



Children's Action for Disaster Risk Reduction

Views from Children in Asia

2012



Girls being evacuated during mock disaster drill in Dhaka City, Bangladesh

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In Action: Disaster Preparedness Team conducting a mock drill in their Primary School in the Indonesia

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all the boys and girls who took the time and effort to write down their thoughts and experience on disaster risk reduction to share them with us.

We hope that these messages will be an inspiration to many more children and youth across Asia, the Pacific, and beyond to start getting involved in disaster risk reduction activities in their communities and country. We hope that the messages from the children and youth will be heard by their government.

We received many great essays from the children and it was difficult to select the few that could be featured in this publication. Thank you to Tyara and Tity, Mark, Nabaraj, Simanta, Rajkumar, Rima, Sushant, Shyam, Asmi, Biraj, Jonisha, Amir, Mithun, Rana, the Children's Youth Council at 28 January High School, the Lamsai Youth Council, and the children's group from Huong Hoa and Dakrong.

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Learning through play with the Riskland game in Viet Nam

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The youths who drafted the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Action plan for their village in Cambodia

Foreword

During the third session of the Global Platform on Disaster risk Reduction held in Geneva in 2011, the Chair's Summary welcomed a five-point Children's Charter on DRR and highlighted the need to nurture effective local action by involving girls, boys and youth in decisions on disaster risk reduction that will affect their future.

Although we often think of children and youth as vulnerable when disasters strike - and in many places they are - we often ignore their potential to be agents of change. Throughout Asia and the Pacific, these young people have their own perspective on how to reduce the effects of disasters on their communities and are helping to put to practice their ideas on how to solve these problems.

Listening to their views and perspectives is an opportunity we can't afford to miss. Today's children and youth are the generation who will inherit the legacy of our actions and so their involvement is a crucial first step to ensure that actions to reduce risks are not only effective but sustainable for years to come.

Let us take a moment then to consider the messages from this next generation in Asia, for it is never too late for us to learn from them.

Today's children and youth are the generation who will inherit the legacy of our actions and so their involvement is a crucial first step to ensure that actions to reduce risks are not only effective but sustainable for years to come.



Jerry Velasquez

UNISDR Senior Regional Coordinator
for Asia Pacific.



Mark Pierce

Plan International Regional Director for Asia.

List of acronyms

AMCDRR	Asia Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction
CCA	Climate change adaptation
DRM	Disaster risk management
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
VDC	Village Development Committee (Nepal lower administrative unit)
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Introduction

Children's View about Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change



Youth-led campaign to prevent climate change in Angkor Chum district, Cambodia

The Asia Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) Declaration adopted in Incheon in 2010 recognized “the need to protect women, children and other vulnerable groups from the disproportionate impacts of disaster and to empower them to promote resiliency within their communities and workplaces.”⁽¹⁾ Specifically it called on DRR stakeholders to promote child-and-people-centered education for community preparedness and risk reduction.

The aim of this publication is to provide children and youth in Asia a platform to report on progress made towards these commitments from their own point of view. Previous surveys conducted with Children globally show that their views on local governance for disaster risk reduction often tend to be less positive than those of adults in all respects. This suggests that children have contributions to, or views about the process of improving local governance for disaster risk reduction which are unique to children but not yet being taken on board.⁽²⁾

Thus this publication seeks to document the perspective of children from seven Asia countries on how disasters and climate change affects their

lives and their rights. It highlights their views on what they believe their role can be in addressing disaster risk and climate change in their community and what they are expecting from their government, NGOs and the private sector. By presenting their own experiences of participating in disaster risk reduction activities, it aims to highlight the capacity of children in order to inspire other children and youth, as well as encourage local governments, NGOs, and the private sector to support child-centered community risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

⁽¹⁾ Incheon Declaration on Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia and the Pacific 2010, AMCDRR, Incheon Korea 25-28 October 2010.

⁽²⁾ Views from the Frontline 2011: Detailed Children's Report
<http://www.globalnetwork-dr.org/views-from-the-frontline/voices-from-the-frontline-2011.html>



Children learn first aid during mock drill at school in Bangladesh

When children take action, even a small act can make a big impact

Tyara (15 year old girl), from Grobogan District, Central Java Province, Indonesia

My name is Tyara. I'm a 3rd grade student in Junior high school. I live in a village in Tanggungharjo sub-district, Grobogan Central Java province. My village is situated in the lowland area near to Semarang City, a capital city of Central Java province. The total population is 1,364 families. The majority of people's livelihood in my village is farming. Every year, our lives depend on the harvest period. Most of the farmers have enough land for farming for them to meet the basic needs of each family and we feel blessed for this. Especially during harvest time and when the price is good, the income of farmers could reach millions of Indonesia Rupiah ⁽³⁾ and they spend it for basic needs such as food, clothing, housing renovation, saving for their children's education; as well as for secondary needs like motorbike, bicycle, and television.

Based on historical disaster records, my village has experienced several disasters such as flood, whirlwind and drought. In the period of monsoon, the hazard of flood starts to threaten my village. As far as I remember, almost every year floods have occurred because the forest which was located near to our village has been deforested. The rain could not be absorbed by trees, as the number of trees has decreased so the water now runs off to the residential areas causing flooding. In contrast, during the dry season my village will face another significant challenge - water shortage caused by drought. There will be a scene of long hours of queuing by the water source. Some people even went to the neighbouring village to get clean water although the distance was 2 kms. Or they ventured into the forest to get it. Right now,⁽⁴⁾ we are entering the dry season again. It is starting to get difficult to get clean water as most of the water channels in every house are empty. This is one of the characteristic of my village when comparing the monsoon and dry seasons.

My village is also vulnerable to whirlwind. Usually when it happens, most people do not know what to do except to panic and run to an empty ground. Whirlwind will cause damages to a number of



Pupils in our primary school, participate actively in hazard analysis

houses and uproot trees. Looking at this fact, it clearly shows that disaster risk reduction is still not a priority in our village.

Change started to happen in my village after there was an initiative to introduce and start the disaster risk reduction (DRR) project in 2011 until now. This project was done by Plan Indonesia, one of the NGOs that support the community and government in my village. People in the village, including children in school, are able to get appropriate information on hazard, risk and vulnerability.

⁽³⁾ 1 Mio Indonesian Rupiah are equivalent to about USD 110.

⁽⁴⁾ The essay was written in July 2012.

One of the good examples is the DRR activity in our village primary school which started in 2012 and which promotes the roles and participation of children in disaster preparedness activities. In this school, there were a series of awareness raising activities on DRR including trainings, activity on hazard and vulnerability assessment like making risk maps, and setting up the evacuation route that involved pupils, teachers and school committees. They also selected 20 pupils, boys and girls from grade 4 to 5 for the disaster preparedness team (*tim siaga bencana*) and planned a mock drill based on the hazards most likely to happen in that school. The two main hazards that threaten this school are flood and whirlwind.

A simulation of whirlwind affecting this school was planned by the School Disaster Preparedness Team with full support from the Principal and teachers and the involvement of all pupils including pupils with disability. It started with the Principal ringing a bell as part of our early warning mechanism, then teachers in each class room provided instruction to all pupils to exit the class and head to safe heaven area by following the agreed evacuation route. The disaster preparedness team did their job very well, by acting as little doctors to support any of their peers and friends who needed help. All pupils, teachers, Principals and school guards were involved and very enthusiastic in the simulation activity.

A carnival under the theme “back to nature” was also held in this school. This carnival is basically to support the “GO Green” campaign that was initiated by the local government in Grobogan district. Looking at this initiative and the development of DRR activities in our primary school, it has triggered a change in the community. The village government encourages the majority of the people in our community (mostly adults) to actively take part in DRR activities. A series of sensitization events on disaster preparedness to prevent and deal with flood and whirlwind were held. The community in

my village finally got access to information and know what to do when either an emergencies or disaster occurs.

For me, the main challenges that my village is facing that keeps it from maximizing the active engagement of the community, including children, in any DRR or other development work, is the lack of communication facility and equipment. For example, the availability of internet connection is one of the tools to link my community to the rest of the world out there. But we have to walk around 3 kms if we want to get connected or access *warnet* (Internet stall). This is something that the government should pay attention to. Providing access to communication facilities in the village is very important and helps meet people’s rights (including children’s) to better and useful information. I do believe, better communication access will bring significant change and positive values in this village, especially on how our community can build their perspectives about development. It will help us to see many things differently, turn a traditional way of thinking to a modern one.

