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PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

A module for training teachers and caregivers

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Rädda Barnen
Save the Children Sweden



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ISBN 91-89366-11-5

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Graphic design: PressArt

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Preface

In the region Eastern and Central Africa where Radda Barnen works since the 1960-ies, children are extremely exposed to armed conflicts and displacement. Refugee camps often become the environment in which children grow up and where basic needs are met in terms of food, health and education. Other children have little choice but to enroll as soldiers or aids and mistresses to adult warriors. Due to their husbands' and brothers' involvement in the warfare women and girls are forced to take on additional chores and responsibilities. For the girls this often means that their chances to go to school – if there is any at all – are very small. Flight, refuge and return also entail family separation. Even a feeding centre may involuntarily contribute to separation: children are advised to pretend that they are orphans in order to get extra rations. While the children visit the centre a sudden raid may disperse the family.

Few agencies address the trauma and stress that children endure when they grow up under these circumstances. Radda Barnen is one of the few agencies working with traditional coping mechanisms. This training module is the result of some of our experience gathered over the years. It is aimed at agencies and staff working with children in armed conflicts, academics, researchers and students who are involved in social work, psychology and antropology.

Hirut Tefferi, the author of this compilation of experience, is a psychologist and a Radda Barnen staff member. She has worked with family reunification and children's psychosocial needs for almost twenty years.

This training module, edited in 1998, was previously an internal Radda Barnen document. Due to an increasing interest in meeting the psychosocial needs of children who are victims of war, we have, however, decided to make it available to a broader audience.

Addis Ababa, September 1999

*Per Tamm
Regional Representative*

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to the various persons and teachers in southern Sudan, too many to list here, who co-operated in the preparation of this training module. My special thanks to our partners the SRRA and RASS Education Co-ordinators, Benjamin Nyaga, Alebel Derib, Fatuma Ibrahim, Noah Ochola, Firew Keyfyalew and Per Tamm for their support and encouragement over the two-year period it took to develop and test the module and to Birgitta Galldin-Åberg and Helena Gezelius for reading and commenting on the draft. My gratitude also to the Education Co-ordinating Committee (ECC) members for their valuable comments and for testing the module in the field. Finally I thank Hirut Demis for typing and editing the module.

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Introduction

Dear Teacher,

Welcome to this important module! Are you aware of your cardinal role as a teacher?

Your role is to promote learning in children. Learning is a change in behaviour. It is brought about by reinforced practice. It is your responsibility to create desire in every child to continue learning. To achieve this desire, you must have knowledge and skills which would enable you to identify problems of children that are caused by the effects brought about by armed conflict in their environment. In this module you will be assisted to learn some skills that can be used to minimize problems faced by children in order that they may feel secure and motivated to learn.

As a result of war and displacement, children are generally affected by war-related problems such as having a disability, losing their loved ones, having no shelter and other essential basic needs. As their teacher you must be aware of their problems and be able to understand the effect caused by conflict and displacement to these children's attitudes to life.

The module aims to encourage teachers to look at psychosocial problems in everyday learning situations of children and to explore issues that are related to the psychological and social needs of the children in war-affected areas.

This psychosocial module is different from the *Subject-* and *Method-*based modules in that it helps you to acquire a better understanding of wider issues. Although the term 'psychosocial needs' may be new to you, you will realize that the module contains issues which you are already familiar with and these include:

- The effect that war has on the way people think and behave. This module will help you understand the way children in particular are affected by war.
- The role of the school and teacher in promoting the psychosocial well-being and development of children

'Psychosocial needs' is not a subject in itself and you will not be teaching what you find in this module as a subject in school. The material in it will help you to understand what affects your pupils, and what you can do to help in their well-being and development. It might also reveal to you a better understanding of your own problems.

The module should not be seen as the only source of information: you are expected to draw on your own experiences and it encourages you to think of different methods promoting the psychosocial well-being of children both in and outside school.

Thinking and talking about some of your past experiences may be painful for you. Remember, therefore, that the module is meant to help your pupils to live with such experiences and be able to develop through teaching and learning experiences that take into account their specific needs. You will be acting as a role model for your pupils.

Some examples of how you can use the topics and exercises in the content and method module are incorporated in this module.

A Glossary of terms that may be new to you is provided at the end of this module.

Objective of the module

After going through this module you should have acquired the knowledge, attitude, and skills that will enable you to:

- a) teach effectively children with special needs caused by conflict situations;
- b) discover your role in shaping the lives of children affected by war and conflict situations;
- c) adopt methods that can enhance harmony among children with different backgrounds, and
- d) identify the problems of each individual child in the class for effective handling and guidance.

Recommended use of this module

This module is designed to act as a trainersguide for those who are expected to train teachers who teach war-affected children. It is also designed in such a manner that it is self-directing so that the learner can use it without much assistance from the trainer.

The content of the module leads the learner to understand the intricate situations that the children he/she is expected to teach have gone through and the impact such situations have caused to their way of life. These situations create a strong barrier to effective learning by children in school.

The module consists of the following elements:

1. introduction to the module
2. objective of the module
3. title of each unit
4. objective of each unit
5. key words in each unit
6. the content: covering issues, experiences and approaches of children in conflict situations
7. selected case studies, discussion questions, things to do/exercises

8. summary giving the key highlights of each unit
9. overall summary of the module
10. glossary of key words and terms

The overall goal of this module is to equip you with knowledge and skills that will enable you to understand and appreciate the behaviour of children you are expected to teach in school. Some children may exhibit behaviour that is out of the ordinary. In such circumstances you are expected to respond positively and use approaches that will re-direct children's attention to positive thinking so that constructive learning can take place.

