



Safe Child, Safer Schools and Safe Communities

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, a consistent effort since 1994 by governments, I/NGOs, academic institutes and the private sector culminated in the ground-breaking meeting which led to a 10-year plan known as the Hyogo Framework of Action 2005-15: *Building Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (HFA)* being adopted by 168 States to substantially reduce disaster losses in lives as well as social, economic and environmental assets of communities. There is an addendum on children which has often been ignored or neglected. However, in the subsequent years, UN ISDR (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction) brought out School Safety as an important sector for reducing vulnerability to children and the institutional environment they live in¹. The Hyogo Framework of Action, the National Disaster Management Act 2005, and the Ahmedabad Agenda of School safety set the policy context on children and disasters.

- India is a signatory to the Hyogo Framework of Action 2005 - 2015. As such it is committed to set up the National Platform of Action and work towards building the resilience of communities. The National Disaster Management Act 2005 mandates State governments to set up appropriate structures, systems, plans and programmes from the state to the district, panchayat and village/ward levels. However, there are no specific provisions for a child-centred approach in the disaster management processes and mechanisms.
- The Building Standards Association in India provides certification about safety standards and building codes and yet, it is often the government schools that collapse due to medium and big disasters. Whether the schools are in stable condition or not, they invariably become the immediate shelter for people in the first months post disasters. The Ahmedabad Agenda on School Safety made it an important item on the national agenda to ensure that all schools are safe in India. Currently, School Safety Guidelines are being codified.

Children and Disasters

Children suffer inordinately in all phases of disaster and are the most invisible in most disaster recovery and rehabilitation processes except when they are orphaned. A child besides being orphaned, which is the extreme end of the spectrum, also suffers due to varying levels of deprivation and trauma - physical, psychological and social. Children are faced with the serious consequences of living with disability in the event of a physical injury during disasters such as earthquakes. Children also face the prospect of being separated from familiar environments and from families with limited understanding of the event itself due to lack of knowledge, find it difficult to cope and become withdrawn and non-communicative necessitating psycho-social support. Natural hazards and disasters increase vulnerabilities to children leading to exploitation, abuse and neglect, hence needing special care and attention to ensure that their rights are fulfilled by the duty bearers. Conflict, terrorism, multiple natural hazards and disasters continue to torment children. In recent disasters schools have emerged as one of the most vulnerable in the institutional scenario. Some glaring examples are: the Kumbakonam fire tragedy in Tamil Nadu where many children died; the earthquake in Pakistan and Indian administered Kashmir had the highest number of casualties among children; the China earthquake impacted children and schools in an unprecedented manner. Natural disasters exacerbate the violations of the rights of children as enshrined in the UNCRC and these need to be addressed in Disaster Risk Reduction.



¹ Ref. *Disaster Risk Reduction begins at School* an UNISDR publication

How does this link with climate change?

Climate change is happening now! Glaciers and ice caps are melting, sea water levels are rising, rainfall patterns are changing, drought conditions are affecting more and more of the world's land mass and water resources are depleting. In order to achieve the goals articulated in the HFA², it is accepted that we must consider climate change as a primary issue and that "Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is the first step in climate change adaptation" (Ban Ki Moon, UN Secretary General). Climate Change Adaptation refers to the ways individuals, communities and governments can prepare for and respond to climate variability. More and more Governments and Civil Society organisations are recognising the similarities and linkages between DRR and climate change adaptation. Both focus on reducing people's vulnerability to hazards. In the case of DRR, this focuses predominantly on current hazards such as floods, droughts, earthquakes and storms in the near future. Climate change adaptation focuses on climate-related hazards, and looks as well at anticipated environmental changes; it aims to increase communities' resilience in spite of the expected changes and uncertainty over the coming years.



What about conflict?

In many of the areas where Save the Children works, children and their communities often face multiple threats. While Save the Children recognises the diversity of hazards faced by the communities we work with, we make a distinction between natural disasters and human-made disasters such as conflict. This is on account of the humanitarian principles of imperative, impartiality and independence. We believe that including 'conflict' in our DRR activities threatens these principles and if the information was misconstrued, could place the communities we work with in danger³.

II. KEY ISSUES

- Risks and vulnerabilities related to children who are exposed to the worst effects of natural and human-made disasters have not been given adequate focus in terms of mapping their risks and vulnerabilities.
- Disaster Management Act 2005 by Government of India has not made specific mention of children and their issues in the approved DM Act.
- Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Planning at the national, state and district levels anchored by UNDP, NDMA and other key stakeholders has neither considered children as important stakeholders nor does it have an integrated child focus in risk management planning and activities.
- Government of India is developing National School Safety Guidelines in collaboration with key stakeholders from among the civil society organisations, which will be disseminated to the District level disaster management authorities as a government notification. This offers a huge opportunity for Save the Children to join the process and ensure that children participation, protection and equity are brought on board.