Another challenge as part of my observation is that the eagerness of people to be involved in DRR activities needs to be improved. Still, some groups in my village feel that risk reduction activity is not a priority. To change their views, I think the official support from the local government is important to endorse DRR as part of the village development plan.

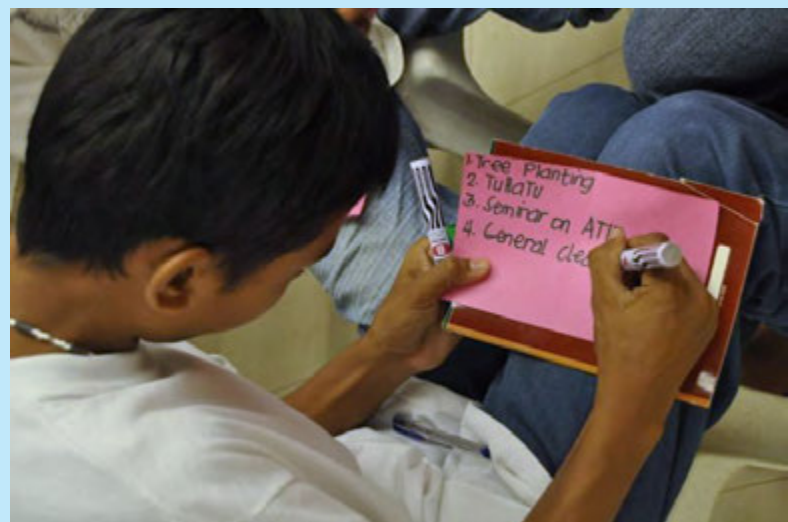
Personally, I learn about disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) because I want to make a contribution to preserving the environment. I’m also inspired by the action shown by those younger children in our primary school. I am willing to study more and gain more new knowledge on DRR and CCA. I am committed to participate actively in promoting the importance of disaster preparedness in my village.

I am willing to work with other children, boys and girls to share and spread useful information on DRR to all people in our village, no matter what their educational level is, what tribe, etc. There should be equal access and opportunity for everybody to participate. In the future, I am willing to start a campaign for adults especially parents in my village to invest in children's education, because we are the next generation of this country, and we are able to make the change for a better future. I am hoping

that the government will support it and make my dream come true.

Every small action can lead to a big impact as long as access and opportunity is available. Investing in children's education will make us capable to be a change maker in DRR and any other development work, for our own community and for the whole society.

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A Disaster in Waiting

Mark (14 year old boy), Child Leader from Eastern Samar, the Philippines

The Municipality of Oras is one of the towns of Eastern Samar. It's the center of trade where nearby towns buy and sell their agriculture products like rice, tuna fish and others things. At first glance the town looks safe from any disaster, but after we made a hazard and vulnerability assessment, it seems that Oras is a disaster in waiting.

I am Mark a child leader in our community in *Baranguay*⁽⁵⁾ Tawagan. I am a witness on how vulnerable to flooding and tsunami our town is. In 2010, I was invited to attend a training on Hazard Vulnerability Capacity Assessment as a children representative of our community. We were trained on how to use the different tool in assessing community's hazard vulnerability and its coping capacity when a disaster happens. The training encouraged me to organize a children's group. Why children? Because during disaster we are the most affected in the society and should be prioritized. The children have the right to participate in any community capacity development. And we too can easily understand those which can harm us and use our talent to influence duty bearers to protect children against the risk of disaster.



When I discussed what I learnt from the training with my fellow friends they realized the importance of children participating in community activities. Recognizing the importance of our contribution in the development, we made an organizational structure for our group and I was elected chairman to lead the group. Being a chairman of the group I understand the great responsibility of bringing with me the voice of my fellow children and how this voice can be heard by our community leaders.

Last August 2011, I had the opportunity to join a consultation on Climate-Smart Disaster Risk Management. The purpose was to consult children on how our participation makes a difference in reducing the effect of climate change and disaster. During the discussion it was shared what the relationship is between the causes of climate

change and a community who practiced cutting trees and then later experienced a disaster. We also discussed how to prepare and how to save ourselves when an extreme hazard event happens and these were considered as the capacity of the community. The discussion emphasized the importance of children having this capacity and the need for us to be protected.

When I went back to my village I discussed what I learnt with fellow children. The discussion ended with the plan to organize a "DRR Texter Clan". Using our mobile phone we send text messages about Disaster Risk Reduction, warning people of an incoming typhoon and preparedness to our friends who live in high risk areas.

⁽⁵⁾ A *Baranguay* is the smallest administrative division in the Philippines and is the native Filipino term for a village, district or ward.

When a typhoon is coming, I forwarded text messages on the weather forecast shared by our DRR Project staff taken from the weather bureau (PAGASA ⁽⁶⁾). We also send tips on what to do during bad weather. Our initiative was appreciated by the people in our town. Our members reached to 95 youths who came from different barangays of Oras, Eastern Samar.



After that our group committed to help other vulnerable children. I was involved in different disaster risk reduction activities organized by Plan International. We have become facilitators, discussing the Rights of Children including the importance of protecting children before, during and after disaster against any form of child abuse. In our community they choose our group to be in-charge of the early warning committee and they choose me to head the committee with my parent adult counterpart. Our group was also involved in making infomercials on how regular flooding in the upstream barangays affects family's livelihood which triggers families to send their children to Manila to work where they could possibly be trafficked. The infomercial was aired in different radio station in Eastern Samar.

Eventually these involvements developed our self-confidence in discussing different issues affecting children.

Now as a volunteer Disk Jockey of Radio Natin, a local FM radio station, my experience in DRR activities has made me more confident in sharing important information on disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness. It also convinced me to become responsible in my studies and finish schooling. And it made me more committed to inform children about protecting themselves from abuses and become involved in any DRR activities in the community to increase their coping capacity against the possible impact of disaster.

We have become facilitators, discussing the Rights of Children including the importance of protecting children before, during and after disaster against any form of child abuse.

⁽⁶⁾ The Philippines Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

What's climate change?

DRR Communication youth group, Huong Hoa District in Quang Tri Province, Viet Nam⁽⁷⁾

We are the DRR Communication and Facilitator Youth Group in Huong Hoa district, a mountainous area of Quảng Trị, Viet Nam.



A map of hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities in our village

In 2011, Plan Viet Nam came to our school and asked us a meaningful question: “What is climate change?” We barely knew about anything so-called to be climate change, except for some update from our teachers and from television. “What’s climate change?” was our first idea when thinking about it. Then, we were asked to think of any abnormal change that was easily recognized in our area for the last few years.

I couldn’t tell the reason for it but we children all felt that the temperature has increased and it becomes

warmer and warmer, as one of my friend said. We could see that drought becomes an emerging type of hazard in this area. Recently, unpredicted disasters also happened in a more frequent manner. Local residents living in mountainous areas and along the river experienced flash floods and landslides in our communities. For instance, the typhoon Ketsana and flooding in late 2009 was a significant example of the growing disaster intensity.

⁽⁷⁾ This essay was written with the help of Plan staff based on interviews and focus group discussion with two groups of children from 2 villages in Huong Hoa and Dakrong, in Quang Tri province. The two groups (mixed boys and girls) consisting of 7-10 children aged 11 to 15; and aged 16 to 18 respectively. In the second group, a mix of out-of-school and at-school children was selected.

The climate is changing

In the mountainous areas, two main sources for water supply are the river and water flow gravity system taken from the mountain nearby. It is true that water stress is being experienced by local communities during the dry season from May to July. We could observe that more people need to travel to the river to fetch water for their homes. For the last two to three years, women and girls who are normally in charge of getting water; have to spend more time on this activity. Before, we could get water easily from the water flow gravity system and I would go to the river to fetch water just once or twice per month. Now, during dry season, water becomes less. I need to go to the river every two to three days a week. Each time, I need to bring back 10 cans (20 liters each) for my family. In our village, more and more families in the community switched their production to 'keo' – Acacia – and some other types of industrial trees planting since it requires less water. We are afraid that more and more people will face this increased issue and it might turn into true drought conditions in the future.

