

Advocacy and Campaigning

15 Humanitarian advocacy

Keywords: humanitarian, emergency, conflict, protection, humanitarian principles, humanitarian space, cluster system, international humanitarian law (IHL)

Duration: 3 hours



Introduction

Save the Children combines operational humanitarian response with communication and advocacy. This integrated approach increases our capacity to have a lasting effect on the lives of children. Humanitarian advocacy increases our impact for children in humanitarian crises, improving the effectiveness of the overall humanitarian response and addressing problems which programs alone cannot tackle.

Learning Outcomes for this session

Knowledge and understanding

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

1. Understand what humanitarian advocacy is, why we do it and the key issues on which we typically advocate in humanitarian contexts.

Practical and professional skills

Develop and implement an advocacy strategy in a humanitarian situation.

2. Use humanitarian principles and international law as tools for humanitarian advocacy.
3. Navigate the humanitarian system in order to advocate effectively.

Duration: 3 hours

1 Humanitarian advocacy – what, why and when

What is humanitarian advocacy and why do we do it?

Humanitarian advocacy is one of the pillars of our overall humanitarian effort and a critical element in our ambition to be the leading humanitarian response agency for children.

The term ‘humanitarian advocacy’ encompasses not only advocacy in emergencies, but also advocacy conducted before and after crises and in situations of protracted vulnerability, suffering or conflict. In these situations we try to influence the policies and actions of local, national, regional and international institutions and actors so that they better address the unique challenges faced by children. This usually includes working to ensure that humanitarian responses are appropriate to children’s needs and rights, and that they respect humanitarian principles. It can also mean seeking to tackle some of the underlying causes of humanitarian suffering faced by children.

Advocacy is an essential pillar of Save the Children’s humanitarian response, because it:

- can lead to changes in policy or practice that can help many more children than we can reach through programme delivery alone
- holds duty-bearers to account for their responsibility to fulfil children’s rights in humanitarian contexts
- ensures that the voices of children and their families are heard and help influence decision makers in line with what children want and need.

As a leading humanitarian actor active in often hard-to-reach areas, we generally have access to information about the impact of crises on children and their families that others do not, including those in a position to improve conditions for children. As a well-known organisation, in the countries where we work and internationally, we also have a powerful voice that we can – and should – use for the benefit of children affected by crisis. When we don’t advocate, this sends its own signal: policy makers expect to hear from us on the major humanitarian crises, and if they don’t we risk giving the impression that we think no changes are needed.

Who does humanitarian advocacy?

Save the Children staff and partners carry out humanitarian advocacy at all levels – at the national level in programme and member countries, through regional offices, and at the international level through Save the Children members and the advocacy offices in Addis Ababa, Brussels, Geneva and New York.

Much of this work is conducted by people with ‘Advocacy’ in their job titles, but by no means all of it. In fact, a lot of our most effective advocacy in humanitarian contexts is done by programme staff who may not even think of themselves as advocates.

Let’s demystify humanitarian advocacy

You are probably already a humanitarian advocate.

If you...

...speak to people affected by crisis to understand their needs, identify what should happen to improve their situation and share this information with others

...brief donors on the humanitarian situation in the country or countries where you work, share your expertise with them and suggest ways of working

...participate in coordination meetings and try to get your points across, or

...share concerns and practical suggestions with your senior management for them to raise in external meetings

...then you’re already doing humanitarian advocacy!

The Humanitarian Advocacy Working Group (HAWG) brings together policy and advocacy representatives from Save the Children’s country and regional offices, members and advocacy offices in Addis Ababa, Brussels, Geneva and New York. The HAWG meets by telephone at least once a week and is the platform within Save the Children for ensuring coordination, coherence and increased impact across our membership.

In Category 1 or 2 (extraordinary and large) emergencies a dedicated advocacy manager should be included in the response team. In-country advocacy managers are crucial. They provide detailed information and analysis of the situation on the ground, develop advocacy messages and strategies, and manage all advocacy initiatives and liaison on behalf of Save the Children.

What are the key issues on which we advocate?

The aims of humanitarian advocacy vary from context to context, but there are some overarching themes that are common to different situations and that Save the Children considers as key issues. These include **humanitarian access and principles, funding, protection and coordination**. Clearly, this list is not exhaustive and priorities will depend on context and risk analysis at a country level.

