

Living with disasters and changing climate

Children in Southeast Asia
telling their stories
about disaster and climate
change



Save the Children



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Save the Children works for:

- A world which respects and values each child.
- A world which listens to children and learns.
- A world where all children have hope and opportunity.

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About this book

Living with disasters and changing climate is about children, disaster risk reduction, and climate change. Based on Save the Children's experience in Child-centred disaster risk reduction in Southeast Asia, this book is a collection of children's stories and statements about their views on disasters and climate change and their impact on the children's lives, and how they can do something about it.

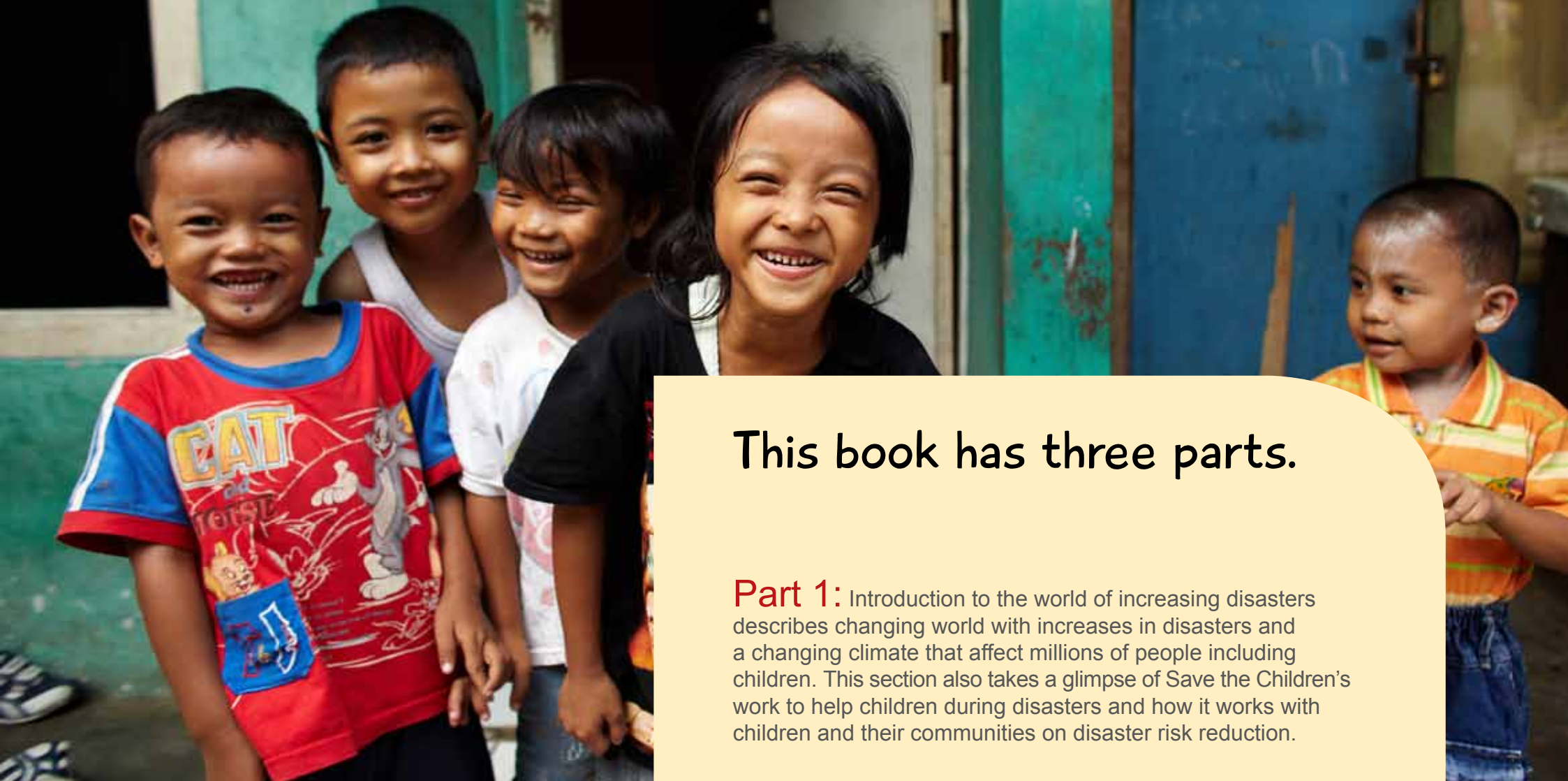
While experts project an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters and climate change and their adverse effects on children, we rarely hear from children, especially children from poor communities. Children are often seen solely as victims of these unfortunate events – the most vulnerable.

Children should not be seen as victims, but actors in addressing the impacts of natural disasters and climate change on their lives and the life of their community. Policy makers and local authorities need to listen to children and see them as part of the future solutions. Children need to be involved in initiatives to build up their knowledge and resiliency thereby reducing the impacts of disasters and climate change, especially on the most vulnerable.



These stories were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Interviews and focused-group discussions were conducted with children and adults in five communities in Thailand and four communities in Indonesia. Case studies were also collected from Vietnam and the Philippines. Programme documents and reports were used as secondary resources.

Children interviewed for this book have experienced different levels and frequencies of disasters and effects of climate change. While their voices do not represent the voices of all children in the Southeast Asia region, the book attempts to highlight common concerns amongst children who have experienced disasters and climate change. The fact is that children want and can take action to reduce the risks of disasters and climate change on themselves and their communities.



This book has three parts.

Part 1: Introduction to the world of increasing disasters describes changing world with increases in disasters and a changing climate that affect millions of people including children. This section also takes a glimpse of Save the Children's work to help children during disasters and how it works with children and their communities on disaster risk reduction.

Part 2: Children want to take action and tell their stories of the impact of disasters and climate change on their lives as well as their activities to overcome the effects of disasters and reduce the impact of future disasters and climate change on their lives.

Part 3: What children want to see happening collects children's wishes – what they want to see happening with regards to disaster risk reduction in their communities.

Part 1: Introduction

The world of increasing disasters and climate change

Millions of people including children die and made homeless and/or displaced due to a lack of knowledge on disasters, emergency preparedness, and risk reduction. Climate change affects the way of life for thousands of people through the creation of chronic and immediate disaster situations. From 2005-2009, 503,839,279 people have been affected by natural disasters in East and Southeast Asia alone.¹ Asia Pacific as a whole has seen several catastrophic natural disasters in the last five to six years including the Tsunami (2004), earthquakes in Pakistan (2005), China (2008) and

Indonesia (2009), cyclone in Myanmar (2008)(OCHA, 2009) and storms and typhoons which have recently displaced millions of people in the Philippines and Vietnam. The number of natural disasters has quadrupled in the past two decades. On an average, naturally disasters affect the lives of 250 million people and kill 66,000 people every year, half of which is believed to be children (Save the Children, 2007).

Climate change is impacting on the Mekong sub-region of Southeast Asia resulting in rising levels of seawater and weather-related disasters. As people in the region mainly rely on agriculture for their livelihood, too much or too little rain reduces productivity. Although the scale of rural to urban migration as a result of climate change has not yet been explored, this type of migration is increasing as it becomes more and more difficult to earn a livelihood through agricultural means.

