Comprehensive School Safety Policy:
Summary Report for Policy Makers on Trends in the Asia Pacific Region
Overview

In 2017, Save the Children, on behalf of the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES), and in partnership with the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), conducted a global survey collecting baseline data on national Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) policies and programs.

Survey questions were focused primarily on policies (rather than to outcomes), and aligned to the Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) Framework (GADRRRES, 2017) and the CSS Targets and Indicators (GADRRRES, 2014). Survey questions covered a hazards and risks overview, education sector overview, enablers and blockers to school safety policy development and implementation, and national policies addressing the three pillars of CSS. The 24 responses provide the basis of analysis and shed light on basic CSS policy themes in the three sub-regions that are well-represented. Because Japan is the only respondent outside of South Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Pacific, it is not included in regional responses, but is represented in the survey totals.

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We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) and the global partnership with C&A Foundation and C&A that supports the Comprehensive School Safety National Policies: Global Mapping Survey (2017) and related Comprehensive School Safety case studies.

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Themes in Comprehensive School Safety

This section describes Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) policy themes across the Asia-Pacific region with attention to both policy areas where countries are performing well and policy areas where countries have room for continued improvement. Governments and advocates may use this information to better understand how to improve or scale-up current policies, or develop new policies.

Disaster Risk Reduction and Education Policies

One of the most impressive themes revealed by the survey was the high rate of policies in place that address disaster management. In the Asia-Pacific region, all responding countries have disaster management policies in place. High rates of disaster management policies across the Asia-Pacific region point to both the successful achievements of the UNISDR Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 as well as growing awareness among governments of the need to develop plans addressing disaster risk, and the presence of political will to develop and implement such policies.

While respondents have disaster management policies in place, most are not fully integrated with the education sector and education policies. Of the 24 respondents, 18 (75%) have disaster management policies that referred to the education sector, yet typically only in the form of a single section or paragraph (see Table 1).

Globally, recognition of the importance of disaster risk reduction and management as part of the regular business of the education sector, has grown significantly over the last 10 years. It is promising that governments in the Asia-Pacific region have already begun to cross-reference their disaster management and education policies, and that education authorities are accepting their role as duty-bearers to ensure both children’s safety and survival in school, as well as educational continuity in the face of known hazards.

According to the survey, governments have instituted broad disaster management policies covering each of the three pillars of CSS. Despite excellent work developing disaster management policies that cover all three pillars of CSS policies may not cover all aspects of each pillar.

Pillar 1 Policies: Safe Learning Facilities

In Pillar 1, all Southeast Asian countries and most South Asian and Pacific countries have policies for safe design and construction of new schools (see Table 2).

Nevertheless, fewer countries have policies that required safe site selection or monitoring of school construction, which may seriously undermine the implementation of safe design and construction. As a country with very high earthquake risk, Japan has policies addressing all four aspects of construction. Fewer than half of the countries reporting have policies for the assessment of existing school buildings and the retrofit or replacement of unsafe school buildings. However, five countries with these policies indicated the policies are unfunded or have not, as of yet, been implemented.

Table 1. Disaster Management Policies Referring to the Education Sector
Pillar 2 Policies: School Disaster Management

Most countries, 21 (88%), have policies to address school disaster management at the national-level. To ensure proper implementation of disaster management policies, it is necessary to provide schools with guidance so that school staff can facilitate its implementation on the ground.

Of responding countries, 15 (63%) governments provided schools with guidance and procedures for risk reduction, 18 (75%) governments provided schools with guidance and procedures for emergency response, and 11 (46%) governments provided schools with guidance and procedures for recovery.

Pillar 3 Policies: Risk Reduction and Resilience Education

Survey results indicated that countries have been especially proactive in promoting risk-awareness to the general population, especially to children. Most responding countries reported having a national curriculum that included material on climate change (75%), DRR (79%), and resilience education (54%). However, teachers are offered training in these subjects at a substantially lower rate (see Table 3). Only nine responding countries (38%) indicated that national teacher training college modules include climate change, ten include DRR (42%), and six include resilience education (25%). Furthermore, only six countries (25%) indicated that school disaster management is included in teacher’s training and five (21%) indicated that the education authority requires teachers and administrators to undergo professional development for school disaster management. The high rates of risk reduction and resilience curriculum for students and low rates of teacher training in these areas suggests a capacity gap. Governments may be asking teachers to provide students with knowledge the teachers themselves do not have.

