CHALLENGE BRIEF

DRA call for proposals on safety and protection
1. MAIN DETAILS
 Organisation name: Red een Kind (Help a Child)

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2. PROBLEM STATEMENT
How can we increase the mental health & psychological wellbeing of people affected by humanitarian settings?

3. CURRENT CHALLENGE
During crises, all people, whether very young or very old, are affected in one way or the other. Psychosocial support services are important for all age groups, and for most they do exist. The group which is often overlooked are the very young children under 7 years of age. Many people think they might not understand anyway and are not that much affected. However, this is a misconception. The brain is developing rapidly in the first years of a child’s life and is very sensitive to influences from the child’s environment and yet these children have limited possibilities to understand what is happening and limited coping mechanisms. In addition, parents/guardians and important others are very busy dealing with the consequences of the crisis themselves and tend to overlook the needs of the young ones. Research indicates that: “(...) high levels of parental stress are associated with adverse trauma reactions in young children. Parental dysfunction, family adversity, residential instability and problematic parenting can increase the impact of traumatic events as well.”.¹ Humanitarian actors are not prioritizing interventions in early childhood development either, due to the lack of evidence on how and why these interventions can improve outcomes in humanitarian settings.²

The prolonged stressful conflict situations in South Sudan and DRC have severe psychosocial consequences for adults as well as children. Parents - often minors themselves - have to take care of their children in these difficult and dangerous circumstances. Lacking care and protection, witnessing a lot of suffering, and experiencing stress and sometimes even violence from parents is very confusing and harmful for children. Their psychosocial state should not be overlooked. Instead, it is a challenge that needs to be addressed.

4. IMPACT GOAL
The impact goal of addressing the abovementioned challenge is that children under 7 will no longer be neglected in their need for psychosocial support, leading to the improvement of the lives of these children as well as the people around them, since – on top of psychosocial suffering - people with unaddressed psychosocial problems are more likely to become victim of or cause safety and protection issues³. If these children are not supported well, their development will be affected. Children who are exposed to a lot of violence and did not learn how to cope with this in a non-harmful way and did not feel supported, grow up with the idea that violence is normal. This will influence their behaviour and emotional state and further development when growing up.

³ Idem.
Direct impact for the applicant and other users of the innovation: the innovation makes a method available to effectively target a group which at the moment is hard to reach with existing programmes.
Long term impact for both the users of the innovation and the target community or even the broader society around the target group: effective psychosocial support to children with psychosocial problems potentially contributes to the prevention of harmful behaviour of these children when growing up.

We use the figure below to explain on which level of psychosocial support Help a Child is currently working. The main focus of Help a Child is on level 1 and 2, while we also touch upon level 3. Help a Child is looking for innovations on level 2 and 3.4

We are open to innovative ideas that strengthen the psychological wellbeing of crises-affected children and that:
- Either directly target children (e.g. using toys) or target these children via their parents/guardians (e.g. parenting methods).
- Support any age category under the age of 7. (We acknowledge the difference in focus when it comes to needs of a 1-year-old child (e.g. bodily attachment) and needs of a 6-year-old child (e.g. support to express oneself). We are open to thoughts on all age categories under 7.)

5. ASSUMPTIONS MADE
- The humanitarian sector is willing to include a focus on children under 7 in psychosocial support efforts, making it possible to scale the innovation.
- The geographical area of intervention is stable enough to enable regular project support.

6. RISKS IN PURSUING THIS CHALLENGE
- Working in a conflict situation might risk the implementation of the pilot being hampered (e.g. lack of access to the geographical area of intervention).
- Parents might not be willing or able to be involved in the support provided by the project. This could be mitigated by integrating this pilot in an existing project which is already focusing on parents or by adding a component to the pilot which is specifically focusing on support to parents.

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4 More on Help a Child’s vision and mission is to be found on the organization’s website: https://www.helpachild.org/organization/help-a-child-in-brief
7. NEXT STEPS

- Interested parties are invited to share a one-pager explaining how their knowledge / expertise / product might provide a (part of the) solution to the defined challenge. Deadline: COB Friday May 10.
- Matchmaking sessions with invited private sectors actors, knowledge institutions, etc. on Friday May 17 and/or Monday May 20.
- Sessions with identified partners and country teams to brainstorm about the design and ideas for such a pilot – Second half of May.
- Pressure cooker sessions of Help a Child and partners to work out a concept on paper – Second half of May.