Despite these threatening facts, the scale of the impact of disasters and climate change on children has not been fully explored. The exact number of children who have died or been affected are debatable and always difficult to come by. Taking recent examples, an official number of children who died in the Sichuan earthquake was only available a year after the disaster with a total of 5,335 children [Times Online, 2009]. There is no official number of children who died and/or affected by Cyclone Nargis in 2008 that was believed to affect 2.4 million people and kill 140,000 in Myanmar. Furthermore, emergency responses are not always directed according to specific needs of children. Need assessments are done without consultations with children and often leave the most vulnerable groups of children struggling for their own survival.

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1 As defined by EM-DAT: The International Disaster Database, natural disasters include drought, earthquake, epidemic, flood, mass movement dry, mass movement wet, storm, volcano, and wildlife.

What we know for sure is that children are the most vulnerable when a disaster strikes and in the aftermath of a disaster. Children who survive a disaster may immediately experience injuries, hunger, malnutrition, and illnesses. In the disaster aftermath, stress over loss of family members, separation, loss or disruption of livelihood, abuses and exploitations can leave long-term psychological impact on children. Different groups of children also experience different levels of impacts, poor children, children from ethnic groups, migrant children, and girls are likely to face more difficulties and receive less support due to discrimination in times of disasters.

Climate change can cause the loss in productivity which implies loss of income, and economic losses for a country as a whole. This loss may reduce government's spending on the country's health system especially in poor countries, which makes the survival of children under five more difficult. As many poor families live on agriculture, loss in productivity implies loss of livelihood. Changing in precipitation and temperature have direct impacts on the family's livelihood and survival. As a result, many families move or force their children to move into the city to find jobs and feed the family. While rural-urban migration could be prosperous, thousands

of children could find themselves struggling to earn in exploitative working condition, to access to clean water, food, and basic services in over-crowded slums scattered around big cities.

Therefore, children have no choice but to live with more frequent and intense disasters and increasing effects of climate change. The question is how can children be actors in risk reduction through preventive and risk reduction measures? Children in cooperation with communities need to be equipped with life-saving tools to reduce their risk and the risk of others from disasters and develop resilience.

At the same time they need the knowledge and tools to mitigate the current and future impacts of climate change on their lives and their communities.



What Save the Children does to save children's lives in disasters?

Responding to emergencies

When a disaster hits, Save the Children mobilises its resources immediately to help affected communities and children. In the aftermath of a disaster, children's survival and safety are top priorities. Activities in the very first phase after a disaster include identifying and registering separated children and orphans in needs of special protection; ensuring the nutritional needs of young children, setting up proper shelters and hygiene facilities to prevent spread of preventable diseases, and organising child-friendly spaces.

Here are some examples of Save the Children's immediate responses to current disasters in Southeast Asia.



Save the Children's response to the recent Southeast Asia crisis

Sumatra earthquake, Indonesia

Two earthquakes struck Sumatra on 30 September 2009. 1,117 people are reported dead and 2.5 million people have been affected. 250,000 families are homeless.

Save the Children has distributed shelter and hygiene kits to 143,777 people, including 64,492 children, in Pariman district, West Sumatra.



Typhoon Ketsana, Vietnam

Typhoon Ketsana hit Vietnam on 28 September 2009, followed by Typhoon Mirinae five weeks later. Over 3 million people have been affected and at least 150,000 people were forced to leave their homes.

Save the Children has distributed food and essentials, such as rice, blankets, mosquito nets and jerry cans to around 100,000 people.

Typhoons Ketsana and Parma, the Philippines

Typhoon Ketsana and Parma struck the Philippines in October 2009 causing heavy rain and landslides and affecting 8.7 million people. 902 people have died and more than 1.9 million were forced to leave their homes.

Save the Children distributed food and essentials to around 50,000 people along with the setting up of safe play spaces for children in a number of evacuation centres.

Source: www.savethechildren.org.uk as of 25 November 2009

Reducing risks

Save the Children recognises that children are the most at risk in disasters and more lives can be saved with preparations. Therefore, we focus on reducing the impacts of emergencies on children and their families. Child-centred disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness programmes are carried out to reduce the risk from disasters.

Save the Children believes that children and communities are key to disaster risk reduction. Disaster risk reduction is a way to build community's awareness about hazards and their vulnerabilities, to develop early warning system, and emergency preparedness plan together; to identify coping mechanisms for their own community; and to develop resilience. It is therefore important that DRR involves everyone in the community including children. By strengthening their skills, children will understand the risk of disasters in communities and are enabled to take a lead in reducing the risks and impacts of potential disasters in the future.

* Photo caption : Children, families and schools in central Vietnam were affected by Cyclone Ketsana in September 2009.

Involving children in disaster risk reduction (DRR)

Child-centred disaster risk reduction (DRR) is children playing leading roles in their communities to reduce the negative impacts of disasters, through meaningful participation. Children should be involved from the start in assessing and identifying risks, planning, implementing, and evaluation of the DRR (Save the Children, 2008). However, this does not replace adult responsibilities. Empowering children through their participation should be considered as an important protection strategy as well as a right which needs the support of adults (Save the Children in Sri Lanka and Save the Children Sweden, 2006).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognises the rights of children to protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. In times of a disaster and its aftermath, children will be exposed to an extraordinary number of dangers. It is therefore inarguable that children must be protected. Nevertheless,



as a right, children must also be informed and/or have a say on how they want to be protected. Child-centred DRR recognises children as active agents who can prevent, reduce the impacts of disasters, and develop resilience; not passive victims. Space is created for children to voice their concerns and to take action, together with adults.

Save the Children's experience in Child-centred DRR has shown that adults are impressed by children's opinions and their ability to participate in DRR activities.



With adult support, children are enthusiastic to learn and take actions, becoming aware of disaster risk and impact, and developing their skills to respond along with adults.

DRR activities also lay the foundation for activities to reduce the impacts of climate change. By learning about causes and effects of disasters, many children can establish the link between disasters and climate change. Several children participating in the DRR programme have observed changes in temperatures, seasons, and rainfalls in their areas which affect their lives at different levels. Based on the knowledge they have learned from the DRR activities, children have initiated their own activities such as recycling activity, campaigning on reduction of plastic usage, and re-planting trees. These activities help reducing the impacts of disasters as well as changes of the climate.



Save the Children's Disaster Risk Reduction Programme in Southeast Asia

In **Thailand**, the programme evolves from tsunami response programme. DRR programme was started off in more than 120 schools through local partners in tsunami affected provinces. A number of learning and experience was documented during the pilot project which later applied as a baseline knowledge to replicate the programme in the other 15 disaster prone areas in the country where facing small scale disasters all year round. The target group is also expanded to children in communities and adults, as well as DRR knowledge to add more activity on disaster preparedness such as evacuation plan and drill.

* *Save the Children's Disaster Risk Reduction programme is also implemented in Lao PDR and Myanmar*

Vietnam is one of the countries in the region that prone to disasters and climate change which was recently affected by Typhoon Ketsana and Mirinae. Save the Children has implemented Child-Focused (later transformed into Child-Led Disaster Risk Reduction Programme) since 8 years ago in seven provinces of Vietnam. More than 600 children in 30 schools have been trained in child rights, DRR and hazard-vulnerability-capacity assessment. Children in schools and communities participate in disaster risk analysis, the production of school-risk maps and the action plan, advocate and disseminate DRR knowledge, the impact of disaster to younger children and decision makers. In addition, Save the Children in Vietnam has extensively worked on emergency response alongside with DRR programme.