The contents of this module provide you with an opportunity to explore through case studies and discussions, ways and methods that enable you to deal with children under difficult situations and problems brought about by war and conflict situations.

The module does not give all the answers on how to deal with children's problems but may inspire the teacher to teach the children in need of help.

Since this module is not intended to give you mere theoretical knowledge on psychosocial needs, it is highly recommended that as you go through it you see yourself as:

- a) a true friend of the children
- b) a person who can provide what has been taken away from the children by war or conflict situations
- c) a person who has some answers as to why certain things have happened to them and not to others.

The sample case studies and discussion questions are meant to help you to explore more cultural norms of the communities where the children you teach live. The directory of the norms will give you an opportunity to explore further the community cultural practices which will enrich your teaching approaches particularly when holding discussions on various experiences the children might have had.

Ensure that, as you discuss issues related to conflict situations, the causes and measures taken to resolve the conflict should be thoroughly discussed, understood and appreciated by the children.

Good Luck!

UNIT 1

Introduction to psychosocial needs

Specific Objectives

After going through this Unit you should be able to:

- understand the term 'psychosocial needs'
- list psychosocial needs of individuals in society

Key words: psychosocial needs, vulnerable

What do we mean by 'psychosocial' (pronounced sai-ko-so-shal) as applied to the effects of armed conflicts on children?¹

The unexpected and often violent experiences of war have serious effects on child development and well-being. The word 'psychosocial' simply underlines the dynamic relationship between psychological and social effects, each continuously influencing the other.

In armed conflict the child's emotions, behaviour, thoughts, memory, learning ability, perceptions and understanding are affected. Relationships within families and communities change because of death, separation and family and community breakdown. Relationships may also change because of damaged or changed social values and practices and the destruction of social facilities and services. As many individuals and families become destitute because of material and economic devastation, they lose their social status and place in their familiar network.

Note to Trainer

Please note that it is important for the trainees to grasp the basic concept in this chapter. After reading the above definition (there may be a need to copy the summary on a blackboard), hold a discussion with the trainees based on their experiences.

1.1 Human needs

Human beings have physical and psychosocial needs. Physical needs are those that our bodies need in order to live. **These** are water, food and shelter.

Psychosocial needs are those necessities we need in addition to physical needs that would make us joyful or happy as we continue living. Psychosocial needs include

1) For the purpose in this module we shall make use of the following meaning, which was adopted in 1997, in a workshop conducted by UNICEF.

the way we think and feel about ourselves and about others, our own safety and the safety of other persons who are important to us, the relationship we have with the people and environment around us, our understanding of and reactions to the events around us, etc.

Discussion Exercise:

- Form small groups and make a list of different things you think are needed in life
- Group these needs under physical or psychosocial

1.2 How can we make sure that the psychosocial needs of children are met ?

Why are psychosocial needs important? As can be seen from the discussions in 1.1, psychosocial needs should be met because they are important needs that affect the normal functioning of any human being.

There are different ways in which the psychosocial needs of children can be met. To give some examples: the teacher can be one of the most important persons in the life of a child in that the teacher can be a person who is understanding of the child's reactions to different problems and provide support to the child. The child could be encouraged to go to the teacher to seek advice and support. The support of the teacher can extend further to solve or assist in the family or neighbourhood of the child. Parents of the child can use the teacher as a support in understanding and assisting the problem faced by their child and the different reactions that the child may have faced in his/her development.

Psychosocial needs of children can also be met by carrying out activities that help in promoting the psychological and social well-being of children with a view to facilitate their overall development.

Activities such as play, education, and recreation are important. There may also be other activities that promote the psychosocial well-being of children. These activities could differ from one situation to another depending on the situation and the resources in the surroundings. However, **the activities should aim at:**

- a) Encouraging normal family/community life: normal family and community life is an important source of feelings of security for the child. For example, in communities that are undergoing conflicts, ordinary routines such as informal neighbourhood meetings, family gatherings, etc. are disrupted. It is important that the teacher, as an important member of the village, encourages the continuation of such activities.
- b) Protecting the child from further problems: care must be taken not to inflict further damages on children while dealing with those who are affected by

negative experiences as they are likely to be more vulnerable than other children. For example, there are some traditional ways of treatment that could aggravate the problem of the child.

- c) Facilitating the development of the child: as children grow and develop they need to have a better understanding of their surroundings and the events surrounding them. Therefore, it is important to work towards promoting the development of the child. For example, children may be encouraged to participate in decisions that affect their lives and their community. Children also can contribute to their development and the development of their village by taking certain responsibilities.
- d) Providing appropriate help to those whose behaviour and well-being is affected by the situation; it is clear that the teacher cannot provide the answer to all the problems of children in the community. It is important to work towards appropriate methods to solve the problems of children in consultation with persons and organizations in the area.

Note to Trainer

Please ask trainees to divide themselves into groups and let them discuss the following:

What are the reasons that make it important to discuss the psychosocial needs of children affected by conflict?

1. The objectives of this exercise are to:

- a) encourage trainees to look at different issues concerning the child's right
- b) explore the impact of conflicts on children's learning.

2. Conclusions about the rights of children for protection, care and rehabilitation as well as the impact of conflict on children can be drawn and highlighted as you summarize the group discussion.

Discussion Exercise:

- Let the trainees divide themselves into groups
- Assign each group at least one of the aims listed above. Each group will discuss various activities that the children can do in the school and around their communities in order to promote their psychosocial well-being.

UNIT 2

Effects of conflict and displacement on children

Specific Objectives:

After going through this Unit you should be able to explain the effects of war on:

- children
- the family
- the community

Key words: effects, conflict, displacement, social values

The aim of this discussion is for the teacher to understand the different effects that conflicts have on children. Only very few examples of the effects are provided so that teachers will be able to raise and discuss experiences in their respective lives, families and villages.