III. STATEMENT OF SAVE THE CHILDREN

Child Centred Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CC CB DRR) is a framework where children play a leading role in their communities to minimise the negative impacts of disasters. Save the Children believes that children can play an important role in helping their families, villages and communities to reduce the risks associated with natural and human-made disasters. Children should be involved in all aspects of Disaster Risk Reduction work in their communities from assessment to implementation.

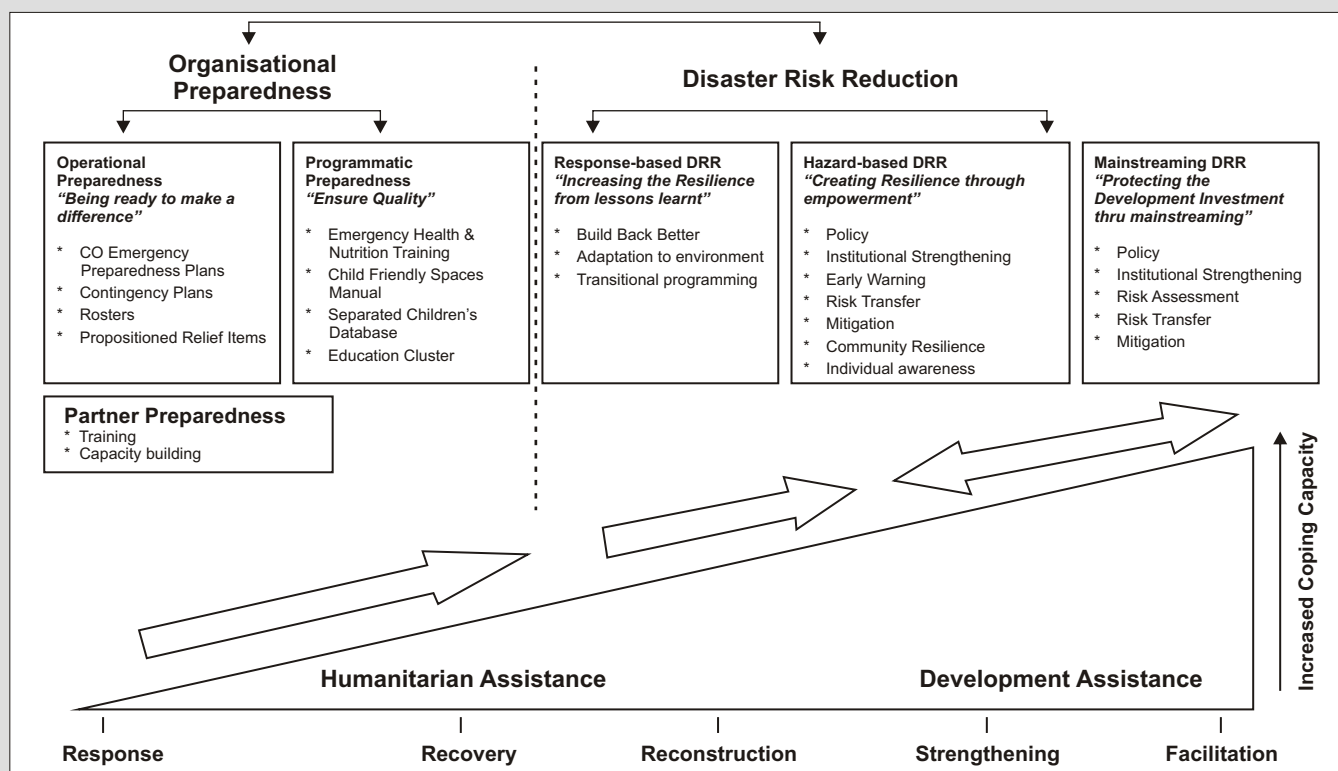
Save the Children's Approach

1. Response Based DRR with strategic focus on Building Back Better.
2. Hazard-Based DRR considers building resilience through empowerment.

² 5 key principles and actions of HFA are the guiding factor in ensuring that DRR becomes a local priority and a national priority. Save the Children will focus on inclusion of CCDRR in this process.

³ DRR strategy paper, 2009: ACE-ELT DRR Working Group - unpublished

3. DRR into Development/Mainstreaming DRR a risk approach. This is a new 360° approach to Development & Humanitarian Response through the inclusion of DRR to promote and protect Human Development.