The Philippines is one of the most at risk countries in the region to be affected by climate change and disasters. The most prevalent natural hazards are typhoon and flooding which cause landslide, mudslide and storm surge. In addition to natural hazards, the country is also affected by the civil conflict in Mindanao. Save the Children in the Philippines has implemented DRR programme since 2003 under different donors. The programme empowers children to analyse community hazard, vulnerability and capacity assessment as well as form a disaster response team to assist other children during a disaster.

Indonesia The impact of tsunami in Aceh in the year 2004 is the most significant event for Indonesia to pay attention to Disaster Risk Reduction activity. Additionally the country is also affected by frequent earthquake, flood, landslides and drought. Based on the fact that Indonesia is located on the ring of fire, as well as there is an intense climate

change in the country. It has placed the population of Indonesia at the highest risk among those in Southeast Asia region. Save the Children has responded the large and small scale disasters in Indonesia as well as DRR programme which is considered to be the most effective programme helping children and families better prepare for disasters in East and

Southeast Jakarta, Langkat and Aceh Tamiang. Children from 79 schools and surrounding communities have gained more knowledge and skill on DRR, they understand how to assess their own community's vulnerability and capacity assessment, pass on DRR message to adults and other children, as well as help their families evacuate to the safe place



Impact of disasters on children's lives – from their perspective

Adults may think that children might not understand the situation or what they need to do during a disaster. However, if one would ask, they will see that children can explain and understand the impacts of disaster on themselves, their families, and their communities.

Children understand the impacts of disaster because disasters change the way they live. Some changes are temporary but some are permanent. From interviews and focused group discussions, children identified many impacts and changes including impacts on their education, impacts on their living condition and safety, psychological impacts, and impacts on their livelihoods.

Amongst the top three impacts that many children identified was impacts on education. Going to school equals having a normal life to children as it provides their social space. Therefore, during disasters, many children are concerned about not able to catch up with their classes, missing friends and teachers, and bad school performance. Some children in the interviews said their school performance dropped after the disasters. Some had wished that they stayed shorter in the evacuation centres so they would be able to go back to school.



* Photo caption : Children in Indonesia explain the impact of disasters on their lives through drawing



Life in disaster aftermath is a struggle for many children. Children find it difficult living in evacuation centres. They do not expect it to be like home but many times their specific needs are not met. Some children reported that they did not receive an equal food distribution or other support. Some children waited longer for support because of their remote location. A few children who quickly returned to a family-like environment also expressed that, despite that, things were not the same for them anymore.

Even with all material supports, children who experienced catastrophic disasters and lost their loved one said that it took a long time for them to recover emotionally. Fears and sadness do not go away quickly. During the interviews, children said that adult's support was the key to their emotional recovery. Having developed their resilience over time, children nevertheless said that they were not yet fully recovered. Yet, they tried to stay positive.

As older children normally share their families' responsibilities by working, they understand the impacts on and/or loss of livelihood of their families. Especially the first child with several younger siblings said it was more difficult to feed the family after a disaster. Some lost part of their lands. Some lost their working equipments. Some lost their crops. A few children expressed that the compensation they received to rebuild their livelihood did not match what they had lost.

Despite the fact that many children affected by disasters are not given information on their situation and excluded from the decision-making process, children quietly observe and understand how disasters change their lives. Now let's listen to their stories.



"My house was not touched by the landslide, neither my school. But the road to my school was partly cut. At one point half of the road was gone and we could use only one lane. We had to wait for the cars from the other side to go first, and we took turns. It was very dangerous. There could have been accidents."

Mai, 16-year-old girl, Phayao Province, Thailand, experienced landslide in 2008

"After the water had gone, we went back to clean our house. We tried to stay in the house but it was difficult. We had no mattress and no mosquito nets. So we went to stay at my uncle's house. My sister came back from Bangkok and brought us some stuff. We also went shopping for new stuff together. We bought the mattress, pillows, mosquito nets, and other stuffs. My sisters also helped us to repair the house. It took us around three to four months to repair the house.

We have got new stuffs and lived in the same house but it did not feel the same. It did not feel as warm as before. We lost a lot and my sisters bought a lot of new stuffs but it was not the same."

Mam, 12-year-old girl, Uttaradith Province, Thailand, experienced flash flood and massive

"The food distribution was unequal."

Soleha, 11-year-old girl, Langkat, Northern Sumatra, Indonesia, experienced a massive flood in 2006

"There were many organizations came in to help. But I cannot erase those old pictures of my friends. I cannot tell exactly how I feel ... my close friend died.

When I went back to class. I was still afraid because I did not know if tsunami would happen again. Some children in the class would cry and the teacher had to rush in. We were afraid even of strangers. There were fewer children in the classroom. Around 47 people in the village died. People may think that 47 was a small number but I thought that it was a lot because there were not many people in my village. We all knew one another.

It took about five to six months for the students to feel better. But I don't think that it will ever be the same. I still can't accept the fact that my friend has died.

Nuta, 14-year-old girl, Ranong Province, Thailand, experienced the Andaman Tsunami in 2004



"I remember coming back to the house, once the flood waters had retreated, and seeing the tables and chairs that we are sitting on now lying in shambles. There was mud everywhere and everything was dirty.

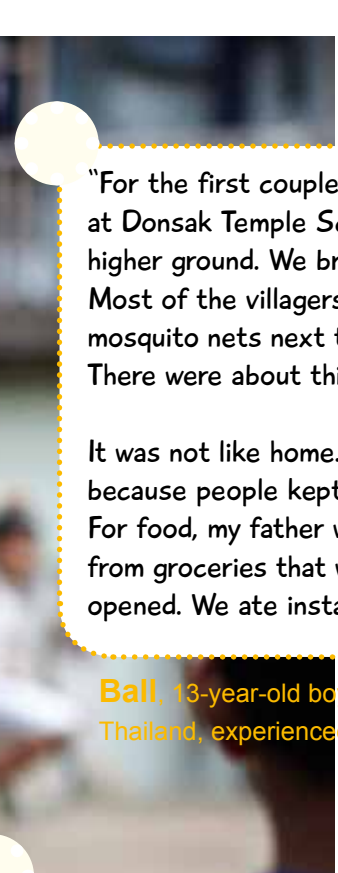
We run a motorcycle repair shop at our home and the mud damaged the tools and equipment. Our rice paddy was also submerged in sand and mud."

Bui Thi Thu Hang, 11-year-old girl, Yen Bai province, Vietnam, experienced flood as a result of storm Kammuri in 2008



"The landslide destroyed parts of my family's plantation. We planted corns. The landslide came at night and we found out in the morning when we came to the plantation. The mud covered half of our plantation. There were many rocks and tree trunks coming down as well. We could not move them away or do anything about it. We just kept working on the rest of the plantation that was not destroyed.

I usually helped out my parents on the plantation during weekends. I felt sad and worried when I saw what happened to our plantation. The rest of the plantation was not enough for us (to live on). There were seven of us in our family – my dad, my mom, my five younger siblings and me. So we went to our relative's and found a new plantation."



"For the first couple of days, we moved to stay at Donsak Temple School because it was on a higher ground. We brought some medicine with us. Most of the villagers were there. We all set up mosquito nets next to one another in classrooms. There were about thirty families.

It was not like home. I could not sleep well because people kept chatting until late at night. For food, my father went to buy instant noodles from groceries that were not flooded and still opened. We ate instant noodles for every meal."