We looked at a historical timeline to see changes in average conditions and temperature and pointed out that extremely cold weather caused damage to crop failure, for example what happened to the maize crop in late 2010 in our community. We also remembered that typhoon Ketsana as a sudden disaster brought very negative impact to the livelihoods of children's family when almost all villagers lost their crop and lacked food for two to six months. We feel that our hilly crops (mainly rice), which are one of the main livelihood sources in the mountainous communities, are facing problem with drought and deforestation. Lower productivity can be seen for the last several years. Generally, more and more children have to find short-term labour jobs to contribute to their families' income. Children have to travel around 5-10 kms during the day for this kind of work. The most popular daily job is to collect coffee beans from the farms in Huong Hoa district. It is more girls than boys over the age of

fifteen that tend to take this work for income. The small incomes, equivalent to VND 50,000 – 70,000/day (US\$ 2.5 – 3.5) helps us pay for our own and our brothers/sisters' educational books and clothes for school.

When disasters happen, we cannot go to school, sometimes for a few weeks and often for a few days. Another problem is that our educational supplies might get lost or damaged during flooding time. Most schools at village level are not very strong buildings and have poor equipments so students face more risk there in case of emergency. When we drew risk maps we could also see that a number of school sites are located at risky areas such as being next to the river where river-landslide or typhoon can cause damage.

Our activities

We had a number of opportunities to attend and join DRR activities at our schools and communities. Before, most schools did not have a contingency plan for disaster preparedness and mitigation. For the last two years, we were asked to participate in the Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment and DRR planning process at our schools. Some of the tools, such as hazard mapping, historical timeline, drawing pictures of our understanding on disaster risks, are an interesting and fun way for us to improve our understanding about disaster preparedness.

During the school year, ten of my school friends were selected to be the facilitators to organize awareness events at schools. They have become very confident to share and discuss with us the issues of disaster risks and we could talk to each other on how we, as children, and our families in the communities, could act as an agent of change to protect our families, our communities and our schools and better cope with disasters. A lot of events were organized in our school by the communication group such as games, video presentation and group discussions.

⁽⁸⁾ This ISDR board game "Riskland" allows players to learn about what they can do to reduce disaster impacts by answering questions and advancing along the board's winding path. The kit and game may be adapted according to the different hazards communities face, and translated into multiple languages.

For the first time, we got to know that we can learn from interesting games such as the Riskland game⁽⁸⁾, and the drawing and modelling exercise. It not only helped us understand more, but also gave us a chance to feel more confident to talk with adults and their friends about disaster and climate change risks and measures to cope with its impact. We also could show our drawings and photos to the local government during the DRR Day to express our needs and concerns.

I myself was a member of the video group which was really exciting. Six months ago we produced our own film.⁽⁹⁾ We were trained on how to write up a story, called “script” on disaster and climate change. Our group worked together to prepare a storyboard, record the video and the voice-over. We interviewed some older people in our villages. We also interviewed our teachers and the commune leaders to ask about what they think about the needs to support children to face the impact of climate change. I am very proud that our films were broadcasted to millions of children, friends and people in our province and in our country through the television.

It is time for us to know, to think, to speak and to act

We are now in the process of strengthening and establishing the Climate Change Adaptation Children Clubs in our schools and communities. By participating in this club, I will continue to provide strong messages to my friends at schools and to adults in the community on climate change and disaster risks. We will continue our discussion among ourselves in order to propose some recommendations for climate change adaptation and disaster risks reduction. I am very happy to know that Plan will pilot a very exciting model where each of our

clubs will be sponsored with USD 500 as a seed fund. We will spend the seed fund on adaptation measures that we decide ourselves. For instance, we will advocate to the local Government and local community people that they should prevent deforestation to maintain water source for hill rice planting.

We will continue to organize awareness events at our schools to provide knowledge to the newcomers in the new school year. Of course, we children will teach other children as it is easier to understand and share ideas. We would also like to have more dialogue between children and teachers and adults. For example, our video was a good way for us to share our views with the community and the local officials. We are excited that with a part of the seed fund, we can start lots of activities like planting trees for prevention of landslide and protection of water sources. In order to have a better environment for learning and playing at school, we will use our seed fund to set up the rain water storage system in our school. We hope that by seeing that example, adults can do the same at their homes so that girls do not have to travel to the river to fetch water.



Learning through play with the Riskland game

⁽⁹⁾ You can see the films at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VUyjWe0tXo> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgkqsUXy2Hk>



And Action! We are making a movie about disaster risk reduction in our village

For the first time, we got to know that we can learn from interesting games such as the Riskland game, and the drawing and modelling exercise. It not only helped us understand more, but also gave us a chance to feel more confident to talk with adults and their friends about disaster and climate change risks and measures to cope with its impact. We also could show our drawings and photos to the local government during the DRR Day to express our needs and concerns.

The power of children's voices through community radio

Tity (17 year old girl), from Dompu District, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

Tity is my name, I am a 3rd grade student in Senior High School in Dompu, West Nusa Tenggara province. I would like to share and tell about the experience of our children's group called, *Sanggar Sinar Pajo* (Children workshop), situated at my village in Dompu District, West Nusa Tenggara province in initiating and conducting a campaign on "caring for the environment". The campaign is also promoting children's participation in disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities.

My village is one of the disaster prone areas in Dompu district. It is located on Sumbawa Island, in the southern part of Indonesia. The types of hazard that have been identified are volcanic eruption of Mt. Tambora, landslide, flood and potential transmittable diseases such as diarrhea and malaria. Most people in my village lack knowledge and access to information on health, environment and DRR. Most of community members don't even realize nor are aware of the potential disaster hazards in their surroundings. Therefore, there is little participation in any prevention and mitigation activity. Now that we are aware about these hazards, the children's group tries to do something and initiate activities that are able to help to minimize disaster risk that could potentially emerge in our lovely village. Actually, there is a perception by adults toward children's participation in this village. Most adults assume and perceive children as a passive citizen. The voice of children is still not recognized nor heard in many circumstances. As children, we see this problem as a challenge which encourages us more to prove that this assumption is wrong.

Since 2010, a Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) project has been implemented in this village supported by Plan Indonesia. The activity targeted the community as well as children. After being involved in WASH activities, children have heard and know more about the environment and its relation with DRR topics; so they realize about the vulnerability of their village to disaster hazards.

They are keen to know and learn more about those topics. They have the ultimate goal to be a good communicator in their community on various useful topics. They want to make a change in their society.

The children also realized that in order to have the possibility to voice their own concerns, they have to initiate it by themselves to gain support from the adults. Therefore we agreed and decided to become involved in *Sanggar Sinar Pajo* (Children's workshop) and proactively plan useful activities on DRR. We learn about practical examples on prevention and mitigation toward disaster risk. We also researched by ourselves by accessing newspapers, online media and by learning from study visits. We also asked Plan's staff to share with us any useful Information material and publications on DRR.



The community radio SATIFA FM in the village



After Sunday cleaning activity of the drainage system in one aisle inside the village

We also remind the community about the experience of a past flood incident in their village, which caused a crop failure and affected the income and livelihood of the community. Regarding the environment and hygiene issue, we spread messages and raise the awareness in the community about “the importance of hand washing” before and after having meals and after defecating; not performing open defecation (ODF); consume clean water (boiled water) to prevent the infection of any disease, especially during floods.

Further concrete actions were planned by us children involved in *Sanggar Sinar Pajo*. We initiated the campaign “caring for the environment” by utilizing the community radio, SATIFA FM that is available in my village. We made a plan to spread and broadcast information with the purpose to raise awareness of our peers and community who listen to SATIFA FM. The coverage of SATIFA FM reaches not only our village but also several surrounding villages.

The broadcasters of SATIFA FM are all children, both boys and girls. I am one of them. We organize ourselves and collect information from different sources about environment and risk reduction issue and broadcast it to the wider community through radio. Our messages include: how to take care a good environment; how to behave friendly with the environment to prevent future disaster in particular flood and landslide; and information about the types of potential hazards and disaster prevention and mitigation activities.

One example of messages that we broadcasted through SATIFA FM is on how to prevent and reduce the risk of flood. A key message emphasizes the importance of changing the bad habit of littering. We children believe that by littering, it can block the water drainage channel as well as create blockage in the river that could trigger flood in the community.

Our children’s group is also involved in “Sunday Cleaning Activity”. With our peers and adults, we cleaned the drainage ditch along the main road and in the aisle inside the village. Besides cleaning the road and ditch, the children’s group is also involved in cleaning the religious place such as our mosque, because we believe that living in hygiene environment is part of practicing the faith.