Some sample objectives are:

- **Ensure respect for humanitarian principles, space and access:**
 - All children are able to access essential services and impartial humanitarian relief.
 - Donors and other actors do not jeopardise the humanitarian space necessary for independent and impartial humanitarian response.
 - All actors (including parties to conflict) protect and respect humanitarian activities, including staff and beneficiaries.
- **Ensure that civilians – especially children – are protected:**
 - Governments deliver their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), relevant UN Security Council resolutions, human rights and refugee law, and other international obligations; and all parties, including non-state armed groups, adhere to international humanitarian law (IHL).
 - Child protection and education are fully integrated throughout the response.
 - UN and regional peacekeeping missions include adequate capacity to prevent and respond to violations of children's rights.
 - Governments and partners provide coordinated assistance to children who are unaccompanied or separated as a result of armed conflict.
- **Ensure optimal functioning of the humanitarian system:**
 - Humanitarian coordination is effective in assessing and communicating needs and promoting predictability, quality, accountability, and independent and comprehensive humanitarian action.
 - Children's voices and expressed needs inform the humanitarian response.

- The humanitarian response meets internationally agreed standards (e.g. SPHERE, Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (<http://cpwg.net/minimum-standards/>), INEE Minimum Standards for education in emergencies (<http://www.ineesite.org/en/minimum-standards/handbook>), etc.).
- **Ensure adequate funding for the humanitarian response:**
 - There is sufficient funding to protect and support children, and child protection and education are funded to similar levels as other sectors.
 - Funding is appropriate to the context, including support for early recovery, preparedness and disaster risk reduction.
 - Funding is channelled through the most appropriate mechanisms and organisations with operational reach to quickly respond to affected populations.

Activity 1 (SAQ)

Read the case study below and, drawing on the description but also on your own knowledge and experience of this or other humanitarian contexts, identify some issues for which you think advocacy could add value. Focus your answers on the four sample objective areas above.

Bear in mind the reasons why we do humanitarian advocacy, including:

- to overcome practical constraints to our humanitarian operations;
- to change policy or practice in order to help more children than we can through programme delivery alone;
- to hold duty bearers to account for their responsibility to fulfil children's rights; and
- to ensure that the voices of children and their families are heard and help influence decision makers in line with what children want and need

Case study: The Philippines

On 8 November 2013, one of the most powerful storms ever recorded hit the Philippines. Typhoon Yolanda (known internationally as Haiyan) brought sustained wind speeds of up to 235 km per hour and a storm surge as high as 5 metres in some coastal areas. It quickly tore through the country, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake across nine of the Philippines' poorest provinces.

Fourteen million people were affected by the typhoon, which destroyed housing, basic services, infrastructure, crops and fishing boats. UN-led rapid initial assessments found that damage to health facilities varied from 50 to 90% in the affected areas, approximately 90% of school buildings were damaged and more than a million homes were destroyed or partially destroyed. According to the Department of Social Welfare and Development, six million children were affected, which was 42% of the total disaster-affected population. Access to the social services that form the cornerstone of children's wellbeing, health and development took an enormous hit, putting children at risk of disease and under-nutrition and threatening education and protection.

There was a rapid international funding response and many actors, including the government, local communities, the UN and international NGOs, deployed to the affected regions in order to assist victims of the disaster. In the initial response phase, significant logistical challenges confronted both national and international agencies, particularly in reaching remote islands. However, support from (and coordination between) the Filipino army, international military contingents and humanitarian actors led to a rapid improvement in logistics, enabling humanitarian agencies to get skilled aid workers to the frontline of the response and provide life-saving assistance.

Six weeks into the crisis, child-centred agencies identified a gap in the needs assessments, namely inadequate consultation with children. This may have skewed the prioritisation and effective targeting of assistance in the relief phase and reduced opportunities for a longer-term programme design to align with children's needs in the recovery phase.

2 Developing and implementing an advocacy strategy in a humanitarian situation

The principles for developing an advocacy strategy are the same whether you are operating in an emergency or a non-emergency situation (for more in-depth guidance on developing an advocacy strategy, please see Session 3). However, given the more rapid pace and greater volatility of most humanitarian contexts, you will often need to move quickly and flexibly and be even more targeted in your prioritisation.



What's different about a humanitarian advocacy strategy?

1. **Advocacy strategies do not have to be long.** Two to five pages is a good length. Despite the fast pace of many humanitarian contexts, it is important that the strategy is written down and shared with the different colleagues that are working together on implementation.
2. **Pick your battles.** Identify the issues for advocacy in an emergency, conflict and humanitarian setting in the same way as you would for long-term advocacy work, but bear in mind that time and resources may be even more limited. So you should really focus on areas where Save the Children has clear added value and potential for impact.
3. **Keep your eyes on the bigger picture.** Depending on the context and resources, you may want to balance your advocacy goals between seeking immediate impact and long-term policy change, and between programmatic advocacy and norm-changing advocacy. In addition to reactive country-specific advocacy, the Humanitarian Advocacy Working Group (HAWG) works on long-term thematic strategies (e.g. on hunger crises or DRR and children and armed conflict), and there can often be real value on both sides in linking our in-country advocacy with this more global work.