Ball, 13-year-old boy, Uttaradith Province, Thailand, experienced flash flood and massive landslide in 2006

"It is annoying to have floods every year. I'll be far from my family because my parents will evacuate to our relatives' house and ask me to guard the house for our belongings. I can only evacuate to the district shelter (which is closer to his place). I am the only child. My parents started to ask me to guard the house in 2007 because I was old enough. I always lack sleep when it is flooded. I lack of sleep because the sleeping mats in the shelter are made of bamboos and they are not comfortable to sleep on. There are also a lot of people evacuating to the shelter."

Eki, 17-year-old boy, Kampung Melayu Kecil village, Jakarta, experienced floods every year

Part 2:

Children want to take action!



One reason that makes adults overlook children's situation is because they do not talk to affected children, and in small-scaled disaster, children might not be considered being affected at all. As a result, children are too often seen as passive victims of disasters. However, if they are given the opportunity and support, children are more often willing and able to take action in response to a disaster. Children are key stakeholders and can reduce the impact of future disasters and climate change on their families and communities. Children have ideas on how to respond and reduce future risk. They want to take action – be part of the solution.

Children participate in the DRR through various activities and at different levels. In some places children are involved in adult-initiated projects, and in other places children initiate their own projects. What makes difference is not children's potentials or capability, but support from adults and

enabling environment created for them to participate. Despite different levels of participation, all children understand the aim of participating in DRR; that is to be better prepared for future but unpredictable disasters. Stories from children show how children are eager to learn and be involved in protecting themselves and their communities.

Save the Children's Disaster Risk Reduction programme works with children and communities surviving and experiencing disasters to arm them with preventive and coping mechanisms for disasters. Through children's camps and workshops about disasters, children have learned causes and effects of disasters, their vulnerabilities, and the importance of disaster preparedness. Save the Children and its local partners developed preparedness, contingency, and emergency plans with children and their communities so they know what to do when disasters strike.

* Photo caption :Children in Indonesia perform through song and dance on how to reduce the vulnerability to disasters



Practical skills such as first-aid, swimming, and monitoring a rain gauge are also taught. Emergency drills are carried out involving children so that they practice what they have learned in camps and workshops.

Children also want to do something to counter climate change in order to reduce the risks of their communities. Through the DRR activities, children learn causes and effects of natural disasters; and that disasters and climate change are inter-related. Many children in the interviews identified climate change as a cause of hazards and/or disasters in their communities. They also know that climate change is caused by human. Therefore, children have tried to raise awareness to change the way their communities live to reduce the growth of climate change.

In addition, children have gained several skills through participating in DRR activities

including management, communication, and leadership skills. Children said in interviews and focus group discussions that they see themselves developing and becoming more mature. Several children have become young leaders in their schools and communities initiating their own projects for other children.

Adults' support is critical to children's development and participation. Children have potentials to develop their skills to voice out their concerns, initiate new projects, and work along side with adults. However, all of these need to be supported by adults around them including parents, teachers, and local authorities. When children voice out their concerns, adults need to listen. In order to initiate a project, adults must create an enabling environment for them to do so. Adults also need to learn how to work with children in order to teach children and understand what children's needs are.

Children want to take action in DRR because they have the knowledge and capacity.

To many adults' surprise, the DRR activities have strongly proved children's ability to save lives. Children are eager to learn and practice what they have learned. In every group discussions, children have shown their new skills and tools such as creating and monitoring a self-made rain gauge, giving first-aid to injured persons, community map, and warning system.

Child-led Emergency Drill



Jessica Oxales is a Grade 4 pupil in Manila Elementary School in a high-risk municipality in Albay. She is one of the many children who witnessed the devastation after the wake of the Typhoon Durian-induced lahar flow that claimed thousands of lives, destroyed homes and livelihoods, and disrupted classes in that fateful day on November 30, 2006. Jessica and 616 more pupils from 22 high-risk public elementary schools attended the Children's Summer Camp sponsored by the Bicol Assistance Project being implemented by Save the Children with funding support from USAID.

In the summer camp, she was placed in a drill scenario of a 7.5 magnitude earthquake and an incipient fire that resulted to mass casualties in the campus. After hearing the blast that signalled the simulated earthquake, she and the rest of the campers immediately ducked, covered their heads with hands, and sought safety from under sturdy tables and chairs. Being elected as one of the key leaders of the Bulilit Emergency Response Team (BERT) in her school during the camp, she showed her way out in the classroom to lead other pupils to the safe holding area after hearing the evacuation warning bells and rapid whistles.

Once in the safe holding area, she listened carefully for the instructions of the Principal who gave instructions to the Security Committees of the BERT and the School Disaster Risk Reduction Management Group (SDRRMG) to perform immediate head count of pupils and to form a human cordon around panicking pupils. While watching in awe as the chaos ensued around her, she heard the Principal-turned-Incident Commander command

her team of search and rescue to perform sweeping of classrooms and emergency transfer of victims to the safe holding area. As the leader of the search and rescue team, she bolted from her feet and walked her team to the classrooms to sweep and rescue. Once in the vicinity of the first classroom, she performed a primary survey of the rescue area. Upon judging that it was safe, she went inside the classroom in disarray. Under fallen debris caused by a 7.5 magnitude earthquake, a pupil screamed in pain from an apparent fracture of the right leg. Immediately, Jessica assigned 2 of her team to perform proper victim handling and 2-man emergency carry. Judging that other classrooms may have similar cases of casualty, she instructed other members of her team to rapidly sweep other classrooms and perform necessary actions.

Extract from a case study from Disaster Preparedness and Bicol Assistance Project Bicol Region, the Philippines

It is important to be prepared



Ple is fifteen years old. She lives in rural Phayao province. She has no experience on catastrophic disaster. However, her community faces the same hazard every year – floods. In the raining season, the main road that she travel to school is cut off because of floods, and she has to use another road which is longer to go to school. In some years, the bridge leading to her village was also cut off. There have been people she knew who were affected by the floods. Some of her school friends have lost their belonging, cropland, and animals after the floods. Ple was really concerned about the situation and did not want to see anyone she knew affected again. Therefore, recently, Ple joined

the Save the Children DRR project implemented by Phayao Youth News Agency in Phayao province, Thailand. She received trainings about disasters and DRR.

“We have done a community map identifying where the risks and safe areas are. Our community map also identifies which families have children and elders, and how we can help them when a disaster strikes. During training, we played a game about how we needed to work together to prevent a landslide to get into our village. Everyone sat on a chair but left one chair empty A person playing a role of a landslide tried to get that empty chair from the village. So everyone had to rotate to sit on the empty chair and prevent the landslide from taking any empty chair from us ... we will have an actual emergency drill soon.”*

Ple may have had a short experience with the DRR activities but she understood the importance of the DRR. She expressed that the best way to save lives was to be well prepared, and that children and adults should work together to help others who might not know about disaster risk reduction.

“It is best to inform people in advance where the safe areas are. We can use the community radio broadcast to inform people where those areas are – where people can run to and stay away from the floods. It is better to let them know in advance. We should also tell them what they should prepare to pack. As someone who received trainings, I want to pass on my knowledge to other people in my community. Also, when they learn about disasters and that they are partly caused by human, we will find preventive measures together so that they can protect themselves and others when there is a disaster.”

“Adults may have a bigger role (in DRR) than the children. However, the children can help educate and improve the understanding of those who may not yet know about this issue. Educating adults can be a role of the children. For some adults, because they have experienced disasters, they can also help children when a disaster happens. It's like we have different kind of knowledge to share.”

