

Towards a Resilient Future

Children and Disasters



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|---|--|----|--|
| 2 | Addressing Climate Change in South Asia, with More Focus on Children | 8 | Building Safer Education in Urban Areas: A Case of School Disaster Management Plan |
| 4 | Blighted Childhoods by Uttarakhand Disaster | 10 | Children and Disasters |
| 6 | Addressing Children's Vulnerabilities in Tsunami Rehabilitation | 12 | Women and Disasters |
| 7 | Climate Refugees | 14 | Child-Centred Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment |
| | | 15 | Child-Centred Disaster Risk Management Planning |

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Addressing Climate Change in South Asia, with More Focus on Children

Over the last few decades the South Asian region, has been vastly impacted by the adverse effects of climate change. With a large percentage of the poor and vulnerable in the world living in the region, the social context makes the impacts of the situation to be increased in impact for the region. With the release of Working Group 1, AR4 Report of the IPCC, it has been shown that climate change can no more be called a myth, and that we all need to take action to address this phenomenon created by man. In order to address the issues of climate change, and find solutions, it is necessary that we look into its impacts with children of the region in mind.

Over the last 25 years, extreme weather events, including heavy rainfall, heat waves, droughts, floods, cyclones and hurricanes, have contributed to injury, illness, impoverishment, displacement, hunger and death for hundreds of millions of people, often with particular implications for children.¹ It is further highlighted that without adequate planning and good governance, poor urban areas can be among the world's most life-threatening environments.⁽⁵⁾ In some informal settlements, a quarter of all children still die before the age of five.² And in many urban areas, the risks children face are bound to be intensified by climate change.



Various conditions associated with climate change are likely to result in increased risks for young children. In slower onset disasters such as droughts and famines, mortality rates are also more extreme for young children. Overall death rates for young children continue to drop in most parts of the world due to improved health care, immunisation rates and environmental conditions. But for many of the children most at risk from the biggest killers – diarrhoeal and respiratory diseases, malaria and malnutrition – the situation is likely to worsen with some of the effects of climate change.

Moreover, small children, along with women and the elderly, are most likely to be victims of such extreme

events as flooding, high winds and landslides. A study of flood-related mortality in Nepal, for instance, found the death rate for children to be double that of adults, with pre-school girls five times more likely to die than adult men³. The disproportionate health burden for children of challenging environmental conditions is well documented. According to the most conservative estimates, children under 14 are 44 per cent more likely to die because of environmental factors than the population at large.⁴

In addition to weather events triggered by climate event, malnutrition also plays a key role in impacting the children of South Asia. Reduced rainfall and other changes

1 Bartlett, Sheridan, (2008) *Climate Change and Urban Children: Impacts and Implications for Adaptation in Low- and Middle Income Countries*, SAGE, IIED

2 Ibid

3 Pradhan, Elizabeth Kimbrough, Keith P West, Joanne Katz, Steven C LeClerq, Subarna K Khattri and Sharada Ram Shrestha (2007), "Risk of flood-related mortality in Nepal", *Disasters* Vol 31, No 1, pages 57-70.

4 Prüss-Üstün, A and C Corvalán (2006), *Preventing Disease through Healthy Environments. Towards an Estimate of the Environmental Burden of Disease*, WHO, Geneva.

affect agriculture which in turn impacts agricultural systems of the region and result in interruptions in food supplies in sudden, acute events. After Bangladesh's 1998 floods, when families were unable to compensate over time for the shortage of food and the deterioration in health conditions, flood-exposed children failed to experience the "catch-up" growth common after a shock, remaining shorter than unexposed children from the same neighbourhoods⁵. Malnutrition appears further to be a greater risk among children of displaced families⁶.

Children as Agents of Change

Despite the vulnerability of the children to climate change, it has been shown that with adequate support and protection, children can also be extraordinarily resilient in the face of stresses and shocks. There is ample documentation, moreover, of the benefits of having older children active, informed and involved in responding to the challenges in their lives, not only for their own learning and development, but for the energy, resourcefulness and knowledge that they can bring to local issues⁷.

In addressing climate change, climate education plays a key role. Article 6 of the UNFCCC focuses on this aspect and highlights the need for equal education for male and female children which would allow changes in mind sets, and awareness to react to climate change. We also need to take into account the context of South Asia, where the poor and vulnerable households are of adults who are without a formal education. In this

context, children who are educated will play a key role in changing the lives of communities through the knowledge that is bestowed upon them through education. Children educated on climate change will result in education of families as well as a future generation.

Furthermore in building climate change related strategies and agendas, the policy makers need to pay attention to the inclusivity of children, and how the changes will impact the lives of children. In the creation of these, it is necessary that children's requirements are well understood. This is purely based on the fact that unless such understanding exists, the steps they take to respond to the crises of climate change are likely to be mis-targeted in some important ways.

In South Asia some countries have understood the key role that children play in battling climate change. In order to address the issue in a much more effective manner, countries such as Sri Lanka have incorporated

Despite the vulnerability of the children to climate change, it has been shown that with adequate support and protection, children can also be extraordinarily resilient in the face of stresses and shocks.

method of getting the active participation of school children in environmental projects which address pollution through environmental clubs set up in schools through the guidance of the Ministries of Environment and Education. However there remain improvements that could be made with a focus on climate change, given that despite the existence of a structure to implement the inclusivity of children in addressing climate change, there remains the need for them to be climate change focussed, or linked to the theme.

