COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE 2020 REAL TIME REVIEW MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Evaluation Title	COVID-19 Response Real Time Review
Commissioning Unit	FastAid
Link to Evaluation	Grassroots Component ; Management Component
Management Response	Real Time Review Steering Committee
Management Response Approval	International Management Team - pending
Management Response Status	Approved by IMT in January 2021

Overall Management Response

War Child welcomes the report and the findings of its very first Real Time Review of a first global emergency response. War Child is also very pleased with the positive findings on relevance, effectiveness and staff wellbeing during this response particularly in the light of a recent organizational Core Humanitarian Standard self-assessment that found these same areas to be the weakest performing of all the commitments. Hence, the COVID-19 Response experience has a lot of learnings to offer for our regular operations and overall approach to humanitarian action. The recognition of agility that the response demonstrated and the capitalization on untapped resources, creativity and expertise provides for foundations to build upon while addressing the recommendations of the Real Time Review.

War Child also acknowledges that a number of improvements are needed to institutionalize and strengthen future emergency responses (or spikes in protracted crises) as well as improve strategic alignment with overall operations and incorporate learnings into its overall practice. Specific actions and comments to the recommendations are found in the next section of the Management Response.

Recommendations and Action Plan

Recommendation 1: Develop unique War Child Emergency Brand
Recommended actions

1. **Build on 3 core expertise**: Child protection, education, MHPSS
2. **Add emergency cash work as a flexible tool** for sectors where it does not have capacity to meet emergency needs of children: e.g., shelter, water, therapeutic nutrition
3. **Save lives, protect long-term rights**: Protect community gains from WCH long-term work (protection), meet children's critical needs and help them bounce back better (resilience); develop local capacities
4. **Disaster-proof long-term work earlier**: to protect against future emergency risks and develop resilience cycle
5. **Do Research-based Programs**: Uses WCH research capacities to develop evidence-based emergency programming models for children
6. **Be a Technical leader**: for other agencies in the three core sectors
7. **Be a Lead Advocate for durable solutions for children:** for the emergency needs of children also in regions where WCH is not working
8. **Build partnerships and networks: with like-minded agencies** for funding and for sectors WCH does not work in
9. **Humanitarian Policy approval** through IMT or Board that clarifies WCH emergency mandate: unique brand, approach, sectors etc.
10. **3 years Humanitarian strategy** to implement Policy
11. **National emergency strategies**: in overall national strategies
12. **National Emergency Preparedness Plans**: Help countries develop
13. **Emergency roster of national staff**: can be deployed during emergencies
14. **Emergency protocols for support functions**: to allow faster response
15. **Donor representation**: with key donors to showcase unique brand and Covid-19 successes
16. **Emergency training**: technical and management-build it in country and unit budgets and some HQ money
17. **Emergency manuals**: technical and management-adapt existing ones immediately, e.g., good Enough Guide and develop own gradually
18. **Emergency funds**: can be quickly recouped from emergency appeals
19. **Emergency HQ capacity**: part-time positions, short-term consultants, interns, volunteers, job shares and occasional full-time position

Management Response	War Child welcomes this recommendation and will seek to incorporate the recommended actions into its emergency policy, strategy and operations.		
Key actions	**Responsible**	**Timeline**	**Comments**
1. Add emergency cash work as a flexible tool for sectors where it does not have capacity to meet emergency needs of children	FastAid	March 2021	Existing guidance note on CASH will be revised (by taking inputs from fresh papers published in The Lancet, CASH Learning Network and other sources) to integrate CASH for primarily MHPSS, Education and Child Protection outcomes and nutrition, WASH, and other outcomes (in relevant contexts such as a pandemic). A revised guidance notes to be available in March 2021.
2. Build partnerships and networks with like-minded agencies for funding and for sectors WCH does not work in	FastAid and 2PG	Q2 and Q3 2021	Fast Aid partnerships will be with both like-minded agencies and other agencies who can offer complementary (so that collectively we can offer comprehensive services. Fast Aid will be prioritising partnerships with South Based agencies and agencies who have expertise and track record for food and nutrition security and CASH programming to address the impending hunger crisis. Fast Aid partnership approach paper will be made available in

				the first quarter of 2021. Fast Aid partnerships with 3 agencies will be developed during the 2nd and 3rd quarter of 2021.
3.	Develop Humanitarian Policy and 3 years Humanitarian strategy to implement Policy	FastAid

IMT: approval | Second half 2021 | A humanitarian policy and strategy will be available in the second half of 2021, outlining emergency mandate, unique brand and approach. |
| 4. | Ensure emergency readiness | FastAid | 2021 | This entails country emergency strategies and preparedness plans, roster of staff, protocols for support functions, training, manuals and HO capacity. |
| 5. | Institutionalize StartUp Fund | IMT | Early 2021 | Emergency Response Start Up Fund, to ensure agility and speed, will be institutionalised during the first quarter of 2021. This fund is a critical component of the "global pooled funds". This will also be a component in Fast Aid Policy. |

Recommendation 2: Embrace the "working in the grey area"
Recommended actions
War Child situated itself as working in developmental / post-conflict settings. The COVID-19 emergency was a wake-up call. It became evident - to a global scale - what many field staff and partners already acknowledged: in many locations War Child operates in a grey area. In this space, threats and challenges continuously undermine the wellbeing of children and families and the options they have. Acknowledging working in the grey area demand to readjust the organization work, coherently.