** The empty chair represented a household that could not help themselves in disasters.*

Being alert



In a district of Uttaradith province, Thailand where children experienced flash flood and massive land slide three years ago and repeatedly experienced small floods every other year, Save the Children works with local youth network to educate children about disasters and preparedness. Children were introduced to warning systems such as how to read rain gauge and natural signs; and to the community disaster focal point. Children become more alert but calm when there is heavy rain.

"I joined three children's camps and learn a lot ... I know that I should tell my parents and villagers to prepare their stuffs before disasters hit. This year when the village was flooded a little, I warned people not to panic because there was not as much water as the big flood (two years ago), and told them to put their stuffs on a higher ground. Some people believed and followed me. Some did not. They just got panic and went to stay at the temple."

Art, 12-year-old boy



Photo caption :
Children
in Thailand
take a lead in
evacuation drill
of flood in their
community

"(Now when there's heavy rain) ... people move things up on a higher ground. The Village Head will announce through community radio to alert everyone. In the latest flood, I noticed that the river starting to get muddy because of the mud from the mountains, and the water in the rain gauge rised to the red zone. I then told my dad and my mom to pack our things upstairs. But the flood was not so bad. My house only flooded a little."

Ball, 13-year-old boy

Children consider educational session and awareness raising an important step to reduce risks. Many children have also become peer educators telling their direct experiences and transferring the knowledge they learned about disasters to other children so more children can save their lives during a disaster.

When fear turns into strength

Story from Ismael, Ban Talae Nok village, Ranong province, Thailand

Ismael is now 17. He is one of the active members of Baan Talae Nok Youth Group. Tsunami wiped out his school and part of the Baan Talae Nok village in 2004. His experience teaches him that learning about disasters can save lives.

26 December 2004 was a Sunday but 11 students including himself and a teacher were at school rehearsing a play for the upcoming New Year celebration for the village. Never heard about tsunami before, all came into the empty sea with curiosity when they saw the seawater drained. The big wave took them by surprise and it was too late to run. Fortunately, Ismael was one of the lucky three students who survived the wave. However, his teacher along with his brother and seven more classmates did not make it.



For almost a year, Ismael along with his schoolmates was in distress by the loss of their families and village. Children were afraid to leave their parents for classes at school. They were in panic every time they heard a bang and afraid of strangers. They would not go near the sea or on the beach where their old school once was. They were just afraid of everything.

The headmistress of his school together with Rabatbai Group – a local children's network and Save the Children's partner – had tried to find ways to help the children to overcome their fears and psychological problems or sadness. They encouraged the children to observe what was left in their village, instead of mourning about what they had lost. To rebuild the children's self-esteem and confidence, the children were introduced to 'voluntary work' and how they could contribute to rebuild their community – making them feel capable and useful. It was a good start.

Children started to change. The children decided to rebuild the garden in their old school ground as a tsunami memorial place, and started to discuss with Rabatbai Group what they wanted to do for their village. Supported by Save the Children and Makhampom Theatre Group, they started with a community theatre about tsunami. The theatre aimed to educate people about the cause and effects of tsunami and what to do when tsunami hit. The theatre gave Ismael an opportunity to release what was inside his mind, and made him feel better. He said the theatre helped him to express 'himself' out. The theatre also made him feel more confident as someone who educated people about Tsunami through theatre.

Ismael went for his theatre village tour from one village to another during evenings and weekends. After sometimes, Ismael and his friends started to think about smaller children. They were worried that smaller children had less chance to survive tsunami. Together, they discussed and came up with the idea of a puppet theatre called "The Alert Rabbit", which was written by the children of Baan Talae Nok. It was a story about a panic rabbit who was always careless and panic about everything. Later, the rabbit learned how to prepare for disasters with his community.

In order to spread the words, the children of Baan Talae Nok, Rabat Bai and Save the Children put the play into a storybook for children. It is suitable for primary school children as well as adults who lack of knowledge on disasters. The book is indeed a mini manual on disaster preparedness. It talks about what a disaster is, how Tsunami happens, how to pack a life-saving bag, and evacuation routes. It also comes with games and a set of cards for children to check their understanding about vulnerable groups, capacities, and resources in their community.

The story of the alert rabbit has helped the children of Baan Talae Nok gained their confidence and self-esteem back. Later, they also established the Baan Talae Nok Youth Group to initiate projects for their village such as wetland preservation and recycling garbage. Now in his last year of high school, being asked about how much better he felt from the time after the Tsunami, Ismael confidently replied.

"About 60 per cent of the bad feelings in my mind have disappeared. (So what about the other 40 per cent?) What make me feel better are activities that I have done with the youth group. I feel that I can give my friends knowledge by educating them about disasters, and that will keep filling up the other 40 per cent."

Children want to tackle climate change because they know that it increases disasters.



Having learned about the causes and effects of disasters, children learn that climate change is a reason behind many disasters. As a result, children become more aware of climate and environmental changes around them, which not only increase disasters but also have impacts on their daily lives.

"People cutting down trees caused the flood and landslide in my village because there was no tree to hold the soil together. There were many people cutting down trees. However, the Royal Forest Department came to work in our village after the disaster and people cut fewer trees. Burning garbage can also cause disasters because it causes global warming. Global warming causes disasters and draught. The climate changes every year that it becomes warmer. The dry season comes sooner. When I go farming rice with my dad, I can see that the water goes away quicker."

Ball, 13-year-old boy, Uttaradith Province, Thailand, experienced flash flood and massive landslide in 2006

"Before, there was not as much rain as nowadays. I think it could be because of the waste (in our village) produces some kind of gas into the atmosphere, so it rains a lot more. ... It also affects our rice plantation. Now people don't want to grow rice in the raining season, because there will be floods. We were able to grow rice for our own meals every year in the past. Now we still grow rice every year but we can not tell if we will be able to eat them or not."

Nek, 12-year-old girl,
Nakon Sri Thammarat Province, Thailand



"I think everyone in this world causes climate change, not only people in my community. It relates to the global warming. There is so much pollution in the atmosphere because people burn plastic and garbage. In the past, people put garbage (e.g. leaves, natural garbage, etc.) under the trees so they became organic fertilizer, but now people get rid of their garbage which are mostly plastic by burning. For example, the public dustmen don't come to my grandmother's house because it's too far, so my grandmother burns her garbage. I asked her why she did that, and whether the dustmen came to collect her garbage. She replied that they hadn't come for a long time and she didn't know why. She said that when they didn't come and we didn't burn it, the garbage would pile up. I told her that burning garbage could cause global warming. My grandma said that she knew it but what could she do. She could not do anything because they dustmen did not come."

Nhong, 16-year-old boy,
Mae Sot, Thailand



"The seasons change. When the school started this year, our teachers were surprised that we had already harvested the rice. Comparing to last year, we harvested after school had started. This year we started harvesting so soon. It could be because of the weather because we planted rice according to the weather. We usually start planting when it rains and it rained sooner this year."

Mai, 15-year-old girl,
Phayao, Thailand

Having recognised the problem, many young leaders have already started to take action on climate changes as part of their disasters mitigation. As many of the communities encounter floods every year because of blocked drainage, the majority of the activities are around reducing the use of plastic and getting rid of plastic waste properly and creatively in their communities so not produce more pollution into the air. Some are also involve in community's awareness raising on the importance of a forestation.



