

Emergency Capacity Building Project 'Case study of good practice'

Standard Case study

Save the Children - Building Capacity for Emergency Response

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1. Introduction

Save the Children (SCF) responds to emergencies that put at risk the survival, protection and well-being of significant numbers of children, where addressing the needs and well-being of those children is beyond the indigenous coping capacity, and where SCF is able to mobilise the financial and human resources to take urgent action on their behalf. SCF operates in over 100 countries. Save the Children US (SC-US) operates in 45 of those countries, in 4 regions, and has 4,800 employees of whom 97% are national staff.

A Global Emergency Team provides rapid response to large-scale, high profile emergencies. However, factors such as knowledge of local relationships, language and culture, mean that local staff already in-country are often better-placed to deliver effective emergency programs, especially in cases where accessibility is an issue.

SC-US therefore concentrated on placing national staff at the heart of its emergency preparedness strategy. Focused around developing the capabilities of national staff to mount quality emergency response programs, the strategy has a number of elements and is implemented at all levels of the organization.

2. About the National Staff Capacity Building Strategy

The strategy comprises:

- **Regional REDI Teams:** national staff are deployed on the REDI (rapid response) teams, supporting local field office staff when additional capacity is needed in the aftermath of small or medium scale emergencies. Members of the team are selected based on gaps or additional capacities required, and members' key competencies cover a wide range of cross-sectoral expertise. Formal training is provided for those who do not have previous relief experience, and less experienced members are deployed with more experienced counterparts, providing opportunities for apprenticeships and mentoring.

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- **Regional Emergency Response Training:** a point person in each Field Office receives formal emergency response training.
- **Focus on local emergency preparedness:** Regional Preparedness Advisors work with Senior Management Teams in each Field Office to develop emergency preparedness plans, thereby also enhancing the team's capacity to respond to an emergency. Whilst Regional Advisors have responsibility for working with area offices to launch the regional REDI teams when required, the emphasis is on developing the capability of the Field Office to initiate and manage its own emergency response.
- **Temporary Duty Assignments:** national staff are seconded to short-term assignments, typically 3 – 6 months, enabling them to gain experience and skills in an emergency context alongside more experienced staff. Performance evaluation during the assignment informs plans for further personal development in relevant skills.
- **Formal training:** employees attend external training programs specific to their areas of expertise.
- **Simulation exercises:** in situations where deployment to a field site with a mentor is not possible, simulation exercises have proved to be an extremely effective development tool.

3. Background

Evolved over a period of about 5 years, the strategy was championed by the Children in Emergencies and Crisis Unit and the Emergency Response Unit initially, and is now incorporated at all levels of the organization.

Key to implementation of the strategy are Regional Emergency Preparedness Advisors; qualified mentors; and trainers with practical knowledge of emergencies.

At the outset, a significant time investment was required to design the formal training program: this could require up to one week of development time per workshop. The ongoing annual cost of implementation runs at \$90,000 per Regional Advisor plus the costs of training; and travel and living expenses of Temporary Duty Assignments.

4. Evaluation

The purpose of this strategy is to equip local staff with the knowledge, skills and capabilities to implement a quality emergency response within their own country. As a result of implementing the strategy SC-US has been able to increase the speed and appropriateness of response. Because the organization is drawing more directly on local knowledge the level of appropriateness is also improved. SC-US now has a wider pool of

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staff with relevant capabilities to deploy in emergency contexts. At the same time, other staff in Field Offices have also gained awareness of the need for a different approach when the focus of their work changes suddenly from development to relief, thus supporting the overall emergency response effort. National staff now feel more involved in the emergency response process, and more valued as a result of being offered opportunities to develop their skills, and hence more options for career development.

5. Conclusion

The strategy is now embedded in the structure, processes and development plans of SC-US. It systematically offers development opportunities to strengthen local capabilities, whilst tapping into local knowledge and building wider awareness of approaches to emergency preparedness and response.

Improvements in program delivery, greater involvement of national staff and increased options for resourcing emergency response have resulted from the strategy.

This case study originated from [Save the Children US](#) and has been prepared by People In Aid in partnership with the Emergency Capacity Building Project (www.ecbproject.org).