The Child Protection in Emergencies Postgraduate Diploma
Lessons and recommendations from an academic-humanitarian partnership

The Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE) postgraduate Diploma project is premised on a global academic - humanitarian partnership, between the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Child Protection Working Group (CPWG)[1] – represented by Save the Children UK and UNICEF.

Project Background

The project was conceived in response to the lack of diverse and readily deployable mid-level CPiE staff identified by the CPWG in 2010. [2]

Over the last 5 years the project has developed from a nascent idea into a fully functioning programme with 20 students, working in a variety of international and national agencies from 16 different countries, enrolled in the first cohort.

The project, championed by the CPWG and its members, has been driven from an academic perspective by the *University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)* with Save the Children and UNICEF providing technical and practitioner expertise.

> **Key Features**
> - An accredited, 18 month postgraduate qualification.
> - Blends theory and practice.
> - Delivered by distance-learning using an interactive, multi-media approach.
> - Includes a 3 week residential module in South Africa and a 6-8 week international placement.
> - Replicable and adaptable open-source course content.

The partnership has worked collaboratively to design, develop and deliver a programme that blends both theory and practice to build CPiE sector capacity.

The process has not always been easy and the partnership has had to negotiate and overcome several challenges during the course of the project including:
- Developing a curriculum in partnership.
- Understanding and working within different sector norms (academic vs. practitioner) with different imperatives.
- Negotiating complex relationship dynamics, over different continents.
- Building a workable governance model.
- Uncertain funding streams.

Lessons and Recommendations

Recognizing the growing importance of academic-humanitarian partnerships which bring together those working in the field and those who can ground the theory in practice, this paper hopes to contribute to sector learning by highlighting the key lessons and recommendations that have been identified by the CPiE postgraduate Diploma project.

1. Seek expert advice

Different sectors work in different ways and to different timescales; they often use different language and different methods of communicating. When partnering across sectors it is important to ensure that expert advice or representation is sought during early project negotiations to help identify and unpick assumptions. If left unaddressed, initial misunderstandings can lead to project delays further down the line.

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[1] The Child Protection Working Group is a global forum for collaboration on child protection in humanitarian settings.
[2] Fischer, T. (2010), *Addressing capacity gaps in Child Protection in Emergencies (CPIE) A Scoping Exercise on Child Protection in Emergencies staff capacity with Career Development Program options for mid-level CPIE Specialists*. CPWG: Geneva

During the early stages of this project there were misunderstandings about the academic requirements for new courses, the necessity for national accrediting bodies to evaluate foreign qualifications and the timescales for the project – subsequently the partnership had to work hard to ensure the project remained on target.

Recommendations
- Flesh out ideas fully; explore alternatives before committing to action.
- When partnering out of sector enlist the advice of objective "industry insiders" during early project negotiations to help unpick assumptions.
- In the case of a similar project, seek objective academic advice or representation on the selection panel of any tendering processes to help guide the process as well as help partners to better understand the international academic environment.

Some specific academic considerations for developing capacity building initiatives include:

- Qualifications structure (including comparability across different national structures, for example in the number of hours required to achieve a certain level of qualification).
- Accreditation systems, both within the university and at the national level.
- Entry requirements and processes for students.
- Fee structures, particularly for foreign students.
- Academic expertise in subject matter and delivery method e.g. distance learning.
- Teaching language.
- Practices and norms around faculty capacity building.
- Accessibility to foreign students in terms of visas and associated costs.

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2. Establish relationships, mutual understanding and a shared vision

Forging relationships in any partnership is important, but especially in one that straddles different sectors and geographies like the CPiE postgraduate Diploma project. There are often known and hidden dynamics which can lead to real or perceived power imbalances. These dynamics impact relationships and can include:
- when there are pre-existing relationships and new relationships in the group.
- differences in the values attached to academic and practitioner knowledge.
- the North / South divide.
- donor / Recipient relations.

Partnership working requires active engagement, it is particularly important to recognize when dynamics pose a threat to project delivery and a conscious effort by all partners is needed to keep relationships on track. This may involve investing in regular face to face meetings.

