Disaster Risk Reduction and Vulnerable Populations in Jamaica
Protecting Children Within the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Framework

Michelle T. Edwards and Kerry-Ann N. Morris
Mitigation, Planning and Research Division (MPRD) and Information and Training Unit (IT), Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM)
Kingston, Jamaica

ABSTRACT

In this paper we will examine the efforts of Jamaica’s risk reduction programme, through the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), to address the special needs of children in disaster situations, with a focus on what has been done in meeting these needs and how effective these interventions have been. Children make up approximately half of the total Jamaican population. This makes it very necessary for disaster management to focus on the needs of this very vulnerable group.

KEY WORDS: children; disasters; Jamaica; ODPEM; protecting; risk; vulnerability.

INTRODUCTION

The growing literature on social vulnerability and disasters clearly demonstrates that natural disasters and other extreme events do not impact populations equally or at random. Lori Peek, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the Colorado State University, argues that deaths, injuries and property losses from disasters tend to reflect larger patterns of social stratification and inequality. Vulnerable groups such as children, the emphasis of this paper, because of their positions in society, often have the hardest time preparing for and responding to disasters, and thus suffer disproportionate impacts when an event actually does occur (Peek, 2007).

This paper will examine the efforts of Jamaica’s disaster risk reduction programme, through the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), to address the special needs of children in disaster situations, with a focus on what has been done in meeting these needs and how effective these interventions have been to date. This examination will conclude with a look at the way forward for greater integration of the special needs of this particularly group within the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) framework in Jamaica.

THE COMPREHENSIVE DISASTER MANAGEMENT (CDM) FRAMEWORK

Risk is defined as the probability of a hazard occurring that has the likelihood of having a negative impact on certain groups in the society. Disaster Risk Reduction therefore involves the systematic development and application of policies, strategies and practices to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society to avoid or to limit the adverse impact of hazards within the broad context of sustainable development. The Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) cycle therefore illustrates the ongoing process by which governments, businesses and civil society plan for and reduce the impact of disasters, and take steps to recover after a disaster has occurred. Appropriate actions at all points in the cycle lead to greater preparedness, better warnings, reduced vulnerability or the prevention of disasters during the next repetition of the cycle.

The CDM framework is multi-hazard and multi-sectoral in its application and is concerned primarily with integrating vulnerability assessment and risk reduction into development planning and management (CDERA, 2001) through four major phases: Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery.

CHILDREN AND THE COMPREHENSIVE DISASTER MANAGEMENT (CDM) FRAMEWORK IN JAMAICA

According to the Demographic Statistics 2006, published by the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (Kingston, 2007), children (0 to 18 years) accounted for 54.9% (approximately 1,468,625) of Jamaica’s total population of 2,673,816 (STATIN, 2007). Table 1 is a breakdown of the children population in Jamaica for 2006, according to the three stages of the life cycle of the child: early childhood (0-8 years); middle childhood (9-13 years); and adolescence (14-18 years).

Table 1: Children Population in Jamaica by Age and Sex, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>% of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>41,153</td>
<td>20,875</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>44,205</td>
<td>22,410</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>44,555</td>
<td>22,413</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>45,209</td>
<td>22,734</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>44,250</td>
<td>23,320</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>55,004</td>
<td>26,530</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>52,661</td>
<td>26,309</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>51,375</td>
<td>25,672</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>54,032</td>
<td>27,021</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-8</td>
<td>432,444</td>
<td>217,284</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>55,240</td>
<td>27,877</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>54,825</td>
<td>27,500</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>58,015</td>
<td>28,528</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>57,554</td>
<td>28,837</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>56,229</td>
<td>28,150</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-13</td>
<td>281,863</td>
<td>140,892</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jamaica’s population is very young, yet it is this sector that is most vulnerable to disasters.

In any type of disaster, children and adolescents constitute a particularly vulnerable group. Children require special protection as, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, they have the right to be the first to receive attention during emergencies. Peek (2007) argues that disasters harm the physical spaces in which children live – their homes, neighbourhoods and schools – and may lead to long-term displacement, disrupt their daily routines and educational progress, threaten their sense of safety and security in the world, cause stress within families and communities and may result in personal injury or the death of loved ones. Clearly children not only have basic survival needs such as food, water and shelter, but also suffer great emotional trauma and require psycho-affective needs such as love, recreation and play (ODPEM, 2005).

