

UNICEF'S CORE COMMITMENTS FOR CHILDREN IN EMERGENCIES



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UNICEF's support for behaviour change communication in emergencies is guided by the Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies (CCC), which provide the overarching organisational framework for a humanitarian response.¹

Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies

UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies are not merely a mission statement - they are a humanitarian imperative - in health and nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, protection, education, HIV/AIDS and programme communication or behaviour change communication. Emergencies particularly in South Asia have grown increasingly complex, and their impact is especially devastating on the most vulnerable. In the midst of these crises, children and women are not only incidental victims, but increasingly are often targets of wilful violence and abuse. In many cases, they are denied access to basic services and essential relief supplies. The CCC provides a framework from which to work with partners from the government, United Nations and non-governmental sectors.

The commitments outline UNICEF's role in providing protection and assistance to children and women. They make a clear distinction between life-saving interventions, which should be carried out immediately - within the first six to eight weeks of any

The two fundamental tenets supporting all UNICEF operations are:

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child, and
- A commitment to a human-rights based approach to programming.

crisis - and the broader spectrum of essential activities that may be added beyond the initial response. Although this distinction is clear for sudden onset emergencies, the logic of the CCC should apply to all humanitarian crises: focus first on interventions proven to be essential for immediate survival and protection.

UNICEF adheres to the following key principles in fulfilling its Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies:

- Children in the midst of armed conflict and natural disasters such as droughts, floods and earthquakes have the same needs and rights as children in stable conditions.
- UNICEF's response will recognise the priority of humanitarian action while assuring safe access to affected populations, and the safety and security of staff and assets.
- The emergency response will build on existing activities and partnerships developed through the country programme of cooperation.
- The response will be based on nationally defined priorities and UNICEF's comparative advantage.

Behaviour change communication plays an essential, albeit often neglected, part in any emergency. In the past, many emergency responses in South Asia tended to focus on providing supplies and setting up services. Little attention was paid to addressing risky practices, poor habits and communication needs based on the existing knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices of the affected individuals and families. Also insufficiently addressed was creating awareness and demand for emergency supplies, services and assistance among affected families and communities.

Experiences from the tsunami response in South Asia showed that communication preparedness for emergencies, risk communication and behaviour change communication (BCC) initiatives that benefit affected individuals and communities were not always adequately given importance, funding, and thus were not coordinated, planned, managed or monitored well. Fulfilling the Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies, however, requires that BCC initiatives become an integral part of preparing and responding to emergencies.

The following section offers you an overview of the basic communication related principles to help you prepare for and respond to in an emergency. It outlines the essential steps you need to take in developing a rapid communication action plan. It points out some issues you need to consider when designing appropriate communication messages and channels with the affected communities during emergencies.