Source: Save the Children Alliance

IV. SAVE THE CHILDREN'S STRATEGY

- **Better prepared** * Manage Disasters better * Minimise the impact
- **Build Child-Centred Resilient Communities**

Save the Children will engage with nodal ministries and institutions of the Government of India at the national, state and district levels. National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) working directly under the Prime Minister's office is the national institution of the Government of India dealing with Disaster Risk Reduction policy, planning and implementation at the national level. State Disaster Management Authorities (*a few states have set this up and others are likely to follow*) and District Disaster Management Authorities have the role and responsibility to steer this at their respective levels. Save the Children needs to engage with government institutions and departments at all levels to advocate the Child-Centred approaches.

At the ground level, the following significant benchmarks need to be achieved and demonstrated with sustainable mechanisms, namely:

- Building of resilience and safety with a critical child-focus by empowering children as leaders in mainstreaming CC-DRR and make this a local priority
- Anchoring Child Centred Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction in the local context and cultural conditions
- Strengthening Vulnerable Communities to cope with the risks by linking to Child Survivals Protection, ECCD, Hunger Reduction, Health and Inclusive Learning Environment
- Developing demonstrable models within Save the Children partner network and to the Governance at the panchayat, district, state and national levels
- Mainstreaming Risk and Safety education in school curriculum
- Institutionalising knowledge network to address underlying causes of risk
- Negotiating with Government of India Ministries/Nodal institutions at national, state, district and panchayat/village levels to integrate child centred disaster risk reduction in policy, planning and implementation
- Inclusion of children's representation and participation in decision-making bodies

Components of Child-Centred DRR

Child Centred Participatory Planning (CCPP):

Local communities including children undertake Vulnerability Capacity Analysis (VCA) and mappings; and evolve their own Disaster Management Plans at the level of community and at the level of the institutions. The objective is to facilitate emergence of children as leaders in risk reduction in the community.

Putting Early Warning systems in place:

In order for preparedness actions to be successful, adequate early warning systems need to be in place.

Formation of Task Force Groups (TFG):

Task Force Groups are small groups from the community organised to be responsible for specific tasks. It is essential that about 60% of the members are children in the age group of 12-18 years. TFGs are constituted to handle: Early Warning, Evacuation, Search & Rescue, First Aid and Shelter Management; and they are trained on their specific roles and responsibilities. To ensure that children are exposed to minimum risk, Search & Rescue and Evacuation is led by adults while Early Warning, First Aid and Shelter Management can be led by Children.

Disaster Preparedness / Management Planning: Community and Institution-based

Based on the VCA, children with support from communities will formulate a contingency plan, which is ratified by the local panchayat. The contingency plan will include general information about the community, disaster history, seasonal calendar of disasters, and distance of the service provider from the village, details of TFG members and some mitigation / prevention measures that minimise the impact of future disasters.

School Safety Initiatives:

School based DRR consists of children undertaking a VCA with specific reference to their school setting. Students, teachers, principals, management and board of education need to be actively engaged. In particular, emphasis must be in teaching about hazards and risk reduction in formal curriculum and in non-formal teaching learning situations. Regular mock drills form an integral part of this process. School Disaster Management Plans need to be put in place.

V. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Save the Children has implemented School level Disaster Risk Reduction initiatives in 55 schools and communities in Andaman and Nicobar Islands during 2008 - 2009 wherein children, parents and teachers were given training. The Andaman Department of Education had acknowledged this and had committed to scale it up in the schools in the islands. In addition, 104 villages in the three flood risk States of Orissa, West Bengal and Bihar benefitted from DRR awareness, knowledge and practical implementation in terms of health and nutritional safety, elevation of hand pumps to protect potable water as well as grain banks to strengthen food security during the pre and post disaster days. The Grain Bank case study was included as Best Practice in ECHO DRR initiatives. Currently, Save the Children is implementing a 2 year CC-DRR intervention in 160 villages in Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal with the support of ICICI-CSO Partners.

Save the Children strives to ensure that at least 1,000 schools and communities have emerged as sustained communities of practitioners of Child Centred Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction in the next 5 years.

Obviously, *the first level of engagement* will be at the level of entire communities where the best impact of this will be demonstrated. Key stakeholders at this level can be: children and youth, educators and professionals, parent teacher associations, community based organisations (CBOs), NGOs, academia, policy planners and governance dealing at this level.

Strategically, Save the Children will engage in developing demonstrable models: **in the community and in the schools, at the village level and in urban settings** by mobilising children and adults into self governing Disaster Managers.

Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction must essentially be community based and inclusive! Inclusion in Save the Children is perceived as non-discrimination. In CC-DRR, its application is to be evidenced by actively including socially excluded groups including the disabled.