

Concept Note on Child Protection Approach for AVSI

AVSI Foundation

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In AVSI's experience, when we talk about **Child Protection**, we have to recognize a general and fundamental aspect: the **development of children is inextricably linked to the families and communities that surround them**, which means that interventions are addressed to different actors (parents and caregivers, families, educators, communities and state authorities) always taking into account what impact they can have on children. Moreover, we believe that it is not possible to think of an absolute division of sectors: following a **multisector approach**, implementing different activities in different areas (protection, health, education, nutrition, food security, etc.) favours a more effective achievement of the child protection objective. AVSI's integrated child protection programs focus on the following pillars:

- Every child, charged with needs and resources, is a value for the community; the child is a person who has something to say/to give to society. For this reason, AVSI always applies **psychosocial support approach** to Child Protection interventions aimed at strengthening the resilience and well-being of the child. A qualified support relationship underpins every humanitarian intervention. In order to perform this work best, it is necessary to know the human being and understand his constituent elements, as well as to understand how to promote and enable the well-being of the person and the community he/she belongs. AVSI Foundation have developed psychosocial interventions, in which the starting point is the person (holistic approach). A holistic approach means a specific way of viewing the human being as a whole, paying attention to his physical, mental, relational, cultural, moral dimension, and spiritual values. Holistic interventions in psychosocial projects are the ones that include all of these dimensions¹.
- The first protection for the child is the **educational intervention**. Education and child protection are two inseparable sectors in AVSI's vision. Indeed, education provides the necessary skills to promote human development that encourages sustainable lifestyles, respects and protects human rights, gender equality and the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence. Properly trained parents and caregivers, teachers and educators are the first "protective" environment for the growth of children, in the family, at school and in the

¹ For a better understanding of AVSI psychosocial approach see:

Psychosocial interventions as an approach to children in conflict situations (2022)

https://www.avsi.org/upload/publication/100/116.pdf?_637847700782460492

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community. Protection is not primarily "defending" oneself from something, but rather promoting the growth of the human being in an environment where the human being reaches his maximum potential and becomes a conscious, free and responsible person, capable of understanding what makes him/her vulnerable and what protects him/her.

Especially during protracted emergencies, AVSI's interventions in the educational sector (which includes both the formal and non-formal education one) are integrated with teacher and educators training also on the psychosocial elements of teaching. For this reason, AVSI integrates the education and rehabilitation paths of schools with psychosocial support activities, with better results in terms of child protection.

- **Family strengthening and integration with the community** is fundamental for the protection of the child. For all the actors who become part of the child's sphere, first and foremost the parents and caregivers, it is fundamental to see each child as a person charged with needs and resources, while emphasizing his/her value as a person who is unique. The ability to work with and strengthen the community enables sustainability. An example of this is the PACOME method (French acronym for PArnts, COMmunautés, Écoles) developed in Rwanda². The methodology is based on elements of Rwandan culture: it is the creation of a partnership between parents, schools and communities (including health centres, financial institutions, religious organisations, civil society organisations and local authorities) to strengthen the resilience, self-sufficiency of families and thus the protection of children.
- **Awareness raising and caregiver commitment:** parents and the community must be made aware of the importance of their role in child protection from the very first days of the child's life. Parents are made aware about the importance of their commitment and engagement with their children through meetings and awareness discussions on the specific psycho-social challenge that caregivers might be facing at family level or community level. Many awareness tools have been developed by AVSI about: Positive parenting, the relationships with the child, disability and uniqueness of each, child protection and children's rights, child labour and early marriage. Community focal points representing the community-based organizations (CBO) and Social Development Centres (SDC) also take part in organizing/ attending the group meetings with parents to jointly orient the family to the best services available. SDC and CBO are accompanied and reinforced in their capacity to directly offer psychosocial support to families and children.
- AVSI's approach has a specific focus on **Early Childhood Development**, strongly working on the relation child- parents and caregivers environment building on the concept that "indeed

²PACOME model in Rwanda(2017)

https://www.avsi.org/upload/publication/100/117.pdf?_637847701920045625

a child's brain is built, not born".³ The multisectoral approach promoted by AVSI is therefore key to fuel the early years by supporting mothers' knowledge on adequate nutrition, build awareness and knowledge on protection from harm and responsive stimulation, as well as providing early learning opportunities (see footnote 1). This is done on one hand by providing space and support for responsive interactions between the child and the caregiving environment and on the other by offering learning opportunities. To this regard, AVSI's experience in the non-formal education field with refugee children in the response to Syrian crises in Lebanon (started in 2012) is key. This experience was also adapted to the COVID pandemic⁴. AVSI adapts such a process to the culture in the community of intervention, in order to build on context specific perspectives and methodologies.⁵ In crisis situations this approach guides AVSI intervention toward providing adequate support to parents or primary caregivers to facilitate their capacity to remain as responsive as possible to the child's needs. This may include direct assistance to meet basic needs, as well as offering an adequate set of activities for children under 6 years and ensuring first psychological aid for both caregivers and children (Details can be found on AVSI Position paper on PSS Approach).

- Provide **personalised accompanying pathways** integrating the family that allow to fully understand the needs and therefore to intervene on different sectors. This principle is well expressed within one of AVSI's main projects: **Distance Support Program (DSP)**. The main objective is to help the human growth of children through the stable presence of educational figures (social workers, educators) who accompany the family in the educational process of their children. The activities carried out under Distance Support are the most varied, from financial support for school attendance and retention to teachers training to after-school activities; cultural, recreational and sports activities for children, to training courses to improve parents' parenting skills and/or professional skills.

³ UNICEF, (2017). *Early Moments Matter for every child*. New York NY, USA: UNICEF.

⁴ Finalized guidelines for remote learning and blended learning in AVSI community based early child education and basic literacy and numeracy non-formal education programs
https://www.avsi.org/upload/publication/100/105.pdf?_637776793343380531

⁵ Shonkoff, J. P. (2017). Breakthrough impacts: What science tells us about supporting early childhood development. *YC Young Children*, 72(2), 8-16.

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