

## Adolescent Engagement Initiative: Life-skills in the humanitarian context

### *Myanmar Child Protection Sub-Sector*

In 2014, the Child Protection sub-sector in Myanmar prioritised addressing the needs of adolescents affected by conflict in Rakhine and Kachin/Northern Shan State. Adolescents had been underserved in the humanitarian response, while they are the most likely to adopt risky behaviour, negative coping mechanisms and are at disproportionate risks of particular protection issues.

In line with the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, adolescents affected by emergencies in Myanmar have the right to be provided with a consistent minimum package. In order to ensure that adolescent engagement efforts are not dispersed and efforts are not duplicated, the Child Protection Sub-Sector sought to coordinate and jointly develop a programme model.



For further information on the background to this joint initiative, please consult: Child Protection Sub-Sector, April 2014, Adolescent engagement concept note

### **What we have achieved**

The sub-sector decided to focus on life-skills as both a viable means to help adolescents avoid risky behaviours and negative coping mechanisms, as well as a good entry point to engage adolescents. Life-skills education has been shown to build psychosocial competencies, critical thinking, decision-making and problem solving skills, and may help to foster a sense of personal worth and agency. Ultimately, it can contribute to behavioural change and an improved ability to make informed choices in life.

In 2002, UNICEF has developed a comprehensive life-skills package, which was endorsed by the Ministry of Education. Many child protection and education agencies have used the EXCEL life-skills package (Community-Based Extended and Continuous Education and Learning) for Out-of-School Youth over the years, but never in the humanitarian context. This comprehensive course is separated into three phases, and covers key life-skills competencies. In addition to the core modules, there are storybooks which address some of the key child protection challenges, including Mine Risks, Trafficking and Peace-Building.

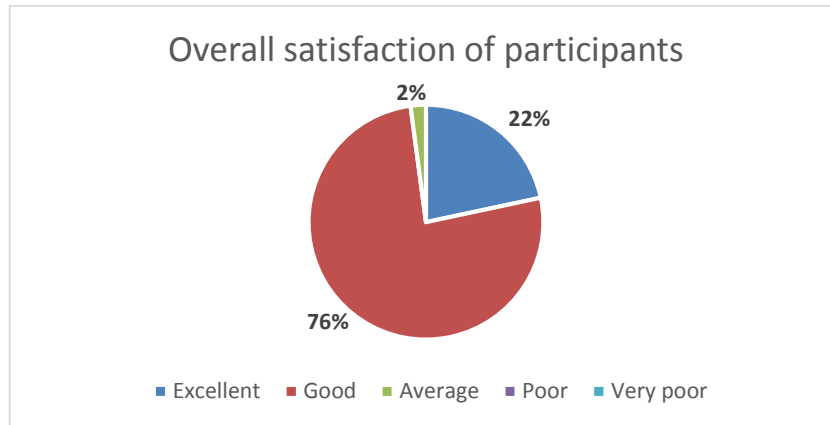
### **The Training of Trainers**

The Child Protection Sub-Sector, with support of the Education sector, organised Trainings of Trainers in Sittwe in August 2014 (Phase 1), and December 2014 (Phase 2+3). In Myitkyina, the first training was held in November 2014 (Phase 1), with the second one pending. It will be offered when the majority of participating agencies have finalised the roll-out of Phase 1. Participating organisations are:

- **Rakhine:** Danish Refugee Council, Save the Children, Relief International, International Rescue Committee, Plan International, Lutheran World Foundation (LWF), Community and Family Services International (CFSI)

- **Kachin:** Danish Refugee Council, KDG, CHAD, KMSS, PYOE, WPN, KWA, Ta'ang, Action Aid, World Concern, International Medical Corps (IMC)

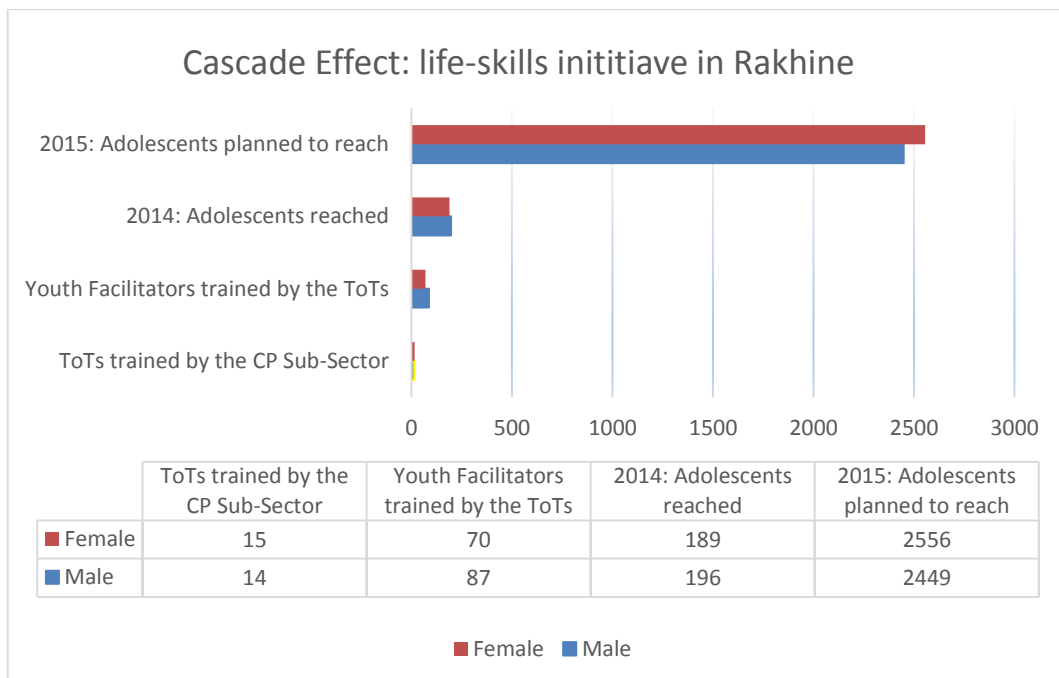
Most participants have proceeded to train youth facilitators to implement life-skills programming. Others are supervising life-skills programming and participated in the training to be able to provide adequate supervision and guidance.



