

Protection Sector Update

OCTOBER 2013

SECTOR OVERVIEW

Natural disasters and conflict often exacerbate the vulnerability of individuals, requiring people to cope with additional threats that include sexual violence, theft, exploitative labor, and exclusion from life-saving humanitarian assistance. In response, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) is at the forefront of the humanitarian community's efforts to protect conflict- and disaster-affected communities by funding activities that mitigate these dangers. While working to minimize and respond to specific risks, USAID/OFDA requires partners to "mainstream" protection—an approach to ensure the safety of those receiving emergency relief aid—in all humanitarian assistance programs.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, USAID/OFDA provided nearly \$32.5 million to support stand-alone protection programs, including nearly \$9 million to 11 U.N. agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for global protection initiatives and approximately \$23.5 million to 20 U.N. agencies and NGOs for local protection activities in 17 countries. Worldwide, these programs have supported more than 36 million people, providing services for child protection, psychosocial support, prevention of and response to gender-based violence (GBV), and coordination of and advocacy for protection activities.

HELPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES DURING ARMED CONFLICT IN MALI

Beginning in March 2012, violence and insecurity prompted hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes in northern Mali, placing women and children at risk of sexual violence and recruitment by armed groups. Since French armed forces began assisting the Malian military intervention in January 2013, ongoing displacement and insecurity—including suicide bombings and sporadic fighting—have underscored the impact that conflict continues to have on civilians living in northern and central Mali. To reduce the vulnerability of children and families in Mali's Gao and Mopti regions, one USAID/OFDA



A young girl carries her sibling in an IDP camp near Somalia's capital city of Mogadishu.
[Courtesy of the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF)]

partner is establishing community-based centers that identify and assist vulnerable children and support children who remain separated from their families or were recruited by armed groups. Through this partner, USAID/OFDA is also providing services and support to women and girls affected by GBV, as well as psychosocial assistance for individuals of all ages who have experienced violence or abuse.

PREVENTING GBV AND SUPPORTING SURVIVORS IN SOMALI IDP CAMPS

In Somalia's internally displaced person (IDP) camps, women and girls often face the threat of GBV; the U.N. reports that at least 1,700 women in Somali IDP camps were victims of rape in 2012. Services for GBV survivors are extremely limited in these camps; high cost for transportation to services, gaps in appropriate medicines and supplies, and scarcity of female medical staff limit victims' access to care. In addition, a significant number of survivors do not seek GBV support where services exist due to cultural stigma, social blame, and fear of retaliation. Through five implementing partners, USAID/OFDA is providing accessible medical services and psychosocial support to survivors while simultaneously working to prevent GBV by increasing the

physical safety of IDPs and addressing the cultural norms that legitimize sexual violence. In addition, one USAID/OFDA partner is training teachers to facilitate dialogues regarding GBV and gender norms, as well as strengthening female-led groups that advocate for vulnerable women and girls in IDP communities. Across Somalia, USAID/OFDA partners are providing protection support and services for more than 400,000 IDPs.

PROTECTING SYRIAN CHILDREN

Conflict has affected more than 3.1 million children living in Syria, constituting approximately 46 percent of the 6.8 million people in the country affected by ongoing clashes between the Syrian Arab Republic Government and non-state armed forces. Although escalated conflict and sudden population displacement in Syria has limited access to communities in need of humanitarian assistance, USAID/OFDA partners continue to reach children through child-friendly spaces, informal education activities, and other supervised safe areas that facilitate psychosocial support, as well as child health interventions. For example, one USAID/OFDA partner is supporting multiple spaces in northern Syria that provide children with safe areas to play and engage in learning activities, as well as receive access to safe drinking water and sanitation services. In addition to protection activities that keep families united and reduce the risk of child recruitment and abuse, USAID/OFDA is ensuring that implementing partners mitigate the risk of harm, abuse, and exploitation of vulnerable populations while delivering blankets, clothing, and essential household items to families in the worst-affected areas of Syria.



Children receive humanitarian assistance following flooding in a central Afghanistan province. (Courtesy of the International Organization for Migration)

IMPROVING SAFETY AND CARE OF CHILDREN IN AFGHANISTAN

Malnutrition increases the risk of disease and emotional distress among affected children and can result in permanent physical and cognitive damage. Disasters often exacerbate these risks while displacing populations and leading to increased malnutrition. To prevent food insecurity in seven of Afghanistan's northern and central provinces, USAID/OFDA partner Save the Children (SC/US) aims to improve the protection of vulnerable children in highly food-insecure environments. SC/US educates families and government officials on care of children during food crises, including information on unsafe practices and strategies for coping positively. To ensure that child protection is mainstreamed in disaster risk reduction programs, USAID/OFDA and SC/US help strengthen the disaster response and management capacity of communities, civil society organizations, and key government authorities. SC/US efforts are meeting children's

protection needs during disasters by helping communities map potential hazards, improving emergency preparedness planning, and training community members in search-and-rescue techniques and first aid.

INVESTING IN GLOBAL INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE PROTECTION

During FY 2013, USAID/OFDA continued to support global research, advocacy, and training initiatives that enhance the capacity of humanitarian actors to protect conflict- and disaster-affected populations. Through partner Terre des Hommes, USAID/OFDA is supporting the implementation of the *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, which aims to improve the quality, predictability, and accountability of child protection responses in humanitarian situations. Relief agencies and aid workers use the standards to better understand multi-sector responses to disasters and the importance of protection mainstreaming, ensuring that effective protection measures remain central to humanitarian operations around the world.