Table 3. Risk Reduction and Resilience Subjects: Inclusion in National Curriculum and Teacher Training
Resource Challenges

In some cases, a lack of financial resources and staff guidance and training seriously limit implementation, including the quality and consistency of implementation. Resource limitations are particularly evident when it comes to addressing weak school facilities. Of the 13 countries that have policies for structural assessment of schools or structural assessment with policies for retrofitting and replacing weak school facilities, five countries indicate these policies are neither funded nor implemented. While policy intentions are clear, the lack of financial or technical resources allocated for policy implementation leaves children and staff exposed to death and injury, and the potential for school disruption remains very high.

Financial and human resource scarcity is also evident in education sector disaster management policies and programming. Lack of full-time disaster risk reduction and education in emergencies staff within education authorities and irregular or no funding for these programs suggest that there are insufficient funds allocated in education sector budgets to develop staff capacity and to fully implement school-based disaster risk reduction and management.

In the years ahead, governments will need to secure budgets and develop staff capacity to build upon the successes, and fulfill the promise of the policy initiatives in place.

Comprehensive School Safety Policy Facilitators and Blockers in the Asia-Pacific Region

This section discusses facilitators and blockers to the development and implementation of Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) policies, drawing upon survey responses from the 24 countries surveyed in the Asia-Pacific region and literature in CSS, disaster risk reduction, and risk reduction and resilience education. Understanding common facilitators and blockers to CSS policy development and implementation allows governments and advocates alike to focus on strategies to strengthen facilitating factors and reduce the impact of blocking factors.

 Though facilitators and blockers will vary by country, and sometimes by local jurisdiction, general findings from survey countries and from relevant literature are useful to consider.

CSS Policy Facilitators

Among the 20 responding Asia-Pacific countries, facilitating factors for the implementation and development of policies that advance school safety largely overlap. Facilitating factors for both CSS policy development and implementation revolve around the themes of advocacy and evidence (see Table 4).
Evidence of disaster risk can be in the form of scientific or technical studies detailing hazard risk or structural risks, in the form of collective memory of a previous disaster, or both. Evidence of disaster risk in schools highlights the need for the development or improvement of policies that focus on school safety. Such evidence can support policy change.

CSS Policy Blockers

Twenty Asian-Pacific countries identified the top three to five blockers of CSS policy, from a menu of choices that included a lack of commitment among potential advocates, problems with funding, technical knowledge and policy content. Twenty-one countries responded with a selection of top blockers for policy implementation (see Table 5).

Like facilitating factors, blocking factors for the implementation and development of policies that advance school safety largely overlap among Asia-Pacific survey respondents. Blocking factors for both development and implementation of CSS policies revolve around the theme of resource scarcity, particularly in the form of funding shortages and lack of technical capacity and human resources.

Lack of Technical Capacity and Human Resources

Twelve (57%) of the Asia-Pacific responding countries indicated that a lack of technical capacity is a top blocker of CSS policy development and implementation. Some governments indicated that strong evidence of disaster risk is a major factor in facilitating policy action around school safety.

Advocacy

Human resources are indispensable in the development of a successful CSS policy framework; advocates can publicise the problem, educate stakeholders, and exert pressure on relevant authorities to develop and implement policy solutions. Survey responses indicate that in Asia-Pacific respondent countries there are many dedicated CSS advocates within both government and civil society working hard to develop solutions to school hazard risk, and these advocates should be celebrated as great assets toward the development of successful CSS policy frameworks within the region.

A multi-variate statistical analysis found a strong correlation between civil society advocates and stronger comprehensive school safety policies. Countries that ranked strong civil society advocacy as a top facilitator were much more likely to have policies for the multi-hazard assessment of schools, managing schools as temporary shelters, and in-staff training for teachers and staff on school disaster management. They were also more likely to have policies that required school building assessment and have a policy for addressing disaster impacts on the education sector, either through education sector disaster management policies or education in emergencies policies.

Evidence

Many governments indicated that strong evidence of disaster risk is a major factor in facilitating policy action around school safety.
governments report difficulties in developing and implementing school safety policies due to lack of training or guidance, even where technical skills are not necessarily required. Some education sector staff may not fully understand their responsibilities in relation to the school safety policies due to lack of training or unclear direction; over half of respondents (13–62%) indicated that “the education sector staff who need to implement the policies do not understand them”.

Multi-variate regression analysis indicated that countries citing a blocker of “a lack of a clear framework and steps for making schools safer” were significantly more likely to have education policy that included both disaster risk reduction and disaster response. The positive correlation may suggest that in countries where education policy does address disasters, the approach may not be sufficiently coherent. Advocates may be aware of, and frustrated with, the lack of clarity regarding how these policies are implemented.

