

A close-up photograph of two hands shaking. The hand on the left is darker-skinned and wears a black beaded bracelet. The hand on the right is lighter-skinned. The background is blurred, showing a person in a black t-shirt with a red logo and orange pants, and another person in a light-colored shirt, both with their arms outstretched.

**AFFECTED COMMUNITIES
IN THE DRIVING SEAT -**

**PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN
HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS**

1. MAIN DETAILS

Challenge owner: War Child Holland

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War Child Holland undertakes research and development to demonstrate the effectiveness of all our interventions. Our in-house R&D team is working to develop a holistic Care System made up of evidence-based intervention models. This Care System will increase access to integrated education, protection and psychosocial support for conflict-affected children and their communities. This challenge brief outlines and contributes to the development of one specific element of this Care System.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

“How can we better facilitate communities to drive the design and implementation of the responses to their safety and protection challenges?”

3. CURRENT CHALLENGE

A school crossing attendant is a familiar sight for people in Western Europe. An identified risk facing children crossing the road on their way to school is mitigated by placing an attendant at a busy crossing - thereby facilitating a safe passage.

There are multiple examples of **communities taking effective action to protect their children** around the world - not least in contexts of humanitarian crisis.

Some 41 million children currently live in contexts affected by armed conflict or natural disasters¹. **Protective mechanisms often break down in contexts of humanitarian crisis - leaving children disproportionately exposed to protection risks.** These risks include family separation, sexual abuse and exploitation and recruitment into or use by armed forces and groups, among many others².

Community-level support reaches large groups of children and is low-cost, sustainable and effective. Community-level actors are well placed to support families and children when problems come to light. Actors working on child protection in humanitarian contexts are therefore increasingly prioritising **community-driven** processes - learning from programmes that were developed and evaluated in development settings. Studies of these developmental approaches show that effective community-driven approaches take time to develop, as they follow community processes and time scales³.

¹ UNICEF, *Humanitarian Action for Children 2019*, retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/humanitarian-action-children-2019-overview>

² Wessells, M.G. (2009). *What Are We Learning About Protecting Children in the Community? An inter-agency review of the evidence on community-based child protection mechanisms in humanitarian and development settings.*

³ *Idem nr. 2*

Yet acute humanitarian needs require urgent responses. What's more, communities may be made up of people unfamiliar to one another because of displacement or have weakened social fabric due to a loss of trust resulting from armed conflict. External actors have therefore predominantly prioritised top-down approaches where the ownership, power and leadership of an intervention lays outside of the communities themselves. While agencies typically opt for a 'quick fix' due to the magnitude of the problems they face, **sustained effectiveness of child protection action only comes with a truly contextualised response - one driven by communities and embedded with their values, beliefs and social structures.**

Through this project **we take up the challenge to identify, develop and evaluate a standardised intervention** that can be adapted to meet various contexts in a structured way. The intervention **aims to improve the protection of children, facilitating a genuine community-driven process within the urgent complexity of humanitarian contexts.**

4. IMPACT GOAL

War Child Holland conducted a review of the literature, in partnership with Save the Children and Plan International, in order to collect available evidence on community-driven child protection initiatives. A Theory of Change drawing on the findings of the literature review was developed together with child protection practitioners working in Africa and the Middle East.

A draft outline of a potential intervention was also developed during this process. This draft outline was further developed into a zero-draft intervention manual in which a first test was conducted in Sri Lanka. The planned steps to complete this work will comprise an adaptation of the intervention based on the results of the test in Sri Lanka; a pilot of the feasibility of the intervention; and an evaluation of its effectiveness.

The evaluation of the intervention will ideally take place in various humanitarian settings in order to assess its effectiveness across differing contexts. Collaboration with DRA partners in this process will enable replication of the evaluation in broad contexts.

Both the standardised intervention and contextualisation process, when positively tested, will allow for replicability and scale-up of the approach by other humanitarian actors. This will allow for significant increase in the numbers of children reached. The intervention will be shared with DRA partners as well as other actors within the field of child protection in humanitarian action.

In humanitarian action the focus is often heavily placed on responding to people's needs. **This intervention will heavily (but not solely) focus on prevention - with the aim of reducing the number of children experiencing violations of their safety and protection.**

5. ASSUMPTIONS MADE

- In contrast to the quick fixes currently used in humanitarian settings, **the community-driven intervention contributes to sustainable social norm change as lasting change** is started and fuelled from within the community.
- Community processes can be facilitated and facilitators of a community-driven process identified and trained to take a reflective and empathetic approach in which deep listening, asking questions and non-judgemental attitudes are key.

- A relatively stable context can be identified to test the new approach thoroughly prior to sharing it widely in the sector.
- The aid dependency that is created in some humanitarian settings does not prevent acceptance of community-driven action.
- Basic humanitarian needs are met in the first humanitarian response phase before undertaking a community-driven approach.

6. RISKS IN PURSUING THIS CHALLENGE

- Funding prioritising short-term needs and immediate outputs prevents a people-led and community-driven approach from being developed.
- Open discussions in communities can be perceived as political organization in highly politicized settings, potentially placing people at risk in a community-driven approach.
- Unstable context leading to movement of people will take away the social stability that is a vital component of community-driven action.
- Differences between population groups, based on characteristics such as ethnicity, religion and class, may negatively influence trust between people and their willingness to organise joint action.

7. NEXT STEPS

We are looking for your expertise in the following areas:

- **Facilitation of 'out of the box' thinking.** Establishing sustainable social change is a challenge in itself - and an intervention that tries to achieve sustainable social change can be strengthened by innovative ideas and 'out of the box' thinking with a team of child protection practitioners and other relevant actors. This will be most effective when facilitated by someone with relevant change management expertise.
- **Expertise in coach training in different cultural contexts.** In the current intervention model the coach plays a central role as he/she can facilitate the intervention in the community in a humble, non-directive and non-judgemental manner. To professionalise this position, we would like to bring in outside expertise to bring about improvement of the training programme.
- A low-cost method/process that can be used by and motivates communities in humanitarian settings to **translate information on maltreatment of children to a community-driven action plan.**

We would like to invite **actors working within and outside of the humanitarian sector** to share their expertise and jointly brainstorm on out of the box, scaleable that can be tested in unstable, humanitarian contexts. For parties to **indicate their interest the deadline is May 9.** Depending on availability of the interested parties, the brainstorm session is planned on 20, 21 or 22 May, 3-5pm, at the War Child office in Amsterdam.