

PRESS RELEASE

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Education and knowledge can save lives

Children are among the most vulnerable population group during disasters, particularly while they are attending school. They often die as a result of a lack of risk awareness and poor quality of the physical infrastructure. In Pakistan, for instance, more than 17,000 school children died while attending class during the October 2005 earthquake.

A new review entitled “*Let our children teach us*” that will be launched on Monday in Davos, Switzerland, at the International Disaster Reduction Conference (28 August-1 September), outlines concrete solutions to reduce the impact of disasters on children through disaster risk reduction education.

Prepared by Ben Wisner,¹ an USA professor and disaster risk reduction expert, the review, commissioned by the ISDR Thematic Cluster on Knowledge and Education, takes stock of initiatives across the globe that reduce the impact of disasters through education and efforts to protect school buildings from natural hazards.

The review examines specific teaching practices that provide children with a better understanding of their environment and reduce their vulnerability to natural hazards. The review contains a wealth of useful resources and a great variety of experiences that can be easily exchanged and adapted in many countries. It also proposes solutions, identifies gaps and opportunities and encourages governments, international organizations, NGOs, private sector, educators, parents, communities and children to take action.

In Turkey, an on-going, country-wide, disaster awareness training programme for instructors has the potential to ensure the safety of five million children in the event of an earthquake while Cuba has made disaster prevention and preparedness for response part of school curricula and the payoff has been a significant reduction in the loss of lives in recent hurricanes.

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Around the world, children in primary and secondary schools benefit from a wide number of teaching practices that vary greatly in approach, intensity and quality. The review emphasizes that more resources should be devoted to sharing experience, translating and adapting curricula and networking on the most effective pedagogical efforts.

“Education, knowledge and awareness are critical to building the ability to reduce losses from natural hazards. The ISDR thematic cluster on knowledge and education gathers a number of governmental institutions, NGOs and international organizations that are working together to convince more national and local governments to make disaster risk education a priority, particularly in countries that are prone to natural hazards. Disaster risk education involves a broad range of actors, not only from schools but also from the tertiary and informal education” says Salvano Briceño, Director of the secretariat of the UN/ International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

The review was produced for the ISDR secretariat and Action Aid International and provides a basis for the two-year ISDR campaign on “Disaster risk reduction begins at school” and the Action Aid schools projects underway in seven countries to address disaster risk reduction.

The Davos International Conference, which hosts more than 1000 participants from all over the world, dedicates a complete session on education, local knowledge and traditional wisdom for disaster reduction and sustainable development.

The Conference is organized by the Swiss Federal Research Institute (WSL) and the Swiss Federal Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research (SLF), Davos, and is jointly sponsored by UNESCO, the Global Alliance for Disaster Reduction, the Global Disaster Information Network and UN/ISDR.

The report is available on line at: www.unisdr.org

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