Funding Shortages

By far, the biggest blocker reported by Asia-Pacific respondents was funding. Many respondents reported that “the government has not allocated sufficient funds to be able to carry out the policy activities”, with (16–76%) indicating that this is true for policy development and (17–81%) indicating that this is true for policy implementation. It is notable that these concerns are nearly universal. Only four countries out of 21 (19%) did not list funding as a concern.

Recommendations for CSS Policy

Advocacy in the Asia-Pacific Region

Based on survey results from 24 countries, this report has identified several promising policy themes that build upon current strengths among these countries in developing and implementing CSS policy. The survey has also identified policy areas where governments can continue to improve, as well as factors that may block the further development and implementation of policies advancing school safety. Below are four recommendations for how Asia-Pacific countries can continue improving their CSS policy frameworks.

1. Better Integration of Education and Disaster Management Policies

Across Asia-Pacific respondent countries, disaster management policies and education policies can be better integrated. Lack of thorough integration of education and disaster management policies suggests that education and disaster risk reduction (DRR) are conceptualised as different issues that should be treated with different policy approaches. Cross-referencing education and disaster management policies institutionalises a system of shared responsibilities and coordination between disaster management and education authorities, and facilitates a policy framework that conceives of and presents DRR and education as inseparable concepts.

2. Addressing all Comprehensive School Safety Responsibilities, Targets and Indicators

While Asia-Pacific respondent countries have developed policies that span all three pillars of the CSS framework, many policies do not fully cover the major responsibilities and the targets and indicators associated with each pillar. For example, many countries reported policies that address safe school design and safe school construction for new schools, but fewer had policies that require monitoring of school construction or safe site selection. Policy-makers must develop counterpart policies that require the training of teachers and education staff and put in place measures to periodically evaluate the abilities of these staff to execute relevant policies.
3. Including Teachers and Students

Asia-Pacific respondent countries have made great strides in incorporating DRR, resilience, and climate education into the national curriculum, but the teachers responsible for teaching the curriculum are trained in this material at substantially lower rates. Likewise, teachers and school administrators are trained at low rates in disaster management while expected to guide fire and other hazard drills. This suggests a capacity gap between teacher training and the knowledge they are expected to impart on students. Teachers are an integral factor in DRR programming in schools; they must be thoroughly trained in the DRR-related subjects they are directed to teach, in the educational programs their classes are to participate in, and in the school drills they are expected to lead.

Similarly, policy-makers must more carefully consider the roles of students in disaster management and planning, as they too comprise a crucial role in the successful implementation of DRR policies and programming. Eight Asia-Pacific survey respondents (33%) indicated that their education sector disaster management or education in emergencies policy addressed the role of students or youth volunteers, and only two respondents (9%) indicated that their school disaster management policy included guidance on encouraging child participation. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC) outlines children’s right to participate in decision-making in matters of their well-being, including those related to disasters. But beyond the participatory rights outlined in the UN-CRC, there is strong evidence that child participation in disaster planning enhances their resilience and reduces their vulnerability to hazards (Peek, 2008; Back et al., 2009).

4. Investing in Technical and Human Resources

The most common factors that Asia-Pacific survey respondents cited as blocking the development and implementation of CSS policies revolved around the theme of resource scarcity, particularly in the forms of technical capacities and human resources. It is important for Asia-Pacific governments to identify the technical capacities in which they are lacking, and which are relevant to a policy or program need, so that they can develop targeted strategies to improve in these areas. Governments may identify where technical capacities are lacking through internal surveys and assessments, and prioritise areas for improvement based upon current policy or programme needs. Governments should also invest in human resources within the education sector and develop staff trainings, workshops, seminars, and written guidelines that help ensure education sector staff understand the policy vision and implementation steps. Protocols for periodically evaluating the knowledge and capacities of staff implementing policies can further support policy implementation. Basic staff training may overlook their powerful role in policy development and revision.

Conclusion

Governments of Asia-Pacific respondents have made great strides over the past 10 years in the development of disaster management policies, and are gradually integrating these policies with those of the education sector. Most governments have policies in place that span all three CSS pillars and disaster management policies that include core DRR concepts. Asia-Pacific countries have vastly strengthened the policy frameworks that support comprehensive school safety.

These accomplishments indicate a growing awareness of the importance of disaster risk planning and management, and a willingness on the part of governments to allocate resources to develop policy solutions. These efforts need continued documentation and ongoing evaluation. Policy gaps need to be filled. Where policy exists, efforts need to turn to funding, training and integration into everyday practice. From this strong base, CSS policy will not only protect students and staff and ensure educational continuity, it will also support a culture of safety that spreads from school to community and from community to nation.