

Michael Wessells at the Second CCF Child Protection Workshop  
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### **Examples of CCF's Rapid Assessment Rapid Response**

Emergency response can be too slow. Time and again the international community is criticized for its slowness, but not CCF! One of the achievements of CCF under Michelle's leadership has been the development of an almost-immediate strategy for responding in time of need.

The Tsunami catastrophe of Christmas 2004 was a classic example of quick reaction. John Schultz the CCF President and Michelle, Vice-President for International Programs, were celebrating Christmas with their families. Did CCF wait for their return to HQ, for formal meetings and deliberate creation of careful intervention strategies? NO! Decisions were taken over the phone and delegated to Christie Scott as Director of Emergency Response, and teams were sent out immediately using expertise garnered from CCF programs across the world. Dr Paco from Guatemala arrived in Sri Lanka at the same time as Abou from The Gambia and Solesne from Washington DC, and the work began.

We believe it is ethically wrong to spend 6-8 weeks assessing damage and need, while people are starving, clean water is lacking and epidemics develop. Our approach differs therefore from many other agencies, and we stand by it. They send in teams, spend time and money of an assessment, and then they vanish. Even if they come back later, we believe this approach is ethically flawed.

**CCF's Rapid Assessment Rapid Response** has evolved under Michelle's leadership as an efficient and appropriate way of reacting to emergencies. We do not try to replicate the tasks that other agencies can do better than we can. CCF-CFI focuses on the things we can do well, and in areas where we have a comparative advantage in the tools we can bring to the emergency table.

Donors do not give enough attention to children's needs. Mostly, they are ignored or treated as mouths needing food. In fact children have huge emotional needs and we try to take account of their reactions to disaster: for children are directly and catastrophically affected by things like physical violence, the death of their parents, the destruction of their homes by an earthquake or the burning of their villages by armed men in uniform. We try to ensure that children can participate emotionally in the emergency response through expressive activities. For very small children, things as simple as drawing pictures or acting out scenes can lead to an easier acceptance of the results of catastrophe. Providing an appropriate form of non-formal education can lead to improved child protection at a time when the whole population is at risk.

**This approach led CCF to develop the concept of a Child-Friendly-Space or a Child-Centered-Space (CCS).** CCS is a place where mothers can come with their children and

gain access to precious services. Here is a place where – first of all – there are no armed men, no weapons or any kind (which is an important factor in a time of civil war). Here is a place where children can feel protected, while their mothers have access to such health and social services that are available. Here is a space where children can interact in peace, unthreatened by the turmoil that surrounds them, and where their parents can discuss difficult issues in a calm environment. We have found occasions where land disputes and other underlying causes of strife have been settled because the CCS provides a non-stress environment where people can talk calmly.

It is also important to remember that many of the mothers are actually themselves children. Definitions of ‘childhood’ are culture-specific. When a father in Chad decides to marry off his eleven-year-old daughter as a protection mechanism (to lessen his daughter’s danger from the risk of rape by marauding armed bands) we are obliged to recognize that the father’s definition of ‘child’ no more conforms to western stereotypes than does the definition of ‘peace’ along the Darfur-Chad frontier. Accepting this reality does not diminish the physical or emotional stress for the child-bride, and the CCS offers her a place where she can seek help and support from the people best able to provide it: other young mothers.

Western psycho-social treatments seldom provide the best practice for other cultures. The mental illness model focuses on past horror. CCF’s Rapid Assessment Rapid Response approach prefers to focus on the real need, which is the immediate future. Recognizing the coping mechanism of early marriage, CCF encourages the children themselves to practise risk-mapping with patterns drawn in the sand. Such simple tools allow child-led risk-avoidance strategies to emerge. Adults may be keeping boys and girls separate, while the children recognize that mixing the sexes diminishes the risk for both: girls may be less vulnerable to rape, and boys to forced conscription. A child well-being committee can facilitate assistance for children from a range of local groups.

**CCF experience in Afghanistan using the child well-being committee** allowed the parents to discover things they had never heard of before. The CCF team in Kunduz and Talokan found that committees including children were far better informed about local news. In a patriarchal society such as Afghanistan, child-participation is counter-intuitive and yet it proved valuable in stopping several 11-year-old girls being married and improving the quality of potable water.