In other countries of South Asia there also remain other projects which have understood the role of children as change makers. Many Civil Society Organisations having understood the importance of children in this process have focussed their awareness creation projects to focus on children, and also on climate education. In India Clean India initiative has successfully reached out to many schools in different regions, as well as many other countries are thinking in lines of similar action.

In conclusion we could say that the focus on children as a solution of climate change is not missing. However there needs to be a consolidated effort on developing the quality of the space allocated to children to be agents of change, and improvement in their inclusivity in structuring strategies to act on climate change. ■

- Vositha Wijenayake,

Outreach and Advocacy Coordinator,
Climate Action Network South Asia

5 Del Ninno, Carlo and Matthias Lundberg (2005), "The long-term impact of the 1998 flood on nutrition in Bangladesh", *Economics and Human Biology* Vol 3, No 1, pages 67-96.

6 Jayatissa R, A Bekele, C L Piyasena and S Mahamithawa (2006), "Assessment of nutritional status of children under five years of age, pregnant women and lactating women living in relief camps after the tsunami in Sri Lanka", *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* Vol 27, No 2, pages 144-152; also Barrios, R E, J P Stansbury, R Palencia and M T Medina (2000), "Nutritional status of children under five years of age in three hurricane affected areas of Honduras", *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública* Vol 8, No 6, pages 380-384.

7 Hart, R (1997), *Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care*, Earthscan/ UNICEF, London.

Blighted Childhoods by Uttarakhand Disaster

The June 2013 floods and landslides in Uttarakhand would go down in India's history as one of the most debilitating disasters. The extent of death and devastation witnessed in this disaster has been unprecedented. The loss of life and property along with the disruption of basic services saw the state of Uttarakhand descend into a state of anarchy for months. While this disaster has been considered as a tragedy of the highest order by all, children and adolescents as a group have been hit the hardest. The following three incidents involving children clearly bring out the wretched state in which a lot of children of the state find themselves after the June 2013 floods.

1. The first incident deals with the sad story of Anil who found himself in the unfortunate position of a stable hand in Kedarnath on the ill-fated morning of 17th June, 2013.

Motivated by the prospect of earning some money to support his studies and help his family financially, Anil along with two fellow students came to Kedarnath from his native village of Kaunj-Pauthni in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand. As a stable-boy Anil used to ferry pilgrims on horseback to and fro between Kedarnath and Gaurikund. On the morning of 17th June 2013, a raging Mandakini river, fuelled by incessant rains broke its course to sweep across Kedarnath swallowing Anil along with many others.

It had hardly been 20 days since this 16 year old student from Doongri-Maikot High School started to work when his life ended abruptly and horribly. This account Anil's misfortune is but one of the many tales making up a larger story of childhoods

in Uttarakhand blighted by this tragedy.

2. The second incident narrates the ordeal of Pinky, a ninth standard student hailing from the village of Shrigad in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand. Pinky was hardly four years old when her mother passed away. Two years after her mother's demise her father also expired. Fortunately, by that time Pinky's elder sister had married and decided to take Pinky to live with her at her in-laws.

Pinky's brother-in-law (her sister's husband) used to support his family by ferrying pilgrims on horses and mules in Kedarnath. A part of the meagre living thus made, was happily spent by Pinky's sister on her education and upbringing. All was going well for Pinky when her fate took a twist for worse as





her brother-in-law went missing after the floods and landslide in Kedarnath.

The death of the sole bread winner in Pinky's family meant that the family could easily plunge into poverty. This unfortunate incident has also cast a shadow of uncertainty on Pinky's future as she might be forced to discontinue her education for the want of financial support.

3. The third incident is related to the plight of the State Primary School at Farkia, in Chamoli District of Uttarakhand. The July 13 landslide has transformed this school's building into a pile of rubble. The two weeks after the catastrophe were absolutely chaotic and the school had to be operated from two makeshift locations in the village. From 13th August onwards, this school was shifted to the premises of the Panchayat. But the dank premises of the Panchayat proved to be a major impediment for teachers to teach and consequently for children to learn.

It has been seven months since the school's building was destroyed. However, there is still no indication to point that the reconstruction process would be starting any time soon. The 30 students of this primary school along with the 10 children in the Aganwadi centre that operated from this school's premises all wait endlessly for help from the government to come in. But this wait has been too long and now unrequited patience is giving way to angst and dejection.

The only redeeming feature in this abject story is the help that has poured in from various non-government voluntary organizations. These organizations have been responsible for providing this school with basic and essential items such as small plastic boards, plastic chairs, cooking items, jute mats for children to sit, etc.

Despite the hardships faced by it, this school is still operating which speaks volumes about the spirit and sincerity of its teachers

who in the face of adversity have decided to brave on. It is this resilient spirit of its teachers that has helped students to attend this school in the most unfavourable of circumstances. However, given the chaos caused by the disaster the learning capabilities and possibilities of the students have been severely affected.

The aforementioned incidents paint a poignant picture of the trials and tribulations of children during and post the June 2013 tragedy in Uttarakhand. Viewed from the perspective of children, the Uttarakhand floods and landslides is an unmitigated disaster that has killed, orphaned and dispossessed them with abandon. This disaster has also exposed the enhanced inherent vulnerability of children to extreme events during exigent times. These three incidents provide a snapshot of ordeal that children throughout the affected areas of the Uttarakhand disaster have to go through.

