



Case Study on Narrowing the Gaps for Equity

China

Child Friendly Spaces in post-disaster settings and impoverished communities

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ABSTRACT

Responding to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, UNICEF-China and government partners established forty Child Friendly Spaces (CFS): safe, protective, colorful environments in which earthquake-affected children could receive child welfare, protection, psychosocial and other support services. The success of the post-disaster Child Friendly Spaces prompted expansion of the programme into impoverished communities in five provinces, where vulnerable children are often unable to obtain equal access to the limited services available through China's nascent child welfare system. Adapting to the needs of these communities, these Child Friendly Spaces augment the global UNICEF CFS model with micro-child protection systems that integrate case management, referral, early detection and other services. Child Friendly Spaces are helping to alleviate disparate access to public social services for vulnerable children in these communities.

BACKGROUND

The 8.0 earthquake that devastated Sichuan province in May 2008 caused 88,000 deaths and 400,000 injuries. In the aftermath, five million people were homeless.

Together with the National Working Committee for Children and Women (NWCCW) and the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), UNICEF-China undertook assessments to determine the needs of earthquake-affected children, both in the immediate and longer terms. Thereafter, UNICEF-China and NWCCW established forty Child Friendly Spaces to serve as community-based child protection centers, to deliver support services, and to provide a safe place for earthquake-affected children to recover from life-changing circumstances, such as the loss of a parent or the collapse of a family home.

The implementation model was both successful and sustainable, and local governments have now taken over funding for continued operation of thirty-six of the Child Friendly Spaces. The model has also proved adaptable. Child Friendly Spaces have now been established in impoverished communities in five provinces to fill the gaps left by China's nascent child welfare system.

Impoverished communities in China tend to lack equal access to community-based child welfare, protection and early childhood development services for many reasons, including: too few social workers qualified to work with children; a lack of multi-sectoral cooperation to intervene on behalf of vulnerable children and their families; and low awareness about, and capacity to respond to, child protection concerns among government officials and key professionals, like teachers and health care providers. As a result, significant gaps in social safety nets exist for vulnerable children, a situation exacerbated by disasters like the Sichuan earthquake.

Child Friendly Spaces in these impoverished communities responded to the needs of vulnerable children by providing, in addition to child welfare and child protection services, basic health information, early childhood development services, early detection of disabilities, access to social worker, case management, referral services, and non-formal education. By introducing a micro-level child protection system, with integrated social work, early detection and referral services, the Child Friendly Spaces have expanded on the global CFS model to promote equal access to public services for vulnerable children in China.

STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

Programme objective. The goal of the Child Friendly Spaces programme in China is to provide a safe, protective space, and to support delivery of child welfare, protection, psychosocial, and other support services for disadvantaged children made vulnerable by disasters, poverty, social, economic and other factors.

Equity focus. The establishment of Child Friendly Spaces fills an important gap. In earthquake-affected areas, as well as impoverished urban and rural communities, children lack equal access to rights-based child welfare, child protection, and early childhood development services. By providing free service at easily located and accessible centres, Child Friendly Spaces help vulnerable and disadvantaged children access community-based public services.

Evidence-based advocacy. Piloting Child Friendly Spaces in Sichuan after the earthquake generated evidence to support advocacy to adapt and institutionalize the CFS model for purposes of providing community-based child protection services. Lessons learned on delivery of social work services to children at Child Friendly Spaces are also informing the development of a national social work plan to support an expansion of the social work profession in China.

Capacity building. UNICEF-China supported establishment of professional teams on social work, early childhood development, monitoring and evaluation, communication, and management support to build the capacities of the staff at Child Friendly Spaces to operate and sustain the programme. Workshops and onsite support introduced international best practices. The result is that thirty-six of the forty post-disaster Child Friendly Spaces are now self-funded and self-sustaining.

PROGRESS & RESULTS

Building back better to improve access to services and resource allocation. Through Child Friendly Spaces, more than 270,000 earthquake-affected children and their families, primarily living in rural areas lacking equal access to public services, were able to access child welfare, child protection, psychosocial and other support services. On May 30, 2011, local Sichuan governments took responsibility for funding, operations and management of the Child Friendly Spaces; UNICEF-China provides ongoing technical support. These Child Friendly Spaces continue to serve tens of thousands of children. The work that UNICEF-China and its partners have done to establish and sustain Child Friendly Spaces has demonstrated that “building back better” is possible for child protection services, even in hard-to-reach rural areas.