2.1 Effects on the child

- Conflict situations expose the child to dangers to his/her life. For example a child might lose part of his/her body, or might die because of direct exposure to fighting.
- Children constantly become afraid of the situation in their surroundings. The children's trust in the surroundings, community members and parents to protect them is reduced, as they see that their parents and other adults are as helpless in the conflict situation as they are.
- Children may not be able to depend on the normal routine of life and relationships.

2.2 Effects on the family

- Members of the family might become separated from each other as the situation at home becomes insecure and especially when their basic needs cannot be met.
- Parents feel very helpless as they cannot provide the basic necessities for their children.
- Parents cannot provide proper guidance for their children and are forced to concentrate on meeting only the very basic needs.
- Parents cannot protect their children from danger. Usually, one or both par-

ents might not be present with the family because of death, injury or displacement.

2.3 Effects on the community

The following are some of the ways in which communities might be affected by conflicts and displacements:

- facilities such as schools and health clinics might not be available or function efficiently;
- normal relationships, ceremonies and occasions are disrupted;
- members face problems while meeting their needs, thus prompting tension/conflict to arise among them;
- the community values will be changed: for example, the respect and care given to elders, children or women might be different in wartime than in peacetime.

Discussion Exercise:

- Discuss in small groups what you think are the effects of conflict and displacement on your family, your village and yourself.
- What effects do these changes have on your child and the children in your village?

Note to Trainer:

During the group discussions one point that might become clear is that, in addition to the effect on the child, the child's environment (his family and village) is also disrupted. This general feeling of security, lack of trust and continuous threat will result in changes in behaviour in the child. When the child's immediate surroundings and his/her life is affected by conflict, some changes can be seen in the behaviour of some children.

UNIT 3

Common symptoms of psychosocial problems that are observed among children

Specific Objectives:

After going through the group discussions in this Unit you should be able to:

- identify common symptoms or behaviour changes among children
- list names in connection with such behaviour
- explain what is believed to be the causes of such psychosocial problems

Key words: symptoms, behaviour, abnormal

As we have seen in the previous section, children are likely to go through a lot of negative experiences which can be seen in the change in their behaviour.

Discussion Exercise:

- Discuss in groups five common behaviour patterns that are considered as abnormal by your community.
- What are people who show such problems referred as?
- What are the causes of such behaviour (as understood by your community)?
- What are the measures used to help such children in the community?

Take Note:

Please note that labelling children with one or other type of behaviour problem that they show can be damaging to the development or improvement of the child.

Note to Trainer

The aim of this exercise is to explore with trainees different types of abnormal behaviour, their causes and related treatment and beliefs. It is important that the behaviour considered as abnormal is discussed in detail. For example, how does the person exhibiting the behaviour relate to other people? Does the person take care of his/her personal hygiene (basic needs)? What is the place of such a person in the society, etc.?

Please ensure that the trainees do not feel embarrassed about discussing traditional causes.

The following are some of the most common changes in the behaviour of children who are living in conflict situations. Check whether what you have discussed is covered here below:

- withdrawal from contact with adults and/or children
- withdrawal from normal activities such as playing and laughing and lack of emotions
- feelings of excessive sadness and guilt
- aggressiveness (beating other children and adults), quarrelsome and excessive anger
- sleeping difficulties, having nightmares, bedwetting
- showing physical symptoms such as loss of weight, experiencing aches and pains that are not of physical origin
- lack of concentration in school and not able to follow up what is being taught.
- feeding problems or reduced appetite
- re-enacting the unexpected and life-threatening experiences in the mind.

The expression of such behaviours as bedwetting, aggressiveness, etc. is commonly unacceptable. It is therefore important to understand the causes of such behaviour.

It could also be the case that, even if the situation is not seen as dangerous by the adults, it could be seen by the child as extremely dangerous and threatening to himself/herself or to persons that are close to him/her. For example, movement of 'friendly' troops and big artillery near the village may be understood as something common and non-threatening by the adults. This same event might be disturbing for the child because of his/her previous experience or lack of knowledge, or the child might not be able to understand such a situation because he/she cannot differentiate between an 'enemy' and 'friendly' force.

UNIT 4

Coping with the problems people face during wartime

Specific Objectives:

After going through this Unit you will be able to:

- **explore coping practices that are used in your respective villages**
- **decide some principles behind the practices**

Key word: coping

When people are faced with problems, they generally try to solve them by using various methods. If the problems cannot be solved, then people try to cope with the problems and live with them.

In this Unit we shall try to see how people try to cope with problems that are caused by war. We shall also attempt to identify methods that people have traditionally used to cope with such problems. For example, you may have been told by an ancestor of ways that were used to cope with the problems that were created during an earlier war. Please do not hesitate to mention methods that you have heard of in the past because they are essential in the development of appropriate methods for coping with such problems in schools. The following are some of the methods that have been used to cope with problems during wartime.

4.1 Helping each other

Community members become organized to solve problems. Village people might do this on their own initiative or on that of the person who needs help. This kind of solution is usually implemented when a community member has met with a sudden problem such as loss of property, death of a child, etc.

4.2 Consulting with wise persons/elders

In some instances, consultations and discussions will be held with village elders and other 'wise' men/women, including traditional and religious persons. In such cases, the affected person will be provided with some counselling and guidance. In many cases, there are also discussions in order to find out the causes of the problem. In this respect, it is important to note that discussions are held to understand the cause of the problems. In the case of behaviour problems such as mental disturbances, wise men/women or counsellors would prescribe a certain way of acting or an activity to be done in order to solve the problems.