The alarming situation can only be addressed through institutional mechanisms. For instance, there is an urgent need to strongly implement labour laws in these places of pilgrimage that precludes children from being used as cheap labour. Similarly, the damage suffered by school buildings in this disaster bear testimony to the unscrupulous practices followed by government contractors and bureaucracy. Stronger measures such as laws, regulation, monitoring and audits that inhibit corruption and incompetence are needed. Only through a concerted effort based on the previous actions can the children of Uttarakhand be helped to overcome the adverse impacts of this disaster and live up to their fullest potential. ■

- Omprakash Bhatt,
Sarvodaya Centre, Gopeshwar,
Chamoli, Uttarakhand

Addressing Children's Vulnerabilities in Tsunami Rehabilitation

The aftermath of Tsunami in December 2004, gave an awaking to the entire coastal villages to know about term. The December 2004 Tsunami proved to be an unmitigated disaster for all the coastal villages of Cuddalore district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. It's been more than nine years to that tragedy but the pain and suffering it caused is still palpable among the residents of these coastal villages. This massive disaster forced the local, district and state administration to coin policies for disaster risk reduction (DRR). In fact, the severity of this disaster stirred all departments like education department, revenue department, health department, fire and rescue department, etc. to include DRR strategies in their program.

After the Tsunami of 2004, Cuddalore district faced floods in 2005, Cyclone Nisha in 2008 and Cyclone Thane in 2011. During the calamities of 2005 and 2008, a lot of agencies were present in the district to support the district administration cope up with these calamities along with carrying out the task of their respective tsunami recovery programs. However, the situation was different after Cyclone Thane in 2011, wherein the local administration played a key



Photo: AIDMI.

role in the recovery and rehabilitation process. As a result of the proactive role played by the local administration the death toll from Cyclone Thane was kept to the bare minimum.

As a result of the various programmes organized by government departments students in the district were made aware of disaster and preparedness after Cyclone Thane. Mrs. Thangamani, Head Mistress of Panchayat Union Middle School, Periyakanganakuppam corroborates this fact and stated that her students studying in standard seventh and eighth weren't much aware of disasters after the Tsunami but their knowledge improved considerably after the Cyclone Thane. But this awareness about disasters and the knowledge that their district has been

conferred with the status of a disaster prone village has overwhelmed the students psychologically. They now live in constant fear and even a slightly heavy wind makes them very nervous as they fear the advent of an imminent cyclone.

A potent method to rid the students of these unfounded phobias is disaster preparedness lessons. These lessons can be imparted to students according to their academic calendar, i.e. these lessons should be given to different students according to the class in which they study. These lessons should continue well into higher secondary.

All these efforts can be boosted by support from the parents as well. They should be made active stakeholders in the entire effort for achieving resilience. As far as the school level is concerned the students and the parents can be motivated. And the students can be trained and formed as Disaster Resilient Groups to cope disasters in and out of the school like we have the scouts and guides etc. Regular and frequent programs will help the student to be more resilient in future and disaster preparedness will be inculcated within them. ■

- **Reuben James**, Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu
Interview with **Mrs. Thangamani**, Head Mistress of Panchayat Union Middle School, Periyakanganakuppam, Tamil Nadu.



Photo: AIDMI.

Climate Refugees

Over the past two decades, disasters have affected billions of people worldwide and killed 1.3 million. The economic and human losses resulting from weather and climate related disasters have increased five-fold in recent years. As the impacts of climate change intensify, the frequency, scale and severity of extreme weather events and their impacts on children and economies will dramatically increase. Reducing risk and building resilience are critical elements of sustainable development. Unaddressed, climate change and disasters hold the potential to stall and reverse progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and trap the most vulnerable in the cycle of poverty.

Integrating robust analysis of disaster and climate risk into development planning and implementation will contribute to safeguarding the sustainability of programs and help communities be better prepared in the face of increasing disaster risks. Children play a critical role in this process; however, they are often sidelined from the decision-making process and defined as passive victims. But children have the potential to effectively communicate risks and act as agents of change, and they are capable of actively participating in the decision making processes that will ultimately affect them, and their families.

Mr. Venkadesan, Asst. Project Officer said that efforts towards recognition of children's rights to survival and protection as well as to education and participation would be the core of any child centered activity framed. Today the Government has taken prudent



Photo: AIDMI.

Mr. Venkadesan, Asst. Project Officer, Sarva Siksha Abhyan, Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu.

steps in strengthening the infrastructures of the educational institution. There is no structural vulnerability is found in this district. After tsunami in 2004 all the building in the coast of the district is reconstructed with the special care of disaster resistance also now after 2011 cyclone all the educational building are constructed disaster resilient.

The schools are given awareness on disaster preparedness and climate change by various agencies and government departments. As a follow up of this schools have formed eco clubs and involved in no plastic zone creation, plantation of trees and kitchen garden in schools. All the schools are given with garbage bin separate for degradable and non degradable. Also the usage is inculcated to the students.

