingly because they were provided the opportunity to do this in a way that was not imposed or forced on them. At the end of the workshop, one daycare worker said that she and her fellow teachers felt like they had had a vacation because, for a little while, they were able to focus on the positive activity of making toys for children rather than on the sad events and aftermath of the tropical storm.
Noteworthy Practice: Take advantage of global resources and adapt them for your context and culture

UNICEF provided an ECCD in Emergency training in Bangkok in 2011, introducing the UNICEF ECCD in Emergencies Kit as well as guidelines for facilitators and suggested activities for children. Plan Philippines worked with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to develop trainings for day care workers based on the UNICEF training and adapted for Filipino culture and contexts. Trainings using the adapted modules were conducted by DSWD in different communities across the Philippines as part of the pre-disaster preparedness efforts, and Plan Philippines hopes to include the training as part of their disaster preparedness plans internally and for partners.

Aileen Ceñido, day care worker in Saudi Village, Barangay Lunsad, shared her reaction to the ECCD training provided by Plan:

> As a day care worker, the seminars we attended on SNP (supervised neighbourhood play) and stress debriefing provided by Plan helped a lot and I learned a lot of things. And the ECCD materials provided will help a lot, especially when we conduct our sessions. During typhoon Ondoy, a lot of things were affected [such as] … the preschool education of the children in day care centres because the centres were destroyed with flood and trash [debris] entering the centres. The flood stayed longer and walls were destroyed as well. Before the centres were fixed, we waited before the water subsided and we’ve taken out all the trash [debris] inside. We cleaned it for almost a week with a lot of mud inside it. It took us almost a month before we were able to resume the sessions because the centres were not fixed right away. But with the help of our village captain and with the help of the parents in the community, our centre was rebuilt. And as soon as we were able to fix the centre, the children went back with lots of stories [to] share about the typhoon. And even now, children are so happy with the new toys inside the day care center. Children became okay again. And the children [who were] provided [with] counselling, it seems they were able to forget … the experience from that disaster.

Noteworthy Practice: Working at all levels (local, regional, national, and global) may be necessary in order to see the change you are working towards. Consider all levels when thinking of next steps.

Plan Philippines recognises that there is still much work to be done around raising awareness and lobbying for programming funds for ECCD in emergencies. Plan celebrates recent national government initiatives in this area, but hopes to increase ECCD in emergencies activities and actions on the part of local government units. Lobbying efforts are needed from the community level so that local government officials will understand ECCD in emergencies and recognise its importance for young children and their families. However, the Disaster Risk Reduction law is still quite new in the Philippines and many community stakeholders are not yet familiar with it, so advocating for something as specific as ECCD in emergencies may take time.

Another challenge faced by Plan Philippines, which can be common across settings, is changes in partnership staffing. Shifts within the Philippines ECCD Council resulted in a vacancy for the post with responsibility for the capacity assessment tool, thus delaying the capacity assessment work until a replacement was identified.

Additional next steps for ECCD in emergencies work in the Philippines include completing the baseline of information on ECCD in disaster risk reduction as a basis for policy development, and advising and facilitating the integration of comprehensive ECCD information into one capacity assessment tool across sectors, which is an ongoing initiative by the Philippines government.
KYRGYZSTAN is prone to natural and human-made disasters, and the districts of Batken and Leylek have been especially hard hit by natural disasters such as mudslides and earthquakes. Mudslides are the most common natural disaster occurring in Kyrgyzstan, followed by floods. Simple houses such as clay shelters have suddenly collapsed under heavy rain, leaving little chance of escape for those within. This vulnerability is compounded by a lack of knowledge and skills on safe behaviour and disaster risk reduction at the community level, especially among the most vulnerable population: children.

Although young children are among the most vulnerable in emergency situations, they are overlooked by many disaster risk reduction (DRR) interventions which target older children or their families. While it was obvious to UNICEF Kyrgyzstan that special care must be taken to protect preschoolers during times of chaos, they also wondered what could be done proactively to lessen the danger to young children by taking preventative measures before an emergency occurs. Recognizing that young children are naturally very curious and eager to learn more about the world around them, in 2011 UNICEF Kyrgyzstan designed a programme to capitalise on children’s keen ability to learn quickly and to memorise important safety messages and information. UNICEF also aimed to make changes in the public’s perception of young children so that they could be seen as capable of understanding emergency situations, able to act safely to protect themselves, and able to develop the skills needed to engage in safe behaviour. A special programme for young children was developed called “A Preschool Child’s Safety in Emergencies” to teach kindergartners how to behave safely in emergencies.