4.3 Expression of feelings

This is usually employed by persons who have lost close relatives through death. The affected persons are encouraged to express their feelings towards the death and loss of the relative in many ways. Poems, expressing the personality, the deeds and the value of the dead person, are significant parts of the grieving process. However, those who are grieving are expected to express their feelings, but some expressions that may be harmful to them are not considered appropriate behaviour. In this respect it is essential to note that the grieving person is usually surrounded by caring persons who are willing to listen about and discuss the events that led to the death, the manner in which the death occurred, and the implications on the life of the family and the community.

4.4 Sharing information

People in war-affected areas usually try to share information on different issues ranging from the way the war is affecting their lives to what they can do about various practical day-to-day needs and activities. Information about safety, causes of conflict, reasonable prices of goods, information about family members who are elsewhere, etc., are discussed. The informal communication helps people to understand the situation they are in and to try to do something to solve their problems and/or promote their development within the existing situation. People can draw strength from understanding that there are other persons in the same situation as the person himself/herself.

Methods for coping with problems can differ from one community to another, depending on the different situations in the community. However, the main ideas that are of interest to us, as teachers, are the approaches and principles used by the help-givers (the wise men/women, religious leaders, traditional leaders, etc.) Those lessons are important because one of the roles that a teacher has in the school is that of being a helper to the child.

Summary:

The lessons that we learn from the approaches described above are:

- expression of feelings
- having a supportive environment that permits the expression of feelings in a somewhat guided way
- the seeking or offering of advice and support

In some instances, one or more of the above methods are used in dealing with problems.

Discussion Exercise:

- Discuss a problem and the different ways of coping with it that are described above in relation to the situation in your village.
- What is the role of the person who plays the supporting role (priest, counsellors, chief, friend, parent or relative) in the indicated methods of coping?
- What other ways do people in your village use to cope with their problems?

UNIT 5

The role of the school in helping children to cope with problems

Specific Objectives:

After reading through this Unit you should be able to:

- appreciate the role the schools can play in helping children to cope with problems
- understand the role of the teacher in promoting development of children

Key word: observe

During conflicts, social services such as schools and clinics do not function as desired. It is important to start organizing schools for children as soon as possible. As can be seen in many war-affected areas, it is possible to organize schools by using existing materials and human resources. Schools can be started up under trees by interested adults and later on develop into classrooms and have trained teachers.

Take note

It is important to know that children need to be cared for in an organized way so that their lives will have planned routines and structures. Children must be given a chance to play, interact and express their feelings and experiences.

Schools can have significant roles in the life of children and communities affected by war. The following are some examples:

1. Schools can provide an environment where children can be together, play and learn meaningful activities that are essential for their development.
2. Children with disabilities can be identified and helped to cope with their problems, early in life, so that they may have a better chance of developing their talents.
3. Schools can provide a situation where teachers can identify and help children who have problems.
4. The existence of schools can be very encouraging for the village. Parents feel that their children are engaged in a constructive undertaking. Many communities are very proud to have been able to construct and run schools. Parents see it as a very important achievement that they are able to provide support to make it possible for their children to be educated.

UNIT 6

Approaches that teachers and other school staff could use to identify and help children affected by conflict and displacement

After going through this Unit you should be able to:

- identify children who are affected by conflict and displacement
- understand basic approaches to help children affected by conflict and displacement.

Key words: specific objectives

6.1 Who are the children who are affected by conflict and displacement?

As discussed earlier, the effects of war are not limited to the individual child but are likely to damage the physical and social surroundings of the child in a serious way. Therefore, all children who are found in war-affected areas are taken to be affected in one way or the other.

Teachers must look for signs of change in the behaviour of children both in and outside the school environment. They should be especially sensitive to changes in some situations more than in others.

Example:

- a) The behaviour of children must be looked at more carefully in periods immediately after violence in a village, such as armed attacks, air raids, shelling, cattle raids, etc.
- b) Children who have gone through similar experiences before and children who do not have close relationships or support (orphans, displaced children, unaccompanied children) are likely to suffer more.

In such instances, teachers are advised to discuss with their students the feelings and experiences of children in relation to past incidents.

Take note:

- It is essential to describe events and experiences in terms that are understandable by children.
- It is important to discuss feelings that are connected to experiences. Children must be helped to put their feelings into words.
- Care must be taken so that children feel that they are expressing their experiences and feelings in a secure and sympathetic environment.

Teachers and students must not tease or make fun of particular children who have passed through such experiences. One way of ensuring this would be to draw up a certain 'code of conduct' together with the children. This code of conduct consists of rules and principles that students have agreed to follow during and after the discussion of events.

Such a code of conduct would be essential to systematize interaction in the classroom with relation to expression of feelings especially in periods following serious incidents such as attacks and loss of lives.

- Some children may not be willing to discuss their experiences and feelings. This can be an indication about the seriousness of the problems. For example, the child might feel that some memories are too painful for him/her to handle. In such situations the teacher is advised to support the child by respecting the child's wish. The teacher may also seek help from and consult with persons who are trained to handle such problems.

Exercise: Role Play

Select a number of teachers on the course to act as children who have gone through a conflict situation recently. A smaller number of teachers should act the role of teachers in the affected school.

Describe the conflict situation in detail. Today is the first day of school since the incident. In this role play, the teachers are expected to do the following:

1. initiate discussion on the recent incident in the village (as described)
2. together with the students, establish a 'code of conduct' that they would like to follow during the discussions. Please note that these regulations should apply for both teachers and students.

After the role play, discuss the procedures that were followed by the teachers in developing the 'code of conduct' for the classroom. The main emphasis for the discussion is whether the 'students' in the role play felt that there was an environment of understanding and care in the way the teachers initiated discussions.