Management Response	War Child welcomes this recommendation and acknowledges that our work is situated in the triple nexus with increasing uncertainty and convergence of crises becoming more frequent. To that end War Child will work to improve on its ongoing analysis of context for swift adaptation to ensure continuous relevance (part of CHS improvement plan and KA under R1 and 3), improve its preparedness (see KA under R4) and improve its agility by institutionalizing the Start Up Fund (see KA 5 under R1) for timely response.

Key actions	Responsible	Timeline	Comments
1. Explicitly acknowledge that organization works primarily in protracted crises and spell out policy and operational implications for different operational contexts	IPD – programme policies

COs - country strategies | 2021 | While we acknowledge that we work in triple nexus and implement initiatives that support community cohesion, War Child does not have explicit peacebuilding expertise and will not develop it as such. We do however work on improving our understanding of working in such a context, through improvements in conflict analysis, do no harm and conflict sensitivity (see KA under R4).

This key action also enables country teams and the organization in general to reflect on organizational positioning, relationships and capacities that will need to be propositioned. This will aid coherence of decision-making around responding when emergency situations arise. |

Recommendation 3: Be prepared to stretch your intervention – coherently and within reach.
Recommended actions
The flipside of relevance is: if needs arise beyond its core programming areas, is it appropriate for an organization – with a strict mandate and expertise – to provide what is asked? This was a strong tension within War Child when deciding to respond. There were fears that venturing beyond the tried and tested Care System could mean to provide children

with less than the highest standards of assistance. In the experience of field workers, the choices made in broadening activities – the "menu of actions" - worked well. They responded to untapped needs. They opened possibilities for action. They were perceived as fully coherent with the organizational mandate. They played on organizational strengths. Stronger real-time and participatory monitoring will be needed to validate these perceptions with input from communities, to improve and tailor the menu of options. But this first-time emergency response seems to have demonstrated capacity, relevance, and coherence.

Management Response	War Child welcomes this recommendation and will work towards increasing the relevance of its work by ensuring that it forms part and parcel of analysis and design and adopting programming strategies and approaches that cater to relevance (see also KA under R1,2,6) and become more intentional in developing partnerships with complementary expertise (see also KA under R1).		
Key actions	**Responsible**	**Timeline**	**Comments**
1. Emphasize relevance and ensure that determinants to wellbeing are accounted for in analysis and response	PQ & FastAid – programmatic policy and Assessment Guide/Tools	2021	Unpack relevance in relevant organizational policies and revise assessment toolkit to reflect the analysis of determinants and causes of distress to ensure relevant action is planned and undertaken. Principled humanitarian action to be the compass.
2. Revise the organizational narrative, including the ToC, to reflect that the Care System is not a blueprint solution and not the only applicable solution. Additionally, ensure that Care System interventions are only applied when their relevance has been ascertained.	ToC/CS Steering Committee – in revision of ToC/Care System IMT – global strategy IPD – relevant programme policies Comms – organizational communications	2021	It is imperative to acknowledge that quality programming is more than the replication of the Care System as a blueprint solution. This should be reflected at all levels of the organization to provide a consistent direction for and representation of our implementation. It is equally important to ensure an understanding of pre-conditions for our work in our key thematic areas; for example, during the COVID response it quickly became apparent that without RCCE the rest of our work could not take place and/or it would be largely irrelevant to affected populations as the response cannot be devoid of context and causes of distress and challenges faced.

Recommendation 4: Invest in Disaster Risk Management (DRM) for resilience building

Recommended actions

The humanitarian capacities needed by War Child are not about flying out to the next disaster. Acknowledging the "grey area" involves helping local communities to be resilient to hazards and threats. To back them up when they are overwhelmed. And to acknowledge that risk-proofing the future children is not an option in areas threatened by conflict and other major hazards (COVID, but also climate-change and other localized threats). Implementing this approach within the organization will require to continue investing in a humanitarian department, with dedicated resources and staff (for coordination, capacity building, surge capacity), but also in a strategic intent to mainstream a DRM culture and approach throughout the organization.