As natural disasters took their toll, safety issues needed to be addressed in the preschools. UNICEF Kyrgyzstan applied a systematic approach in disaster risk reduction with the goal of mainstreaming DRR in the field of education (from the policy to the preschool level, with a focus on both preparedness and risk reduction). UNICEF and the European Commission partnered to enhance the culture of safe behaviour through improved knowledge and skills of children in prevention of, response to, and recovery after an emergency. UNICEF began working with kindergartens to ensure safety in emergencies, with the hope
of scaling up the pilot project and replicating good practices in other regions of the country. The project was successful and replication is now planned for pilot municipalities in the south of Kyrgyzstan for 2012–2013.

These interventions for young children were part of UNICEF’s broader ECD programme which began by supporting local authorities to open community-based kindergartens in Batken and Leylek districts of Kyrgyzstan. Local authorities provided buildings for the kindergartens, supported building maintenance, and supported teachers’ salaries. UNICEF helped to equip the kindergartens with educational supplies and equipment for children 3 to 6 years of age. The kindergarten staff was trained in methods of interactive, child-friendly teaching of young children. Local authorities participated in trainings on how to open and sustain community based kindergartens, where new concepts of shorter school-day sessions were offered instead of traditional full-day kindergarten sessions.

**Noteworthy Practice: Work with children, parents, and teachers as active and effective agents of change in mitigating the negative effects of emergencies.**

UNICEF Kyrgyzstan believes that well-informed and motivated children have the ability to inform and teach their peers, family members, and others with whom they come in contact, sharing new knowledge in a way that is unique to children. Since skills acquired in childhood are often fixed firmly in one’s memory, the other advantage of training young children in what to do in an emergency is that such training ideally will stay with them for life, protecting them now and in the future. Children who are taught today will likely become well-informed mothers or fathers in the future, and will share their knowledge and experience with their own children and loved ones. UNICEF Kyrgyzstan is committed to talking with children about emergency situations and the ways to stay safe during natural disasters and other types of emergencies, and sees “A Preschool Child’s Safety in Emergencies” activities as an effective long-term investment.

The disaster risk reduction in preschool education project covers 11 school preparatory classes and 13 community-based kindergartens in Batken district (1,017 children) and 7 school preparatory classes and 7 community-based kindergartens in Leylek district (700 children). “A Preschool Child’s Safety in Emergencies” project began by developing learning materials for preschool children (books, posters, and colouring books). A series of training sessions was then held for parents, preschool staff, the Department of Local Self-Governance, and mentors. Simulation exercises were held for parents and children to give them the chance to put into action their new skills and knowledge learned during the trainings. Kindergartens were also provided with literature, training materials, and CDs about safe behaviour skills, emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction. Parents were involved through monthly parent meetings which included discussions on emergency preparedness and teaching parents safe behaviour skills in emergencies.

Reaching out to the larger community was an important goal of the project, and awareness raising in the community is done regularly. Parents across the community are informed about the importance of preparedness in various types of emergencies, and preschool employees claim that they regularly use their knowledge on disaster preparedness and child safety. Best practices in emergency preparedness from each preschool are highlighted and shared with other preschools through exchange visits and demonstration lessons.

UNICEF has already seen the impact of “A Preschool Child’s Safety in Emergencies” project. During recent mudslides it was noted that, due to the trainings and information sessions, parents are more confident in navigating an emergency. One mother of a kindergartner in Batken district said that when the mudslides occurred, she and her family waited safely on the hills behind their garden for the mud to go through their area. A young pupil from a different kindergarten in Batken district reported an incident during which he noticed boys playing with matches and then accidentally setting fire to straw which had been prepared for cattle. The kindergartner quickly responded to the situation, informed adults, and asked them to call the fire brigade. As a result of the safety skills the boy had been taught for various situations and emergencies, the fire was stopped before it caused serious damage.
In kindergarten and preparatory school, children, teachers, and parents continue to successfully practice their new knowledge and skills through games, such as simulation exercises for earthquakes, landslides, and fire emergencies. They practice evacuating students from kindergartens and debate topics such as traffic rules and “fire – our friend or foe?” Contests are held to see who remembers the most information on safe behaviour in emergencies, and children engage in role-play games to reinforce learning and provide practice for quick thinking and action in emergencies. As a result of these activities, teachers and children, as information carriers, disseminate their knowledge on safety in emergencies. Parents, preschool staff, and other stakeholders communicate with each other and exchange ideas and information on how to behave in a particular situation and successfully apply what they have learned in their everyday lives.

