Regional Emergency Psychosocial Support Network

The Network built a relevant and up-to-date database, with 342 entries already uploaded and available for online viewing as of March 21, 2003. With most of its materials related to disaster, children in situations of armed conflict and child refugees, emergencies and internal displacement, the bibliographic database contains entries with country-specific information covering the Philippines, Indonesia, East Timor, Cambodia, Australia, and other neighboring countries as well as entries of a generic or universal nature. As an information exchange hub, the Regional Network successfully launched its website on March 21, 2003 at the Balay Kalinaw of UP Diliman, Quezon City.
Report on the Field Trips by Dr. Les Spence

A theme that was repeated everywhere was that the individual as the focus of 'treatment' was generally unsuitable in the local area (and in the Region). Individuals are so embedded in their family/fraternity groups and in their village/community, that the whole unit is the only useful focus of change as implied in the above Balay quote.

A key aspect was that I could arrive in each country with few contacts or appointments and see in a few days so many of the very people and networks I was seeking engaged in community psychosocial support; it demonstrates the power of networking.

Another feature was how almost all of these organisations blended together a ‘service delivery’ approach with an ‘enabling of local community mutual help’ approach. I discussed this at length in the paper on interfacing service delivery and self help.

I have been linking for over 15 years with indigenous networks in the Region. I have written on interfacing service delivery and self-help. Entitled “Interfacing Alternative and Complementary Well-Being Ways for Community Mental Health and Psychosocial Support” my paper had been presented at the conference in Bali, Indonesia in 2001. A copy of the paper can be viewed at the following link: http://www.psychosocialnetwork.org/baiq_interfacing.htm

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Almost all the organisations I met used local psychosocial ways - that is the ‘service’ they offered was ‘support for locals engaging in their own self and mutual help.’ Some had adapted Western ways. A few used Western Ways based on expert prescribed and delivered individual-based ‘client vulnerability’, pathology and ‘mental illness.’ Almost all the organisations and networks I linked with was based upon culturally sensitive local resiliency, competency, and wellness-based approaches.

I have a feeling that the populations in which I worked usually had local structures that were strong and resilient. Some had been damaged by conflict but remained strong beneath the surface. The affected local people are almost all of the people I met followed the wellness approach rather than a mental illness-mental health pathology approach.

I went to take this opportunity of thanking all the people I have been linking for over 15 years with indigenous networks in the Region. A feature of these networks is voluntary support by people who have exquisite ways of befriending people and offering nurturing support. This happens spontaneously in everyday life as a context presents itself. There is a tendency for these natural nurturers to recognise another natural nurturer when they meet one. There is a tendency for these natural nurturers to become friends with one another and to informally share stories - to pass on rumours of what works and to network. I found a similar process occurring naturally and spontaneously in East Timor, with some evidence of it in Cambodia and Vietnam. I sense that I would find this process everywhere if I were there long enough.

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PROFILE

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In his report, the network consultant noted the “growing appreciation of how many very special people there are in the region – people who, on their initiative, and emerging themselves from trauma to wellness with the support of other locals, have evolved energies supporting local mutual help using psychosocial wisdom and way.”

Regional Psychosocial Network (continued from page 1)

Indonesia, East Timor, the Philippines, and northern Australia to help expand the linkages. More than ample materials were collected from the contacts in these countries. All these contributed to the formation of the two training phases delivered in the Regional Network’s function as a response conduit. Dr. Spencre, whose help was invaluable for the consolidation of existing materials and initiatives, also developed the emergency kit or training module. This formed part of the second training phase – the training of a regional emergency response team, with a common language, vision and understanding of the lessons learned in the region. The training kit/modules have been reviewed by the Secretariat. It is now scheduled for pre-testing in the early part of this year to coincide with the proposed regional training course.

The two-year funding for the Regional Network supported by UNICEF-EAPRO ends by January 31, 2004. The secretariat is currently negotiating for new funding from UNICEF to continue the project for another two years. “We hope that organizations would actively use the resources of the network and continue to visit the psychnet website. This will surely benefit a lot of people in the region,” Dr. Proteacio-De Castro added. “We have started something good here but we have to continue and make it work.” (MPP)
Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC), Red Cross East Timor (CVTL)

International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC)

No Disaster is Too Small or Too Great

Two disasters of two differing magnitudes hit the Philippines and East Timor only two days apart in mid-December 2003, prompting the respective national Red Cross chapters in these two countries into action. On December 17, a flash flood struck the villages of Melito and Atadura in the southern East Timor region of Maliana. While there were no reported deaths, the flash flood and the ensuing landslides devastated the area and left more than 400 people homeless. Two days later, heavy rains flooding and major landslides in more than five towns in two administrative regions in the Central and Southern Philippines left 174 people dead and injured 60. With damages to infrastructure, agriculture and property estimated to run in millions of US dollars, the flooding and landslides affected more than 5,290 people in the province of Southern Leyte alone. Three landslides occurred in the twelve villages in the towns of Lilian, San Francisco, San Ricardo, and flooding was reported in the towns of Pintuyan and Malibog, all in Southern Leyte. Flooding also hit the provincial capital Maasin. The remoteness of the and the lack of infrastructure in the hardest hit areas exacerbated the situation, slowing down relief efforts and hindered assessment missions.