The long term and sustainable resilience of children towards disaster should have Safe learning facilities, School disaster management, Risk reduction and resilience education. For this to be achieved the children need to be clearly educated on the risk reduction, and this need to be

incorporated in the curriculum. Any sustainability looks towards future, future is in the hands of the students today, so healthy, safe and well educated children creates safe and developed societies for which the voice and choice of the children need to heard and addressed.

The students are to be trained as catalyst for developing disaster resilient future. It is the need of the hour to prepare the children psychologically and mentally to train them to inherit the disaster risk reduction as their culture.

We envisage students are well equipped to cope with disasters by having school disaster risk management plan, more greenery in school, better linkage with community and school through students, holistic disaster management plan for all the education institutions of the district. ■

- Reuben James

Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu

Interview with Mr. Venkadesan, Asst. Project Officer, Sarva Siksha Abhyan, Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu.

Building Safer Education in Urban Areas: A Case of School Disaster Management Plan

Disasters and risks to Assam are becoming increasingly complex due to the diversity of hazards affecting Assam. Emergencies can quickly escalate in scope and severity resulting in significant human and economic losses. Kamrup, an administrative district in Assam is prone to flash floods, earthquake and fire accidents.

Schools play a vital role in every community. They are not only the places where students learn and teachers teach; but are also used for social gatherings, theatre and sports. In addition, school buildings play an important role in responding to and recovering from natural disasters. In an event of a disaster, schools serve as emergency shelters for the local community. Based on a report submitted by Assam Engineering College (AEC) to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) in March 2013, approximately 200 private and government schools in Guwahati were found highly vulnerable to disasters and its impacts. ASDMA has

been a pioneer in taking an initiative on School Safety in Assam to build capacity of school stakeholders by conducting City Emergency Management Exercises (EMExs); mock drills; awareness generation programmes and dissemination of publications with an objective to reduce vulnerability. In 2012-13 All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) with the support from ASDMA conducted 40 trainings on school safety in 25 districts of Assam where 1,682 teachers from 1,314 schools attended the trainings where they prepared School Disaster Management Plan (SDMP) of their own school and participated in the mock drills.

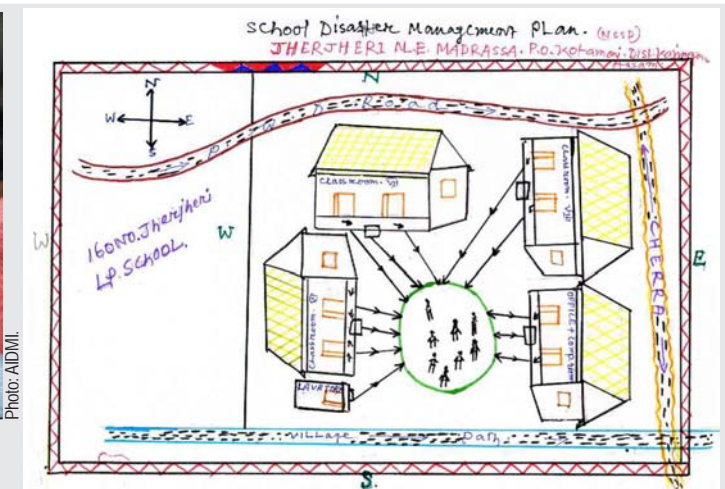
Further, ASDMA with AIDMI has implemented 'Pilot School Disaster Management Plans through 'Model-School' Approach' in Kamrup Metro with 4 Schools (2 government and 2 private) to understand the challenges faced by schools towards building safer education. Series of meetings with teachers, students and stakeholders were held to explain the

objective and importance of SDMPs, to conduct Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (HVCA) of their schools and to prepare SDMPs (which are based on the guidelines suggested by National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) under National School Safety Program (NSSP)). Different teams such as Disaster Management team, Search and Rescue team, Fire Safety team amongst others involving school staff and students were formed under School Disaster Management Committee to carry out a 'School Safety Audit' that helped them find out about gaps in safety and non structural mitigation measures. These teams are committed to build disaster resilient schools by conducting periodical safety audits, updating SDMPs, conducting mock drills and other DM activities. Disaster Mitigation Fund worth INR 35,000 was provided to each school to build disaster resilient schools.

Following are some of the non structural mitigation measures found



Oriented participants were busy in preparing school risk assessment through group exercise.



SDMP of Jherjheri M.E. Madrassa, Kotamoni, Karimganj, Assam.

by these teachers for their respective school under the project:

1. Additional fire extinguisher for mid day meals kitchen
2. Fixing book shelves, *almirahs* and securing chemical laboratory bottles/racks and placing of warning signs with safety measures
3. Electricity safety audit and repairing/replacement vulnerable appliances including calendar for routine check up
4. Fire safety audit and fire safety measures by placing of sand buckets, displaying maps of fire extinguisher locations/evacuation routes/location of Emergency Support Function (ESFs), display of emergency numbers through visible tools, routine assessment of gas cylinder accessories checking/replacement/repairing
5. Measures for control of mosquito breeding and other

6. Development of IEC materials on water/vector borne diseases, safe evacuation processes, first aid, earthquake preparedness, integrative school-teacher-students-parents involvement
7. Provision for emergency exit channels and diversification of exit routes through temporary channels for safe/rapid emergency evacuation
8. Cleanliness of water drainage system to ensure rapid drainage of logged water through appropriate channel
9. Training of Teachers and staff members on Conducting Mock Drill, Search & Rescue, First Aid and Rights Protection, Accountability and Disaster Risk Reduction