A colorful drawing of a landscape. In the foreground, there's a winding road or path. To the left, there's a landslide area with red and brown earth. Several trees with yellow and green foliage are scattered throughout the scene. The background shows more trees and a clear sky.

"I'm a school council member. The school council introduce new practices in school(to reduce global warming), for example, we asked the food sellers to use banana leaves instead of plastic bags. We also bring our own cups to school so when we buy a drink, we can ask them to put the drink directly into our cups. This can also reduce the spread of diseases. Lastly, we encourage students not to bring plastic bags to school."

Satang, 14-year-old girl,
Nakon Sri Thammarat Province, Thailand



Photo caption :Picture drawn by children
in Thailand identifying the impact of
landslide on their lives

"Everyone in my village worked together on the campaign. To reduce the amount of the garbage in the village, some adults in the village also encourage people to use their own food carriers when they go to the market (so they won't use plastic). For children, we also put our lunch in the food carriers and bring them to school (instead of buying food wrapped in plastic). When we finish lunch, we wash the food carrier and bring them home. And we'll do the same thing in the next morning. When we go farming, we wrap our food with banana leaves and bring the food with us. During our training on DRR, the trainers told us that when we did something we had to think about others. We must not neglect even if we were not affected, but others would be."

Nhong, 16-year-old boy, Mae Sot, Thailand

Rubbish makes money



In Penas village in Jakarta, Indonesia, rubbish is the main cause of annual flood as it blocks the river and drainage in the village. Tio, Kholid, and Via are friends living in Penas village. They have joined Save the Children's DRR activities, which raised their awareness about risk reduction and taught them about disasters. The trio said that there is no place to bury the waste in their village so people throw their waste into the river. Plus, since they live downstream by the river, the river always carry rubbish and waste from villages upstream into their community which blocks the river and causes floods. Burning waste in their communities and factories nearby also pollute the air, hence causing global warming. Tio said,

"The sun used to shine in the morning and in the afternoon it would rain. However, because of the greenhouse effect, it got warmer. One of the reasons is that factories burn and pollute the air. Some people also cut down trees.

In the morning it used to be a bit fresh, but now it is too warm for us. Because our school starts in the afternoon, it is too hot for us to study. It is difficult to keep attention in classes. Because it is too warm, it is tiring to play football in hot weather. I would also have a headache, when it is too warm. I will be thirsty and will not be able to run as fast as I used to."

The children wanted to help by reducing the amount of the rubbish in their community. Instead of burning or throwing into the river, they started to collect plastic water bottles and sell them per kilogram to a local plastic recycling agent. A local partner of Save the Children - Sahabat Akar –organised a workshop to recycle and make a product out of used plastic for the children and community.

"The plastic bottles for water are sold for 15,000 Rupia per 1 kilogramme. My friend's parent buy and sell the rubbish so we just collect the rubbish and give them to her. We get some money in return. The lady will sell the collected rubbish to a bigger buyer. When they have collected a lot of plastic rubbish, they will recycle it." Tio said.

He continued *"There are some people in the community who are aware and do not throw rubbish into the river. However, there are also those who are not aware including nearby factories and continue to pollute the river."*

The children said that they tried to advise those who were not aware not to throw rubbish into the river, including their friends, other children, and smaller children.

From a focus group discussion with Tio (13, M), Kholid (11, M), and Via (10, F) from Penas village, Jakarta, Indonesia

The more children participate, the more they are able to act on DRR and other issues affecting them.

Children see themselves developing over time. Through training and disaster risks reduction activities, children feel that the more they learn and participate, the more they are capable to reduce risks and respond to disasters. In other words, the more they know about disasters, the more they can save lives. It also makes them confident to act during a disaster.

From the focused group discussions, children identified positive change they saw in themselves.



Photo caption :
Picture drawn by
children in Thailand
identifying
the impact of
tsunami
on their lives



PAST

- We did not know what to pack when a disaster hit.
- We did not know where the safe place was.
- When disaster hit, we could not find a safe place because we did not have a community map to show where the safe and risky places were.
- We did not know about communication tool to be used when a disaster hit.
- We were never aware of disasters.
- We were never aware of disaster impacts.
- We did not know what a disaster was and never wanted to learn.
- We did not know about natural resource management.
- We were not confident and expressive.



PRESENT

- We need to keep our ID papers, pack medicine and some food when disaster hit.
- We know that the safe place is on the mountain (for water-related disasters).
- We made a community map to show where the safe and risky places are, and that we should take elders and pregnant women to the safe place first.
- We'll go to community broadcast/radio to alert people.
- We are enthusiastic to learn about disaster prevention.
- We know that disasters destroy houses and plantations, and can kill. Disasters also leave long-term impacts.
- We know causes of unpreventable natural disasters.
- There have been agencies coming to teach us about planting trees.
- We are more confident and expressive.

DRR activities do not only give opportunities for children to develop risk reduction and life saving skills. Many children have identified that through participating in the DRR activities, they have developed leadership, time management, and confidence, and become more responsible persons.

Children appreciate the new skills and confidence they have gained and are not shy to talk about them. For example, from the discussion with four girl children in an urban community in Jakarta, the girls shared with us how they worked as a part of the community's committee organising DRR activities including competitions, children's festival, community's newspaper, and exhibitions. The girls said that from the activities they have gained management skill, communication skill (e.g. how to approach other children), and learned how to work with Save the Children's local partner.

Here are a few stories about children develop and use their new skills to initiate or work on other projects.

I am happy being a young leader Story from Mai, Payao province, Thailand



Mai is a 15-year-old ethnic girl from Phayao province, Thailand. Her village is surrounded by mountains. There have been small to medium landslides in the area where her village and a few more live and plant their crops. A massive landslide destroyed many part of the cropland two years ago. No one was killed as the landslide merely touched a few houses. Yet, the main road to her village was blocked and many of her friends lost their croplands. That was when Mai became interested to join the DRR activities and was trained as a young leader.

“Before the landslides, children were not active or involved. Now we have participated in the activities, we have learned. We also pass on the knowledge through radio programmes or community radio station. For examples, there are two local radio stations in our village – the North and the South of Pang Ka Village. We went to both stations to give knowledge to the villagers. We talked about the causes – how disasters happen – so they know and would

start to think if it was because they cutting down trees. We also put up campaign posters in our village. There is also a radio broadcast at school during lunchtime when we play songs and give educational information to students. Hopefully, the students will bring the information home.”

Through DRR activities, Mai has learned about hazards and disasters, causes and effects, and preventive measures. Along with a group of young leaders, Mai run activities that raised awareness amongst villagers and school students. Mai was happy that her village became interested in the children’s messages. She said that people came to ask her for more information after the broadcast and from where she got this useful information.

Mai explained how useful to learn about DRR.

“Because we have learned and trained as young leaders, if there would be a disaster, we would run to the responsible adults. We could warn people through community radio broadcast so they would be prepared. We could advise people to go to a safe place because we have done community mapping identifying risky and safe areas ... I am happy to be part of the young leaders for our village. These (the DRR activities) can help not only ourselves, but others around us – everyone, when disasters happen.”

With two-year experience of the DRR activities, along with other project and initiatives she has been involved in, Mai sees herself growing to be a responsible adult.