**Noteworthy Practice: All teaching and learning materials and methodologies used with preschool children must be developmentally and age appropriate.**

In Batken and Leylek kindergartens, the starting age of the children is only 3 years old. UNICEF Kyrgyzstan is committed to starting early by educating children on safe behaviour and practicing safety skills with preschoolers. This is the reason project developers decided to include in the training activities that capitalise on young children’s ability to learn by repetition and through fun, hands-on experiences. Teachers led children in emergency simulations, exercises which entailed a thorough drilling of behaviour models in different emergencies. These drills and simulation exercises were designed to give children the opportunity to practice what to do in an emergency so that they can act quickly and automatically if they are faced with an emergency in the future. A child’s behaviour during an earthquake or flood directly affects their chances of survival, the survival of their relatives, and the prospect of minimised damage. Children should have the information and knowledge on disaster risks as well as the ability to physically demonstrate safe behaviour skills and resilience in disasters, and be ready to spring into action and protect themselves in emergencies.

Since kindergarten teachers are the key to the project’s success, UNICEF Kyrgyzstan began by training preschool teachers for two days on “A Preschool Child’s Safety in Emergencies.” Their goals were to (1) increase teachers’ knowledge of the most typical and dangerous natural disaster and emergency situations in Kyrgyzstan and the rules of safe behaviour for adults and children; (2) share the suggested methodologies and didactic materials that are part of “A Preschool Child’s Safety in Emergencies”; and (3) teach and practice skills using the teaching and didactic materials aimed at promoting safe behaviour of children and adults in emergencies.

Participants discussed how to react during mudslides, avalanches, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and heavy rainfall along with practical issues in emergencies and daily life (such as street safety, safe behaviour with strangers, frostbite, poisonous insect bites when one is far from any type of medical care, etc.). Other topics covered in the training included:

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Since 2010, UNICEF has implemented the regional Disaster Risk Reduction –DRR- Programme in 7 countries in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan UNICEF objective is to build sustainable culture of safety of preschool children and to promote behavior change by improving children’s and teacher’s knowledge, skills and tools to effectively prevent, cope or recover from disasters. This pilot project was implemented in 20 kindergardens where UNICEF was already working with.
The trained teachers returned to their preschools and led the children in many educational activities to prepare them for safe behaviour in emergencies. Kindergartners engaged in art activities, such as drawing pictures of rescue efforts, and playing games with their peers and teachers to see how quickly they could answer questions about emergency preparedness and safety practices (such as which corner of one’s school or house is best for hiding in an emergency).

After their work with teachers through the “Preschool Child’s Safety in Emergencies” programme, children and teachers reported that their knowledge about how to act safely in an emergency had substantially expanded and deepened. Here a 6-year-old, Guljan, talks about her knowledge of mudslides:

*My name is Guljan. I am 6 years old. I know what a mudslide is: it pours water into houses, carries away goods from small shops and growls fearfully. Once I was at home with my parents. It started raining heavily, and then a mudslide got formed. I know that small children should not be in the street. It is dangerous to run hither and thither outside. One should avoid hiding in holes and try to climb a hill on the contrary.*

Her peer Aynagul also said that she has witnessed a mudslide in the past and now knows what to do to stay safe:

[Mudslides] can carry away sheep and small children. One needs to climb a hill when there is a mudslide. And during an earthquake, one should hide under a table or get out of the house. One should not stand under the trees and windows, as the buildings get destroyed. In case of a fire, one needs to run out into the street and ask adults for help.

Teachers also shared their recent experiences with emergencies. Nurgul, a kindergarten teacher from the village of Samarkandek, said her family could not escape from a flood which was almost five meters high. Nurgul’s two teenage nephews were killed in the flood; they were 16 and 14 years of age. Nurgul said:

*Before the training, I did not know how to react and what to do during a disaster. I remember myself during an earthquake: at that time I could not even move. We were lucky to have no casualties that time, but this time it was different…*

Since Nurgul has taken part in the UNICEF trainings on disaster risk mitigation, she reports a difference in her ability to act:

*I started better understanding my responsibility for children’s safety. I keep telling neighbours, parents, and friends that they should not allow children to get out of the house during rainfalls. I teach children that they should avoid hazardous places. Now children know how to behave in an emergency. I’ve noticed they start watching for upcoming storms: every time they see clouds, they run into the house immediately.*

UNICEF was confident that the young children who were part of the project would share the facts they had learned with their parents, brothers, and sisters. They also hoped to build the children’s confidence and instil the belief that they now know how to protect themselves when the next emergency occurs. Indeed, children began taking the safety lessons and emergency preparedness information home and teaching their parents what to do in emergencies. One mother reported:

*My daughters are 5 and 6 years of age, but they told me that during an earthquake one should hide one’s head and avoid standing close to buildings and trees. They said: ‘Mom, you should do it this way!’ They make their grandmother follow these rules, too.*