4. **Prepare for change.** In humanitarian crisis and conflict settings events often unfold at a rapid pace. Anticipate the need to react to events and opportunities and to adapt the tactics, methods and messages as the situation evolves. It's worth developing light-touch institutional processes that allow for rapid changes to your plans while also managing risks appropriately. This does not mean we have to change our strategies constantly: despite rapid context changes, your overarching aims are likely to remain unchanged.

Who are you targeting, and who are your allies?

As with any advocacy strategy, power mapping is a useful tool for identifying targets and allies (see Session 6 for more information). In humanitarian contexts, the following stakeholders need to be considered.

- **Governments:**
 - **National governments or *de facto* authorities.** You will need to be specific, e.g. national or local, what department, etc.
 - **States with influence over your primary targets** (e.g. regional governments, allies, state champions of particular issues or causes).
 - **International donors.** Think outside the box! Are there donors other than the traditional ones?
 - **Governments represented on the UN Security Council (UNSC).** There are five Permanent Members of the UNSC, also called the 'P5' (USA, France, UK, China and Russia), as well as 10 elected members that serve two-year terms on a staggered basis.
- **United Nations:**
 - **UN Secretariat:** UN Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General and their offices.
 - **Humanitarian agencies:** OCHA, UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, WFP, etc. At which level?
 - **UN structures in the field** (clusters, UN Country Teams, Humanitarian Country teams (HCTs), Humanitarian Coordinators) **and international level** (e.g. the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), Emergency Directors group).

- **Heads of Peace-Keeping Missions:** in the field and in New York (UN Department of Peace-Keeping Operations (DPKO)).
- **Special Envoys and Special Representatives:** e.g. the UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict .
- Human Rights Council.
- **Regional institutions or groupings of governments:** e.g. European Union (EU), African Union (AU), League of Arab States (LAS), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- **Warring parties in times of conflict.** These can include non-states armed groups.
- **Civil society:** e.g. local or international NGOs, religious actors, prominent ‘Elders’.
- **Private sector actors:** e.g. companies active in the affected area.

What are the most effective approaches to humanitarian advocacy?

Agree a set of messages – and target them intelligently

Clear and targeted talking points based on sound analysis of the context, drawing from our experience on the ground and outlining succinct policy positions and messaging are the core content of our humanitarian advocacy. Used with the right audience at the right moment they can tip the balance powerfully in your favour. In humanitarian contexts they generally need to be updated frequently, and it always pays to target them carefully for each intended audience.

Nurture relationships – creatively!

In a rapid-onset context it can be difficult to build the trusted relationships that you need in order to be able get new information or to have influence on important debates. It helps to put yourself in the shoes of your targets and to think creatively about how to engage them – bring them new information that they don’t already have or find ways to support their work so that they quickly see you as a useful and trusted interlocutor.

Invest time in humanitarian coordination meetings

In humanitarian situations it can sometimes feel like the entire relief effort is just an interminable succession of coordination meetings. However, it is almost impossible to influence many important decisions without engaging in at least some of these. Being present and visible is key to having influence – make the time to attend relevant meetings and always make sure you contribute to the discussion once you're there. You can also consider putting Save the Children forward to co-chair a cluster or to participate in the Humanitarian Country Team (see below); it will be time consuming, but it will enable you to promote your priorities and also to strengthen the involvement of non-UN voices in decision making.

Produce new material

This could be new research (perhaps based on assessment data) or a short policy brief. In most humanitarian contexts nobody expects, or particularly wants, long reports – instead they want new facts, analysis or ideas, clearly expressed. When used well these products can shift the focus on to issues we want to prioritise and galvanise real action. They can also serve as a useful 'calling card' with targets and would-be allies, giving us the opportunity to build relationships that we otherwise might not have.

Build coalitions

Coalitions can take time and resources to coordinate, but in many humanitarian contexts other INGOs are likely to have similar objectives or messages and a collective voice can often be much more powerful than a large number of disparate voices. In situations where speaking out as one organisation can put staff and programmes under a spotlight, working together in coalition with a group of partners, or channelling information to other actors, can also help mitigate risks. There are often NGO coordination forums in the field that can be useful vehicles for advocacy, although sometimes some effort is required to get them to think and function strategically and to link up effectively with actors and groups at the national, regional and international levels. At the international level, there are a number of standing coalitions and groupings that are mandated to work on humanitarian advocacy and that can be useful allies. These include:

- Crisis Action: an international NGO that works to avert conflict, prevent human rights abuses in conflict situations, and ensure that governments fulfil their obligations to protect civilians. It works behind the scenes to coordinate NGOs' responses to current and emerging conflict-related crises and to help them increase their impact on government policy. It has offices in Berlin, Brussels, Cairo, London, Nairobi, New York and Paris. Website: <http://crisisaction.org>