**ODPEM’s Role in Preparing Jamaica’s Children and Schools for Disasters**

In all societies children represent hope for the future. By extension, schools, because of their direct link to children are universally regarded as institutions of learning for instilling cultural values and passing on both traditional and conventional knowledge to younger generations.

Understanding the special place that children hold in our society and culture, and their special needs that will arise during disaster situations, the ODPEM, from very early in is beginning, initiated a dynamic preparedness/public awareness programme that focuses on Jamaica’s children and schools, and that remains a priority for the Organization’s work.

- **Drills, Trainings, etc.:** Earthquake drills, presentations to teachers and students and simulations have been conducted in schools, especially in schools that are located in hazardous situations or vulnerable to hazards, to facilitate preparedness of Jamaica’s children and, by extension, the society.

- **Multimedia Approach:** The Organization also utilizes a multimedia approach in delivering disaster management issues to children, including the Internet. The ODPEM was the first in the Caribbean to have a disaster preparedness website specifically targeting children.

- **Hazard Awareness Days:** Designated hazard awareness days are utilized to further prepare the nation’s children for disasters. These are Earthquake Awareness Day in Schools, observed annually during Earthquake Awareness Week in January; and Disaster Preparedness Day in Schools, held annually during Disaster Preparedness Month in June. On these hazard awareness days, school children are requested to develop original items in song, dance, drama and poetry on any disaster management issue of relevance to them. This approach has served as a means for students to express themselves and their vulnerabilities to certain disasters.

- **Culinary Competition:** A disaster management culinary competition is held every other year during Disaster Preparedness Month. For this competition schools are asked to select students to create and present original dishes that may be used in a disaster event using non-perishable food items.

- **Children-Specific Educational Materials:** Complementing the above activities are educational materials specifically created for children in disasters. These are Earthquake Preparedness for Children brochure, Freddy the Friendly Flood Guide poster, and Children Are You Prepared for an Earthquake poster.

### Integrating Children’s Needs/Rights Within the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Framework: Two ODPEM-Led Approaches

Despite the on-the-ground efforts of the ODPEM, and the large percentage of the population that are children, disaster management policies and practices in Jamaica have been slow in recognizing children as a particularly vulnerable group in any disaster. This has been allowed to happen although Jamaica, in recognizing the special place that children hold in our lives and the rights that they have, ratified the main international treaties that have an impact on the rights of Jamaican children. These are:

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC);
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

All three treaties provide a framework for the development of policies and strategies to promote and protect the rights of children and women, to eradicate inequality and discrimination, and to create a healthy environment in which all children may flourish (UNICEF, 2004).

Jamaica ratified the CRC in May 1991. After many years of debate on children’s issues, Jamaica’s Parliament finally passed the Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA) on March 16, 2004. It is hoped that the CCPA will bring Jamaica in line with the provisions of the CRC; however, there are gaps. For instance, while the CCPA adequately addresses issues of childcare and protection in places of safety, children’s homes and in the care of fit persons, children in other situations, particularly in the access of economic, social and cultural rights, are not adequately addressed. Many of these gaps also have implications for CDM in the Jamaican context.

The following are relevant excerpts from the CRC that are applicable to the rights-based approach for the inclusion of children’s needs in the overall CDM framework. The table further explains whether these excerpts are addressed in the CCPA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRC Article</th>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Status in the CCPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article 6</td>
<td><strong>Survival and Development</strong></td>
<td>“…Every child has inherent right to life…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 9</td>
<td><strong>Separation from Parents</strong></td>
<td>“States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Relevant Excerpts from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Applicable to Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) & Their Status in the Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA)**