UNICEF also sought to reach a national audience of children...
by developing a series of ten Keremet Koch cartoons. Keremet Koch is an animated TV series aimed at young Kyrgyz children ages 3–6 years. Developed entirely within the country and with local talent, it is produced and aired through collaboration between the National Kyrgyz Television Corporation, UNICEF, the Soros Foundation, Aga Khan Foundation, and Asian Development Bank. It is televised daily throughout the country. UNICEF reports that since 2006, the main characters, Akylai and Aktan, have become two of the most popular and well-loved children’s heroes in Kyrgyzstan. A recent evaluation of Keremet Koch states that 98% of Kyrgyz 3- to 6-year-olds watch the programme and want to emulate the positive and prosocial behaviours of the main characters. Ten episodes on safety were broadcast nationally; they focused on the following types of disasters and emergencies:

- avalanche
- flood
- fire
- earthquake
- landslide
- mudflow
- storm
- road safety
- safety at home
- safe behaviour in public places

**Noteworthy Practice: Consider the context for children. What are potential risks young children face before, during, and after an emergency? How can these be addressed now, before the emergency occurs?**

A second reason why UNICEF Kyrgyzstan chose to focus on young children is because there was concern over the integrity of some of the buildings that housed young children’s preschools. UNICEF reports that in attempting to provide access to preschool education to as many children as possible, the state has not always succeeded in ensuring adequate safety of the kindergartens. The reason for this is the poor condition of old, heavily used buildings, as well as the large number of children attending preschool in one setting. Both of these factors make it extremely difficult for caregivers to ensure the safety of all of their young students in emergency situations.

In response to this concern, UNICEF surveyed 38 kindergarten buildings in Batken and Leylek districts to evaluate the actual and technical condition of the buildings regarding their seismic resistance, fire safety, and risks caused by natural disasters. The survey found these buildings to be extremely vulnerable in emergencies, with a number of deficiencies that need to be rectified immediately. Many kindergartens and preparatory classes have no fire extinguishers or evacuation plans. In some of the preschool buildings visited during the evaluation, uninsulated wires protruded, and some preschool staff reported that during cold temperatures, they were equipped with only cast-iron moveable wood stoves which were not shielded for children’s safety, and had their chimney outlets under roofs or roof timbers. The evaluation found there were no systems of water supply in any of the preschool buildings. In addition, almost all buildings failed to comply with modern seismic norms (SNiPs) and fire safety requirements.

The results of the evaluation were so disconcerting that in August 2011 the Kyrgyzstan government launched a nationwide school safety assessment project. This project seeks to assess nearly 3,000 educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan (2,120 schools and 863 preschools) with the goal of promoting and ensuring safety of education facilities for children against natural hazards. Recommendations will be provided with the final analytical report that will contribute to the development of, and lobbying for, a three-year national programme on school and preschool buildings’ capital rehabilitation, strengthening, and construction. A database of all schools and preschools will be developed to store completed assessment information, and after all assessments have been completed, a data analysis will be conducted for the final report. The final report will be part of the National Programme/Plan for school/ preschool safety and is expected to provide a general picture of the safety status of schools and preschools in Kyrgyzstan. It will include specific recommendations for the prioritization of certain school/preschool facilities for future retrofitting, repair, and/or reconstruction.
While assessing what needs to be done to improve kindergarten building safety, UNICEF has also paid close attention to the situation inside the kindergartens, and whether or not kindergartens are properly equipped to handle various emergency situations. To better prepare target kindergartens for possible emergencies, the preschools are now being supplied with necessary equipment to control fire and respond to other types of emergencies. First aid kits have been provided to all kindergartens and automatic fire alarm systems have been installed in half of the kindergartens in Batken and Leylek districts.

Preparedness plans were developed with each kindergarten and are regularly updated so that they are ready with appropriate procedures whenever an emergency occurs. Copies of each student’s personal file as well as official kindergarten office documents are kept in a mobile evacuation box in case they must be quickly removed from the building for safekeeping during an emergency evacuation. Preschools are regularly checked for compliance with standards of fire safety and emergency preparedness.

Reaching out to the wider community, school principals and preschool heads have issued orders to form civil protection commissions. Leylek and Batken district public administrations ordered a commission to be formed consisting of representatives from the Ministry of Education, District Education Department, Fire Department, and Department of Architecture to monitor preschools for compliance with standards of fire safety and emergency preparedness. Because Batken province is especially prone to natural disasters, a close relationship is maintained with the Ministry of Emergency Situations’ local Department on Civil Protection and the Department of Local Self-Governance, and reaction and evacuation plans are developed and in place.