- VOICE: a non-operational network representing 83 NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide, which are based in 18 European countries. The overall vision of VOICE is a collective European NGO response to humanitarian crises. It is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union. Website: <http://www.ngovoice.org>
- InterAction: an alliance of more than 180 US-based international NGOs, based in Washington, DC. InterAction serves as a convener, thought leader and voice of the community. Website: <http://www.interaction.org>
- ICVA: the ‘International Council of Voluntary Agencies’ is a network of humanitarian NGOs, based in Geneva. Its main mandate is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by influencing policy and practice. It represents NGO voices at the highest level of the humanitarian architecture, including at the IASC (see below). Website: <https://www.icvanetwork.org/>

Share information

In a fast-paced environment, timely information is crucial. Your colleagues in regional and global capitals should know about your work and be ‘kept in the loop’ because there will be important influencing opportunities in those places too. It’s important to establish a culture of systematically reporting back from meetings to make sure that everyone is aware of the latest developments.

Activity 2 (SAQ)

Read the case study below. Bearing it in mind, think of a humanitarian situation with which you are familiar. Identify an objective for your advocacy and answer the following questions:

- Who are your targets and who are your allies?
- What methods will you use to influence your targets, and why?
- How will you manage risk?

Case study: Syria

Save the Children's advocacy strategy for the conflict in Syria has developed and changed over time, but it has retained three broad objectives: (1) to convey the urgency of the humanitarian situation for children in order to inspire political progress towards a peaceful solution; (2) to ensure that the rights and needs of children inside Syria are met, with a particular focus on humanitarian access; and (3) to ensure that the rights and needs of children and families in all neighbouring countries affected by the crisis are met (i.e. focusing on refugees, other exiles and host communities).

The power mapping for this strategy was complex, with the ultimate targets (i.e. the parties to the conflict) only being reachable by indirect means (e.g. by allied states, certain UN actors or their own populations), many of which in turn are difficult for Save the Children to influence. At various times, almost all the actors listed in the section above have been targeted in one form or another under this strategy. We have also explored and used a wide range of channels of influence, including lobbying of members of the Security Council, donor governments and UN officials, sharing new information and analysis with trusted targets, working with partners, mobilising influential third parties on our behalf, public campaign actions and hard-hitting use of the media in order to influence political discourse.

Risk management has been a serious issue throughout and protocols have had to be established to ensure that our advocacy doesn't put our staff, partners or beneficiaries at risk, nor seriously jeopardise our programmes. Public work is branded where possible and helpful but unbranded where necessary, and we have learned (sometimes the hard way) the importance of providing warning to key stakeholders before the release of potentially controversial material.

3 Using humanitarian principles and international law as tools for humanitarian advocacy

Being familiar with the four core humanitarian principles is crucial for humanitarian advocacy. These principles were derived from a larger set of principles that have long guided the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the national Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies.

Humanity	Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.
Impartiality	Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.
Independence	Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.
Neutrality	Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Read more about the humanitarian principles:

https://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf

Should or can we always stay neutral?

In principle, Save the Children must strive to respect all four principles and to lead by example for our partners, including our donors. However, the concept of ‘neutrality’ in humanitarian action is not universally agreed; in conflict settings, especially, it can be difficult to remain neutral in situations where one party is overwhelmingly responsible for violations of intentional humanitarian or human rights law (see below). As both a child rights organisation and a humanitarian actor, Save the Children frequently faces difficult dilemmas: does the principle of neutrality override our duty to take a stand for children’s rights? There is no easy answer and each case calls for a careful policy discussion and risk analysis within the organisation.

Our programmes in the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) and in Sudan are good examples of two different approaches:

- In the OPT, our programme has included robust advocacy to challenge Israel’s policy of house demolitions in Area C of the West Bank and in East Jerusalem and to call for an end to the blockade on Gaza, both on humanitarian grounds. Taking a child rights approach and grounding its advocacy in international law, the OPT country office has thus been relatively outspoken in highlighting the failure of one party to the conflict to fulfil some of its internationally agreed obligations, calculating that this approach is likely to have the greatest positive impact for children and their families.
- In Sudan, Save the Children continues to operate in Darfur and other regions even after many NGOs were expelled from the country in 2009. We are careful to protect our operational presence, calculating that we can best serve children and families in need by remaining strictly neutral and focusing our efforts on delivering relief and development programmes.

What other challenges do we face in seeking to implement the humanitarian principles?

Other challenges to our ability to respect humanitarian principles in other contexts include:

- The requirement by some donor governments for NGOs to abide by national anti-terrorism legislation, which can include a ‘no-contact policy’ with specific armed groups identified as terrorists. In many sensitive contexts, such as Somalia, Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen and Afghanistan, the risk of criminal prosecution can hamper our ability to reach all communities in line with our principles. An independent study commissioned by NRC and OCHA and published in July 2013 found that there was a dramatic decrease in humanitarian funding to southern Somalia after the designation of Al-Shabaab as a terrorist group. The independent study asserts that even if it is impossible to determine the extent to which the abrupt decrease in aid contributed to the famine in mid-2011, some relationship cannot be discounted.
- Our funding sources often limit where we can work in other ways. For example, during the war in Afghanistan many donor governments participated in the international coalition fighting the Taliban and channelled a lot of their humanitarian funding to areas of the country that were of strategic importance for military reasons. Accepting this funding could have compromised our adherence to all four principles.
- Governments in countries where we work can also limit where we can work and with whom (see the section below on international humanitarian law for further discussion).