| Article 6 | **Survival and Development** | “…Every child has inherent right to life…” | Not addressed in the CCPA |
| Article 9 | **Separation from Parents** | “States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or | |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>CCPA Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article 20 Protection of a Child Without a Family</td>
<td>“A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment … Shall be entitled to special protection and assistance…”</td>
<td>Sufficiently addressed in the CCPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 22 Refugee Children</td>
<td>“States Parties shall provide … Co-operation in any efforts by the United Nations … To protect and assist such a child and to trace the parents or other members of the family … For reunification with his or her family.”</td>
<td>Not addressed in the CCPA. Children not mentioned in the Alien Act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 24 Health and Health Services</td>
<td>“States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health…”</td>
<td>Insufficiently addressed in the CCPA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 28 Education</td>
<td>“States Parties recognize the right of the child to education…”</td>
<td>Insufficiently addressed in the CCPA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 31 Leisure, Recreation and Cultural Activities</td>
<td>“States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child…”</td>
<td>Insufficiently addressed in the CCPA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 34 Sexual Exploitation</td>
<td>“States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.”</td>
<td>Insufficiently addressed in the CCPA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 39 Rehabilitative Care</td>
<td>“States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse…”</td>
<td>Sufficiently addressed in the CCPA.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only two articles in the CRC that are applicable to the inclusion of a child-rights approach to CDM in Jamaica are sufficiently addressed in the CCPA: Article 20 (Protection of a Child Without a Family) and Article 39 (Rehabilitative Care). Three articles are insufficiently addressed in the CCPA: Articles 28 (Education), 31 (Leisure, Recreation and Cultural Activities), and 34 (Sexual Exploitation). Articles 6 (Survival and Development), and 22 (Refugee Children) are not addressed in the CCPA.

**ODPEM Approach #1: Recognizing Children’s Rights in Disaster Management and Response**

Despite the lagging legislative support, October 28 to November 8, 2001, a period of 20 days, was the turning point in the integration of children’s rights/needs in CDM in Jamaica. This period was marked by severe weather conditions that culminated in heavy flooding in six parishes: St. Thomas, St. Ann, St. Catherine, Kingston and St. Andrew, St. Mary and Portland. St. Mary and Portland were the worst affected parishes. Loss of life was minimal but houses, public buildings, major bridges and roadways, and farmlands were destroyed.

As part of its routine in managing disaster events, the ODPEM prepared timely situation reports of the affected areas. These reports are also used by a wide cross section of stakeholders, including planners, relief agencies and donor organizations during the Response and Recovery phases. However, the reports did not adequately and comprehensively reflect the status of children in disaster conditions. It became immediately obvious that there was a need to recognize that relief policies and practices should be cognizant of the special needs and vulnerability of children. Instead it is assumed that parents will take care of children while, if children must be relocated to shelters, rescue and shelter workers will care for them. This type of nurturing usually occurs outside of the parameters of official policy or guidelines (Madden, 2002).

This also became clear again in May 2002 after severe flooding affected several parishes across the island.

**ODPEM’s Guidelines for Child-Friendly Disaster Management and Response**

Prompted by these two severe weather events, the ODPEM, with the assistance of the UNICEF Country Office for Jamaica, commissioned an assessment of child-friendly disaster response in May 2002, and a workshop on the development of child-friendly guidelines was held in July 2002. These guidelines aim to ensure that risk management, especially disaster response in Jamaica, uses a child-rights approach (ODPEM, 2005), by recognizing the nine articles above in responding to any type of disaster.

Published in 2005, the Guidelines for Child-Friendly Disaster Management and Response was developed around six core aspects of the CRC for integrating a child-rights approach to CDM:

**Table 3: Six Core Aspects of the CRC Integrated into a Child-Friendly Approach to Disaster Management and Response in Jamaica**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Child Protection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Children in shelters are potential victims (violence, drugs, sexual abuse).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children are subject to intra-family violence, especially in unfamiliar, stressful situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Separation from family is the least desirable outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Separated children require identification, tracing and reunification; new orphans require foster care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children with disabilities need special consideration in disasters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The right to play pertains, especially in the shelter context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Health</th>
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...
Health status of children is most precarious in emergencies. Acute respiratory infections and diarrhoeal disease are the chief threats. Children and caregivers lack health and hygiene information. Reproductive health of young girls and adolescents is especially affected during disasters. Psychosocial needs increase for children and parents; response should emphasize family and community rather than individual clinical care.

3. Water and Sanitation
- Children are particularly threatened by the oral-faecal cycle of water-borne diseases.
- The location of water points and latrines are often inconvenient for children.
- Water points pose potential hazards to children. These include unprotected wells and heavy pump handles.
- Both children and caregivers lack hygiene and water resource management information.
- Children tend to have easy contact with solid waste (trash) in and around shelters.

