

Putting Children at the Heart of Disaster Risk Reduction



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Child-Centred DRR Means Putting Children at the Heart of DRR

UNICEF's child-centred approach to DRR encompasses all activities for children and with children aiming to empower them through participation, addressing their vulnerabilities and protecting their rights in order to reduce disaster risk and climate change impact on their lives and development.

Why Child-Centred DRR?

The number of children in South Asia is approximately 614 million, nearly 28% of the total number worldwide (SAARC, 2011). Out of these an estimated 372 millions live in India (60% of the total South Asia child population). Children typically

represent 50-60% of disaster victims, which means they are disproportionately affected by disaster risk. Children's rights to food, shelter, education and protection are compromised. Schools are often used as temporary shelters, depriving children of learning spaces. Globally the number of children affected by weather-related hazards is increasing: from 67 million per year in the late 2000s to an estimated 175 million per year in the late 2010s (Save the Children, 2007). Children – not adults – will feel the full force of climate change and related increased risk of disasters.

Child-centred DRR has the potential to reduce the impacts of disaster risk on early childhood. Child-centred DRR uses a rights-based approach. It works with rights-holders (children) and duty bearers (parents, communities, service providers and governments) and aims at strengthening accountability mechanisms by improving information flows and exchange, thus enhancing transparency and contributing to capacity development. The Convention on the Rights of the Child – signed by all countries in Asia-Pacific – and child-centred DRR are mutually reinforcing.



Courtesy: UNICEF India.

With regard to climate-related hazards, inter-generational justice can be achieved through child-centred DRR. Since children will live long enough to experience the full force of climate change, their views and actions are key.

Policy support for child-centred DRR has increased in the past years. *The Ahmedabad Action Agenda for School Safety (2007)*, *the Bangkok Action Agenda for School Education and DRR (2007)*, *the Islamabad Declaration for Safer School Construction (2008)*, *the Incheon Declaration (2010)* and *Beijing Declaration on South-South Cooperation for Child Rights in Asia-Pacific (2010)* are strong policy documents bringing forward the concerns of impact of disaster on children and reinforcing the need of a child-centred approach to prevention and mitigation.

What is Child-Centred DRR?

Various agencies (Action Aid, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, Plan International, Save the Children and World Vision) have played important roles in developing and pioneering child-centred DRR approaches. According to Plan International, child-centred DRR combines child-focused DRR (for children) and child-led DRR (by children). It acknowledges that adults have a responsibility to implement child-focused DRR to support child-centred DRR. *"Child-centred DRR is an innovative approach to DRR that fosters the agency of children and youth, in groups and as individuals, to work towards making their lives safer and their communities more resilient to disasters. It is empowering for children, and respectful of their views and rights as well as their vulnerabilities"* (Plan International, 2010). *"Child-centred DRR means putting children at the heart of the DRR activities – recognising the specific vulnerabilities children face from disasters, which differ to those faced by adults, and ensuring children are appropriately planned for and addressed*



Play by Girls of Darbhanga on Girl Child Participation in Disaster Risk Reduction.

in DRR programs and policies" (Save the Children, 2011). Contrary to the popular image of children as helpless victims, child-centred DRR stresses the capacities of children and gives priority to child participation as enshrined in Article 12 of the CRC. Child-based DRR relies on participatory and skills-based approaches, which help children reach their full potential according to their development stage, as disaster risk and climate change impact on children has to be viewed and analysed in reference to their age and gender. Inclusive DRR must give all children – irrespective of age, sex, ethnicity, language and disabilities – equal opportunity to participate. Children can motivate adults to do things they cannot do alone. However, not all issues can or should be addressed by children. There are good reasons for example why UNICEF doesn't pursue child-led immunisation or child-led seismic assessments of schools.

How can children be agents for change?

Children become less vulnerable by learning practical life-saving skills

such as first aid, swimming lessons, tree climbing, hygiene promotion and disease prevention. Children become empowered individuals when community-based interventions address issues that directly relate to their lives. This is the case with regard to climate change, reforestation, recycling, tree planting and environmental campaigns. Participatory learning, through theatre, song, games, competitions, documentaries and other community-events (i.e. public meetings or debates) can be effective ways of enhancing awareness and mobilising communities to work together on DRR. NGOs have successfully integrated child-centred DRR with community-based DRR and shown how children have unique perspectives on risks, are effective risk communicators, and can mobilise preventive action in their own communities. Apart from the immediate benefits in target communities and in children's lives, child-centred DRR is a long-term investment in the adults of tomorrow. ■

– Margarita Tileva
Chief Emergency, UNICEF India

The Role of India's National and State Governments in Promoting Child Rights and Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction

India's national and state governments have a wide range of responsibilities to children pursuant to the country's Constitution, international human rights treaties (foremost among these being the International Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989), and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia. They are obligated to uphold the child's right to life, support his or her overall development and well-being, ensure that he or she receives a basic education, protect the child from harmful influences, abuse, and exploitation, and involve him or her in community life. To this end both levels of government have enacted a number of laws, policies and schemes to protect children, such as the National Policy for Children 1974, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012, and the Integrated Child Development Scheme.

The general wording of these instruments entail that they would apply to any situation where there is some sort of deficit or compromise in children's welfare, or a breach or risk of breach in child's rights. In the disaster context, they would apply before disasters where the child's well-being is being negatively affected by his or her surrounding environment, they would apply during disasters where children are enduring severe hardships like no access to clean water or proper

shelter, and they would apply after disasters i.e. the relief, recovery and rehabilitation phases, where children are in critical need of an environment which supports their short and long-term survival. Particular regard needs to be given to child rights for, as was stated in the Preamble of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, 'the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth'.