Nowadays, more children are actively involved in *Sanggar Sinar Pajo* activities. They are eager to share more information that can bring positive values and potentially contribute to changing behavior towards risk reduction for a better environment, not only for children but also for our whole community.

What’s next? The children in our *Sanggar Sinar Pajo* agreed to invite and encourage more children in the village to join and become involved in our activity, both in the community radio programmes and the Sunday cleaning activity. We also want to strengthen our networking with adults especially the village government to support them in realizing more concrete changes such as preventing deforestation in the landslide prone area and near our water sources. With support from Plan Indonesia, the children’s group will keep advocating for more children to participate in any village activity

that are being organized by adults such as mock drills. We children will also keep requesting support from local government to fund our activities.

We children from *Sanggar Sinar Pajo* are taking action to realize our right to information, to be educated and to participate actively in disaster risk reduction. On top of all this, children have the right to be safe from disasters.

Some of the key lessons from *Sanggar Sinar Pajo* that we would like to conclude with are:

(1) Children have the potential to be agents of change in their community, as long as there is the opportunity, access to education and better information management and support from adults;

(2) The selection of media that is familiar and can be accessed by the broader community in the village level, such as community radio, is one of the best options to promote meaningful participation of children in identifying and communicating risks;

(3) Support from parents, teachers and other stakeholders is essential for children to build and strengthen their confidence. They will feel respected.

By giving access and opportunities to children, it means that we can better realize our rights as citizens.

Most adults assume and perceive children as a passive citizen. The voice of children is still not recognized nor heard in many circumstances. As children, we see this problem as a challenge which encourages us more to prove that this assumption is wrong.



Disaster preparedness is protecting us: Children council in 28 Makara High School, Cambodia



Why participate in DRR and CCA activities?

Lamsai Youth Council, Ayutthaya Province, Thailand

In the above poster, members of the Lamsai Youth Council (3 girls and 3 boys aged 13-18) shared their motive for participating in DRR and CCA activities:

- ▶ Need more knowledge.
- ▶ Doing more useful activities in our free time.
- ▶ Expand the knowledge of the community.
- ▶ To gather more experience.
- ▶ Encourage community participation and brainstorming.
- ▶ Be a role model for the community.
- ▶ To be able to use the disaster knowledge for self-protection in the community.
- ▶ Build up the unity among the community.

The Hazardous Bhimphedi

Simanta (14 year old boy), Bhimphedi, Makawanpur District Nepal

My name is Simanta. I live in one of the wards in Bhimphedi. ⁽¹⁰⁾ There was a time when I used to wonder what a child club is. But now, being a member of a child club, I know everything about child clubs. The name of my child club is *Saptarangi* Child Club. The Village Development Committee (VDC) and Plan Nepal have provided support to it. ⁽¹¹⁾ Our child club has conducted various training on DRR. The VDC and Plan Nepal have provided it with cash and in-kind support and awareness training.

Bhimphedi faces high hazards. Earlier, Bhimphedi was very developed. But, floods, landslides and the river have posed problems for it. Once, Bhimphedi used to be a big place, but it is so no longer. Likewise, the Pari Bazaar once used to be a big bazaar, but the floods of 1993 affected it. A big *haat bazaar* (local weekly market) used to be held there every Thursday. Likewise, big bazaars used to be held at Dhorsing, and the floods have severely affected it too. Hazards have posed serious problems to Bhimphedi.



Big floods inundated Bhimphedi in 1955, 1978 and 1993

Various awareness-raising programmes should be carried out, children should not be allowed to swim in the river, and a dam should be built on the river. The children should be involved in a variety of activities, where they get opportunities to learn a lot of things. This should include the participation of all, so that many things can be learnt. I request government organizations and NGOs to involve children in various training events, plant saplings in

Once my friends and I used to climb up to the top of the hill and pluck rhododendron. The *Ainselu* fruit ⁽¹²⁾ which used to ripen in March-April and the rhododendron bush, which used to bloom in March-April, now ripen and flower three or four months earlier. Back then, we had to wear warm clothes even in the summer, but things have changed now. Our forest area used to be quite extensive, but it is now being encroached upon and settlements are coming up in their place. In the past, a large number of birds would flock the area, but now their number is dwindling. Bhimphedi is now going back in time.

vacant land and built embankments in landslide-prone areas. Children should be given priority, with child clubs and health posts set up. As in the case of Pari Bazaar, Simaltar Bazaar and Dhorsing Bazaar, Bhimphedi may also exist only in name soon. We must take steps in time to prevent this from happening. I request NGOs and INGOs to implement programmes for raising awareness of risk mitigation for keeping not only Bhimphedi's name alive but also the existence of the village and its people. I also express my commitment to always remain eager to make our DRR children's club a success.

⁽¹⁰⁾ A ward in Nepal is a political division. Nine wards make up a Village Development Committee (VDC).

⁽¹¹⁾ A village development committee (VDC) in Nepal is the lower administrative part of its local development ministry. Each district has several VDCs, similar to municipalities but with greater public-government interaction and administration.

⁽¹²⁾ *Rubus ellipticus* Smith, a tasty wild fruit plant that grows in abundance throughout the mid-hill region of the Himalaya region.

Reclaiming Rivulet lands into arable land

Asmi (15 year old girl), Handikhola, Makawanpur District, Nepal

My name is Asmi. I'm 15 years old. I live in Lamitar, Handikhola VDC. I study in class 10 in Higher Secondary School. I have worked as a chairperson of the Environment Conservation and Disaster Risk Reduction Club (ECO DRR Club), formed in my school on the initiative of the children. My village lies on the foothills of the Chure mountain range, which is the most recent mountain range to be formed. My village faces serious disaster risks due to a number of streams flowing through the Chure mountain and the yearly floods it encounters.

To go to Hetauda, the district headquarters, from our village, which has the Chure mountain range to the south and the banks of the Rapti rivulet to the north, we are forced to cross the Rapti river either via the temporary wooden bridge in the winter, or hazardously by motor tube boats in the monsoon season, or via the suspension bridge after walking on foot for one hour and a half. Since there is no bridge on the Rapti river, we cannot go to bazaar during the rainy season (from June to August), we have to stock up provision for the goods needed throughout the rainy season before it starts. I cannot go to school for many days in the rainy season because of floods in the stream. Ten years ago or so, when I was in class 1, it used to rain in the months of June and July. As schools were closed those days, it wouldn't affect us so much. But, these days, due to the changes in the climate, it rains in August. So, it is difficult to go to school and for a number of days we have to wait when we are on our way to school because the stream is flooded and cannot be crossed.

Most of the families in our village, which is well-known for vegetable farming in Makawanpur district, have farming as their occupation. My family is also dependent on farming for its livelihood. I'm well aware that, our land doesn't give as much vegetables as it did seven or eight years ago. One of the causes for this is the chemical fertilizer that

My villages as I know it

Bhimphedi was earlier the capital of Makawanpur. The capital was moved to Hetauda in 1985. The reason for moving it is said to be the increasing disasters. The floods and landslides that struck the area every year wiped out the dense settlements. Massive floods occurred in 1954, 1961, 1968, 1979, 1992, 1993, 2002 and 2005. They brought death and destruction, submerged rows of houses, and turned the place into a sandy area. There used to be big bazaars in Ward No 2 and 3 before 1954. People from all over the country came there to buy their daily necessities. The flood of 1954 wiped away the bazaar. Thousands of people displaced there moved to Hetauda. The flood waters eroded 100 to 150 m of land every year. It is recalled that earlier the small canal used to be the grazing area for cattle, but now that area is an open field. In the past, children used to say about Bhimphedi: '*Bhimphedi Sahar, Sabailai Bhimphedi Aune Rahar*' (Bhimphedi town, everybody wants to visit Bhimphedi). But now, they call it '*Battimuniko andhyaro*' (darkness with illumination nearby).

Sushant (16 year old boy), Bhimphedi, Nepal

we use, whereas the other cause is the rising temperature. My mother says that, until a few years ago, our village did not experience cold waves, so vegetables were not affected at all. But these days, cold waves lasting a number of days have made it difficult to protect vegetables, and pests completely destroy potato and tomato plants. Likewise, there were no shells in our village until seven or eight years ago. Nowadays, there are so many of them

that they are slowly destroying vegetable farming and the situation has gotten out of hand. When it rains the water brings stones, pebbles and sand flowing down from the Chure mountains, it raises the river bed, causing floods in the rivulet, which inundate the village or the fields and cause havoc. But in winters, there is always scarcity of water for irrigation.