Note to Trainer:

Please note that there is no right or wrong way of carrying out the exercise in the role play. What is important is to promote a sympathetic environment where the child feels accepted.

It is important to introduce at this stage that the development of the code of conduct for the children is a way of respecting each others rights: the right to express his/her feelings; the right to be heard; the right of children to participate in developing rules in a matter that affects their lives.

6.2 Apply methods of teaching that could be of use to the development of children in the special circumstances they live in

As we have discussed earlier, the most urgent needs of children affected by war could be the need to understand what is happening around them and to be able to express the feelings and experiences caused by the war. Some children may not be willing to discuss their experiences because of painful memories.

6.3 Build on children's capacity to develop, learn and discuss

Note to Trainer:

The aims of the following exercise are to demonstrate:

1. how the learning environment is affected by the event that is of particular significance to the students, and
2. how the learning situation can be utilized to promote the process of learning, by looking at the specific situation of the child.

Discussion Exercise

Discuss briefly in small groups the situation that was described in the role play.

The groups could then discuss the following points:

- imagine and try to re-create the kind of discussion that might be going on among the children
- discuss in your respective groups how the approaches 'a' or 'b' below could be followed up:
 - a) to spend some time discussing the event in the village and the situation that followed as a sequence
 - or
 - b) to immediately continue to carry out teaching the first lesson in the schedule.
- discuss also the reasons why the group chose to follow option 'a' or 'b' and present it to the trainees after the discussion.

Note to Trainer:

The trainer can then summarize the outcome of the discussion to the participants. At this stage of the module, the teacher trainer could already initiate detailed discussion on how certain topics in the subject modules can be of use to promote the children's expression of feelings. For example, trainees may take some time to go through the different modules and find out topics and exercises that could be used in encouraging children to express their feelings.

Children have different capacities and abilities to perform in school. From your experiences as a teacher, for example, you may remember that some students who are good at sports and physical activities might not be as good in their academic performance. There might be children who perform better in groups, etc.

6.3.1 What can be done to build the capacity of children?

Note to Trainer:

The aim of this exercise is to:

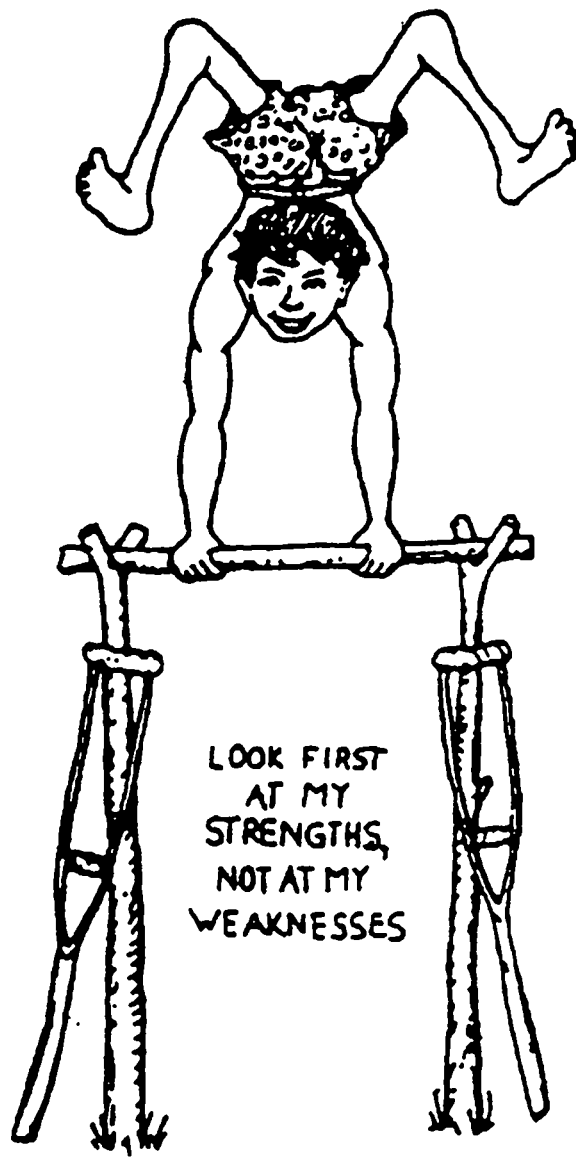
1. make teachers sensitive to different abilities of their students, and
2. find out how these abilities can be developed especially in relation to promoting the psychosocial needs of children.

Discussion Exercise:

- Discuss in the classroom some types of children you have come across during your teaching job.
- Discuss various terms (if any) that are used to describe the different abilities of children.

Summary:

Trainer to summarize the discussion and point out issues raised in connection with the different abilities of the children and introduce the idea of identifying, highlighting and building on the strong points in the individual child. Please take note whether the strengths of children with disabilities was discussed.



Note to Trainer:

Encourage trainees to briefly discuss the message they get from the above drawing.

6.3.1 What can be done to build the capacity of children?

There are many ways that teachers can use to build the capacity of children. For the purpose of this training, we shall discuss three stages that can be followed either for an individual child or for a group of children:

A - Identification

The first stage is to identify the strengths of the child/children. This has to be done correctly and, after observation of the behaviour and achievements in different activities over a long period of time. The child's interest can also be explored in discussion with the child. It is important that the child be asked his/her opinions about the teachers impressions of the child's strengths.

B – Recognition

This is the stage when the teacher is expected to highlight the identified ability. This can be done through discussions with the children concerned, with other teachers, etc. The discussion on strengths is essential because children also need to understand those strengths. Children feel appreciative that the teacher is interested enough to take time to find out their interests and abilities. Because of this, children most of the times start to feel confident and positive about their capabilities. It is important that the teacher believes that the child has the ability to improve in order to efficiently help him/her realize further development.

