



Asian children want greater involvement in disaster risk reduction

YOGYAKARTA, Indonesia, **Oct 24,** 2012 -- Governments across Asia must involve children when they plan and implement projects to help disaster-prone communities mitigate risks and the impact, youth participants at a regional ministerial meeting said.

The young representatives said children must be engaged as active agents of change in their communities, instead of being seen as helpless victims.

“Including children and youth in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation is very important because children and youth will become parents in the future and continue to educate their children,” said Chanvannarith, a 15-year-old Cambodian boy. Chanvannarith was participating in consultations undertaken with over 200 children from 6 Asian countries in the lead up to the 5th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Seventeen children from Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia and Japan are attending this week’s four-day AMCDRR, hosted by the Government of Indonesia, to share their concerns and present a statement to the Ministers.

A compilation of stories of actions by children and youth to reduce disaster risks is also being released at the Ministerial Conference. Titled “Children’s Action for Disaster Risk Reduction – Views from Children in Asia” the stories come from Indonesia, the Philippines, Viet Nam, Thailand, Cambodia, Nepal and Bangladesh.

For instance, children and youth have been doing hazard mapping, raising awareness through radio and games, influencing other children, their teachers, parents and communities on how to reduce the effects of disasters. “My village is one of the disaster prone areas in Dompu district (Indonesia). Many community members don’t even realize nor are aware of the potential disasters in their surroundings,” said Tity, a 17-year-old girl from West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia.

Children make a plan to spread information to raise awareness of their peers and community who listen to SATIFA FM radio. They broadcast messages on how to prevent floods by discouraging littering and encouraging drainage cleaning,

Meanwhile, governments are also recognising the importance of engaging communities in disaster risk reduction at national and local level. In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, the Government through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2012-2016) commits to establish clear roles for communities within disaster risk management plans.

The Children in Changing Climate (CCC), a coalition of child-rights organisations, said in a statement children should not be seen only as victims in disasters, though they are vulnerable and face particular risks to their health, protection, access to education and nutrition in such situation.

“A child-centred disaster risk reduction plan must value children’s perspectives on risk, encourages their participation and helps ensure that they and their families are better prepared. “Children are able to advocate and lead change within their schools and communities” said CCC representative Antony Spalton.

It has been estimated that losses from weather-related disasters alone are doubling globally every 12 years; and climate change impacts are predicted to increase the numbers of children affected by disasters from an estimated 66.5 million per year in the late 1990s, to as many as 175 million per year in the coming decade.

Schools in Asia, the most hazard-prone continent in the world, should be built to resist extreme weather and earthquakes, while disaster risk reduction and climate change should be integrated into children’s learning, CCC said.

“To promote sustainable development, not only should multi-hazard risk assessment also analyze the particular risks of the most vulnerable women, girls and boys but disaster risk reduction must be integrated into basic social services such as water sanitation & hygiene, education, health & nutrition, social and child Protection,” Spalton said.

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NOTE TO EDITOR:

Children in Changing Climate is a coalition of leading child-focused development, humanitarian and research organisations with a commitment to share knowledge, coordinate activities and work with children as agents of change. Global members include the Institute for Development Studies of the University of Sussex, Save the Children, Plan International, World Vision, and UNICEF. In Asia, UNISDR, UNESCO, the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre and SEEDS India work closely with the coalition.

All organisations are committed to effective protection and meaningful participation of children and young people in disaster risk reduction in Asia's rapidly changing climate. Children's unique experiences of disaster risk and climate change impacts and their specific insights and priorities need to be recognised in both disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and mitigation policy and practice.

The Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) is a biennial conference organized by rotation in different Asian countries since 2005. The event represents a unique opportunity for Ministers in charge of disaster management from the region to reaffirm their commitment to the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA). The conference also serves as a forum to exchange experiences on successful practices and innovative approaches in implementing HFA's five priorities for action at the national and local levels. The Government of the Republic of Indonesia is hosting the 5th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction from 22 to 25 October 2012 in Yogyakarta, Republic of Indonesia.