I find it strange that, in my childhood, when I used to go to the forest along with my siblings and friends, there used to be ample water in the rivulets and streams, but nowadays, the sources of such water have dried up due to silt and soil flowing from the Chure Mountain. Also, one has to travel farther to reach a forest, which used to be nearby.

I got an opportunity to participate in the training conducted by the *Samudayeeek Urja tatha Paryavaran Vikas Manch* (Community Energy and Environment Development Forum), Makawanpur, with the support of Plan Nepal, under the child-centered natural disaster risk mitigation programme. In the training, I learnt that our daily activities are responsible for inviting disasters and that we can mitigate the damage from disasters by better managing them. Nowadays, I discuss disaster risk reduction with friends at the ECO DRR Club and at school and share the things I know with them. Apart from this, I discuss measures for preparing oneself for facing disasters in the community.

I find it strange that, in my childhood, when I used to go to the forest along with my siblings and friends, there used to be ample water in the rivulets and streams, but nowadays, the sources of such water have dried up due to silt and soil flowing from the Chure Mountain.



Jonisha and Asmi during a disaster rescue training

What would be the future of our settlement? Maybe, this village would exist only in name! It is frightening even to imagine how terrible our life would be and that of future generations.

DRR training boosted my morale

Jonisha (15 year old girl), Handikhola, Makawanpur District, Nepal

My name is Jonisha. I live in Masine Twanga, Handikhola. I study in class 9 in Secondary School. My school is situated on the banks of a stream. My village, which lies to the west of Chure, the youngest mountains in the world, is at high risk of natural hazards.

My grandfather had died of lightning, because of which I get scared as soon as I hear about a disaster. The incidence of lightning has been increasing for the past few days. Our village, which is bordered by the Chure hills on the south and the Rapti River on the river, always at risk of natural disasters. During the monsoon, my friends and I cannot go to school for many days due to the overflowing stream and sometimes we have to wait for several hours or days before we can cross. As our school is by the stream, flood water even flows into our classes. It frightens us and disturbs our studies.

After 1983-84, a number of people migrated here, the population increased and forest degradation increased. As a result, in the rainy season, loose soil flows with the water and causes landslides and floods in the streams and rivulets here, which raise the level of the riverbed. This again causes the flood water to enter cultivable land and settlements, converting them into sandy lands. According to my father, our old field was also converted into sandy land. More interesting is the fact that, while they were young, the rivulets that were deep and could be jumped across from one bank to another have now become wide on ends and risen above the fields, because of which even a small flood in the rivulet create havoc by entering the village or the fields.

Whenever I hear such things, on the one hand, I feel surprised and, on the other hand, I feel frightened.

If for instance the stones and pebbles of the Chure Hills came flowing down with rain water and the level of the streams and rivulets was raised, converting the arable land into sandy land and creating havoc by entering the settlements, what would be the future of our settlement? Maybe, this village would exist only in name! It is frightening even to imagine how terrible our life would be and that of future generations.

I had only limited knowledge of disasters. I got an opportunity to participate in the Safer School programme and training, conducted under the Child-Centered Disaster Risk Management Programme, by Plan and its partner NGO *Samudayeeek Urja and Paryavaran Vikas Manch* (Community Energy and Environment Development Forum). At the training, I learnt that disasters are a daily occurrence and we can minimize the damage of disasters by managing them. I have taken part in various awareness-raising programmes, school sanitation campaign, and risk mitigation activities by being a member of the Environment Conservation and Disaster Risk Reduction Club (ECO DRR Club).

As I gained skills in helping people after a disaster, carrying out rescue work during disasters, and giving first aid to people injured by disasters, myself-confidence has increased and I now know what to do if any disaster should happen in my school or in the community.

Climate variability causes disaster and affects our daily life and livelihoods

Biraj (15 year old boy), member of the ECO DRR Club in Handikhola, Makawanpur District, Nepal

My name is Biraj. I'm 15 years old. I live in Lamitar, Handikhola, and study in class 10 in Higher Secondary School. I have worked as a member of the Environment Conservation and Disaster Risk Reduction Club (ECO DRR Club), formed in my school on the initiative of children.

According to the Participatory Vulnerability Assessment, carried out under the Child-Centered Disaster Risk Mitigation Programme in the village, floods, landslides, pests afflicting vegetable farming, infernos, lightning, earthquake, hurricane, hailstorm and cold wave, in that order, are the major hazards affecting our village.

When we hear from the elderly how they grazed cattle in this area until twenty or twenty-five years ago, we feel amazed. Sharing their experience, they say, "While taking the cattle for grazing across the rivulets, we collected the fish that had been killed by coming under the hooves of cattle, and they were more than enough for snacks and dinner. Apart from this, we grazed the cattle in the jungle the whole day, and we cut bamboo and *bhorla* (*Bauhinia vahlii*) leaves which were easily available, to make *ghums* (bamboo umbrellas) to return home. Similarly, amriso (a species of natural wild grass for making brooms), wild asparagus, potichyau (a kind of mushroom), *gittha* (air potato), *bhyakur* (eatable vine) were easily available in nearby forests, whereas these are fast vanishing now." As far as I know, this is due to the change in climate.

The DIPECHO programme, conducted for the past few years by the Women and Children's Development Forum in our Village Development Committee (VDC), has been implementing various activities under the Disaster Risk Mitigation Programme. Mr. Madhav Gautam, Chairperson of Handikhola Disaster Management Committee (DMC), is now an expert in disaster management, and informed me that the programme has carried out risk reduction activities through embankment, tree planting and

bioengineering methods and has also set up a disaster information center.

Although I came to know a little about disasters through him, I got an opportunity to understand a lot of things after I participated in the series of training under the Child-Centered Disaster Risk Management Programme conducted by *Samudayeeek Urja and Paryavaran Vikas Manch, Makawanpur*, a local NGO, with the support of Plan Nepal. At the training, I got to know that our day-to-day activities are, in fact, responsible for inviting disasters and we can minimize their damage by managing them. The training events that I took part in were, among others, Risk and Vulnerability mapping of the community, participatory preparedness planning, first aid for disaster victims, and life skills training. I have now become able to map the risks faced by my community and school and provide first aid treatment following a disaster in the village. I discuss my newly gained knowledge at the child club and at school.

Under the Child-Centered Disaster Risk Management Programme, lots of work has been carried out in our community such as awareness raising about disaster management at school and community level, formation of disaster management committee and formulation of a local disaster management plan, interaction on disaster management in school and formation of the ECO DRR Club, training in assessment of vulnerability, hazards and risks and resources in the community, training skilled people that can carry out rescue work and provide first aid, distribution of rescue and first aid kits, training in school vulnerability assessment and formulation of

disaster management plan of the school. Apart from these, rallies, sanitation campaigns, and debate competitions on children's role in disaster management have been carried out. We are also raising awareness in the community and in the school, and our VDC is doing more disaster management work.

Our school and communities face risks from disasters such as earthquake, hurricane, flood and landslides.

Therefore, as it is necessary for children like me to know about disasters and to learn the skills of how to protect oneself from such disasters, I have realized that it is essential to share disaster management knowledge with children, women, the physically challenged and people from disaster-prone areas through disaster management activities.



Biraj and Jonisha practicing first aid

Our school and communities face risks from disasters such as earthquake, hurricane, flood and landslides. Therefore, as it is necessary for children like me to know about disasters and to learn the skills of how to protect oneself from such disasters.

Community cheers children's initiative to make them more disaster resilient

The Children and Youth Council at the High School in Srei Snam District, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia⁽¹³⁾

As the only high school in the district, our school is situated in the north-western part of Cambodia, in a village of Srei Snam district, approximately 90 kilometers from Siem Reap province.

Srei Snam has a population of 35,446, with 15,149 being children (10,027 girls). Residents in Srei Snam district base their living mainly on seasonal rice farming. The farming depends heavily on the rainfall. In some years, there is enough rainwater for rice farming; and people are happy because they will get good crops, ensuring their survival all year round. In some other years, people are sad because of flash floods destroying their paddies.

These days, climate change has increased the frequency of storms, floods, lightning and drought in Cambodia and their intensity. "Floods in 2011 damaged 656 hectares of rice paddies in Chroy Neang Nguon commune. Now we are facing drought. Our seedlings cannot grow and nearly died out. About 250 hectares of rice paddies are being affected by drought," says Keo Key, Chroy Neang Nguon commune leader, adding that drought takes place every year, especially from late June till late August. This is the major cause of poverty in the community.