Management Response	War Child welcomes this recommendation and accepts it in part. War Child will work towards institutionalization of conflict-sensitivity and Do No Harm approach through building its capabilities and improving its practice, including through improved conflict and context analysis (the latter also part of CHS improvement plan) and set up an early warning system to be able to better support resilience of communities. However, War Child will not develop of full breadth of capacity for DRM with communities at this time as this is beyond the scope of the mandate and currently not a prioritized investment.		
Key actions	**Responsible**	**Timeline**	**Comments**
1. Develop an early warning system	FastAid	2021	This key action will contribute to disaster preparedness (FastAid dashboard)

2. Institutionalize conflict-sensitivity and Do No Harm *(see also KA1 of R2)*	IPD	2021-2022	This key action will contribute to resilience building by ensuring that vulnerabilities and risks are not exacerbated due to humanitarian intervention.

Recommendation 5: Rethink modalities to effectively generate evidence for action, reflection, accountability
Recommended actions
There is a big hole in the organization, where appreciation of context, outcomes and learning should happen. The systems in place are insufficient to gather and aggregate needed information and evidence for decision making, real time. M&E is mostly about tracking outreach – leading to broad number aggregations (not the quality evidence needed for evidence-based management). This is a major weakness for an organization operating at time of uncertainty. The R&D department has no connection with ongoing programming. This generates systemic weakness on evidence-oriented actions, outcome assessment, and learning. The response exhibited promising initiatives showing the potential of horizontal sharing, and the desire to acquire new tools for evidence generation, analysis, and use.

Management Response	War Child welcomes this recommendation. It will increase the investment in M&E and specifically work towards more participatory approaches. War Child will also consider how to better align M&E and research work. For accountability see KA3 of R6.

Key actions	Responsible	Timeline	Comments
1. Increase investment in M&E: • Strengthen monitoring systems with a focus on global harmonization and outcome-level M&E. • Invest in evaluative policy and function (assessment, proactive evaluations, action research) *(see also CHS improvement plan)* • Invest in capacities and guidance for participatory M&E to enhance the qualitative component and improve participation	Country Offices – M&E capacity as core function; evaluations included in all grants; increase use of action research for new initiatives IMT – prioritize investment in global data infrastructure and evaluative function (global evaluations, RTRs, action research), capacity for accountability	2021 onwards	Focus on outcomes and perceptions of people affected by crises. Encourage experimentation in evaluative/research approaches and tools, especially focusing on more participatory approaches.
2. Develop standardized indicator menus with a particular focus on outcome level indicators in core programmatic areas	PQ and FastAid		For emergency response only.
3. Determine how R&D work can better contribute to ongoing programming, including emergencies	IPD, R&D	2021	Determine which core interventions are applicable in onset of an emergency

Recommendation 6: Emphasize the role of children as active actors: a shift to active protection			
Recommended actions			
Surprisingly for a child-oriented organization, limited examples were found of activities that deliberately involved children as active actors (e.g. participation in radio programming). Passive protection was often the stance. Yet War Child should be well aware that children are often the best responders and motivators. They have unique capabilities to persuade their own communities about risk, threats, and to generate needed shifts in lifestyles. Can the COVID-19 response be an opportunity to put them in the driving seat?			
Management Response	War Child welcomes this recommendation and acknowledges that much effort needs to be made to increase participation of children in our programming (see also KA1 of R5). War Child will also work together with its partners to further participation of children.		
Key actions	**Responsible**	**Timeline**	**Comments**
1. Strengthen community engagement approach	COs & PQ	2021-2022	Build on RCCE work and capitalize on a number of experienced community mobilizers in War Child to develop the principles of community engagement, build capabilities of implementing teams and put them into practice
2. Outline child participation process in design, implementation and evaluation *(see also KA1 of R5)*	COs & PQ	2021-2022	Build on experience of certain countries and outline participation approach to be put into practice and build capabilities of implementing teams.
3. Develop systems and processes for accountability to affected populations *(see CHS improvement plan)*	COs & PQ	2021-2022	To be addressed through CHS improvement plan

Recommendation 7: Give more visibility to partners and to the agency of communities			
Recommended actions			
In the accounts so far, it is hard to see the community in action. There was mention of volunteers, of local government. But, other than this, the image emerging is often War Child centric. Also, when (implementing) partners were mentioned, it was hard to find more specific details of their work, and of their achievements. There is certainly much more to see on the ground – and it is unfortunate that review could not capture it. But the absence of communities and partners in the narrative, as active actors, demands that War Child shifts its perspective: in putting the voices, the account of the communities first. And in giving them more deserved visibility, as equal partners.			
Management Response	The management welcomes this recommendation (see also KA in R6). Localization and shift in partnerships, particularly with Southern partners is required to be able to capitalize on each other's added value, experience and expertise to better support people affected by crises.		
Key actions	**Responsible**	**Timeline**	**Comments**
1. Determine our contribution to Grand Bargain commitments	IMT	2021	This action will contribute to provide guidance to the organization on the priorities as identified in the Grand Bargain
2. Ensure a shared understanding of and prioritize localization	IMT- global strategy IPD – partnership principles focusing on localization	2021-2022	This improvement action would see our partnership approach shift to equal and responsive partnerships, instead of transactional/extractive approaches. It would set out principles for such partnerships, support in implementation of

| | | | such partnerships and engage in influencing policy and practice at humanitarian system level.