*'Excel trainers are excellent! Provide further ToTs!' Woman participant, Sittwe urban*

### Cascade effect

The idea behind the Training of Trainers was to offer interested CP sub-sector members a common set of tools to engage conflict-affected adolescents, who then take it forward within their own programming as they see fit. In Rakhine, 29 trainers have been trained, who have then trained 157 youth facilitators who will reach a planned 5,005 adolescents in 2015.



## Setting minimum standards

The Child Protection Sub-Sectors in Kachin and Rakhine have gathered constant feedback on successes and challenges in the roll-out to inform a common programme module. For example, sub-sector members agreed jointly on the incentive level for the youth facilitators delivering the life-skills programme. In addition, it was identified early on that to ensure the participation of adolescent girls will need particular interventions. For example, Save the Children in Rakhine has set best standards by offering female only classes with female instructors.

## Lessons learnt

A more in-depth review was conducted in February 2015 in Rakhine, by conducting FGDs with youth facilitators, life-skills students and bilateral discussions with four of the actively implementing organisations. Some of the main lessons learnt include:

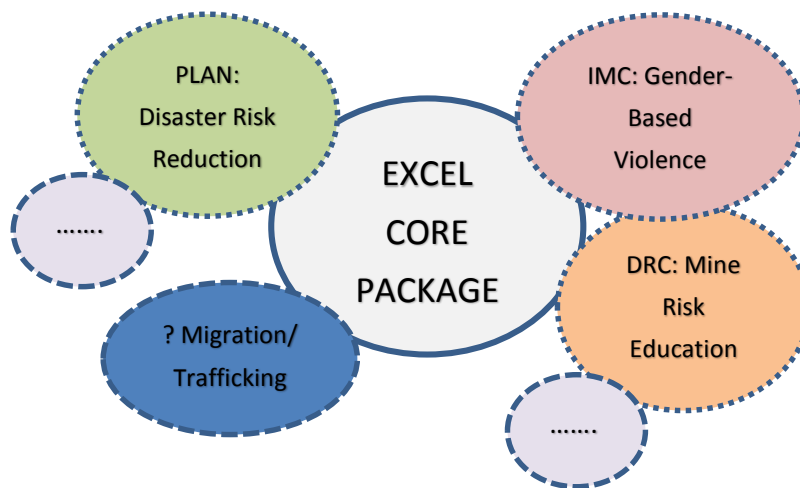
- Adopt a flexible scheduling: Youth facilitators reported that some adolescent boys are interested to participate but are reluctant to sign up for a course which commits a lot of their time. Life-skills programming offered through Child Protection programming should focus on reaching those who are less easy to reach, and scheduling should be adapted accordingly in consultation with adolescents. Organisations have resorted to evening and weekend classes, and some offer different class modules with a slower paced roll-out.
- Increase outreach to the most hard to reach: the idea behind adolescent programming is to fill a gap in the current humanitarian response, but adolescents tend to be more difficult to engage than younger children. Many youth facilitators already conduct active community reach-out to include additional adolescents, those with disabilities or girls from conservative families for example. Others have not been instructed to do and wait for interested adolescents to approach them. Active outreach needs to be standardized for all youth facilitators through a common ToR.
- Separate into different age groups: the idea behind adolescent programming is to fill a gap in the current humanitarian response, but older adolescents tend to be more difficult to engage than younger ones. Where programmatically possible, life-skills classes should be separated into different age groups.



For a more detailed analysis, check the list of recommendations which have been shared with the sub-national CP Sub-Sectors in March 2015.

## The work ahead

Development of emergency-relevant modules: EXCEL, while not emergency-focused, has been used as a core module around which the Child Protection Sub-Sector has agreed to add additional emergency relevant modules. Different organisations which are actively involved in the sub-sector initiative have agreed to take the lead in their development:



Expanding the development of a programme module: Upon request of the Rakhine sub-national CP sub-sector, an inter-agency Terms of Reference for the Youth Facilitators is under development, clarifying the selection criteria and the role that the youth facilitators are expected to take on. Additional common M&E approaches are also being explored. Save the Children in Rakhine is taking the lead in developing a simplified pre- and post-test for illiterate adolescents.

Adolescent engagement in emergencies beyond life-skills: Different organisations are exploring options to engage with adolescents beyond life-skills. The sub-sector will document these initiatives and lessons learnt to provide other sub-sector members with programme ideas. Approaches that are currently being piloted or in planning are: psycho-social support activities in dedicated safe spaces (youth centres), facilitated debate clubs based on youth radio programming, linking EXCEL groups to economic strengthening and vocational training.

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