Protection and international law

Although sensitive, advocating for the protection for civilians and children is critical during conflicts. The protection of civilians in times of conflict is outlined in different bodies of law, including international humanitarian law (IHL), international human rights law, refugee law and criminal law. Numerous UN Security Council resolutions have also increasingly dealt with the protection of civilians in armed conflict, for instance by reminding warring parties of their legal obligations, and establishing accountability mechanisms such as sanctions committees or the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children (see below).

Why use international law in humanitarian advocacy?

- It provides an objective tool for advocacy (beyond moral, political and religious argument).
- It provides a basic tool to trigger the constructive engagement of third states because under Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions all states have the duty to respect and *ensure respect for* the Conventions in all circumstances.
- Addressing violations of law can sometimes tackle the root cause of a humanitarian crisis.
- Increased knowledge of and accountability for international law can create a possibility for peace between warring parties.

International law: a toothless tiger?

International laws and norms are as strong as the political will that exists to respect and uphold them. Even today, accountability mechanisms for violations of international law in conflict remain weak. However, the norms that are set by international frameworks (both those that are legally binding and those that are not) can powerfully help to protect civilians, including children, in conflict. Some notable advocacy campaigns led by civil society have significantly changed the way in which wars are fought and thus lessened the harm to civilians. For example, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, a group of civil society organisations, worked with supportive states, the UN and the ICRC to bring about the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. Even though 36 states have not joined the treaty, the use, production, stockpile and transfer of landmines has significantly reduced since the development of the Treaty, thus reducing the number of casualties caused by these weapons.

International Humanitarian Law

IHL is the law of armed conflicts. It is a set of rules that seeks to alleviate human suffering in armed conflicts, whether international conflicts between two or more states or during civil wars. IHL balances the military necessity to fight a battle and the need for humanitarian protection. It does not regulate the legality of the use of force or determine if a war is just; the latter is regulated by the UN Charter. IHL is not an *ideal* – it sets out the minimum conduct to be adopted by conflict actors. States (either parties to the conflict or all states), non-state armed groups (e.g. rebel groups or guerrillas) and United Nations Peacekeepers are all bound by IHL.

Along with human rights law, which includes the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and refugee law, IHL is relevant because it regulates important issues that arise in contexts in which humanitarian actors operate, such as:

- the protection of civilians, including children, during wars, including rules for the provision of humanitarian access
- the conduct of hostilities, including limits on the use of, means and methods of warfare in order to protect civilians from unnecessary suffering; for example, the obligation to protect hospitals and medical teams, or the prohibition against the use of white phosphorus in populated areas.

The three basic principles of IHL are:

1. **The principle of distinction** between civilians and combatants: civilians and their infrastructures should never be the target of attack and violating this is a war crime.
2. **The principle of proportionality**: an attack is illegal if it causes excessive harm to civilians in relation to military advantage sought.
3. **The principle of precaution**: parties to the conflict should take all precautions to avoid and minimise the incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects. This means, for example, that parties must make sure that their own military bases are located far away from schools and hospitals.

On the important issue of **humanitarian access**, IHL says that when states are unable or unwilling to provide basic services, they are obliged to allow impartial humanitarian organisations to provide relief. States have the right to set the modalities for the delivery of aid (for example, to avoid diversion or ensure that the content of any shipment is strictly humanitarian), but it is unlawful to *de facto* impede humanitarian assistance or arbitrarily to withhold consent. All actors, including rebel groups, have to allow, respect and protect aid.

More information on IHL can be found on the ICRC website:

<http://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/home>

Refugee law and *non-refoulement*

One of the key principles of refugee law is *non-refoulement*. *Non-refoulement* is a concept which prohibits governments from returning a refugee or an asylum seeker to a place or situation where there is a risk to the life or freedom of that individual. In short, it means not returning a refugee or an asylum seeker to a situation of harm by forcing them to cross a border or go to a country where they will face further persecution.

There is a norm in refugee law that during times of mass refugee influx borders should remain open. Border closure, which states regularly do as an exercise of their right to protect their sovereignty, poses challenges for humanitarian advocates. When a state opts to close its border during a mass refugee influx, this effectively denies people their right to seek asylum and potentially places people at risk of further persecution.

The six grave violations of children's rights

UN Security Council Resolution 1612, passed in 2005, established an unprecedented Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to systematically monitor, document and report on six grave violations perpetrated against children by both individuals and groups in conflict situations of concern to the Security Council. On the basis of this information, the UN Secretary-General lists parties that commit such violations in the annex to his annual report on Children and Armed Conflict.