C – Promotion

After identifying and recognizing the strengths of the child, the teacher could then think of different ways of building on those strengths. Please note that as the teacher finds out more about and appreciates the strengths in a child, the more successful the child will be in working towards strengthening his/her capabilities.

Case Study 1

In a community school for children affected by war, a teacher was faced with problems of aggression from a group of boys. The aggression was mainly aimed at girls in their school. They bullied and beat girls. Sometimes they even picked fights with boys in the village. The teachers tried to discipline the aggressive children but the complaints of beating were increasing rather than decreasing.

The teacher then called a meeting with the boys who were the most aggressive. He recognized that the boys were physically strong and fit for sports activities. Discussions were held with the boys on what they could contribute to the sports activities in their school. The boys forwarded constructive ideas on how the sports activities should be organized. Older boys among the group were selected to be leaders in facilitating the schedule of the sports with the help of the teacher. The boys then planned to find out what sports activities interested other children. The purpose of the discussion was explained by the headmaster of the school during the morning parade. The information gathered led to a healthy interaction between the aggressive boys and the children in the school.

Discussion Exercise

Discuss with trainees the lesson learned from the above case study.

Important issues to be highlighted are: children's participation; recognition of strong points; involvement of children in constructive activities to channel their energy.

6.4 Promote normal family and everyday life so as to reinforce a child's natural resilience

Key words: resilience, normalizing, vulnerable

From the discussion in this module, it is clear that the development of the child must be addressed from different angles. So far we have discussed the role of the teacher as a promoter of psychosocial well-being in the development of the child in the school.

In this section we shall try to see how the teacher can take the role of an active community member in promoting normal family relationships and everyday life in the community. Our discussions will then continue on the role of the teacher outside the school. For instance, in collaboration with other members of the community, the teacher can initiate ideas that are beneficial to children and their communities. The following are some points to consider.

6.4.1 Normalizing the environment

This can be described as an effort made to encourage community members to carry out their normal everyday routines. This is suggested because of the fact that, after a prolonged conflict, people tend to get discouraged from carrying out their normal duties. This results in making their life even worse than before.

For example, farmers in a village might decide that it is not worth while cultivating their lands because there is a risk that their harvest might be destroyed by a passing army. The fear that the farmers in the village expressed may be true, but, it might be good to consider with them what alternatives they have.

The process of cultivation in itself occupies the minds of the people and the villagers will have hopes: something to look forward to. If on the other hand, the farmers decide not to cultivate, there will of course be a shortage of food, and also a feeling of hopelessness. The villagers will feel hopeless because they cannot feed and support themselves and they will feel frustrated that they cannot control the situation. If we allow the situation to continue, this feeling of despair could affect the children.

6.4.2 Support community activities

Community activities, such as planning and building schools in the village can be rewarding experiences for villagers. The teacher can create opportunities for discussion to start on how to build, expand or start schools in the community using existing materials and resources. This exercise in itself could lead to develop the villagers' sense of self-confidence. This of course will have an effect on the development of children in the village. It is also likely that the environment and relationships in families become hopeful and positive. Religious and spiritual life can be an important resource and domain that individuals and communities can draw on for encouragement and strength.

6.4.3 Support to children who are especially vulnerable

We have looked at issues touching on the lives of the majority of children who are affected by conflict. As discussed in the previous chapters, there is a need to regard all children living in conflict areas as already affected or likely to be affected by the negative influences of the conflict. That was why we needed to discuss methods that address developmental needs of children.

In any community, there are a number of children who are likely to be seriously affected to the extent that their experiences interfere with their psychological, social and intellectual development. In this chapter, we will therefore try to look at the psychosocial needs of children who are seriously affected by conflict.

In times of war many children get physical or psychological injuries that can lead to disability. Very often we hear of children who have been killed or disabled as a result of the war, for example, while playing with landmines, or children born with physical and/or mental disabilities, etc. There are also children who are affected so seriously by the things they have seen or done that they cannot get the experience out of their heads. They are always thinking about their experience so they feel as if it is happening right now. This persistent thought and feeling will then be an obstacle to relating to other people, or carrying out their tasks such as studying, working, etc. The quality of life of such children is then greatly reduced.

In situations of war, such children are given very little attention. Some of the children even may be hidden away so as not to cause embarrassment to the family. If these children are hidden away and not given opportunities to improve, the potential that they have cannot be strengthened. Instead, their natural potential tend to decrease and their disability can get worse.

Exercise:

Identify in your community three categories of children most seriously affected by war.

The following case study demonstrates the difficulty of a situation for vulnerable children. In a rural community village, people believed that families who have physically or mentally disabled children must have sinned and therefore their dilemma was a punishment from God. Therefore, they intended to hide such children from their neighbours. The children were given food and other basic necessities, but they were not given a chance to play and interact with other children.

In this village, John, who is 11 years old, is a child with mental retardation. His actions are like those of a toddler because he is mentally retarded. His mother usually feels sad and worries when she thinks of John. The neighbours do not talk about him in her presence. Sometimes, she thinks that her close neighbours and relatives do not remember that John exists. John's mother does not know how best to take care of him. She believes that since John's disability is a punishment for the sins she has committed, it is her duty to take care of him alone. However, his body is getting heavy for her to lift, and she has to clean and take care of him like a very young child. She worries a lot about what will happen to John when she dies.

During a visit to the village, one teacher from the school was informed about John by a neighbour. When the teacher went to discuss with John's mother about John's condition, the mother felt relieved that she could discuss her son's problem with someone who is knowledgeable. She also understood that John is a human being worth the attention of the teacher, who is regarded as a respectable person in the village. When the villagers heard about the visit by the teacher, they began to get more interested in John. They were amazed that the teacher did not show fear or disgust at John's condition. The teacher was rather free when talking to John and was quick to point out the good things that John was capable of doing. This changed the thinking of most villagers.