**Noteworthy Practice: Be prepared to handle challenges and difficulties as best as possible, and adapt to new timelines as crises emerge and unexpected setbacks occur.**

In emergency contexts, sudden changes in plans are quite common due to unforeseen circumstances such as those brought about by natural disasters. Therefore, flexibility and the ability to adapt or change programme plans, may be necessary to make the most of difficult circumstances. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, UNICEF was forced to postpone the launch of their disaster risk reduction project for young children by several months due to the Osh tragedy in the south of the country, when all efforts, including those of UNICEF, were focused on providing urgent humanitarian assistance. Originally, the plan was to start the project on June 1, 2010. However, because of the unexpected events in Osh, UNICEF began the project instead in late September 2010.

The late start to the project meant there was less time than originally planned to design the training for “A Preschool Child’s Safety in Emergencies” and develop the necessary training materials on safe behaviour. Since every season of the year may have its own possible natural disaster emergencies in Kyrgyzstan, such as rainfalls that cause mudslides or melting snows that can cause avalanches, time was of the essence. Natural phenomena such as earthquakes can also take place at any moment in Kyrgyzstan. UNICEF agreed that there was an urgent need to get safety information out to children and their communities as quickly as possible so that they would be prepared, no matter the season or time of the year. They faced a tough new timeframe for the project: Instead of the original timeline of 18 months to implement all components, they had only 11 months due to the unexpected late project start.

Although the new timeline affected the development of the programmatic and methodological training design and visual aids for children, UNICEF was able to complete the materials development, testing, and improvement as quickly as possible. The unavoidable delay in completing the training design and materials in turn affected the start of trainings for teachers under the new programme, and training began more than one month later than planned. Consequently, teachers also had to expedite their activities to complete them before the end of the school year when children began their holidays. Despite these challenges, trainings were completed, knowledge was shared, and new practices were put in place. The ripple effects of “A Preschool Child’s Safety in Emergencies” among children,
parents, teachers, and community members are impressive, and continue to be felt today.

**Noteworthy Practice: Watch for and support the ripple effect of your work. Consider how you may positively affect other contexts, programming, and stakeholders.**

Other agencies, groups, and individuals working for children may take note of your work and express interest in replicating, adapting, or extending it in some way. This may take place at the local, regional, national, or global level. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, ripple effects were realised at several different levels.

After the trainings held as part of “A Preschool Child’s Safety in Emergencies,” many community members expressed their satisfaction with the project. Some residents were so impressed with the results that they expressed willingness to continue and extend the project’s activities on their own. A community teacher who received emergency preparedness information from her young daughters said:

> I am a teacher, and I think that schoolchildren should also be taught: workshops and trainings should be organised for them as well. I would like to use this manual to train schoolchildren. It is my plan to carry out a meeting with parents on this topic. Our people are good; they will support this idea. Together we will try to address the problem of safety.

Another resident spoke of the ripple effect of the trainings by saying:

> Before, we had no information and nobody explained or taught us how to avoid danger. Having become affected by a disaster, people started thinking about precautions. UNICEF has been helping us: delivering trainings and providing financial support to mitigate risks. We acquired very useful knowledge. We share them with each other whenever we meet in the street, at some gatherings, and even during celebrations. It is a very important experience. Every time, we change our attitudes and views. People start understanding the importance of precautions.

At the district level, as a result of the building safety monitoring, all secondary educational facilities in Leylek district were equipped with fire boards with fire prevention tools (fire extinguishers, spades, buckets, etc.), and the experience of the UNICEF Project on Disaster Preparedness was disseminated to all district secondary schools.

UNICEF also saw ripple effects at the national level when the Kyrgyzstan Ministry of Education and Science included in their curriculum for grades 1 through 6 students a programme called “Life Safety Basics.” The educational programme “Safety of Preschool Children in Emergencies,” developed within the UNICEF project framework, was also formally introduced to the preschool curriculum by the Kyrgyz Academy for Education.

Other national ripple effects which occurred due to the heightened interest around disaster risk mitigation generated by the trainings were UNICEF’s success in introducing DRM issues in the draft Education Development Strategy for 2012–2020 and influence in the national preschool education standards. Further, as described above, UNICEF supported the development of methodology for safety assessment in educational institutions to assess their safety, allowing engineers and school administrators to see the real picture of safety in all educational institutions across the entire country.

More attention is now given to preparation for emergencies in Kyrgyzstan, and risk mitigation measures are more commonly included in national policies. This has contributed towards creating a culture of safety and sustainability at all levels. The capacity of public bodies has been strengthened in terms of promoting and implementing disaster preparedness and risk mitigation programmes.

**Noteworthy Practice: In order to maintain and improve quality, take time to self-assess and make plans for building on...**
strengths and addressing weaknesses.
Think about your next steps.