System enhancement and strengthening. Child Friendly Spaces has contributed to strengthening China’s policy framework for children. The 10-Year National Plan of Action for Children (2011-2020) (NPA-Children) cites Child Friendly Spaces as a model for delivery of community-based child protection services that is suitable for replication on a national scale. The NPA-Children calls for “[o]ne Children’s Place [to] be established to provide play, recreational, educational, health, psycho-social support and referral services for children in over 90 per cent of urban and rural communities.” In addition, the NPA-Children mandates that local governments establish a post for a children’s social worker in each township in China.

Greater demand and participation. Child Friendly Spaces engaged children, parents and communities. UNICEF-China helped build the capacity of CFS staff to foster active and meaningful participation by children, and children’s feedback guided development of the activity programme. Through workshops on child protection services and the rights of children, Child Friendly Spaces supported awareness raising and behaviour change among parents to enrich their child-rearing practices, and to contribute to improved attitudes about child protection issues in communities. This involvement by children, parents and communities supports the sustainability of the Child Friendly Spaces by raising awareness about the importance of, and creating demand for, the services provided.

Increased capacity and sustainability. UNICEF-China and NWCCW have documented the Child Friendly Spaces programme through a manual on operation of Child Friendly Spaces in emergencies and in impoverished communities. NWCCW has replicated the CFS model to establish Child Friendly Spaces in

Central and Eastern China that serve migrant children, and children whose parents have left them behind (typically with relatives) when they migrate to find work.

CHALLENGES

UNICEF-China encountered three major challenges in establishing Child Friendly Spaces. First, China's size and scale complicate both the delivery of community-based child protection services and the mobilization of necessary resources. UNICEF-China worked in close partnership with NWCCW to manage these issues.

Second, the paucity of social workers qualified to work with children affects the quality of services children and their families can receive at Child Friendly Spaces. UNICEF-China focused on capacity development of CFS staff in order to facilitate delivery of high quality services at all Child Friendly Spaces.

Third, China's rural and urban areas are developing child protection services at varying rates, so Child Friendly Spaces must adapt their child protection focus according to the needs of each community. UNICEF-China has been providing continuing technical assistance to help with this process.

LESSONS LEARNED

Three lessons learned emerged from the experience of establishing Child Friendly Spaces. First, the strength of UNICEF-China's partnership with NWCCW was the single most important factor in the successful implementation and sustainable adoption of Child Friendly Spaces. The partnership facilitated effective coordination and communication among stakeholders, fostered a sense of ownership among stakeholders, and stimulated local initiative.

Second, establishment of volunteer Children's Committees and Parents' Committees galvanized participation by children and parents in Child Friendly Spaces. This engagement and community involvement was critical to the success and sustainability of Child Friendly Spaces.

Third, the integration of international best practices with local innovations and contextually appropriate practices supported effective, culturally-appropriate service delivery that met community needs.

INNOVATION

In China, Child Friendly Spaces evolved beyond the global model and became a vehicle for delivery of child protection and other support services to vulnerable children in impoverished rural and urban communities. UNICEF-China and NWCCW recognized in a timely way that Child Friendly Spaces, initially introduced as an on-the-ground emergency response measure, had potential to function as a key component of a community-based child welfare and protection system, and could serve as a location for delivery of psychosocial, early childhood development, early detection, referral and other support services. Communities that have long suffered limited and inequitable access to public services are now enjoying the tremendous child welfare and protection benefits generated by the CFS model. Official acknowledgment that Child Friendly Spaces have a role both in emergency response, and in child welfare and child protection for vulnerable children, appears in China's National Plan of Action for Children (2011-2020), in which the Government of China adopts the CFS model.

NEXT STEPS

UNICEF-China is working closely with NWCCW to support broad scale replication of the CFS model, including by marshalling government funding, and by increasing the child protection focus of the Child Friendly Spaces. Towards this end, UNICEF-China is currently engaged in comprehensive documentation of the best practices and lessons learned from the Sichuan disaster-response experience.

RELATED LINKS*

[Refer to internet-based resources that provide additional information relevant to the initiative's history, development or outcomes.]

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/indepth/2012-05/11/c_131582519.htm (Xinhua News Feature story for reference)

**All titles are hyperlinked to their respective web-based files.*

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