Later on John's mother reported that John has learnt more things now that he is in contact with many people. She feels comfortable and free while discussing his improvement with the neighbours. John is now frequently seen playing with other children under the shade of the big tree at the middle of the village, where many people meet in the late afternoon.

Exercise:

Summary:

The role of the teacher is not only purely classroom based but includes other participatory roles on issues that promote the general welfare of children in the community.

These roles can then include the following:

- * Identifying who these children are in the communities. The identification can be supplemented by registering the children and the type of disability they have.
- * Finding out what can be done to support these children and to assist them.
- * Finding out how the children can be protected from further harm.

* Giving these children access to education with other children in the existing schools (integrated education).

Can you think of other roles the community would expect you to perform?

Exercise:

Community work

Note to Trainer

Organize, if possible, for trainees to go out to the surrounding village in small groups (2-3 persons) and find out about the situation of disabilities. It is important that the trainees understand that the information they are gathering can be very sensitive. They may therefore have to discuss the matter with the village chief/leader before approaching individual families or villagers; it is important to clearly discuss the aim of the exercise. It is recommended that the trainers' team may take it upon themselves to follow up the information from the trainees and find out with the teachers in the surroundings, the best possible way for the children with disabilities to get access to education.

After the visit to the village, discuss the following points in groups:

- Who are the vulnerable children in the community?
- Discuss what can be done to support the children and their families.
- What can the teacher do to support the family and the community in a war situation?

Take Note:

In order to demonstrate the child's potential please regard the term '**children with disability**' as different from '**disabled children**'.

Note to Trainer

After the above discussion, please summarize the major points discussed by the groups.

6.4.4 Share information and ideas with teachers and others

As can be seen from the above discussion, the teacher has an important role in the community. The teacher is seen as the person who provides knowledge and education for children and the community. The teacher has also got the role of an important community member. How can the teacher be helped to carry out his/her tasks?

The teacher, as a member of the community, also experiences all the effects of war. One way that the teacher could be supported is by other teachers. Teachers in one school may make time to discuss their work as teachers, their feelings, experiences and views of the situation they face in their work. In this respect, Head Teachers and Supervisors of schools may have a responsibility to organize such discussion and sharing of ideas. Although it is common for teachers from a school to discuss issues when they meet at various times, it can be useful to make a timetable for meeting in order to bring up issues of common interest in schools.

Another area of support is training. Well-organized training occupies the minds of teachers in a constructive way and provides them with better opportunities to carry out their work effectively. Regular training can be organized in schools and external assistance can be sought whenever it is possible.

Experience shows that persons who have had no experience in war and conflict situations affecting children have a less clear understanding of the situation that they are working in than persons who are working in hardship areas such as in wars. This means that the former will lose interest in their work, feel helpless and believe that they cannot make any difference in their work, however hard they try.

UNIT 7

Children's rights

In this unit you will be able to:

- explain the rights of children as they exist in societies
- learn about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC)
- draw the similarities and differences between the traditional rights of children and the CRC
- identify situations and practices that can be developed to address the rights of children
- understand the role of teachers in advocating for the rights of children

Key words: rights, convention, United Nations

Note to Trainer

It is recommended that the trainer familiarizes himself/herself with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child before starting this part of the training.

The main aim of the training is:

1. to make trainees sensitive to the rights of children that already exist in their societies
2. to draw similarities and differences between the traditional rights and the CRC
3. to explore situations and practices that can be developed to address the rights of children
4. to enable trainees to understand the role of teachers in advocating for the rights of children

7.1 What are children's rights?

In any community, children are considered to be the future. Therefore, as far as the wealth, the knowledge, the attitudes and the conditions of the community permit, children are given care that is believed to be appropriate. However, we as persons working with children, need to stand up for the rights of children in any way we can. Therefore, there is a need for us to be aware of the rights of children.

A closer look at the practices and traditions of communities shows the different rights that are given to children by the community. Nowadays, basic rights of children are developed and ratified by 191 nations of the world, as of June 1997. The exceptions in this case are the USA and Somalia. This set of rights is called the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). As can be imagined,

there are of course differences in the ways that children's rights are implemented because of various political, economical and social reasons.

Let us take a look at the rights of children as understood in our society in various activities. In order to do this, let us take the different practices of our communities surrounding child-rearing. What are the rights that a child has: at birth, during conflicts, in the event of losing parents or guardians, growing up from childhood to adulthood, etc.

Note to Trainer:

The objective of the following group discussion is for the trainees to understand some existing practices that indicate the rights and responsibilities of children. After this exercise, trainees will be asked to draw similarities and differences between the rights of children as stated in the CRC.

The provisions within the traditions concerning rights of children need to be explored so that trainees can easily identify positive and negative practices concerning children and use the provisions in the CRC as a checklist to develop ideas, beliefs, understanding and practices that are favourable for children. Traditional sayings and proverbs can be used as discussion points for understanding attitudes of the community to children.

Please note that the ideas in the CRC should be used to develop and enrich the positive points in the culture rather than to try to fit the traditions and culture of people into the CRC.

Discussion Exercise:

Discuss in groups or in the classroom the various traditional practices relating to the following by using the examples set out or by using additional examples:

Perceptions about children: Who is a child in your community (in terms of age, social status...)? How are children considered in your communities? Find out some traditional sayings concerning children and discuss what these sayings imply about the status and treatment of children in the community.