UNICEF Kyrgyzstan does not expect the ripple effects of their work thus far to end anytime soon. Disaster risk reduction interventions in education may sometimes last for two to three years, with 15–18 months of a pilot project like UNICEF Kyrgyzstan’s serving as only the first step in raising awareness and improving children’s safety.

Further actions and next steps are planned in Kyrgyzstan to minimise threats to security and safety in the country as a whole. These include:

1. the creation of a joint Action Plan to further mainstream DRR in education, through the Education in Emergencies Action Plan, with the involvement of the Interdepartmental Committee on Civil Protection of the Kyrgyz Republic;
2. ensured inclusion of disaster risk reduction in national standards of education, including standards for training and retraining teachers;
3. ensured inclusion of fundamentals of health and safety in preschool, school, and other curricula along with the development of methodological recommendations and guides for each level and delivery of relevant trainings for teachers;
4. implementation of practical activities that can inform the population and strengthen their skills around safe behaviour in emergencies; and
5. disseminating the project’s experience across the country.

But perhaps the most important achievement to build on is the changed attitude among people who previously thought they could not confront their fate, and that there was no need to try and prevent what one had been destined to. As one 22-year-old said:

People say that if something is your fate, you can’t do anything about it, but now I am clear: our knowledge of safety rules can affect our fate. Better safe than sorry.
Case Study III: Swaziland

THERE ARE MANY different types of emergencies. While some are quite sudden, others are ongoing, taking their toll year after year. Protracted drought and an ongoing HIV and AIDS pandemic led to the formation of a noteworthy practice for children in Swaziland called neighbourhood care points, or NCPs. NCPs are ECCD centres which were established in Swaziland in 2003 to enable communities to provide care and food to orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) living within their neighbourhood. These centres of care helped ensure that OVCs were not removed from their communities into institutional care, but instead were given access to support and basic services within the neighbourhoods where they lived. Of the roughly 130,000 OVCs in Swaziland, about 50,000 children (53% girls) are supported by the 1,500 NCPs across the country. The need for immediate care and support for many needy children in Swaziland has outweighed the availability of child care facilities, so communities are asked to rally around and use locally available spaces and materials to implement the NCP programme.

Noteworthy Practice: Be creative in thinking of actions to support children in challenging, resource-poor environments.

NCP programme designers and community members were creative and resourceful, using what was available to serve children in need. Most NCPs started in places such as a neighbour’s home, a church, under a simple wall-less community structure with a roof, in a school, or even under a tree. As far as possible, communities identified locations which were accessible and close to the children who were most in need of the social services offered by NCPs. Communities then worked towards building temporary and permanent NCP structures to provide shelter for children on rainy days, for storage of materials, and to provide a space for cooking the hot meal which is provided to children each day. As funds became available and new partners offered resources, many communities have also added sanitation facilities to their solid NCP structures.
To mobilise local communities and resources around the launch and continuous support of NCPs, the initiative typically begins with a community meeting of traditional leaders. Leaders are asked to share their own hopes for the children in their community, along with their ideas on the type of programming for OVCs that will be most effective in their neighbourhood contexts. Next, the community leaders organise a community-wide meeting to discuss OVCs and gather everyone’s input on the best ways to support the most vulnerable children in their communities. This technique is used in hopes of building community ownership of the NCPs from the outset.¹²

NCPs ideally serve as a place where the most vulnerable children in a community may come to find emotional and physical care and support. NCPs were designed to provide the following services to OVCs:

- regular, balanced meals
- basic daytime shelter from rain, wind, and cold
- warm clothing
- first aid treatments
- teaching and storytelling activities to provide life skills
- play, drama, singing, and sports opportunities
- consciousness raising and protection from abuse and HIV infection
- gardening and keeping of small livestock
- non-formal and after-school education activities
- psychosocial support and counselling for children with special needs¹³

NCPs strive to provide a day care site for children under 7 from child-headed households so that the older children are free to attend school rather than watch younger, preschool-age children during the day. After school hours, some NCPs also welcome older siblings of attending children and, ideally, offer a regular meal and the same emotional support and encouragement that are given to younger children. These older siblings may in turn contribute to the organization and management of the NCPs by helping with chores, such as collecting water and firewood, helping with cooking and clean-up, supporting and caring for the younger children, etc., each according to his or her capacity.¹⁴ The typical size of the group attending an NCP can range from 40 to 80 children.¹⁵

NCPs are usually open on weekdays from 9 AM to 1 PM and have evolved to provide non-formal ECD activities, such as teaching and storytelling, the alphabet, vowels, identification of body parts, poems, dancing, writing, counting, and concepts such as respect and proper behaviour.¹⁶