This will require funds to invest in operational support (ICR) and capacity strengthening and coaching for certain partners, while with others we need to become better at recognizing their capabilities and learn from them. We could consider a phased approach, with peer learning between country programmes.

Defining the specific added value of partnerships to advance a Disaster Risk Management approach is necessary. This will help to set expectations right, identify appropriate partners and generate momentum. |
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| | Country offices – shift partnership modalities in line with localization

Relevant staff - engagement in shaping sector debates/policies | | |
| 3. Revise the partnership policy to reflect localization and equitable partnerships | 2PG | 2021 | Partnership policy to reflect War Child's commitment to localization and the support to national partners to be prepared to respond to any future emergency |

Recommendation 8: Value the capacities of your teams to adapt, innovate. Bottom up.

Recommended actions

The COVID-19 response was certainly a unique moment in time. The usual roles and responsibilities had to be put aside, to deal – together - with the unknown. Staff was galvanized. The response showed untapped individual capacities. The immense potential of horizontal teams. It also showed the value of delegating decision making at the grassroots: teams, countries, field staff thrived in a new space allowing for innovation, experimentation. War Child in this response exhibited the leadership model that the humanitarian sector is craving for.

Management Response	War Child welcomes this recommendation as it is in line with the changes that the organization is already envisioning in setting up the Shared Platform and becoming a more inclusive organization.

Key actions	Responsible	Timeline	Comments
1. Incentivize sharing of mistakes and innovations	Communication and HR

IPD | 2021-2022 | Work with HR to have managers work with staff in pushing boundaries and narratives internally and externally and value the capacities of our teams
Design an award for
• Biggest Bold Failure
• Replicable Innovation |
| 2. Commitment to reward innovation | IMT, 2PG and CDs | 2021 | Through URF and seeking RF funding |

Recommendation 9: Agile or established?

Recommended actions

Does War Child want to be agile or established? The two models are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to establish a virtuous circle whereby some established, and "flagship" practices and approaches are used, but are continuously improved, nourished with experimentation. There is now a massive imbalance in favour of the "established" side, as a

strategic organizational choice. The COVID response, however, was definitely on the Agile side, showing the untapped potential of this approach to change. The response revealed opportunities for the organization well beyond the management of an individual emergency. But for the potential to materialize, a strategic rebalancing will need to happen.

Management Response	War Child aims to strike an appropriate balance between agile and established and acknowledges that this means that in the future we need to become both more agile and more established, becoming more flexible in working both with R&D proven interventions as well as best practices and innovative approaches from peers and country offices.		
Key actions	**Responsible**	**Timeline**	**Comments**
Strategic rebalancing to become and stay more agile	IMT	2021-2022	This improvement action sees revision of global strategy that rebalances established-agile by implementing proposed improvements of above recommendations, particularly emergency preparedness, ToC adjustment, participatory approaches, and different types of innovation. (see R1, 3, 5, 6 ,8).

Define what the principle of 'agility' means for War Child and learn from some key successes. |
| Country Strategies to define how this balance is to be struck in their respective contexts. | Country Teams, PQ, IPD | 2021-2022 | Consider what criteria should be used to define a good balance. |

Recommendation 10: Envision and shape the "new normal".

Emergencies are not just about "response". They can be about "re-writing the rules of the game" – as now recognized widely re: disaster capitalism. Hence the urgency, at this historical juncture, to be part of these who can re-write the rules (taking along partners, communities). As War Child is engaging in strategic formulation processes, it should engage in future casting to identify opportunities and challenges in shaping a better, child-friendly "new normal". And it should enable this at all levels: from the grassroots to the global, with involvement of partners and communities. It is a big ambition. But this is a unique time in history to make it happen.

Management Response	War Child welcomes this recommendation and will proactively work towards keeping abreast with new developments in the sector and outside the sector to ensure relevance of its strategic focus and work.		
Key actions	**Responsible**	**Timeline**	**Comments**
In addition to ongoing context analysis, organize learning events on topics that can generate insight and foresight relevant to our strategy and our work	IMT, IPD	2021 onward	Learning events from futures thinkers to inspire and stimulate our ongoing adaptation and innovation