4. Food and Nutrition
- Normally balanced diets are interrupted during disasters.
- Insufficient caloric intake can cause malnutrition and disease.
- Breastfeeding may decrease in shelters.
- Food preparation may be less than adequate in shelters, particularly if mass feeding replaces family preparation.

5. Shelter
- Overcrowding constitutes the chief menace to children’s health and safety.
- Exposure to elements causes health problems.
- Bedding, blankets and clothing in shelters are often inappropriate to children’s needs.
- Lack of privacy for young women and families poses dangers.

6. Education
- Education, a basic right, is interrupted by disasters.
- Schools are often used as shelters, undermining education.
- The lack of functioning schools contributes to the destabilized condition of a community.
- There is usually a lack of textbooks, uniforms, shoes and school “kit” following a disaster.
- Pre-school age children lack stimulation in shelters.

The Guidelines serve as an aide-mémoire for planners and implementers in times of emergency. It uses a succinct checklist format that makes it easy for any practitioner in the field to refer quickly to the appropriate sector and guidelines for assistance. For instance the following guidelines in Table 4 are provided under Health:

### Table 4: Guidelines Developed to Safeguard the Health of Children During Disasters

#### Health

**Before:**
- Develop hygiene, first aid and sex education kits.
- First aid kits should be preplaced at shelters with adequate provision of medicines for children.
- Shelter Management Teams should be sensitized on children’s health issues.
- Shelter Management Teams and other community members should receive training in first aid and basic public health issues.

**During and After:**
- Rapid assessment of the affected population must specifically analyze the condition of children, such as age, gender and health status.
- A health team must make regular visits to monitor the status of children and of pre- and/or post-natal mothers in shelters.
- Health education should be provided in shelters via simple health messages to women and children.
- Adolescents in disaster areas should have access to sex education kits with counseling.
- Adequate personal hygiene kits and toiletries must be made available for women and girls.

The other rights of the child are similarly treated to effectively integrate a child-rights approach to disaster management in Jamaica.

![Fig. 2: Cover of booklet Guidelines for Child-Friendly Disaster Management and Response](image-url)
this experience led to the implementation of a project to strengthen the capacities of communities, through schools, to protect children in the event of a natural or man-made slow/rapid-onset emergency.

Protecting Children in Emergencies by Strengthening the Capacity of Schools and their Surrounding Communities to Respond to Disasters

This Project, launched in 2005, was a joint initiative of the ODPEM, the Ministry of Education and Youth (MoEY), and the UNICEF country office for Jamaica. The Project was implemented in 2005/2006 in communities most vulnerable to flooding and landslides. It is being expanded to 2007/2008.

Protecting children during disasters requires two distinct yet inseparable priorities for action: disaster risk education and school safety. Making disaster risk education part of national primary and secondary school curricula fosters awareness and better understanding of the immediate environment in which children and their families live and work. According to Salvano Briceño, Director of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), children who are taught about natural hazard risks play an important role in saving lives and protecting members of the community in times of crisis. For instance, when the December 2004 tsunami struck, British schoolgirl Tilly Smith saved many lives by urging people to flee the shore: her geography class in Britain had enabled her to recognize the first signs of a tsunami. At the same time, Anto, a young boy on the Indonesian island of Simeulue had learned from his grandfather what to do when an earthquake strikes. He and all the other islanders ran to higher ground before the tsunami struck, sparing all but eight members of the community.

Schools also serve as a community’s central location for meetings and group activities in normal times, and as makeshift hospitals, vaccination centres or places of refuge and shelter in times of disaster. Many of these school buildings, however, are unable to withstand the forces of nature.

Recognizing the need for disaster risk education for school children and school safety, the ODPEM/MoEY/UNICEF initiative trained and equipped 150 school-based professionals (teachers, principals and guidance counselors) and Parent Teachers Association (PTA) representatives from 30 target schools with knowledge and skills to inform and develop comprehensive school emergency preparedness and response plans and sensitize community members on emergency preparedness and disaster management processes and procedures. Topics covered in the training included shelter management, vulnerability community assessment, basic disaster management, how to develop and use a hazard map, basic first aid, and community preparedness and response.