This is a very useful framework for advocacy because in given conflict situations UN agencies are mandated to report to the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which regularly reviews the reports of the MRM and makes recommendations on how better to protect children. The Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict raises these issues in negotiations with parties to conflicts and works towards the development of action plans in which parties that perpetrate grave violations agree to benchmarks to end such practices.

The six grave violations of children rights are:

1. Killing or maiming of children
2. Recruitment or use of child soldiers
3. Rape and other forms of sexual violence against children
4. Abduction of children
5. Attacks against schools or hospitals
6. Denial of humanitarian access to children.

For more information, see: <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>

Activity 3 (SAQ)

Drawing on your experience, discuss with a partner or in a group examples of times when you think the humanitarian principles or international law have been challenged. What, if anything, could have been done to address this? How could this have been done? You may need to think creatively as these are often very difficult issues to address.

4 Navigating the humanitarian system to advocate effectively

In order to advocate effectively in humanitarian contexts, it is vital to understand who is who in the humanitarian system and how to make it work in support of objectives. Elements of the system, particularly issues of coordination, leadership and funding, are also often targets of our advocacy.

Humanitarian coordination

Effective coordination is vital in emergencies and other humanitarian situations. Good humanitarian coordination can ensure fewer gaps and overlaps in humanitarian organisations' work and better allocation of scarce resources. It can lead to a needs-based, rather than capacity-driven, response, and can ensure a more coherent and complementary approach, in which the UN and international and local NGOs work together for better collective results.

Following failures in the responses to the Darfur crisis and the Asian tsunami, a 'humanitarian reform' process was initiated in 2005 that refined the current international humanitarian coordination system. One of the characteristics of this reformed system is the **cluster approach**. Clusters are groups of humanitarian organisations, both UN and non-UN, working in the main humanitarian sectors, e.g. shelter or health. The goal of a cluster is to improve the coordination among actors by sector and between sectors.

At a minimum, clusters are expected to answer the question of the 4W's: Who does What, Where and When? But a cluster should provide much more than just information sharing among members. The cluster lead agency is responsible for defining a collective strategic vision and an operational response plan. In many countries dealing with protracted crises, the cluster works in support of the relevant line ministry.

Save the Children engages with the cluster system at the field and international level, while constantly advocating to improve the current models. At the global level, Save the Children is the only NGO co-leading a cluster: the Education Cluster, together with UNICEF. We are also very engaged in the cluster system at country level. A mapping completed in September 2013 finds that we co-lead some 58 clusters or other sectorial coordination mechanisms, mainly in the Education sector, but also in Protection, Child Protection, WASH, Shelter/NFI, Nutrition and Food Security and Livelihoods.

Save the Children's engagement in the clusters at country and global levels often requires considerable effort, but benefits include increased influence on sector policies and practice, access to valuable information, and strengthened relations with national authorities, UN agencies and donors.

Who's who in the humanitarian system?

Understanding who is responsible for what during an emergency is crucial to identifying advocacy targets and provides a basis to hold them accountable.

Cluster leads: See above.

Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT). These are usually chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator and include representatives of UN humanitarian agencies and a small number of NGOs who all have an equal say in decision making. Representation by all HCT members should be at the highest level, e.g. UN Representative and Country Director. Typically NGOs will select a number of representatives to serve rotating membership of the HCT. Some members of the humanitarian community can request 'observer status' on the HCT. This is the main body for the inter-sector coordination. As of November 2013, Save the Children has representation on 21 HCTs out of the 43 HCTs existing worldwide.

Humanitarian Coordinators (HC). The HC is responsible for the delivery of coordinated support to the national authorities across all sectors. He/she has a central role in liaison with national authorities, UN agencies and donors, advocating for the priorities set out by the HCT. In many countries, the HC is also the Resident Coordinator (RC) and this 'dual hat' function means that the HC/RC is also the highest-ranking diplomatic representative of the UN to the national government.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). This is the highest-level inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision making. Heads of UN and non-UN humanitarian partners (represented through the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR)) attend those meetings, based in Geneva and New York.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

This is the office responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies and to coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors. Responsibilities include information management (production of reports, maps, etc.), coordination of joint appeals and needs assessments.

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

During a refugee crisis, UNHCR is the lead agency with accountability for the coordination of the response. In a refugee response, clusters are not usually set up, but similar working groups are established whose structures and leads have similar features and accountability as clusters.

In many countries where we work, there are also UN **peacekeeping** and/or **political missions** present, both of which can be very important advocacy targets for us.

What needs to improve?