“After joining the activities, I am more active to help prevent disasters. I also become more responsible. For example, I am now a senior in my last year of high school, I am involved in many projects, such as, ethics project. I am also a volunteer for the Phayao Youth News Agency. And I’m involved in the DRR activities. I feel responsible for everything I have agreed to do, and will get activities done in time.”





Ban Talae Nok Youth Group

Story from Nuta, Ban Talae Nok village, Ranong province, Thailand



Nuta experienced Tsunami when she was in Grade 3. Her best friend and neighbours were killed by the wave and, like other students, she was afraid to go out of the house. As a result of direct experience of tsunami and loss of loved ones, Nuta was afraid of loud bangs and strangers; and did not speak much. It took her several months to gain her own self back. Although, she admitted that things have never been the same.



Save the Children entered Baan Talae Nok in 2005 in partnership with Rabat Bai Group – a local children NGO. Nuta was at Grade 4 when she joined the DRR activities. Just like other DRR programmes in Thailand, it all started with educational and awareness sessions, community mapping, and preparedness plans. However, the children in Ban Talae Nok school decided to use puppetry to send out the DRR messages to other children and adults. The puppetry – the Alert Rabbit – became well known and was later published as a children's story-

book (see 'When fears turn into strength' above). Nuta said that the puppetry project made the adults believed and accepted the children more, and that made her continued to work on the puppet.

With the successful of the puppetry, children of Ban Talae Nok village wanted to do more than the DRR activities. When her aunt who worked for Andaman Discoveries – a tourist agency promoting eco-tourism – asked the children if they wanted to do some nature preservation projects, they agreed and Ban Talea Nok Youth Group was formed out of the puppetry performers. The first few projects were initiated by adults. Yet, not for long, the youth group started to initiate their own projects. Nuta said that all the projects were aimed to benefit the whole village and she wanted to see the work of the youth group continued with more members.

“One of the project we initiated was the Rubbish Bank Project. We asked children in the village to collect the rubbish and put in our Rubbish Bank. Anyone who has collected rubbish the most in a month will receive a reward. We use the rubbish to make products for sale such as bags. If they are paper, we'll recycle it to fabric paper. We use skills that we've already learned from school to make the products and recycle the rubbish. The sisters from Rabat Bai also taught us how to make the bags.”

“The village benefits from our activities. For example, there will be no rubbish in the village because of the Rubbish Bank project ... (in the future) I want to see more new members joining our youth group. I want everyone joining in every activity, even small children. There are activities that even small children can join, for example, the Money Saving project. Children were asked to make a bamboo tube to collect their savings, and we had a competition for the most creative and beautiful bamboo tubes.”

Ban Talae Nok Youth Group is currently running 5 projects, with 19 members. There is no solid structure as the children said that it is totally voluntary and open to everyone. All one has to do is to step into the club and express their interest in any on-going project or propose a new project.



Children need adults' support to take action.



"It is important to have children working with adults. We, young leaders, are already 15 or 16 years old and can think on our own. When adults work on their own, they may forget children. For example, if they work on DRR and never inform us, when disasters strike, we would never be able to save our lives. They may assume that our parents will help us anyway. By giving us opportunity to involve in DRR activities, first, there will be more people knowing about DRR. Second, we can transfer our knowledge to our friends and smaller children. We, children, have a better understanding for each other. Children may not listen well when adults are speaking."

"... This DRR programme is an important part, in making adults believe in us. We have done our community map. Next, we'll do the drill. When we have our plan ready, we will be the ones coordinating with the adults and educating people. Then, the adults will see that we are serious – that we know about the issue and we take action. Hopefully, some adults may spread the words about it."

Oil, 15-year-old girl, Pong District, Phayao Province, Thailand

Adults' support is critical to children's development and participation. Children have potentials to develop their skills to voice out their concerns, initiate new projects, and work along side with adults. However, all of these need to be supported by adults around them including parents, teachers, and local authorities. When children voice out their concerns, adults need to listen. In order to initiate a project, adults must create an enabling environment for them to do so. Adults also need to learn how to work with children in order to teach children and understand what children's needs are.

Support from adults can be as simple as allowing children to join in a children's activity. Many children in poor communities are simply unable to join in social activities because their parents do not allow them to do so. Some children may have to work for their families that a day being absent from work is a loss of income. Through interviews and focused group discussions with children, the children said that basic emotional supports from their parents including allowing them to join in DRR activities, appreciating their participation, and asking them about the activities they did were among the main supports they wanted. Several young leaders emphasised they needed opportunities from adults to prove their capabilities as children. Only a few asked for resources. According to the children, the key successes of their participation are the opportunities, trust, and understanding from the adults.

Children's participation does not replace but share adults' responsibilities. Adults still hold the responsibility of taking care of their children. However, in order to protect their children, they need to teach the children how to protect themselves and other children.

Child-centred DRR have changed adults' attitudes on children's participation.

Through disaster risk reduction activities, children see change in adults' attitude on children's participation. Adults have seen the children became more capable of expressing and doing things. Adults listen to children more on other issues not just only on disaster risk reduction. More spaces are opened for children's activities in their communities.

In a discussion with schoolteachers and local partner in a school in Langkat, teachers all agreed that there had not been a lot of attention given to children until the DRR programme started in their village. The programme has helped children to learn about disasters and how to protect themselves. A teacher said that she once test her class by asking them about safe places where they could run to when disasters struck, and was surprised by the answer of her students. They answered and explained about the safe place correctly just like adults.

The teachers also explained their roles as supporting adults to help children learning about DRR and to protect themselves from disasters. They said they needed to give knowledge to the children. They had to keep calm in order to make children not panic during disasters. They helped facilitating recreation activities for

children. Finally, when children have accomplished something, they had to show appreciation. For example, when the children finished their community mapping, the teachers and villages put the community map up at the village security post.

In focus group discussions, children said that

- Before, adults ignored what children said. They thought we were just children. Now, many adults believe and understand children better.
- Before, we were not given opportunities. Now, adults give us more opportunities. Adults listen to us more because we have more knowledge on disaster.
- Before, there was no educational material for children on how to evacuate. Now, there are more educational materials for children and made by children.
- There was no support to children's activities, but now children's activities have been given more attention.

"I think children can do these activities (educational and awareness raising on disaster risk reduction) better than adults. Children are more creative. The youth group is important for the village especially after the Tsunami. It builds children's capacity. But we need the adults' support. We cannot work without them."

Ismael, 16-year-old girl,
Ranong Province, Thailand,
experienced the Andaman Tsunami
in 2004

From the view of the adults, through participation, children have changed in a good way. A village head of Baan Kirivong village in Nakhon Srithammarat province expressed how he appreciated children's participation in the village's emergency preparedness plan.

"Children changed a lot. Before, they would only play in their free times. Once they(young leaders) formed their group, they started to organise activities on weekends inviting children in the village to join. There is a core group of young leaders that will discuss about what they want to do and make plans, for example, when they planned to do the community mapping by collecting information from the elders in the village, or when the village organised an event they offer to help as much as they could. The elders would also advise them what to do. Of course, the parents are very happy. They don't have to worry whereabouts their children will be during the village meeting, for example."

In Baan Talae Nok village, a core group of children initiated a community theatre to educate children and adults in their village about disaster risk reduction. The children are also members of the emergency preparedness committee. They work along side of the adults, which the adults find it impressive.

"Children have been involved in the development of the emergency preparedness plan. They attend meetings, are members of the emergency preparedness committee, and make recommendations just like the adult committee members. The adults listen to them. Usually, the children who are members of the committees are already members of student council in their school."