The SDMP pilot will be crucial to encourage school stakeholders to

demonstrate the SDMP and update it periodically with the lessons learnt. The trained teachers and active DDMA are creating enabling environment for such positive change in the field of DRR and School Safety. This pilot will create useful platform for school teachers and students with technical inputs from AIDMI to implement the SDMP. Such practical experience will build the capacity of school for emergency response and risk reduction. The pilot SDMP addresses non-structural elements in school, capacity building of stakeholders, awareness generation, and micro mitigation measures that are not depended on external agencies. This pilot is unique not only at state but national level; it is for the first time that such project is implemented. This pilot comes out with useful experience to share at national/regional level that will push SDMP at next level. ■

- Gautam Bhut and Khyati Halani

CHILDREN'S CHARTER

Disaster Risk Reduction for Children by Children

Children are not just one more vulnerable group to be helped and cared for. Children can actively and effectively reduce disaster risks. And as a result now children have their own charter. This is very pertinent as the moral and pragmatic imperative to include children in disaster risk reduction planning and envisioning process has become inescapable. It is from this need to

include children in the DRR decision making process that the Children's Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction has spawned.

This charter has been developed by collaboration among UNICEF, Plan, Save the Children and World Vision. This charter is the culmination of synthesis of consultations with over 600 children in 21 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The goal of this charter is to raise awareness of a child-centred approach to DRR and for a stronger commitment from governments, donors and agencies to actively engage children in DRR and

climate change adaptation activities by leveraging their knowledge and energy.

The five priorities of the Children's Charter include the following:

1. Schools must be safe and education must not be interrupted
2. Child protection must be a priority before, during and after a disaster
3. Children have a right to participate and to access the information they need
4. Community infrastructure must be safe, and relief and reconstruction must help reduce future risk
5. Disaster Risk Reduction must reach the most vulnerable people. ■

- Kshitij Gupta



A copy of Children's Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction is available at: http://www.childreninachangingclimate.org/database/CCC/Publications/children_charter.pdf

Children and Disasters

Children, defined here as persons under the age of 18,¹ are a highly vulnerable group in disaster situations due to their age and unique developmental needs.² Infants and young children are physically vulnerable because of their limited mobility, their inability to protect themselves, their less developed immune systems, and their specific nutritional requirements.³ Older children and adolescents are at risk of malnutrition, disease, injury and death; furthermore they are liable to develop various behavioural, psychological and emotional problems following disasters. As such situations can lead to large-scale displacement, disrupt essential services and weaken security conditions, children are particularly prone to being trafficked, exploited, abused, being separated from their families, being taken out of schools, and forced into marriage.⁴ Girls, children with disabilities, and children from minority backgrounds, are at even greater risk of being harmed.⁵



Photo: AIDMI.

Numerous studies have established that children form a significant proportion of those affected by disasters. In 2001, the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies found that in the decade before, about 66.5 million children globally were affected by natural disasters each year,⁶ and six years on Save the Children calculated that this would rise to 175 million children per year due to climate change, overpopulation and

accelerated urban-rural migration increasing the frequency of disasters.⁷ Within the South Asian region alone, 70% of all populations affected were children.⁸ Such high numbers have been said to be the outcome of numerous factors, these being:

- A long-standing common, yet erroneous assumption that children are not affected by disasters.
- Inadequate research and poor understanding of children's

1 Here, the international definition of a child as contained within Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is adopted. As will be discussed later on in the paper, the definition of what constitutes a child is particularly controversial in India, with national and state laws defining the 'child' differently depending on the context. See <http://digitalcommons.maclester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1523&context=macintl>

2 The term 'developmental needs' is used broadly to refer to the physical, social, mental and emotional conditions needed to ensure a child's wellbeing.

3 See generally, http://www.recoveryplatform.org/assets/Guidance_Notes/INTERNATIONAL_HEALTH_%20011210_nisa.pdf

4 http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Children/SR/Informal_summary_side_event8.3.12.pdf; see Lori Peek, 'Children and Disasters: Understanding Vulnerability, Developing Capacities, and Promoting Resilience - An Introduction' *Children, Youth and Environments* 18(1), 2008

5 http://www.swisshumanrightsbook.com/SHRB/shrb_02_files/347_18%20jain.pdf; <http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/cws/article/viewFile/9466/8583>

6 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies World Disaster Report 2001: focus on recovery. http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/disasters/WDR/21400_WDR2001.pdf; <http://www.childwatch.uio.no/research/children-in-emergencies/Lancet,%20Children's%20rights%20in%20emergencies%20and%20disasters.pdf>

7 Lori Peek, 'Children and Disasters: Understanding Vulnerability, Developing Capacities, and Promoting Resilience - An Introduction' *Children, Youth and Environments* 18(1), 2008; on increase in number of disasters, see IFRC <http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/89755/Photos/307000-WDR-2011-FINAL-email-1.pdf> p. 200

8 Disaster Management: Global Challenges and Local Solutions p. 2; <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=38327&Cr=disaster+risk&Cr1>

needs, vulnerabilities and experiences of disasters.