Birth of Children: For example, how is a child named; who is responsible for the welfare of a child; who has responsibility to fulfil a child's basic needs; what happens when there are births of children with disability, multiple births such as twins, etc.

Initiation: In communities where initiation rites are performed, what does the initiation ceremony mark in the life of a child, what are the lessons given to the adolescent; what responsibilities are given to the adolescent as an individual? What responsibilities are given to the initiated group as a whole?

(continues on the next page)

Marriage: How are children prepared for marriage? What is considered to be marriageable age? What responsibilities are there for the person who gets married? What are the differences in the roles of boys and girls once they get married? How does the responsibility affect their development? What are the provisions that the community or extended family has towards bringing up children in the event of broken marriages?

Death: In cases of parental death, how are children cared for? Who takes the responsibility for their care?

Protection of children: What practices exist in your community to protect children from abuses such as rape and excessive physical punishment? Do traditional courts or any arrangements that are responsible for settling disputes consider the situation of children in, for example, settling disputes among married couples, etc?

Socialization: What are the methods that are used for guiding children in their upbringing? What are the methods for disciplining children? Who are the most important people in guiding children? How do these methods help or obstruct the development of children and the expression of children's feelings?

7.2 What is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)?

- It is an agreement that defines basic rights that all children are entitled to. It applies to young people up to the age of 18 years, everywhere in the world, whether they live in rich or poor countries and regardless of their race, colour, sex, situation, etc.
- It sets basic standards of children's well-being at different stages of their development.
- The CRC is the first legally binding code of child rights in history.

Main Principles of the CRC:

There are four articles in the CRC that have been given special emphasis and they define some general principles.

A – Best interests of the child (Article 3)

It was mentioned earlier in this Unit that children may have interests that are different from those of adults and it is important that those interests are taken into account.

B – Participation (Article 12)

In order to determine what is in a child's best interests, it is both logical and necessary that the child should be listened to and have his/her views taken seriously in matters affecting his or her life.

C – Non-discrimination (Article 2)

All rights in the CRC apply to all children regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, disability, birth, etc. For instance, girls should be given the same opportunities as boys. Children with disabilities should be given the same chance to have a good quality of life as those without disabilities.

D – Survival and Development (Article 6)

This article is about the child's right to live including the need for preventive action such as immunization. The term 'development' refers to many things, including a child's personality, talents and abilities.

Note to Trainer:

After discussing the four articles, it is important to compare them with the traditional practices concerning children (as discussed in the above exercise.) Please encourage trainees to discuss areas within the culture that could be developed to the benefit of ensuring the rights of children.

7.3 Some ways teachers can advocate for the rights of children

Advocating for children's rights means standing up for rights of children, making the rights of children known to others so that their rights may be respected and protected.

As you might remember, the 'code of conduct' that we discussed with children is one example where the teacher was exercising the four main principles of the CRC.

Note to Trainer:

Please ask trainees to discuss Case Study-2 and how the way the teacher responded to the problem addresses the four main principles of the CRC.

UNIT 8

Summary and Revision

In this module we have tried to cover the following:

- the **psychosocial well-being** of children and the **special needs** of children who are living in areas affected by conflict
- the **effects** of conflict and displacement on children, the family and the community
- **coping methods** that are used by people and the principles in the coping methods; special importance was understanding of feelings and experiences and the support given by the teacher and the environment
- the **importance of schools** in giving opportunities for providing support to children; important role of the teacher in child development
- **approaches** that teachers and other staff in schools could use to help children affected by conflict and displacement:
 1. All children who live in war areas are affected by the war in one way or the other. The degree of the effects of the war differs from one individual to another depending on many factors in the child's development such as his/her earlier interaction with others.
 2. Teachers to use methods of teaching that could be of importance to the development of children. Ways of using the classroom situation to encourage the expression of feelings and understanding of behaviour were discussed. The need of some children not to express or discuss their experiences and feelings must be recognized and accepted. Subjects taught in the classroom can be used to address the psychosocial well-being of the children in the classroom without necessarily diverting from the objectives and the topics of the teaching.
 3. Stimulating the capacity of children to discuss, develop and learn. Identification, recognition and promotion were raised as important considerations to stimulate the development of children.
 4. The teacher as a promoter of normal family and everyday life situation. Some possibilities that were suggested were: normalizing the environment for the children, supporting/initiating community activities and giving support to children who are especially vulnerable.
 5. Support for teachers: the teacher's need to develop and be supported in the work that he/she is carrying out needs to be seriously looked into. Other teachers and parents can be a source of support.
- The **CRC**: as a human rights document, the CRC has corresponding values in the values and practices within societies. For the teacher, it is important to **understand the CRC** and the traditions in the community so that the teacher's work in the community receives support.

Glossary

Abnormal: refers to deviation (e.g. in terms of behaviour) from the normal; exceptional

Behaviour: refers to a way of acting or reacting

Conflict: fight or clash between two opposite bodies

Convention: general agreement on a certain issue by the implicit consent of the majority

Coping: (the root word is cope) being able to manage successfully or deal with something difficult

Displacement: removal of a person from one's home country for military, political or, in some cases, environmental reasons.

Effects: results or consequences of an action

Needs: requirements or wants; circumstances requiring some course of action

Observe: to see and notice; to watch carefully; to note or record facts/data

Resilience: the ability to effectively recover from set-back

Rights: legal or moral entitlements of a person or group

Social values: principles, antecedents, or standards held by a society

Symptoms: signs of the existence of a condition, especially a change or manifestation on the body suggestive of ailment or disorder as perceived by the victim

Trauma: a painful emotional experience or shock with lasting psychological consequences.

United Nations: an association of states for international peace, security and cooperation.

Vulnerable: unprotected, exposed to danger, attack, etc.



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