Recommendations
- Take the time to acknowledge the dynamics affecting partnerships and how they might be impacting on project delivery, do so regularly.
- Organizations working in partnership should prioritize relationship building activities and allocate appropriate resources (time, people and funds) accordingly. Activities might include:
  - generating senior level buy-in for the project.
  - ensuring that staff have the skill sets for partnership work and are adequately supported in developing them.
  - make sure time and finances are made available for partners to meet in order to develop a mutual understanding of how the project is to be delivered (see *ELRHA's Partnership Strengthening Workshops Video*).
- Set up a partnership agreement. Using 'interest-based negotiation' can help partners find common ground and understand the value that each brings. *The Partnership Agreement Scorecard* is a useful

tool for this purpose.

- Open constructive and productive communication channels - these can be scheduled calls, timely responses to emails and ad hoc check-ins.
- Pre-agreed mechanisms should be put in place for dealing with disagreements, along with suitable staff training to facilitate these.

3. Find the right governance structure – be adaptive when it's not working

Partnerships are formed for a range of purposes, it is important to find the right governance structure for both the partnership and the project. As partnerships evolve, as happened over the course of the CPiE postgraduate Diploma project, governance structures may need to be revised.

Project management tools can be useful in helping partners navigate the process of finding a workable governance structure. In this case, a project charter drawn up between all partners helped to specify governance arrangements, accountabilities and milestones.

It is also important to ensure that governance structures support, rather than impede, project delivery. Steering Groups and Senior Oversight groups serve a valuable purpose, but must have a clearly defined mandate.

Recommendations
- Assess which governance model is most appropriate for a partnership and project on a case-by-case basis. *The Partnering Initiative's Partnering Toolbook* identifies some useful options.
- Identify and agree clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for each partner and map the key milestones.
- Where possible, key decision making 'gates' should be identified in advance.
- A group's role and mandate should be clear at all times, for example, whether it is for decision-making, or for oversight.
- Processes for decision-making should be explicit, and where it is stipulated that tasks or decisions are to be in 'collaboration' or in 'consultation', how this works this should be fully explained and agreed.

4. Identify the most important activities – get them right

It is important to comprehensively map out the project to ensure that the right amount of time and resources are invested in key activities. It is also important to work out who should be involved in those activities.

For the CPiE postgraduate Diploma project, developing the course content was a core activity. The challenge for the globally dispersed team was to jointly develop a curriculum with a balance of both theory and practice. When drafting content collaboratively, it is important to build in sufficient review periods - both in terms of length and frequency - to allow partners to ensure the right balance is being struck.

For similar projects, it is important to involve the faculty who will deliver the content in the writing process. Make sure everyone that is involved is in a position to engage in a meaningful way - if this requires any capacity building activities, these should take place before writing begins.

Recommendations
- Writing should take place through intensive co-operation between the writer / practitioner / academic / course deliverer (a number of these roles could be fulfilled by one individual).
- To enable the above, prior to the writing process the faculty should be in place (and any requisite capacity building taken place) so that those involved in delivering the curriculum can contribute to the writing process.
- One approach to joint curriculum development is to identify the key learning outcomes from practice, and build theory around these.
- All involved (including reviewers) require familiarization with the proposed learning environment.

- Build in sufficient review periods for jointly developed curricula, both in terms of time and frequency. Set clear parameters and guidelines for these reviews.
- Be clear from the start who will own (and update) the curriculum - and how it will be shared.

5. See the strength in difference

Core to this partnership was the value in bringing together differences in approach and discourse to develop a ground-breaking initiative. CPiE is an emerging field which straddles a number of disciplines; successfully marrying academic and practitioner perspectives in developing the Diploma posed a challenge.

Working in partnership requires a different approach. It takes additional time, resources and patience but it often generates a more valuable product.

In this case some of the key strengths of the CPiE postgraduate Diploma project lie in its partnership approach and include:
- The CPiE postgraduate Diploma blends theory and practice.
- The CPiE postgraduate Diploma has inter-agency support and ownership across the CPiE sector.
- The CPiE postgraduate Diploma project is a truly global partnership, which has the potential to increase the reach and accessibility of the course.
- UKZN provides an academic base for CPiE, an emerging academic discipline.
- The course at UKZN has the potential to be self-sustaining and can grow accordingly.

Recommendations
- Recognize the value that each partner brings to the project.
- Build additional time into the project plan to accommodate for diversity of opinion.
- Celebrate successes often.

For more information on the CPiE postgraduate Diploma project please contact the Child Protection Working Group, Sabine Rakotomalala (srakotomalala@unicef.org).