Across emergencies, the most common critiques of the contemporary humanitarian coordination system include:

- It is UN centred, with international and, especially, local non-UN partners having much less influence.
- Coordination isn't adequately resourced and many key actors in the system do not have the right skills or approach.
- It is often undermined by a lack of trust and competition among agencies.
- Coordination meetings can be very time consuming, particularly when they are taking place at multiple levels.

Humanitarian funding

During an emergency, the UN coordinating agency (usually OCHA or UNHCR) will generally be tasked with coordinating the Humanitarian Needs Overview and determining funding requirements for the response as set out in an appeal. In most countries, the UN works closely with the government to validate humanitarian requirements and determine priorities. The appeal identifies the total resource required per sector to deliver a comprehensive response to humanitarian needs. Typically, needs and response priorities will have been determined at the cluster level.

It is important to engage in the Humanitarian Needs Overview in each priority sector in the run-up to the launch of an appeal in order to ensure that the needs of children are fully reflected. As with other wider coordination, being involved in appeals processes requires a time investment but can significantly increase our influence (as well as improving donor relations and increasing our prospects of securing funding ourselves).

Participation in appeals also has benefits for the humanitarian sector as a whole. The true scale of humanitarian need and the funding gaps in any humanitarian situation can only be represented accurately if there is full participation in the appeals processes. Getting a clear picture of how much money has been donated, by whom, for which emergencies is challenging but can enable very effective advocacy on funding gaps.

Analysis of funding trends largely depends on OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS), a database that provides an overall picture of money that has been pledged and committed by donors and UN agencies. The FTS allows you to see:

- the funding status of live appeals – in total and by sector
- how much each donor has contributed
- what money has been committed versus pledged.

To access the FTS follow this link: <http://fts.unocha.org>

Activity 4 (SAQ)

Drawing on your own experience, draft the key points that you would make to a senior figure from a major donor government to argue for one of the following:

- Strengthening humanitarian coordination.
- Making funding mechanisms work better for NGOs.

Answers to SAQs

Activity 1

There were lots of issues! These included:

- Challenges in ensuring that all affected children had equal access to essential relief, given the practical challenges of reaching the most remote areas, and also the imperative for organisations to be seen to 'do something', which led some agencies to focus on the easier-to-reach areas.

- The use of military assets was largely uncontroversial in this case, but civil–military guidelines needed to be developed and implemented to preserve the civilian character of the response and ensure that military actors were used only when essential.
- There was a challenge aligning the UN Strategic Response Plan with the government’s own recovery plan. The former was launched before the latter in order to meet the IASC’s 30-day target and the two were not drafted in conjunction with each other.
- There were multiple actors involved in the response and not all of them coordinated effectively, resulting in duplication in some areas and mixed adherence to agreed standards.
- The Philippines is a middle-income country with high capacity so the situation moved quickly from an emergency relief context to government-led recovery. International agencies were not always good at working with national organisations, despite lessons from previous responses about the risk of the international community setting up parallel structures and ignoring or eroding national capacity.
- Efforts were needed to ensure proper accountability to people affected by this disaster, and particularly to children. Save the Children led an exercise to ensure children were consulted as part of the second-round needs assessment.
- A huge amount of funding was raised, but in the hurry to respond this wasn’t always aligned with an agreed strategy. With many donors focusing on ‘classic’ relief activities (e.g. food, non-food items, shelter, water and sanitation), the case needed to be made for funding child protection and education as a core part of the response.
- Similarly, there was a need to ensure that the recovery phase contributed to longer-term priorities, including reducing future disaster risk.
- Some funding was allocated to UN agencies, as they had the management capacity to handle large volumes, but this created a delay in getting funds to front-line agencies who had to agree sub-partner arrangements with their UN ‘donors’.

Activity 2

The case study gives an impression of how these questions have been approached in our advocacy on the conflict in Syria. Some key points include:

- In conflict situations, it is often very hard to influence the main actors directly. It is therefore doubly important to think creatively about indirect channels and to use arguments or frames that are likely to influence these secondary targets. On Syria, we've really struggled to find ways to influence the government of Syria either directly or indirectly, given our lack of traction not only with the government itself but also with its allies. For this reason, we have had to focus on working with partners who have more influence, using the global media in an attempt to move the discourse in a more 'humanitarian' direction, and seeking to have influence through targets with whom we have stronger relationships.
- We have found interagency letters and communications from humanitarian actors to be effective in shifting political opinion on some key issues – for example, we coordinated an interagency letter to all members of the G20 in advance of their summit in St Petersburg in 2013, which was warmly endorsed at the summit by the Indonesian President.
- In advance of the UN General Assembly in 2013 we were successful in shifting the debate among members of the Security Council, by using a combination of concerted lobbying of missions in New York and producing new material (on hunger) that gained coverage in the global media. This helped persuade the Council to agree a stronger position on the critical issue of humanitarian access.
- We have struggled to produce new primary data of conditions inside Syria, both because of a lack of data and because of the risk of revealing where we operate, but we have worked with what we have been able to get to try to produce compelling new material that advances the advocacy agenda – for example, on protection issues and food insecurity. These have been produced as reports. In addition to these, we have shared private briefings on key issues with trusted interlocutors.
- A key lesson from our work on Syria has been the need for very clear protocols around risk management and for these to include the right people. Related to this is a strong need to ensure that all key actors internally have sight of both the strategy and the plans, and that they understand their rationale. In practice, this boils down to communication, communication and communication, as well as proactive efforts to build and strengthen internal trust.