Most NCPs offer at least one hot meal each weekday to enrolled children. Some also provide meals on weekends and during school holidays. A 2006 assessment of the NCPs found that the provision of food was seen as the most important activity offered by NCPs and also the primary motivator for children who regularly attend the NCPs. For some children it is their only meal of the day.¹⁷

Cooking and caring for the children is done by community volunteers who use vegetables from community gardens supplemented by food donated by the World Food Program. Teaching and learning materials are made from locally available materials and provided by the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), UNICEF, and other partners when funds allow.¹⁸ To the extent possible, NCPs rely on local capacity to meet their needs so that programming may continue, regardless of external funding support.

In contexts where resources are extremely limited, such as many of the communities where NCPs are located, the creative use of recycled and found materials is critical. In Early Childhood Development Guidelines for Emergencies,¹⁹ Christopher Cuninghame, Tina Hyder, and Donna Kesler provide useful activity ideas that do not require any materials, as well as lists of children’s toys which may be created locally using recycled and found materials. Although these guidelines were developed for the Balkans region, the following materials could be found in many contexts around the world. Materials should be chosen based on local culture as well as the gender, abilities, and ages of children served.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toys</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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| Natural and recycled materials:  
• shells  
• seeds  
• bottle tops  
• match boxes  
• stones  
• coconut shells  
• plastic bottles  
• cardboard boxes  
• pebbles  
• clay shapes  
• beads or sticks to sort by size, colour, and shape | Classification and supporting concepts of groups and categories, which is the building block to organizing and counting |
| Play objects, dolls, or materials for things that adults do, such as parenting, sweeping, gardening, or writing. Some activities may only require an adult with the time and interest to lead an imaginary game for children, without toys. | By imitating adults, children learn what adults do and start to establish their own identity. Children begin to explore concepts of right and wrong, social norms and customs, and how adults treat one another. Children may also reenact what they have seen and experienced during the emergency. |
| Objects for small and large muscle development:  
Small muscle:  
• paper for tearing into shapes or cutting  
• pencils and crayons for drawing and colouring  
• sticks for drawing in the earth  
• beads (of paper or clay) for stringing together  
• cups for pouring back and forth water, sand, gravel, or mud  
• simple sewing materials | Improves hand-eye coordination and overall body coordination. These skills will be practiced over and over again by young children and mastery of them will improve young children’s self-confidence and self-esteem, encourage independence, and give children courage to try new things. |
| Large muscle:  
• hoops and sticks for rolling  
• balls for kicking and throwing (can be cloth, wooden, or woven) or even tin cans for kicking  
• swings (from cloth hammocks or carrying slings)  
• climbing frames or sliding boards (from wood, tin, or bamboo) | |
Noteworthy Practice: Face challenges, seek help, and work with partners to address challenges as best as possible in difficult circumstances, rather than working alone.

NCPs across Swaziland have faced their share of challenges over the years. In each case highlighted below, challenges were met by working in partnership with others to analyse and agree on best next steps for moving forward.

Community mobilization is one of the challenges faced by NCPs. It has been difficult in some situations because of a failure to lay the necessary foundation of trust between communities and to create community ownership of NCP programming and interventions. In such cases, UNICEF has worked to remobilise the community by resensitising community members to the needs of OVCs and encouraging them to respond by taking action for vulnerable children in their neighbourhood.

Another challenge has been the high turnover rate of NCP caregivers. When an NCP is opened for the first time, community members are identified by local communities to act as caregivers of children in the NCPs. These caregivers are provided training in the following areas:

- general management of NCPs
- identifying and responding to children
- early childhood development
- psychosocial support
- basic facts on HIV and AIDS (including prevention information and improved home caring practices for treatment of illnesses)
- hygiene and sanitation practices
- children’s rights
- early identification of signs of sexual and other physical abuse
- trauma and loss
- food preparation and storage

Caregivers are then asked to train other potential caregivers in their communities. Ideally each NCP has two volunteer caregivers who identify two to four youth to work with them. All volunteer caregivers are selected and vetted by their neighbours and community leaders. However, NCP caregivers work long and busy hours, all on a voluntary basis, without any financial remuneration. Most caregivers live in poverty themselves and struggle to provide for their own households. To address this challenge, UNICEF has partnered with the government of Swaziland, civil society organizations, and community members to generate household-level income for the caregivers through livelihood support initiatives. In one region this is done by creating small caregiver savings and credit associations made up of caregivers’ small contributions to the association, which are then pooled together and loaned out to generate income from the interest on the loans. It is hoped that as caregivers are able to generate income from such livelihood support initiatives, their turnover rate within the NCPs will greatly decrease.

