



The Essential Role of Community Volunteers within Humanitarian Responses

Child Protection actors must invest in the child protection workforce, including community volunteers, in order to respond effectively to children and families affected by crises.

Child protection actors in humanitarian and development settings have long recognized the role of communities in assisting children affected by violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, and family separation. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the reliance on community volunteers in particular, as NGO access was severely limited with lockdowns and movement restrictions implemented across the globe. With a deeper recognition of their essential roles and continuous support to children and families, child protection actors must collectively invest more in community volunteers.

Volunteers are a Critical Bridge



Research¹ led by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action in 2020 has shown that volunteers are a critical bridge extending support between child protection actors and children and families affected by crises. Yet, all too often, community volunteers are not fully acknowledged. In order to better serve children, child protection actors must recognize community volunteers' vital roles and dignity. It is critical to invest in and support community volunteers as essential members of the child protection workforce and to ensure they are part of a team that includes trained caseworkers.

¹ Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, (2021). Community volunteers and their role in case management processes in humanitarian contexts: A comparative study of research and practice.



A Volunteer in a Refugee Camp in Bangladesh

As a woman, I think it is a great achievement to work within my community, and prevent child marriages. I believe that these small achievements can bring a bigger change in my community.

Jannatul Ferdose

The research showed that investing in community volunteers, as essential members of Child Protection teams leads to better, more sustainable child protection responses.

Community Volunteer Involvement in Child Protection Responses Increases Impact

Community volunteers bring significant benefits for children, families, and the community. Volunteers enhance response services because they can easily identify children at risk and are present in the community to respond in a crisis. They have a deep understanding of local culture and systems, which allows them to mediate between service providers and families. Volunteers remain in a community and are able to promote long-term changes for the well-being of children.

Expectations on ‘Community Volunteers’ Formally Engaged by Child Protection Actors are too High

Community volunteers are often formally engaged to work in child protection programs. They are frequently expected to respond to child protection cases without adequate training, supervision, or support to do the work effectively or safely. The research showed that ‘community volunteers’, some of whom are provided a limited incentive, are often expected to work long hours, leaving little time to meet their own economic or family needs. The evidence suggests that this situation is not sustainable and can affect the safety and well-being of the volunteers and ultimately the children and families they serve.

Ingredients for Quality Programming

Community volunteers play a vital role but work most effectively when the responsibilities placed on them are not too high and they work within a child protection team that includes trained caseworkers. Evidence from the Alliance research suggests that a team approach, is more effective and sustainable. The research showed the need to invest in developing caseworkers and community volunteers in their complimentary roles for more effective, ethical, and sustainable child protection responses.

It is essential that volunteers have realistic workloads and levels of responsibility and that ongoing training is aligned with their roles to serve their communities. In order to provide quality child protection responses, volunteers require consistent supervision, coaching and emotional support.



Policy Recommendations

Donors, Policymakers and UN Agencies Should:



1. Invest in the child protection workforce including community volunteers and caseworkers to respond effectively to children and families in humanitarian settings.



2. Promote safe and ethical standards for the roles and responsibilities of community volunteers. Case management is stressful, complex and sensitive work. If volunteers are engaged, it must be done with a careful balance of the potential risks and expectations. Appropriate support from more highly trained and employed caseworker is essential.



3. Affirm and foster the inclusion of community volunteers in child protection teams. Include them in program development, implementation, and evaluation by seeking volunteer input in donor-funded initiatives.



4. Fund quality training, supervision and coaching, and continued support for volunteers so that they can fulfill their important role within the wider child protection system.



5. Create career pathways for community volunteers into national qualification frameworks, so volunteers may become formal members of national child protection systems, contributing to the development of a sustainable workforce that should be part of child protection teams.

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