Activity 3

Sadly, challenges to the humanitarian principles and international law are widespread. One of the biggest issues we face globally is limits on humanitarian access, with governments finding ways to prevent relief reaching certain populations. This both compromises our ability to respond impartially and can be a breach of IHL. However, tackling the issue is not easy as the international system puts great emphasis on the principle of state sovereignty (which is a core tenet of the UN Charter), which makes it difficult to challenge governments who seek to limit the scope of humanitarian action in their territory. In some situations it can be helpful to seek the support of ‘western’ governments in applying pressure to ensure better access, but frequently the target governments aren’t easily influenced by western pressure or other considerations mean that such pressure is only weakly applied. In other cases, we advocate to the UN to be much braver in representing the humanitarian ‘community’ and challenging governments to implement humanitarian law. There have been some successes: for example, in the early years of the Darfur crisis humanitarian NGOs had relatively free access, thanks to negotiations led by the UN. However, broadly the problem remains quite difficult.

Another widespread issue is indiscriminate or deliberate attacks on civilians or civilian objects. Again, this is difficult to influence but it is critical that global voices such as ours continue to make the case for maintaining the ‘norms’ of IHL and human rights law. As humanitarians, we can powerfully make the case for the protection of civilians, in private and often in public, and this can be an effective way of reducing risks to children – very few actors want to be perceived to be committing serious war crimes, so exposure (with risks sensitively managed) can be a powerful deterrent.

The MRM is a key tool for advocacy by the UN and others with governments and other parties to conflicts. However, it is often a sensitive issue for us: while we engage with it in some countries, in others we need to disassociate ourselves from it as our involvement in the collection of potentially incriminating data could compromise our operational independence and neutrality and create serious risk.

Activity 4

Ideas for improving humanitarian coordination might include:

- establishing NGO co-chairs
- agreeing common coordination principles – e.g. equal voice, accountability for actions, dissemination of meeting minutes
- establishing an NGO forum to consolidate and legitimise NGO concerns, including those of national or local NGOs

- removing personalities who are limiting the effectiveness of coordination meetings.

Common challenges that you might seek to address with respect to humanitarian funding include:

- long delays while UN agencies process donor funding
- unrealistically short deadlines for submitting proposals, etc.
- unrealistically low coverage of overheads
- excessive bureaucracy
- politicisation of funding decisions/self-interested funding decisions by cluster leads
- distorted allocations – e.g. with some sectors over-prioritised.

To achieve changes in both areas requires a clear understanding of the way humanitarian structures are supposed to work and also of the reality of how the UN system in particular functions in practice. We need to be perceived as a disinterested and respected actor, not as self-interested – i.e. our arguments need to be for the benefit of the humanitarian response, not for ourselves or just for NGOs. Donors will particularly respond to arguments that address limits on the effectiveness or value for money of their commitments, but they also have relationships to maintain with leaders in the humanitarian system so you will need to secure a high level of trust and respect and you may need to develop strategies to encourage them to take a stronger stance than they would otherwise.

Useful links

Save the Children Internal Resources

OneNet: <https://onenet.savethechildren.net/>

Humanitarian advocacy toolkits

Advocacy guidance for cluster coordinators:

<http://education.humanitarianresponse.info/document/advocacy-guidance-note-education-cluster-coordinators>

UNICEF Advocacy Toolkit:

<http://www.seachangecop.org/sites/default/files/documents/2010%20Unicef%20-%20Advocacy%20Toolkit.pdf>

Minimum standards

Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action:

<http://cpwg.net/minimum-standards>

INEE Minimum Standards for education in emergencies:

<http://www.ineesite.org/en/minimum-standards/handbook>

Sphere: <http://www.sphereproject.org/>

Humanitarian principles

OCHA humanitarian principles: https://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf

The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief: <http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/code-of-conduct-290296>

International law

ICRC Rules of customary international law: <http://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/home>

Children and Armed Conflict: <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>

Humanitarian coordination

Humanitarian Response: <http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/clusters>

The Clusters Approach:

https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/120320_OOM-ClusterApproach_eng.pdf

Lessons in Leadership: Save the Children's Experience of Co-leading the Education Cluster:

http://education.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/Lessons_in_Leadership_0.pdf

Funding:

Financial Tracking Service (FTS): <http://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=home>

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