Srei Snam district lately experienced storms in four villages, namely Sdavpok, Chroy Neang Nguon, Tram Sorsor and Trum. "In just a few hours, the storm collapsed houses and injured many people," says Thlang Yatt, deputy chief of Sdavpok village. Recalling the experience of the storm, the 47-year-old female deputy village chief said, "In 2003, we had a big storm, collapsing 90 houses, killing 15 animals and injuring 5 villagers. My house also collapsed. Before the storm came, I saw black clouds. Shortly later, the rain fell down heavily, with

strong wind. Houses collapsed one after another. When my house fell down, my mother, my two children and myself were there, in the house."

The Children's Council takes action

The Children's Council was formed in 2007 facilitated by Plan and its partner, Child Rights Foundation. Annually elected, the current Children's Council is chaired by a female student, 17-year-old Sophoeun, with support from two deputies and 16 members.

Under the Child Centered Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) project implemented by Plan Cambodia since 2009, the Children's council's members received related training and documents, such as manuals on disaster risk reduction and on climate change adaptation.



Members of our Children's Council are learning about DRR in our school library

⁽¹³⁾ The case study was led by two children who attended a storing telling training. The two children consulted with another two children to develop the first draft of the case study. Following inputs and comments from Plan staff, six children from the youth council worked together to produce the final version of the case study.



Children council in 28 Makara school, Cambodia organize a campaign on DRR

The role of the council is to build the capacity of children to lead school and community activities. “The members are in charge of eight separate sectors and two of them directly relate to disaster risk reduction, emergency response, social assistance and environment and sanitation,” explains Sophoeun, who is serving as the council’s chairperson for the second term, adding that members of the council are both children and youth because some students start school very late.

Since its start, more than 70% of Children’s Council’s members are female. The council implements project without any discrimination. Children with disability have been involved as well. “We have seen that female students are more active in the council,” says Sophoeun. “The chairperson of the council from one mandate to another have always been girls.”

DRR plans developed by children are included in the Commune Investment Plan

Reuy, 22, is a member of the Children’s Council. He explains, “We attended training sessions provided by Plan such as disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, planning process, educational campaigning, first aid, preparedness for flood and drought, risk vulnerability and capacity assessment and the like.”

According to Reuy, after the training members of the council were involved in activities to reduce disaster risks, like planting trees at school. “We plant trees in order to reduce emission polluting the environment as well as to attract rain for farming. These are just a few examples,” said Sophoeun. Children and youth also led awareness raising campaigns on disaster reduction at school and in the community through drama performance, quiz contests and community marches.

“We wrote slogans educating people on disasters and climate changes and put them on boards in the school gardens. We also spread the messages among students during the daily assembly. We educated school students on traffic accidents and environmental issues. We worked to address other key issues like reducing the number of teenage gangsters, promoting children to go to school, creating a charity box to help very poor students and students who have traffic accidents or fall sick,” said Reuy.

The disaster risk reduction plan developed by children and youth were also included in the commune investment plan. For example, they requested a water pumping machine for watering trees during the dry season and some school garbage bins for recycling.

“The Commune Investment Plan (CIP) process normally starts in June every year. Children and youth drafted their plan in advance. During the public consultation, they bring their plan to be integrated into the CIP for prioritization at the commune level. This process makes sure that DRR related activities from children and youth are considered and put into action,” says Ong Thearny, Plan’s DRR Project Officer.

18-year-old Kaung is the first deputy of the council. He says, “A Community pond was dug to store water for use during dry season because the community always face water shortage between June and August.”

Getting everyone’s support is not easy

Implementing the disaster risk reduction activities as well as disseminating information on how to reduce disaster risks is not an easy task at all, especially to gain support from everybody. “When we first started establishing the council, it was difficult to implement the activities. But we worked with the school principal, local authorities and school support committees so that they could help us. Now, we observe that many understand more about the roles of the Children’s Council and support us,” Kaung goes on.

“Another problem is that we do not have much time. We take some free time from our study to work on the Children’s Council activities. We are worried about the Children’s Council activities in the next year because members of the council change every year. So I requested the project on DRR and Child Rights Foundation to continue providing trainings to new members who have not been trained so that they understand their roles,” says Sophoeun.

School and local authorities have been very supportive to the council. Mr. Hong Eng Kaing, Principal at the High School told us, “ The Children’s Council was trained about their roles and responsibilities. Being part of the council gives children and youth opportunities to take up volunteer work

contributing to the development of their community, not only their school. I am really happy and support them.”

Sophoeun, the childrens council’s chairperson, is very pleased. “We learn about writing proposals, managing and reporting projects that address our concerns. We are so happy that our contribution is acknowledged by local authorities, NGOs as well as other children and youth and adults in our community.”

What’s next?

In the coming year, the Children’s Council will discuss better ways for spreading educational message through songs, poetry, drama performance, and similar activities. It will encourage more tree planting especially in the community. Comprehensive plans will be discussed and proposed for the commune investment plan.

The council will continue supporting tree nurseries and vegetable gardens in school. It will write proposals to rehabilitate a pond, run other activities, and to conduct exchange visits with support from NGOs and the government. It will ensure good maintenance of solar panel provided by Plan to the school.

What is needed now

Disasters can happen anytime and anywhere, not just in urban or remote areas. Every child and adult has to know and participate in reducing the risks. New knowledge related to the disaster risk is important for the Children’s Council. Good experiences to promote disaster risk and climate change awareness are also helpful for the council.

To do the work better, the children’s council really needs further support from the government and NGO as well as the private sector. The council has discussed ideas and prioritized the support and cooperation needed from these stakeholders. These are:

Local authorities and the government should:

- Continue to support and encourage the implementation of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation projects by the Children's council.
- Further listen to the voice of the Children's Council by considering and including our plans in the community investment and development plans.
- Increase the scope and speed of information spreading and alert system to get people ready for storms and flooding.
- Respond to the concerns raised by the Children's council.
- Prioritize matters or activities related to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should:

- Continue building the capacity of the children's council and the community on DRR and CCA.
- Support and encourage children and youth in DRR and CCA project implementations.
- Share new experiences and lessons learned with the Children's Council.

Private sector should:

- Lower the interest rate for loans when people encounter disasters.
- Provide special loan for buying seeds, lower than market price and allow longer duration to pay off the loans, like after harvesting the crops.
- Finance child and youth initiated public awareness raising activities, such as questions and answers and experience sharing on DRR and CCA through radio and TV at least one hour every day.

Every year, storms, drought, traffic accidents, animal diseases, house fires and lightning are common disaster risks in Srei Snam. Chanvannarith, 15, another member of the Children's Council, thinks that disaster is everyone's business. "When disaster occurs, it will not only affect one person. It destroys human and animal lives, houses, roads, and rice paddies. Children are like bamboo shoots and the pillars of the nation, so 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. What we want most from our activities are to prevent and

reduce these risks. We are involved in these activities and we learn from our work. We have both the knowledge and experience and we raise other people's awareness on disaster risk reduction," Chanvannarith says.

The Children's Council has sharpened their experiences and knowledge related to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. The different projects on DRR and CCA also give opportunities for the children and youth to work together to contribute positively to their own development, and the development of their family and community.

Children are like bamboo shoots and the pillars of the nation, so 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.



Rana acting in a play to make people aware of Disaster Risk Reduction

We can do it

Rana (boy studying in Class 11), from Jatrabari Slum Area, Dhaka, Bangladesh

My name is Rana and I am living in one of the Slum Areas in Jatrabari, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Now I am studying in class 11. I have been living in this area since my childhood.

Most of the houses of my living area are tin shed buildings. Four or maybe five houses are semi *paka*.⁽¹⁴⁾ The roads are narrow and fragile. The drainage system is not good. All the time, most of the drainage line is filled with waste and garbage. Here in our community there are five water tube wells which is very limited for the size of its population. Among the five wells, two are also damaged. In terms of occupation of the 200 households surrounding my living area, 98% of the people are cleaners who working at the City Corporation, the remaining 2% are rickshaw pullers.



Rana acting in a play to make people aware of Disaster Risk Reduction

What is the problem

The total population occupying this area is more than 12,000. Among the children, remarkably 50% are receiving an education; in contrast 50% are engaged in risky hazardous occupation.

