



Supporting children in child labour through child-friendly spaces in Myanmar

Photo: Plan International

This case study describes how child-friendly spaces provided holistic (prevention) activities and psychosocial support for children in child labour in Rakhine State, Myanmar.

Background

In Rakhine state in Myanmar, child-friendly spaces (CFS) were initiated in 2012 as safe spaces for play during violence and displacement. They have since evolved within a context of ongoing crisis into community outreach programmes which offer a broad range of activities for vulnerable children and their families. In locations where many girls and boys work – much of it in hazardous labour or hidden away in homes – adolescents have been under-served and difficult to engage where they faced heightened risks of trafficking, child and forced labour, early marriage, sexual exploitation, violence and abuse.

Key components of the CFS programme

In the camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) the CFS aimed to offer six key components to at-risk adolescents: opportunities for recreation; access to psychosocial support; awareness-raising; family-strengthening; vocational skills training; and life skills development.

1. Services and support for adolescents at risk of and in child labour

Free-play activities are play-based activities aimed to develop learning, emotional and physical skills, coping mechanisms, peer support, and psychosocial wellbeing, including creative, imaginative, communicative, physical and manipulative play.

- **Structured activities** are activities aimed at building communication skills, confidence, practical and motor skills, problem-solving, collaboration and concentration. They mostly target adolescents who have specific vulnerabilities, including those at risk of or in child labour. Their needs and interests are identified, and appropriate packages are based on their expressed and assessed needs, including one-to-one support at the CFS. Structured packaged sessions include the following:

- **Life Skills** target working and out-of-school children, are run by CFS animators and include both the “Living in Harmony” and “EXCEL” packages.
- **Living in Harmony** is a ten-session curriculum to promote self-awareness, core values, positive communication and empathy to prevent discrimination and exclusion. Each session is structured around activity, learning and reflection.
- **EXCEL (Extended and Continuous Education and Learning)** is a nine-month programme of flexible learning and life skills for children aged 10 to 17 years.
- **Adolescent Skill Building Package** is vocational skills training run by community development facilitators in collaboration with local business and trades people. It aims to develop practical work-based skills in vocations such as screen-printing, motorcycle repairs, crafts or boat-keeping. Upon completing the training, adolescents are supported to access apprenticeships or jobs, depending on their age.
- **Youth Bank** forms part of the vocational skills package and supports community savings and re-investment for young people.
- **Forum theatre** is run by Children’s Groups to identify key child protection concerns, present them to friends, family and community leaders, and develop different solutions and outcomes through dialogue. Solutions are documented, and community groups are supported to implement them.

2. Supporting parents and caregivers

- An engagement strategy for parents and caregivers was developed to overcome parental suspicions of the safe spaces and to promote adolescents’ participation in activities. This included the following:
- information-sharing and communication targeting parents and caregivers to promote transparency about CFS activities and objectives;
- consulting with parents and caregivers during activity design to increase their support for activities for adolescents.

Targeted parenting activities include:

- Modern Family Package – eight parenting sessions that offer parenting skills, guiding adolescents, stress management and relaxation techniques for caregivers as well as self-care, stress management, handling peer pressure and understanding parental difficulties for children.
- Family and Child Events focused on psychosocial wellbeing through games and creativity for the whole family.
- Child Protection Groups led by parents and caregivers. They share information with the community on services available at the CFS and engage in awareness-raising on preventing key child protection concerns.
- Regular community awareness-raising on child protection and child labour, among other relevant issues.
- Caring Environment is run by the community Child Protection Group and provides regular awareness sessions and practical support on developing a caring and safe environment for children, including prevention of child labour.

Successes

- Monitoring showed that parents/caregivers were increasingly using positive discipline, sending their children to school regularly, and reporting that it was helpful for decreasing stress and growing positive relationships with their children.
- Participation brought parents/caregivers closer together in playing, discussing and sharing emotions with their children, although previously they had thought it embarrassing and pointless to do so.

Challenges

- A lack of information-sharing about the CFS with the community hindered trust-building at the start of the programme.
- Retaining adolescents' engagement in some of the longer-term packages was challenging, particularly where children were in full-time work or contributed to household income. In consultation with adolescents, adaptations included more flexible scheduling, including evening and weekend classes, different modules with a slower pace, active community outreach and balancing young people's (future) needs and interests.

Lessons learned

- Actively engaging community-based structures in the camps and advocating with the government to provide safe spaces have both helped to foster stronger community-based approaches.
- A balanced mix is needed between vocational skills (which adolescents are particularly interested in and which help to retain their attendance), and psychosocial and life skills activities (which are understood by facilitators to help with psychosocial wellbeing, protection, emotional and behavioural support).
- Providing structured packages and activities allows changes in children's lives to be more effectively monitored.
- Building the psychosocial skills of children and parents/caregivers through joint recreation increased attendance and family cohesiveness.
- Initially, using consultant trainers/community-based organisations to deliver vocational training was often expensive, of poor quality and unsustainable. As funding shrank, the programme changed to work closely with local businesspeople to provide more sustainable options for the community and the government.
- Where NGOs are unable to provide certain supports, some young people participating in vocational training and "youth banks", have earned and saved money through the sale of goods and services. They have then used that money to provide support to vulnerable community members in need as well as to reinvest back into skills training and youth activities.
- Human resources policies should have been reviewed earlier to reduce staff turnover and provide better support and incentives for staff.
- A focus on IDP communities and camps has left some communities not displaced but isolated and with heightened needs. Transparency and information-sharing were needed across both communities.

Resources

- ◇ The guide to community-based Extended and Continuous Education and Learning (EXCEL) can also be downloaded from <http://www.themimu.info/search/document?search=excel>

More information and resources are available at:

<https://alliancecpha.org>

<https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-hub/child-labour-task-force>