It is worth remembering that the CCF Afghan program was 50% of Michelle’s direct response to the attack on the New York World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. On her initiative, CCF immediately launched two 9/11 response programs, in New York (bringing communities and faiths together in Queens to respond to the disaster and help victims of every background) and in Northern Afghanistan where Michelle worked for UNICEF during the 1970s and carried out the field work for her PhD on development anthropology.

Does this Afghan experience offer a good and viable model for other places and other emergencies? To the extent that it is focused on capacity building for children and

youths, the model is replicable. CCF has experienced two watersheds since 9/11, which have pushed forward the Rapid Assessment Rapid Response strategy and the concept of Child Well-Being Committees: Iraq and the Tsunami.

**In Iraq, there was a decision that CCF would not start a program** because it was not possible to work with the integrity required under the terms of an American military occupation. CCF did not feel able to sign a document that put their staff under the orders of men in uniform and committed the CCF in advance to supporting US government policy. This type of imposition on private, charitable, civil society organizations does not fit the theory and practice of a free and democratic society and we were not able to support it.

Nevertheless CCF agreed to assist UNICEF with the design of a child-focused strategy and a team worked for two months to create a UNICEF Rapid Assessment Rapid Response approach. This team was put together by Michelle and it was led by her personal friend and colleague Jill Clarke. I am sure many of you remember that Jill died at United Nations HQ in Baghdad in the bombing on August 19, 2003 that also killed UN Special Representative Sergio Viera de Mello.

Jill's experience of war-torn societies and her expertise with children's affairs – added to her knowledge of Arabic and love of Iraq - made her an inspired choice to lead the UNICEF mission. Against the war, and angry at US and UK policies in the region, Jill accepted the task from CCF with misgivings. She did not enjoy it. A week before she was killed, her email to Michelle at CCF Richmond read, "I cannot wait to get away from here; but sometimes in life you have to do things you do not want to do." Her mission would have been finished at the end of August. She died just as it was ending.

The strategy Jill designed – and which I had the privilege of completing from the drafts on Jill's computer – aimed at "Reducing the risks to children's well-being, making their unalienable rights a reality, creating an enabling environment that supports children's positive development."

I would add here that some people challenge this type of formulation, asserting that, "Children's rights are universal and unalienable, and therefore they are a reality."

We accept the premise, but deny the assertion. CCF has detailed experience shows that there is a wide gap between the theory of unalienable rights and the reality of rights being denied by governments or corporations or social prejudices that reduce children often to slavery. Our approach is therefore close to – but broader than – UNICEF's 'protective environment' for children. CCF works with children to make their rights a practical reality.

**Nowhere has the CCF Rapid Assessment Rapid Response strategy been tested more severely than in the countries affected by the December 2004 Tsunami.** In several countries where we had ongoing child development programs – Indonesia, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka – the natural disaster caused by an undersea earthquake pushed CCF

staff into action in areas where child protection became the sudden and overriding priority.

Here we tested our approach and proved that our job is to facilitate local competencies at the family, village, province, regional and national level to mobilize government and civil society agencies for child protection. We start by providing a voice for children. Where possible, we work in concertation with other agencies: UNICEF, IRC, SCF, and local organizations. Sometimes the reality of sharing programs with INGOs has proved to be a nightmare! We have moved away from sharing offices and vehicles, to a model of sharing an intervention framework. This allows the agencies to work on a common strategy, and to work in geographically separate areas with each NGO using its own methodology and logistics.

The latest of Michelle's leadership initiatives is taking the issue of Child Protection Beyond Borders (to borrow a film title). With the Mellon Foundation, we are trying to make Child Protection a matter of regional policy in certain areas such as child trafficking and prostitution, and child soldiers. Let that be the end of my tribute: from the Voice of the Child, through the community, the province and national policy making, Michelle has brought CCF-CFI work for children to the international level. Her chairmanship of the NGO Committee for UNICEF is the visible part of this international achievement. The reality of her impact however, is the way in which she and we in CCF are making a difference to the lives of children in 40 countries.