Of the 150 school professionals, 41 were capacitated with knowledge and skills to operate, maintain, and communicate through radios in emergency situations, and increased their knowledge about how to best protect the rights of children in emergency preparedness and response activities through the utilization of ODPEM’s Guidelines for Child-Friendly Disaster Management and Response. Some 40,000 children were initially targeted.

The UNICEF considered the Project a Good Practice (ISDR, 2007), meaning that the Project illustrated one and/or several initiatives, such as:

- Training and capacity building of school teachers, students and staff on basic life saving skills; and
- Building the resilience of school facilities to disaster impacts to protect children in the event of a natural hazard.

The Project helped to develop 30 school emergency preparedness and response plans and increased the capacities of the targeted 30 schools and school communities to better protect some 40,000 children from potential hazards. Communication protocols and communication mechanisms were also established in partnership with the targeted schools, the MoEY and the ODPEM to facilitate preparedness and response activities.

Thirty schools were designated by the MoEY on the basis of their high vulnerability to flooding, landslides or sporadic outbreaks of conflict within the surrounding communities. The 30 emergency preparedness and response plans that were developed increased the capacities of the 30 schools and school communities to better protect some 30,000 children.

CONCLUSION

The ODPEM has made great strides in addressing the needs of and protecting children in disasters through their ongoing preparedness/public awareness campaigns and by creating specific projects to integrate children’s needs/rights in the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) framework. By recognizing the rights of the child in disaster management and response and building a culture of prevention in and through schools - an ongoing effort - the ODPEM and, by extension, Jamaica, is committed to raising awareness, mobilizing action, and harnessing existing practices to reduce loss of life, livelihood, as well as social and environmental losses caused to communities as a result of disasters. These activities reflect the five priorities for action outlined in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters:

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.
4. Reduce the underlying risk factors.
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

Essentially the above ODPEM-led initiatives fall under Priorities for action 3 and 4 above.

But while these are all highly commended efforts we have some ways to go. The ODPEM’s Guidelines for Child-Friendly Disaster Management and Response, although serving as an aide mémoire for planners and implementers in times of emergency, these latter individuals are not sufficiently trained in the specifics of the Guidelines and how to effectively implement them in times of emergencies. This calls for the need for the Guidelines to be incorporated in all training materials, which is currently not the case.

The second ODPEM-led approach, Protecting Children in Emergencies by Strengthening the Capacity of Schools and their Surrounding Communities to Respond to Disasters, also brought to attention the following limitations:

- Of the 30 schools targeted, none had previously designed an emergency preparedness and response plan even though there was a general consensus and recognition that such a plan was
needed. Lack of resources and technical support were cited as the main challenges to the development of such plans.

- Most of the schools had no contingency plans in place to facilitate communication between themselves and emergency responders including the police, fire brigade and, notably the Ministry of Education and Youth (MoEY).

- The schools did not have the telephone numbers of front-line responders available or visible for use during and after a rapid-onset emergency. Most of the schools did not have the telephone numbers of the local police and fire stations.

- Children were not regularly exposed to information on how to prepare for or respond to an emergency situation other than annual Earthquake Awareness Day in Schools activities or information available via radio announcements during the annual hurricane season. Children were poorly equipped to respond to rapid and slow-onset emergencies, due to the lack of vulnerability assessments, hazard identifications and precautionary actions/responses to fire, flooding, and earthquakes.

- No emergency management or response initiative was available or standardized to care for children with disabilities in schools (although there was a general recognition that these children were even more vulnerable during emergencies) or children living in child care institutions.

To better protect children within the surrounding communities, the ODPEM and the MoEY recognized the need to expand the initial project implemented in 2005/2006 and build on the lessons learnt to further strengthen the capacities of schools to react before, during and after emergencies. Such an expansion of the work initiated in 2005 will inform the needed streamlining of the development of emergency preparedness and response plans through schools and childcare institutions by preparing and presenting a how-to guide.

The following were the three key lessons learnt from this Project:

1. Using a standardized tool for developing school emergency preparedness and response plans greatly facilitates the development of thorough and quality plans.

2. The availability and access to basic psychosocial support to children and caregivers following an emergency can substantially aid recovery processes and reduce the impact of post-traumatic stress syndromes on children and caregivers.

3. Increased emphasis must be placed on children and their protection before, during and after the onset of a disaster situation.

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