DRA CALL FOR PROPOSALS ON SAFETY & PROTECTION - CHALLENGE BRIEF

Vulnerable groups access services related to safety & protection in the context of disasters

MAIN DETAILS

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PROBLEM STATEMENT: “How can we tackle barriers that exist to access services related to safety and protection for the most vulnerable people in need of these services”

CURRENT CHALLENGE

The Dominican Republic is considered a hotspot for natural disasters. The country is exposed to natural hazards such as droughts, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, landslides, temperature extremes, tropical storms, and tsunamis. According to the Global Climate Risks Index, the country is ranked as 12th most affected country by weather related events\(^1\). Between 1980 and 2008, 40 natural disasters affected 2.65 million people, almost a quarter of the country’s population\(^2\). During disasters, vulnerable population groups such as children and adolescents, especially girls, pregnant and lactating women, the elderly, disabled people and migrant populations are more at risk and likely to be disproportionately affected\(^3\).

The weak consideration of the specific needs of vulnerable groups (particularly adolescents girls) to access protection services in the context of disasters leads to additional exposure to risks such as sexual and gender-based violence, family separation, child trafficking, unequal access to assistance, discrimination in aid provision, enforced relocation and loss of personal documentation, especially during their stays in shelters\(^4\). During hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, significant gaps were identified in the protection and security (incl. child safeguarding) of the most vulnerable groups: for instance, people living in high-risk areas refused to be evacuated/relocated to state shelters as they considered them highly insecure due to the prevalence of sexual abuse and exploitation committed by some responders and shelter managers who took advantage of the vulnerability of the population

\(^1\) German watch, Global Climate Risk Index, 2019
\(^2\) Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, 2017
\(^3\) Population and Climate Change Adaptation, UNFPA, 2011
\(^4\) This information is extracted from a study conducted by Plan and Oxfam in the Dominican Republic titled "Women and girls in the context of disasters" in February 2013 and Post-Hurricane Irma and Maria social audit conducted by El Foro de Gestión de Riesgos, Oxfam, Casa Ya and Ciudad Alternativa in September 2018
under their care. Specifically, access to food and medical care was deliberately withheld by some responders, who demanded transactional sex or sexual “favour”s in exchange for humanitarian aid.

IMPACT GOAL

Plan International and Oxfam have partnered for the last decade to jointly implement DRM projects in the Dominican Republic, with a good track record of successful interventions strengthening the response capacity and readiness of government institutions, building resilience in communities and articulating networks of community-based organizations, with a focus on institutional strengthening at both national and local level. Plan International foresees a continued partnership with Oxfam to work on the improvement of DRM\(^5\) structures and resilience in the Dominican Republic. This intervention aims to see the following change:

- Vulnerable groups affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action
- Vulnerable groups affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them
- Vulnerable groups affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organisations learn from experience and reflection
- Building of resilience through greater gender equality and community participation generating improved local ownership
- Solving this problem has the potential to reduce the costs of emergency response to the extent that institutional risk management plans can be advocated with contingency protocols that reflect and identify specific actions for the most vulnerable groups. Building resilience and developing a culture of Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness will also lower future investment in response actions which are more costly: one dollar invested in disaster prevention can save seven dollars’ worth of disaster-related economic losses\(^6\)

Without a proper intervention, vulnerable groups (particularly girls) will continue to face barriers in accessing services related to safety and protection and will continue to be exposed to unnecessary and preventable safety and protection risks, and rights violation with severe consequences on their physical and emotional wellbeing.

ASSUMPTIONS MADE

- States are responsible for protecting children at all times, including during humanitarian crises\(^7\), however, public institutions in the Dominican Republic fail to guarantee adequate child protection
- The right to safety and protection in emergencies is not guaranteed, as the Dominican State lacks capacity to protect the most vulnerable people in crises

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\(^5\) Disaster Risk Management

\(^6\) Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery, UNDP

\(^7\) Minimum standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action
Access to quality services related to safety and protection is not equal for all people affected by a disaster, since the state does not promote non-discrimination on the basis of age, gender, race or disability.

There are security and protection gaps in humanitarian relief plans/strategies, particularly in temporary shelters. This was revealed in needs assessments carried out by Plan for implemented projects aiming to tackle gaps that exist to access Protection services for the most vulnerable groups living in urban and peri-urban areas of the Dominican Republic.

RISKS IN PURSUING THIS CHALLENGE

- State actors may not consider it a priority to consider the special needs of vulnerable groups in the provision of services. Additionally, the high turnover of staff and the political campaigns for the upcoming general elections (February and May 2020) may pose a challenge to working with state institutions.
- Hydro-meteorological events during the cyclonic season (from July 1st to November 30th) could paralyze the operations of the innovation or delay its implementation.

NEXT STEPS

Get Insights: Analyse past and present interventions by Plan, Oxfam and other organizations, at national and regional/international level, which have been implemented in the area of safety and protection of vulnerable groups in emergency contexts to learn and build on existing solutions, if any.

Unpack the problem:

- Conduct focus group discussions with vulnerable groups to further specify their needs and identify solutions. Empower vulnerable groups by enabling dialogue with government institutions.
- Team up with stakeholders: communities, government institutions, civil society organizations, private companies, academic institutions, social enterprises, start-ups etc. to brainstorm and discuss about existing and possible new solutions.
- Key partners for this initiative include government institutions, community-based organizations and civil society organizations working on DRM. Private companies, social enterprises and the academic world are also valuable partners able to bring expertise to the table and help scale up the identified solutions, for example, out-of-the-box communication or awareness campaigns. We are eager to know your perspective on the topic, do not hesitate to send us an email and share your thoughts!

Business model: Work with government and civil society to pilot identified solution while continuously monitoring and adapting.

Scale: With successful solutions, scale up. The current issue has a nation-wide scope, with the basic services and the interinstitutional coordination being weaker in the poorest provinces, mainly those bordering with Haiti. Thus, exploring an innovative approach capable of being scaled to benefit neighbouring communities and even other countries will evidently be considered.