Another challenge faced by community leaders responsible for the NCPs has been identifying and selecting OVCs who will

Orphans and other vulnerable children queue at the UNICEF-sponsored Neighbourhood Care Point in the village of Mkhaya in Lobamba Region. A mother of one of the children has volunteered to distribute food supplied by the World Food Programme (WFP).
be invited to enrol in the NCP. In contexts where resources are limited and needs are great, it is extremely difficult to ensure fair targeting of resources for beneficiaries. UNICEF has raised awareness about this issue at the community level and encouraged local partners and community leaders to be involved in all programme procedures, since community members are in the best position to know which children are orphans who have lost one or both parents and are from destitute families. Great care must also be taken not to stigmatise the most vulnerable children identified.26

**Noteworthy Practice: Dream big for children: Start with what is possible and seek ways to build upon and enhance programming for children.**

NCPs have now become critical entry points for difficult-to-reach children. Community Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses teams work with NCPs in some communities to provide immunizations, micronutrients, growth monitoring, and other preventive health care services such as basic check-ups. The Ministry of Health reached almost 15,000 OVCs in 2005 through the NCPs.27 This accomplishment is in line with the goal of providing integrated service delivery to OVCs, in part by using the NCPs as a place where service providers can easily access a community’s most vulnerable children.

UNICEF also envisions NCPs acting as a place where rural water and sanitation workers can establish water points to ensure safe water for children and neighbouring homes; a place where agricultural extension workers can provide guidance on cultivating gardens and small livestock to enhance food security; and a place where education officials can support children who have slipped through the cracks of the formal education system. UNICEF also seeks to make NCPs a place where community and spiritual leaders may offer cultural and religious activities for children. UNICEF sees this vision as part of a “step-by-step movement towards the realization of children’s rights, under the very challenging and difficult conditions which have been created by the HIV and AIDS disaster in Africa.”28

Many NCPs started out primarily as soup kitchens, offering one meal per day to OVCs. Over time, it became clear that this was an opportunity to provide children with a systematic service since they were spending the entire day at the soup kitchens/centres. Caregivers were trained on how to work with young children and training is ongoing so that, as new caregivers join, they can learn the necessary skills for working with children as quickly as possible. A national five-year strategic plan was developed in 2010 for NCPs which seeks to completely transform the care points from feeding centres into comprehensive ECCD centres open to all children, linked with programmes funded by the Ministry of Education. This transformation includes integrating more formal ECD learning activities into the NCP’s daily routine and building permanent structures for attending children to use. UNICEF and its partners are working towards the goal of each NCP being equipped with ventilation-improved pit latrines; furniture, learning and teaching materials such as psychosocial support (PSS) kits, ECCD kits, books, and other materials. At the moment, an ECCD curriculum, early learning development standards (ELDS) document and a training manual are also being finalised in order to standardise the provision of the ECCD service in NCPs.29
(Endnotes)


8 The term *community-based kindergartens* (CbKs) evolved after 2004 as a result of the project on community-based ECD projects launched under the presidential administration. The CbKs were initiated by—and for some time sustained mainly by —communities, but soon were included in the overall system as stipulated in the 2009 Law on Preschool Education.

9 In April 2010, violent protests erupted in Bishkek against the government. These resulted in at least 84 deaths, hundreds of people injured, and extensive damage to state and private buildings. The then president was forced to flee the country. An interim government made up of opposition political and civic leaders took power. In June 2010, persistent social tensions that had been on the rise in the south, where large ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities live side by side, climaxed in intense and targeted intercommunal violence over several days. Officially, over 400 people lost their lives (unofficially, about 2,000, mostly men), with more than 4,600 injured. Large-scale targeted destruction of public and private property, especially housing and businesses, occurred. Of a total previolence population of 1.2 million in Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces, it is estimated that nearly 400,000 were directly affected by the violence, with 75,000 refugees fleeing to neighbouring Uzbekistan (of whom 96% were women and children) and 300,000 people internally displaced. An estimated 400,000 children were directly or indirectly affected by the conflict. The events in the south caused a major humanitarian crisis in the area, along with dangerous regional, cross-border implications.


12 ibid.

13 UNICEF. (draft in progress) *Neighbourhood care points initiative (NCPs).* UNICEF Swaziland.

14 ibid.


16 UNICEF. (2009).

17 ibid.

18 UNICEF. (2009).


20 Ibid

ibid.

UNICEF. (2009).

UNICEF. (2009).

UNICEF. (2009).

UNICEF. (draft in progress).


UNICEF. (2009).

ibid.

UNICEF. (draft in progress).


UNICEF. (2009).