Once, during the preparedness meeting, I was impressed by the children. A child committee raised a question about the preparedness plan we were developing. He said 'what would happen if we can not do according to the plan?' We then started to think about plan B because of his suggestion. The children do not only sit in the meeting and keep quiet. They listen, think, and ask questions."

The interest and appreciation of those receiving information or learn from the children have encouraged the children to keep going."

Ms. Supawadee Nakvichian,
Headmistress of Baan Talae Nok
Primary School, Ranong, Thailand

Part 3: Summary

What children want to see happening

Children are more physically and emotionally vulnerable than adults. Because of their vulnerabilities, they need special protection and support in times of disasters and emergencies. However, the best way to reduce children's vulnerabilities is to arm them with knowledge and skills to protect themselves and other children.

Children have proved themselves through the DRR programmes in their communities that they are concerned about impacts of disasters on their lives no less than adults, and they can develop their capacities to do something to reduce the impacts. Children at various ages and in various contexts have shown us different paces of capacity development. There may be some slower progress towards meaningful participation of children in some places. Yet, age and context are not the main obstacles preventing children from participation. The only thing that can limit their participation is adults' attitude.



Children's participation does not exclude adults. Adults' involvement and support in developing children's skills, giving emotional support, mobilizing resources, and advocating for children's participation are crucial. In the other way around, by working with children, adults will also learn from children about their concerns and needs in order to design programmes that will best address children's needs. As disasters will affect more children in the

near future, it is necessary that more children need to participate in DRR programmes so that they can reduce their vulnerabilities and the impacts of disasters on their lives.

All too often, children's words and opinions are overlooked. It could be because children use simple and uncomplicated words without any technical or scientific terms. It could be because adults think that they have bigger problems to deal with. It could be because adults think they already know them. However, an overlooked opinion of a child could be the one small thing leading to the solution. All we have to do is to listen to their opinions carefully.

Here are a few final words from the children's interviews on what they want to see happening as they continue their DRR activities in their communities.

A group of five children, three boys and two girls, are sitting in a classroom. They are wearing school uniforms consisting of white short-sleeved shirts with a red floral pattern and red skirts or shorts. They are sitting on wooden chairs at wooden desks. The classroom has a yellow wall and a window on the right side. The children are looking towards the camera with serious expressions.

“(In disasters) ... I want the adults to help every village, and not discriminate. Some remote villages might not receive as much support as others. When the Tsunami hit, the support to our village was quick. We received a lot of support right after. However, there were other villages that received less support.”

Ismael, 17-year-old boy,
Ranong Province, Thailand

“I want adults to come to our activities and see what we can do. We can show them (our understanding about disasters) in a play. And to the children, don't be panic when disasters come. Listen to the news. If there is a lot of water, keep things on a higher ground. Pack important things.”

Art, 12-year-old boy,
Uttaradith Province, Thailand

“Sometimes adults listen to us, sometimes they don't. We want them to listen to us so we talk to them politely. We are happy when adults listen to us and do as we suggest. We would be very happy to see someone listen to us.”

Tio, 13-year-old boy, Jakarta,
Indonesia



"I believe that children have a right to be heard and we have good ideas that people should listen to."

Bui Thi Thu Hang,
11-year-old girl,
Yen Bai Province, Vietnam

"I want to see everyone of us takes care of our own village, to prevent the disasters. Even if the disasters would not have direct impacts on us, but we should all participate because everyone else may be affected."

Mai, 15-year-old girl,
Phayao Province, Thailand

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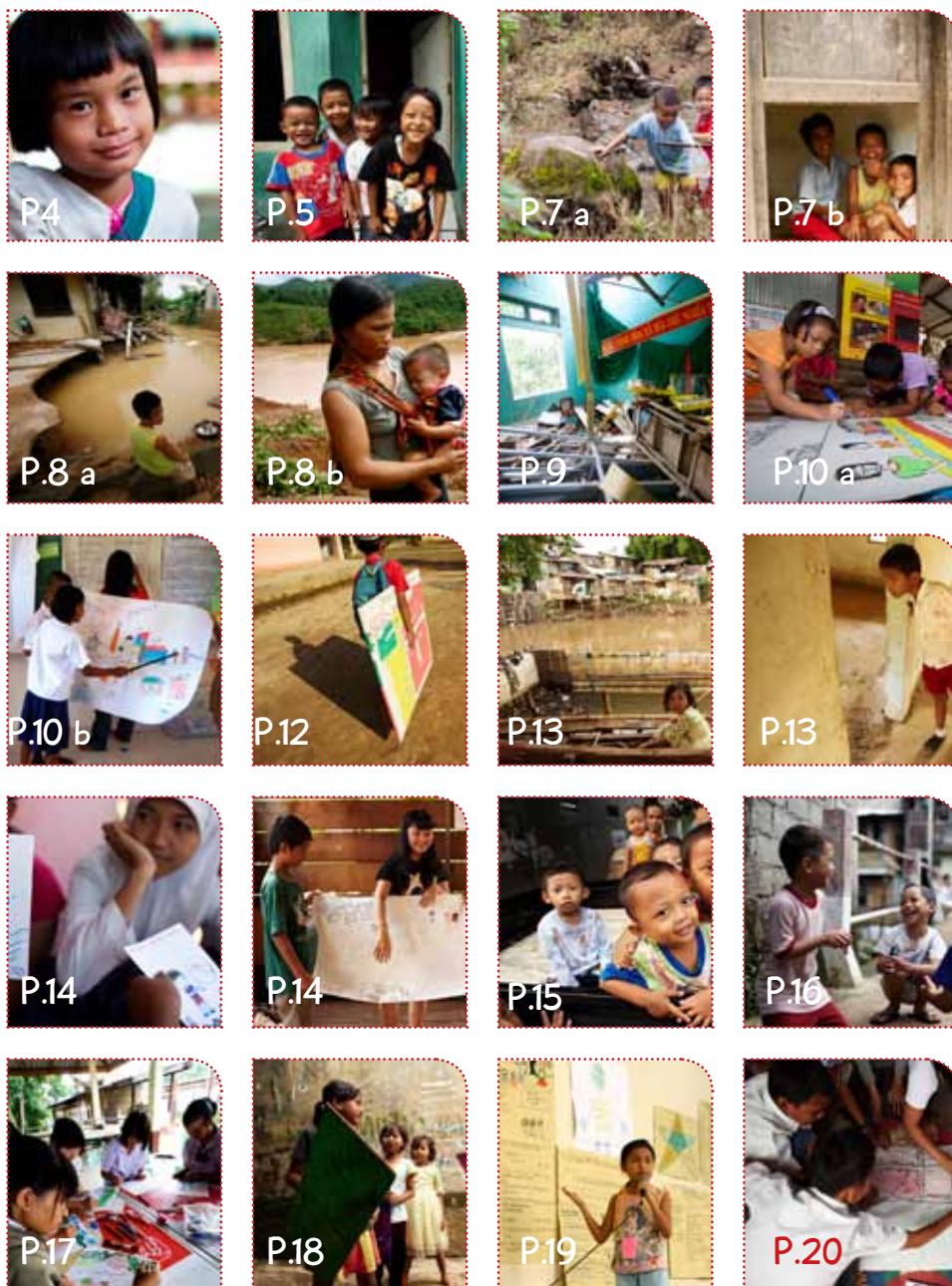


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