- Children occupy a low position in society and lack the power to voice their concerns.⁹
- Disaster management approaches have typically subsumed children's needs under those of adults or have completely ignored children's particular requirements.
- Disaster management professionals lack the expertise to address children's needs.
- There is poor recognition of the fact that children possess basic rights and must be treated as equal human beings.
- Failure to prepare communities properly for disasters and inadequate relief responses.

India is no exception to the global trend. Over the course of its extensive disaster history, children have suffered disproportionately.¹⁰ In the 2012 Assam floods – one of the

biggest flood disasters to hit the region in ten years, – it was estimated that half of the 2 million people affected were children.¹¹ In the devastating 2008 Kosi River floods, regarded as one of India's worst disasters, children were amongst the most affected and were subject to child abuse, child trafficking, trauma, malnourishment and trafficking. The relief materials sent were generally for adults and not targeted at them.¹² Similarly, the 2010 cloudburst/flash-flooding in Leh saw 5,000 children, about 40% of the affected population,

bear the brunt of the floods. They became highly traumatised due to their anxiety about the upcoming winter and further cloudbursts.¹³ Highlighting the poor levels of safety in India's schools, in the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, 931 children were crushed to death when their school building collapsed. It is anticipated that unless preventative and mitigating actions are taken, more children will be affected as climate change is projected to exacerbate India's already high vulnerability to disasters.¹⁴ ■ – Vandana Chauhan

9 Lori Peek, 'Children and Disasters: Understanding Vulnerability, Developing Capacities, and Promoting Resilience - An Introduction' Children, Youth and Environments 18(1), 2008

10 Ministry of Home Affairs, Disaster Management in India, pp. 8-10

11 <http://www.savethechildren.org/site/c.8rKLIXMGIpI4E/b.8198235/> ; <http://wvasiapacific.org/latest/india-world-vision-responding-to-assam-flood-affected-communities.html>

12 <http://www.childlineindia.org.in/bihar-report.html>

13 <http://www.savethechildren.in/what-we-do/disaster-risk-reduction-emergencies/responding-to-emergencies.html?start=2>

14 <http://umdcipe.org/conferences/epckdi/9.PDF>; Ministry of Home Affairs, Disaster Management in India, pp. 11-12

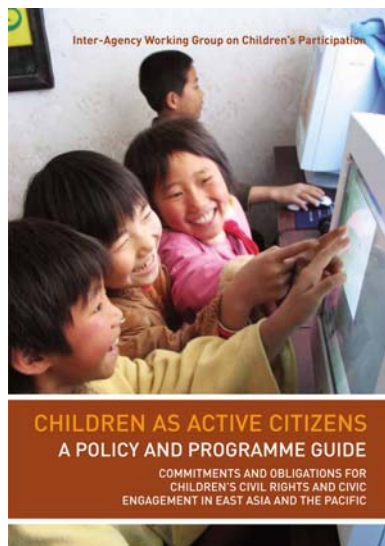
KNOWLEDGE SHARING: BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Children's Participation in Building Resilience

In the year 2008, The Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation (IAWGCP) published "Children as active citizens – a policy and programme guide for commitments and obligations for children's civil rights and civic engagement in East Asia and the Pacific". The publication is a landmark in many ways. The most important point it makes is that children are citizens. They stand equal to all.

This publication presents an agenda for the promotion of children's civil rights and civic engagement. It is divided into three parts.

Part one includes Introduction, Importance, Negligence, Agenda and Regional Context of children's citizenship and civil rights.



Part two includes Operationalizing children's civil rights with Birth and civil registration; Children's expression of opinion and control

over decisions in daily life; Access to information; Feedback and complaints mechanisms; Justice for children Economic citizenship and access to resources.

Part three includes Developing and Practicing active citizenship detailing on Citizenship competencies and civic engagement; Children as active citizens in the media; Children influencing public decisions; Children-led associations.¹

Though the focus is not on reducing risk on resilience the publication is of interest and use for all who look at risk from the window of sustainable right based development. The more children participate in reducing risk of disasters and climate change more they become active in shaping sustainable and safe development. ■

– Ritu Saxena

1 For entire guide refer: http://www.crin.org/docs/JT_active_citizens.pdf

Women and Disasters*

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA 1) will end in 2015. With only a year left to 2015, the demands for a post 2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (HFA 2) have become more pertinent and vociferous. A series of consultations, seminars and workshops have been organized worldwide to identify and address the key areas in the field of disaster risk reduction (DRR) through HFA 2. Women as a force in resilience building and gender equity in DRR has emerged as an important key area that warrants attention in HFA 2. The All India Disaster Mitigation

Institute (AIDMI) decided to address this key area by holding a group discussion with tribal women of south Gujarat who were affected by floods in September 2013. This exercise explored not only the vulnerability of these women during such contingent times but their inherent strengths as agents of resilience as well.

In the wake of the unprecedented heavy rains and consequent floods in September 2013, large parts of south Gujarat were badly affected. The downpour caused rivers Heran,

Osran and Vishwamitri to spill their banks in Gujarat, forcing thousands to flee their homes and seek refuge in school shelters and terraces of *pucca* house. This article tried to look at the impact of floods on tribal women based on the real experiences of those who were affected by 2013 floods. AIDMI along with Sukhi Mahila SEWA Mandal visited Vadodra district to meet tribal women to discuss and understand the same.