Water logging is an inevitable problem in our community. After just a few minutes of rainfall, unbearable hazards are brought to this area. The main reason is improper drainage system. The drainage line is filled with waste most of the time and as a result even if there is just a little rain the water cannot go properly via the drainage and ultimately the water becomes logged. Due to water logging children, pregnant women and persons with disability cannot move properly, compelling women to stay in stranded conditions for several days. Students cannot go to school regularly. Another

problem associated with water logging is that most of the drainage lines and potholes in the road become covered up by the water pools, the holes cannot be seen and students fall into them, their reading materials become wet, and it can even pose a serious threat to their physical safety. People face frequent constraints to their movement. Skin diseases and water borne diseases like cholera and diarrhea are common and it affects most the children. Pregnant women are one of the most vulnerable groups during water logging.

Other remarkable hazards in our community are fire and floods. The most notable hazard which could affect us in the near future is an earthquake that could bring enormous damage.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Semi *paka* means the house is partly made of concrete/stone and partly made of mud mortar or tin sheets.



Rana acting in a play to make people aware of Disaster Risk Reduction

Our Actions

I started joining DRR activities in 2009. Mostly I have been involved in awareness activities such as drama, rallies, acting, participating in different meetings, and decorating walls with awareness messages. Through these activities I gained practical knowledge to reduce disaster risk.

I, together with other children, identified firstly the main hazards in our community by identifying and assessing the risk and

seeking possible solutions for the problems. For instance, the drains are not covered and people throw their home waste and garbage into them, which clogs them and causes water logging. Observing the situation, I along with others children and classmates arranged garbage basket for every house through local resources and made people aware about them so that they can use it. Now people became more aware and keep garbage in the basket and ultimately it reduces the frequency of water logging compare to the past. We also arranged several dialogues between government authorities and our community people so they now clean the drain regularly. We, the children and youth as well as the community people, work together to reduce the risk but people with disabilities are not engaged widely with us yet.

First, Plan Bangladesh under its Child Centered Disaster Risk Reduction programme inspired and supported us to do the activities. After that, we children worked along with our parents, older people, the Ward Disaster Management Committee, Community Development Forum, local Panchayat and other persons who also helped us regarding this, which made the work easy to do.

Challenges

I have faced different challenges while implementing the DRR activities, like when I went to people's houses to make them aware about using the garbage basket, they first ignored me because I was just a child.

We've seen a significant amount of personal property damage in the last floods of 2004 which hit around half the city's area mainly caused by spillover from surrounding rivers and rainfall that generates runoff beyond the capacity of the drains. It was inundated for the longest period of time, more than the other parts of the city. I remembered water provided by the central water supply system was found to be contaminated. Flood water mixed with sewage (due to the poor sanitation system) which gave birth to water borne diseases. Huge housing damage were reported during that period. The education system was highly disrupted as student could not attend schools. This was due to multiple reasons including the inundation of roads and school buildings, health problems, diseases and so on. Loss in the small business and trade sector was also severe. The persons with disability and adolescent girl face numerous problems in the shelter center because they have no separate facilities there. As a result they feel insecure.

As I mentioned before, most of the houses in our community are tin shaded and people generally use timber wood to cook food so fire is a common phenomenon here. In a fire, the furniture and sometimes the whole house burn down within a short time. A woman died because of a fire in our community.

My mother also first did not allow me to participate in the drama play but later she gave me permission when I and Community Development Forum members made her understand about the importance of the activity. Some people insulted me when I acted in the drama in the role of beggar. I faced challenges but there were also numerous positive sides.

The Government and NGOs should involve the children in more activities because children do many things but sometimes it is quite tough for them alone to implement things without the support of others.

What's next

Currently, I have been participating in different drama plays, meetings, trainings, rallies etc. and I believe that these activities are valuable because I make people aware about reducing disaster risk. My future plan for DRR is to form a local leaders

committee and work with their support and active participation.

Children can also do other important social works such as advocating for stopping child marriage, and for a drug free community, and inspire other children to go to school, stop sexual harassment and mockery.

I believe that the Government authority and NGOs have to work with us because we can do all the work together with support from them. Without this no work is properly complete.

The important lesson that I have learned from participating in the DRR activities is understanding about what makes the life of the community more vulnerable to earthquake, water logging, flood, and fire, and what are the necessary measures that should be taken before, during and after a disaster.

I have faced different challenges while implementing the DRR activities, like when I went to people's houses to make them aware about using the garbage basket, they first ignored me because I was just a child. [...] The Government and NGOs should involve the children in more activities because children do many things but sometimes it is quite tough for them alone to implement things without the support of others.

Our Community is Prepared for Disaster

Mithun (boy studying in Grade 9) in Secondary High School, Barguna District, Southern Coastal Area of Bangladesh

Acting in a community drama like this is great to raise awareness about household preparedness and early warning



Barguna situated in the coastal area of Bangladesh is well known for its disasters. Every year cyclones, storms and or heavy tidal surge affects the local people and damages their crops and property. The lack of awareness affects thousands of people every year, out of which one third are children.

I am Mithun from a village in Badarkhali Union of Barguna Sadar Upazila under Barguna District in the southern coastal area of Bangladesh. I am studying in class 9 at Secondary School. Most people in our Union are farmers and fishermen. Out of the 40,000 people living in this union 20,000 are children. Besides the Bish Khali River, there are many canals out of which flows the water during high and low tide. We are regularly dealing with disasters such as cyclone “Sidr” and “Ayla”. Due to water surges and the increase in the level of salt in the water, the farming community cannot cultivate crops. The lack of rainfall during the dry season is also hampering the crops and harvest.

Global warming is not only hampering the farmers but also affecting the breeding of fishes. As a result there are not enough fishes in the rivers and seas and because of this our fishermen are slowly moving towards other profession. As mentioned our union is situated beside a big river Bish Khali and in cases of heavy high tide, our flood embankment breaks down and our cultivating land and homestead gets flooded.

In the middle of 2011, I became involved in the disaster risk reduction programme of Plan Bangladesh implemented by South Asia Partnership (SAP) Bangladesh.

This programme involves children and youth participating in the community's risk assessment process and increasing awareness of communities on disaster risk reduction. I participated in rallies, acted in community dramas, and organized courtyard meetings for raising awareness of the community people on early warning and household preparedness. I also participated in our school disaster preparedness planning and received training on first aid, and other important life skill activities.

Due to the implementation of these awareness activities, the people in our area now know about early warning signals and how to their families can prepare for disasters. The families in our village have started to raise their houses above the water level, tied the roof of the houses and staked it to the ground, cutting the branches of the trees surrounding their houses. They are also keeping their important documents ready wrapped with plastic sheet, keeping stocks of dry food, candle and matches. They have made portable stoves and tied dry fire wood near the roof above the water level. I have noticed that people in the area are now more aware of assisting elderly people, pregnant women and disabled children and these people are no longer

neglected in the society because of the message we provided to them through awareness activities. People are paying more attention to their disaster preparedness needs.

I am not the only person involved in increasing awareness of the community people. The school children and locals are equally involved with this programme. We know that disaster risk management requires a lot of information and risk reduction actions by the community to reduce the risks in their areas. After considering my community's safety needs, I have decided to involve myself in this type of programme. It will be good if the government and non government organizations take steps to involve the youth in these kinds of work and provide them adequate training and support to continue doing such programme.

I would like to end by asking others to work together on disaster risk actions to minimize future damage in this disaster prone and deprived district.

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Keeping my Community safe from Disaster Risk

Amir, 14 year old boy from the Children's Organization & Slum Volunteer in Southern Part of Dhaka City, Bangladesh

I am Amir, 14 years old, a member of Children's Organization (CO) & Slum Volunteer of Pora Slum in Jatrabari, located at the southern part of Dhaka City, Bangladesh.

The total population of our community is 11,000. 90% are engaged as city cleaner and about 10% are rickshaw puller or day labourer. Only 50% of children from our community benefit from education opportunities. The remaining do not go to school due to extreme poverty, parents lack of awareness about the importance of education, and because they send their children to work for family income.

Now I am going to tell you the story of how I learnt the way to keep my community safe from disaster risk.

The risks in my community

Most of the houses in our community are built with tin roof and bamboo post and thatched walls. The roads in our area are in deplorable conditions and in need of repair and maintenance. Due to the fragile road condition and poor drainage systems the natural flow of water is disrupted resulting in water logging that affects the whole area.