Nonetheless, immediately after the separate disasters had struck, the respective national Red Cross chapters began the difficult task of helping the affected communities back to their feet. The Red Cross East Timor (CVTL) had already provided the affected families in Maliana with kits and second hand clothing. Water and sanitation experts were sent to the villages with reported outbreaks of diarrhea. While the East Timorenese government immediately distributed food to 26 families a week after the December 17 landslide, the CVTL reported food shortages among the flood-affected communities. With the flood distribution scheduled almost a month after the initial food distribution, families were reported to have resorted to eating only once daily. The CVTL and the IFRC also issued an appeal for assistance to the survivors of the December 19 flooding and landslides.

The December disasters in East Timor and the Philippines again demonstrated the relentless drive of the IFRC and its national chapters throughout the world in its noble mission to help humanity in the face of natural and man-made disasters. For the men and women behind the world’s largest humanitarian organization, no disaster is too small or too great. (MPP)

References: Articles from where this special news feature was based appeared in Special News Feature

Hold Southeast Asia Regional Workshop on Child Soldiers, Presents Ten-Point Action Plan for 2004-06

From November 10 to 12, 2003, 36 individuals from 31 organizations from all over the region, including demobilization, reintegration, and rehabilitation of child soldiers from November 2003 to March 22 to 24, 2004. The aim of the workshop is to enhance efforts for disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation in the region, with participants particularly looking at the situation of children involved in armed conflicts in Indonesia, Burma (Myanmar), and the Philippines in the region. The workshop on children and armed conflict in the region, the workshop is an opportunity for local and regional and international organizations to learn, build capacity, network and collaborate on programs for children involved in armed conflict. The experiences of other regions in developing programs will be presented in the workshop. Among others, the workshop will consider specific concerns, like legal and policy frameworks and the protection of children involved in armed conflict, and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict as an advocacy tool in the disarmament process. Other themes in the workshop include juvenile justice in post-conflict environments, and strategy development for enhanced programming related to demobilization of children. For more information about the workshop and registration, please contact Jean-Luc Botie of UNICEF-EAPRO through jlbottie@unicef.org or Glenda Ramirez of the SEA Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers at seaordinatorchildsoldiers@yahoo.com. (MPP)

Regional Workshop in Bangkok Moved to March 2004

The Southeast Asian Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers announced the rescheduling of the regional workshop in Bangkok. The rescheduling was in response to requests from the participating organizations. The workshop on children and armed conflict in the region, the workshop is an opportunity for local and regional and international organizations to learn, build capacity, network and collaborate on programs for children involved in armed conflict. The experiences of other regions in developing programs will be presented in the workshop. Among others, the workshop will consider specific concerns, like legal and policy frameworks and the protection of children involved in armed conflict, and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict as an advocacy tool in the disarmament process. Other themes in the workshop include juvenile justice in post-conflict environments, and strategy development for enhanced programming related to demobilization of children. For more information about the workshop and registration, please contact Jean-Luc Botie of UNICEF-EAPRO through jlbottie@unicef.org or Glenda Ramirez of the SEA Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers at seaordinatorchildsoldiers@yahoo.com. (MPP)

From September 20 to 24, 2004, the Coalition held the Regional Workshop on Child Soldiers Southeast Asia Regional Workshop on Child Soldiers, Presents Ten-Point Action Plan for 2004-06

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The Philippines, which has a population of over 80 million, is a country that has been affected by numerous natural disasters in recent years. The most recent one was the 2004 tsunami that killed thousands of people and displaced millions. The country is also prone to typhoons, which occur almost every year. In 2004, the Philippines was hit by three typhoons, including Rolly, which was one of the strongest typhoons to hit the country in recent years. The government has been working to improve its disaster response efforts, but much remains to be done. The recent floods and landslides in the Philippines have highlighted the need for better preparedness and response to natural disasters. The government and the international community must work together to ensure that the affected populations are provided with the necessary support and assistance to help them recover from the disasters.

The Indonesian government has also been hit by natural disasters in recent years. In 2005, Indonesia was hit by a strong earthquake and tsunami that killed thousands of people and displaced millions. The government has been working to improve its disaster response efforts, but much remains to be done. The recent floods and landslides in Indonesia have highlighted the need for better preparedness and response to natural disasters. The government and the international community must work together to ensure that the affected populations are provided with the necessary support and assistance to help them recover from the disasters.