Disasters do not discriminate; they affect all – women and men, rich and poor, children and the elderly. But specific groups are impacted differently and the extent of suffering varies. For example, women bear a greater burden of extreme climatic events as compared to men. The root causes of women's vulnerability often lie in unequal power relations that deny women basic rights and give them secondary status in the labour force. This is compounded by a limited access to land rights and extensive domestic responsibilities which contribute significantly in making women economically vulnerable long before a natural disaster strikes. While the experiences of each woman participant will be different, there are a few generalizations below that were frequently echoed during the focus group discussions with flood affected tribal women:

Domestic Responsibility: Women are overwhelmingly responsible for domestic chores; these do not vanish in the event of a disaster such as floods but increase dramatically - cleaning, repairing, drying, fixing belongings, collecting fodder among the regular household activities.

• **Participation in livelihood activities:** In one of focus group



Photo: AIDMI.

1 This article has been prepared based on the AIDMI's recent impact evaluation of 2013 floods affected tribal women and their recovery.



Photo: AIDMI.

discussions, women pointed out that post floods they had to start working in informal sector as agriculture labourers, housemaids etc to make the ends meet. Despite of the diminishing and limited resources during and post floods, women do not see the increased workload in a negative sense but consider it as a part of their 'duty' towards family.

- **Restrictive Social Norms:** Approximately 70% of the women said that they were handicapped in escaping floods if the water levels were very high as they cannot swim (learning swimming being a taboo), or climb trees because they are weighed down by clothing to 'preserve their modesty'. One woman from village Badaliya said that "*During these tense moments, it is difficult to manage saree. My child could run towards higher lands or climb the roof tops but he got scared and refused to get down from my arms making it difficult*

for me to walk fast. With a lot a difficulty I managed to climb the roof top of panchayat building with my child".

- **Health and Sanitation:** Lack of clean water and the inability to use public toilets due to floods puts the women in a difficult situation. All the women present in the focus group discussion agreed that the social taboos around norms of appropriate behaviour make them highly susceptible to health problems.

All this paints a very grim and depressing picture, however it is essential to look at the other side of the coin – the resources tribal women brought post 2013 floods. First, women are remarkably resilient and they will do just about anything to keep their families together, to keep them safe and healthy. Despite the heavy burden that women had borne post the 2013 floods, they demonstrated considerable fortitude and ingenuity in their attempts to rebuild their damaged houses and

livelihood to guarantee their family survival. Secondly, traditional distinctions between the roles of men and women changed post floods with pragmatic decisions being taken on re-allocation of responsibilities. Due to the crop loss to floods, the women started working as agricultural labourers in the fields of others. Third, the women of the district were members of women's organisations such as Sukhi Mahila SEWA Mandal that played a crucial role by providing them with relief materials during and post floods.

Times of disasters leave people in a situation of crisis. Therefore, disasters should also be seen as an opportunity to improve pre-existing conditions such as gender imbalances in society. Reconstruction, therefore, should not be thought of simply as a process of replacing what has been lost, but also as an opportunity to improve the existing social order and make it more equitable for the most underprivileged and vulnerable groups. ■

- Khyati Halani

Child-Centred Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment

Disasters have damaged the lives and rights of children around the world. In the near future, the increasing severity and frequency of disasters would escalate the vulnerability of children as well. Disasters affect children directly by endangering their physical security and indirectly by exposing them to ills like poverty, malnutrition, disrupted education, psychological trauma, etc. Children due to their unique stage of physical and mental development have special needs. Thus, any policy that is meant to build the resilience of children to disasters must address these special needs.



Photo: AIDMI.

Even though children are extremely exposed to the adverse impacts of disasters they are often excluded from disaster management planning and practice¹. More opportunities should be provided to children to participate in disaster management and climate change decision making. Their participation in those decisions can ensure the realization of other child rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to safety, survival, protection from violence and harm, adequate health care, and education, all of which are compromised in the event of a disaster, natural or man-made. Programme evidence has shown that children have a unique perspective on disaster risks that can improve a community's overall resilience to disasters, and they are effective communicators of risk to each other and their communities.

The All India Disaster Mitigation Institute's (AIDMI) experience of working with children in DRR has

shown that children's participation in the identification of hazards and the monitoring of risks in their communities is a central component of a child-centred Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) program. Training children on DRR, therefore, is most effectively centred on conducting, with children, a child-friendly, participatory Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (HVCA). The participatory HVCA process with

"While humanitarian principles and human rights conventions ensure that, increasingly, children are given special protection in emergency situations; children's right to participation remains largely unrecognized. Children continue to be perceived as mere victims of disasters rather than active agents of change who can make a real difference."

- Plan International, 2007

children accomplishes two important objectives: it builds children's knowledge and skills in DRR, and it enables children to analyze and monitor disaster risks, vulnerabilities, and capacities in their communities, to better protect themselves, and to share their informed views to influence disaster management governance and planning.