The major disasters in our community are water logging, fire, flood, and most dangerous earthquake

which may smash the whole area within a few seconds. Water logging creates enormous problems for the people in our community. Cooking food becomes difficult because the wood is damp from the water logging. Children face difficulties going to school as their uniforms become wet and their books and exercise books are sometimes damaged, and our parents face numerous problems while going to work. During this period different types of skin diseases occur and spread quickly among the children. Water borne diseases like cholera and diarrhea is common due to unsafe drinking water. Persons with disability, children, old people and pregnant women are the most vulnerable.

My home area is very congested, with its narrow winding streets of wood, metal and low grade material and so if a fire event occurs it is very easy for the fire to spread within a short period. It is quite tough for the fire brigade to reach the location because of the narrow and congested road system. My area was completely destroyed by a fire outbreak in 1997 and partially destroyed again in 2010.



Flood is also common in my area. In 2004, about 60% of the capital city of Dhaka was flooded with waters polluted by sewage. Having no alternatives we went to a temporary flood shelter. A large number of people like my family took shelter there. Due to the lack of proper facilities women and children suffered a lot. People died as a result of disease because they had no access to safe clean water. It was the slum dwellers like us who live on poorly drained land that suffered the most. The most vulnerable during the 2004 flood were persons with disability and pregnant women.

Our success

From July 2009 I have been working on disaster risk reduction. After being trained as a fire service volunteer I helped save the life of Mr. Abdur, a disabled person, from a fire last year. This was only possible because I and 39 other slum volunteers got training on first aid and fire safety, which was organized by Plan Bangladesh from 20 to 22 December, 2011 and facilitated by experts from the Fire Service and Civil Defense.

I feel really proud of myself for taking part in that work. The participation of our children's group is worth mentioning. We are raising awareness of our friends, family and neighbours on DRR through drama, courtyard meetings, mock drills, distribution of posters and leaflets. Due to our awareness raising efforts the following changes are being observed in our community:

- In the past people did not drink boiled water but now they do not forget to boil the water for drinking.
- Earlier the people did not keep water and sand in their kitchen but now they always keep water and sand that reduce the possibility of fire going out of control.
- People now use garbage baskets to keep the waste in proper place which was completely unheard of 3-4 years ago
- Earlier the people did not know the emergency number of the Fire Service and Civil Defense but now everyone from children to elders know it by heart and can use it during emergency situation

The children's group also participated in the community's risk assessment process and mitigation planning along with the adults. Plan International Bangladesh has involved children in the DRR processes in our community as they know about the potential of children's participation in disaster management. We are no longer looked upon as passive victims but as active agents of change for our own well-being. The young girls and boys in our children's organization worked side by side with the community adults and the Ward Disaster Management Committee to identify the hazards and vulnerabilities and prepare an action plan for reducing our vulnerabilities. Seeing the performance and contribution of the children, one member from the children's volunteer group was later included in the Ward Disaster Management Committee.

The children and youths in our area grouped together and formed a Children's Organization and started to work on disaster risk reduction. Initially we faced obstacles and discouragement from our parents, neighbours and other community people but as we started to work, we were able to make them understand the importance of the activities we were doing in reducing the disaster risks through different awareness raising programmes. The people who obstructed and discouraged us have gradually changed their views and now support us in our work.

I decided to get involved in these activities when I came to realize that these activities will gradually help build the safety of our own community. I am now happy that I am part of the group that is bringing change in our community. I believe that girls and boys of other communities should also be involved with this kind of activity and build promote safety within their own community. We children cannot do some activities like deepening the drainage systems, but I think we can help our community representatives to advocate for this work with the relevant government departments and NGOs for reducing the disaster risks of our community.



Me and the other Slum Volunteers

For example we can form more children's organizations, initiate a community based approach to disaster risk reduction and advocate for a community based disaster fund.

A first test

An incidence of fire occurred on 12th January 2012 which didn't spread out more because our community knew how to respond to the fire. The community people keep buckets of water and sand handy in their kitchens for extinguishing fires. This has been possible only because of the slum volunteers like me who shared the awareness messages among the community people and we also support the victims through first aid as well as provided quick

information to Fire Service and Civil Defense about the fire incident.

It is now acknowledged by the older people in our community that we have special capacities to be independent, strong survivors who are capable of contributing to reducing disaster risk. I am now very happy to think that my contribution is for the wellbeing of my community. I now know what steps I can take for response, preparedness and mitigation to reduce disaster risks. Active participation of our groups in disaster risk reduction activities has enriched our knowledge and made us recognize our rights, raise our voice and enhanced our creative power. It made us active agent of change rather than passive victims.

The young girls and boys in our children's organization worked side by side with the community adults and the Ward Disaster Management Committee to identify the hazards and vulnerabilities and prepare an action plan for reducing our vulnerabilities. Seeing the performance and contribution of the children, one member from the children's volunteer group was later included in the Ward Disaster Management Committee.

Children's Charter on Disaster Risk Reduction

An action plan for disaster risk reduction for children by children

The five point Children's Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction has been developed through consultations with over 600 children from 21 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America and identifies children's priorities for Disaster Risk Reduction. It was launched at the Global Platform for DRR in Geneva in 2011.

1. Schools must be safe and education must not be interrupted

"I felt unhappy when I saw the school destroyed by the storm. I did not go to school because the school was destroyed. It happened at night and in the morning my friend and I went to school and found it had been destroyed." (child from Lao PDR).

2. Child protection must be a priority before, during and after a disaster

"We do not feel protected by anyone in our community" child from Mozambique. In India, children suggested training in life-skills which they feel would "enable them to protect themselves from risks and troubles" and that they be provided special care when they are traumatised by disasters. "We should be treated with dignity during emergencies and should take protective measures to mitigate/stop physical and sexual abuse".

3. Children have the right to participate and to access the information they need

"I am part of the Emergency Committee that has been created in the community. Our goal is to reduce the disaster risk by implementing the principles of the Community Emergency Plan." (child from Dominican Republic).

4. Community infrastructure must be safe, and relief and reconstruction must help reduce future risk

"Build bridges because every year children miss school in the rainy season when they have to cross gullies, rivers and water channels huge enough to drown them." (child from Lesotho)

5. Disaster Risk Reduction must reach the most vulnerable

"In my area, there were three children about 4-5 years old. Once they went on the river dyke to avoid the flood water which could make them wet on the street, but they slipped and fell in the river and were drowned because they could not swim." (child from Philippines) "To me, there is a big difference because many disabled children are not treated properly by providing them the necessary information since they are not being taken into account due to the fact of being disabled." (child from the Philippines)

Resources

Useful documents and links on child-centered DRR.

Children in a Changing Climate Coalition

- Children's Charter for disaster risk reduction:
<http://plan-international.org/about-plan/resources/publications/emergencies/childrens-charter-for-disaster-risk-reduction>
- Children in a Changing Climate Coalition:
<http://www.childreninachangingclimate.org>

Plan International

- Climate Extreme: How young people can respond to disasters in a changing world:
<http://plan-international.org/about-plan/resources/publications/emergencies/climate-extreme-how-young-people-can-respond-to-disasters-in-a-changing-world/>
- Child-Centered Disaster Risk Reduction: Building resilience through participation:
<http://plan-international.org/about-plan/resources/publications/emergencies/child-centred-disaster-risk-reduction-building-resilience-through-participation>
- Plan's Child-Centered Disaster Risk Reduction Toolkit:
<http://plan-international.org/about-plan/resources/publications/emergencies/plans-child-centred-disaster-risk-reduction-toolkit>

UNISDR

- Riskland Game
<http://www.unisdr.org/2004/campaign/pa-camp04-riskland-eng.htm>
- Stop Disaster Online Game
<http://www.stopdisastersgame.org/en/information.html>
- Library of Education material on DRR on Preventionweb
<http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/trainings-events/edu-materials/?tid=36>

Save the Children

- Child-led Disaster Risk Reduction: A practical guide
<http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/trainings-events/edu-materials/v.php?id=3820>

UNICEF

- UNICEF and Disaster Risk Reduction
http://www.unicef.org/files/DDR_final.pdf

IFRC

- Children in disasters - games and guidelines to engage youth in risk reduction
<http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/publications/v.php?id=16726>
- Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre Games and Exercises on Climate change
<http://www.climatecentre.org/site/games-exercises>



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