Once an HVCA has been conducted with children, children gain knowledge and skills on their community's hazard and vulnerability profile. This knowledge of children can be applied to inform the planning and implementation decisions for prevention, preparation, and mitigation activities that have been prioritized by children at the end of the HVCA process. Follow-up child centred DRR programming springing from their HVCAs can include small projects that the children manage themselves to affect change, awareness raising, and advocacy in cooperation with adult groups and NGOs to hold local governments accountable to their responsibilities, with the aim of creating spaces for children's voices to be heard on a regular basis in disaster management decision making.²

Thus, a child-centred HVCA is an indispensable tool to increase the stake of children in DRR planning, implementation and decision making. While more time consuming than other methods of DRR training with children, a child-centred DRR produces greater benefits for children and a more effective approach for promoting overall community resilience to disasters. ■

- Brij Chauhan

1 http://www.preventionweb.net/files/3820_CHLDRR.pdf

2 <http://www.plan-uk.org/resources/documents/260258/>

Child-Centred Disaster Risk Management Planning

Geographies around the world are prone to various forms of hazards. But the incidence of disasters and the severity of their impacts have always been found to be higher in lesser developed regions. This owes to the fact that hazards compound existing vulnerabilities thereby leading to disasters. Therefore, any effort to reduce the damage potential of hazards must necessarily be aimed at reducing these underlying vulnerabilities.

Lesser developed regions are generally densely populated, environmentally sensitive, caste differentiated, educationally backward and economically poor with unsteady sources of livelihood, weak public institutions, poor access to basic services and poor physical infrastructure. A combination of all these debilitating factors makes lesser developed regions highly vulnerable to hazards. In such a scenario, the communities in these regions are not disaster resilient and remain either

plunged in poverty or on the brink of it. Due to a variety of reasons, children as group are greatly exposed to the adverse impacts of disasters. This makes it crucial to plan risk management measures that affects them - directly or indirectly.

Disasters impact children the most in terms of physical, emotional, mental, educational and nutritional development. The first step to risk reduction and management is to identify the causal factors affecting children and plan around that. Let's take a look at one such scenario that is a causal factor inducing the enhanced vulnerability of children to the detrimental effects of disasters.

A disaster strike would have a damaging effect on the existing infrastructure like roads and bridges, and as a result restricts access to markets. Or otherwise, it may also directly affect their livelihood (such as flooding of agricultural field or death of domesticated animals) or the

quality of the products that devalues them. The reduced income levels have a direct affect on their children, in terms of access to food (or quality food), thereby having an effect on their all round growth and diminished health status. Any harm to physical health can also have a corresponding impact on emotional and mental health. Clearly, while children do not have anything to do directly with livelihoods, the impact on them is obvious. The risk management component that is child-centred has to do more with addressing the risk to livelihoods that their parents face. Thus, livelihoods diversification and disaster mainstreamed livelihood promotion programmes are required to be planned and implemented in a way that can substantially reduce the scale at which psychosocial and medical support is required by children. This is particularly important when we know that underdeveloped regions have poor access to medical infrastructure and ability to retain qualified doctors or clinical psychologists is difficult.

The scenario addressed above identifies just one major causal factor making children and communities vulnerable, while impact of several other issues such as poor access to potable water and sanitation need to be further evaluated and addressed.

Likewise, causal factors need to be identified in similar fashion and in greater depth for problems such as child abuse and sexual exploitation, poor access to education and quality delivery, child labour, etc., where clearly identified causal factors can lead the way to an effective and responsive child-centred disaster risk management planning. ■

- Varun Kappal



Photo: AIDMI.

MILESTONE

Southasiadisasters.net: Capturing DRR Voices Since 2005

All India Disaster Mitigation Institute has recently completed more than 100 issues of Southasiadisasters.net. This success is possible mainly due to the contribution of over 345 policy makers, community leaders, UN team members, academics, youth leaders and heads of authorities belonging to 188 organizations from India and 33 countries, covering 13 disasters, spanning over 30 themes and 11 important national and international policy discourses. Perhaps this is the longest and largest such effort to capture Disaster Risk Reduction in action in Asia. The uniqueness of Southasiadisasters.net can be highlighted in the following points:

1. Southasiadisasters.net has a rich repository of knowledge on themes that address all the 5 priorities of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA 1).
2. Southasiadisasters.net has comprehensively covered a total of 13 disasters since 2005.
3. Southasiadisasters.net has made considerable inroads in shaping the discourse on 11 policies related to disaster risk reduction at national and international level.
4. Southasiadisasters.net has been enriched by contributions from that have come majorly from action oriented and local level implementation agencies. The Southasiadisasters.net has been fortunate enough to receive contributions from distinguished researchers and academics.
5. Southasiadisasters.net espouses a truly global perspective to the policies and practices related to the field of disaster risk reduction. But it is rooted in down to earth. It has received contributions from individuals and organizations from 33 countries.
6. In advocating better and improved disaster risk reduction policies and practices, Southasiadisasters.net has collaborated with a total of 188 national and international organizations that range from governments departments to educational institutions to United Nations System's and from international NGOs to the private sector.

Thus, the hitherto published 100 issues provide over 17,000 readers with a rich repository of knowledge covering a wide range of issues and themes related to disaster and climate risk reduction. ■

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Congratulations to AIDMI team members who have succeeded in producing a hundred issues of Southasiadisasters.net over the past eight years! This publication has now created a vital niche in providing a stream of distilled knowledge concerning disaster risk management within the Asian Region. May this important work continue in the years ahead and may the material being published remain always relevant, accurate, innovative, interesting, be broad in its scope and perhaps most important, to continually challenge current wisdom.

– Ian Davis

Visiting Professor in Disaster Risk Management in Copenhagen, Lund, Kyoto and Oxford Brookes Universities, UK

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