Within the disaster management sphere however, there has been very little recognition and incorporation of these principles. At the national level, the Central Government's National Disaster Management Act 2005, the nation's overarching disaster management framework, does not include any references to vulnerable groups, not to mention children, while the accompanying National Disaster Management Policy 2009 subsumes children under its general considerations for vulnerable groups. The same situation exists in individual states (for instance, Odisha's Orissa State Disaster Management Policy does not include children) and internationally. Indeed, the international blueprint for disaster risk reduction, the Hyogo Framework of Action 2005-2015, only states that there should be disaster risk reduction education programmes, child-friendly recovery schemes, and strengthened social safety-net mechanisms.¹

Such under-recognition of child rights can be attributed to a number of factors, namely:

- A long-standing common, yet erroneous assumption, that children are not affected by disasters.
- Inadequate research and poor understanding of children's needs, vulnerabilities and experiences of disasters.
- Children traditionally occupy a low position in society, are typically ignored, and lack the power to voice their concerns.
- Poor understanding of child rights and responsibilities owed to children.
- Poor understanding that child rights apply to all situations including disasters.

There is an urgent need to address this situation as due to their age and unique developmental needs, children are especially vulnerable to disasters. Infants and young children have limited mobility, fewer self-defensive capabilities and specific nutritional requirements. Older children and adolescents are at risk of malnutrition, disease, injury, death, human trafficking, and abuse; they are also prone to developing behavioural, psychological and emotional problems following disasters. Recent disasters in India highlighted this fact - in Assam, around half of the two million people affected by the 2012 floods were children, and in the 2010 Leh cloudburst/floods, 5000 children

¹ Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters s 13 (e)

i.e. 40% of the disaster victims, bore its brunt. It is most alarming that within the South-Asia region alone, 70% of all populations affected by disasters are children.

India's national and state governments can take a number of steps to incorporate child-centred disaster risk reduction into their disaster management frameworks, as well as those frameworks which are relevant to children. Some suggested measures are:

- Create new, or modify existing disaster management legislation, policies, schemes and programmes so that they include child rights considerations.
- Carry out child rights advocacy and education campaigns for all department officials, the general public, and all those who work in disasters and community development.
- Strengthen the implementation of government schemes and policies at the ground level e.g. develop accountability mechanisms, commit more resources.
- Establish well-integrated, well-coordinated institutional structures at the district, state, and national levels to promote effective child rights governance in disaster situations
- Create mechanisms at the district, state and national levels to facilitate child participation in disaster management and child rights issues.

Before any of these steps can be taken however, both levels of government need to commit themselves to the ideal of protecting child rights. For without commitment, there can be no vision, and without vision, there can be no action. ■

- Hui Chi Goh

EVENT

Promoting Child Rights and Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction at the Policy Level



Launch of state platform for children participation in disaster risk reduction on December 5, 2012 in Bihar.

The All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), a long-standing proponent of child rights and child-centred disaster risk reduction, has continuously carried out a wide range of advocacy activities. At the end of 2011, together with UNICEF, Plan International, SEEDS and Save the Children, AIDMI launched the Children's Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction at the National Platform on Children and Disaster Risk Reduction in New Delhi, India. This had been developed following consultations with school students.

In the Charter, the children called for leadership opportunities to build a safer world. Together with governments and civil society organisations, the children pledged their commitment to create an environment which empowers children to participate, lead, and exercise their rights enshrined in the International Convention on Child Rights. They also urged India's policy-makers to incorporate child-centred disaster risk reduction into the National Policy for Children 1974, the National Disaster Management Act 2005, the National Disaster Management Policy 2009, and disaster management guidelines.

Encouraged by the high success of this event, AIDMI is now working with the National Disaster Management Authority, UNICEF, and other organisations to launch similar child rights and child-centred disaster risk reduction platforms in other states of India. The first was held in Bihar on December 5, 2012. ■

- Vandana Chauhan with Hui Chi Goh

Emergency Management Exercises as Tools for Developing Child-Centred Disaster Management Plans

Emergency Management Exercises (EMEx) are a week-long series of trainings and workshops designed to explore and strengthen the emergency response systems in India's disaster-prone cities. They bring together a variety of actors in disaster and emergency management – regional emergency responders, education institutions, hospitals, health professionals, humanitarian agencies, government departments, non-government organisations, civil society organisations and professionals from emergency management-related fields – to assess the cities' disaster preparedness and resilience, acquire new skills for

emergency management and mass casualty events, and to develop a multi-disciplinary, inter-stakeholder, coordinated response to emergencies

EMExes were initiated to address the unpreparedness and unawareness of India's cities to the ever-increasing risk of disasters. Such risks have arisen due to factors like rapid urbanisation, overcrowding in informal settlements, accelerated population growth, the lack of basic services and infrastructure, poor planning, weak building controls, environment degradation, and high urban poverty. They were also conceived to develop a greater

appreciation of the nature of urban disasters and risks (which are quite different to the ones which arise in a rural context) amongst all stakeholders.

EMExes are the latest installment in a series of successful emergency training initiatives devised by the United Nations Disaster Management Team (UNDMT) in conjunction with the National Knowledge Commission of India, the University of Mumbai, the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), and the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. These were: training courses in disasters and mock drills for the Ahmedabad Civil Hospital (2007), a conference in emergency medicine (2007, organised jointly with the New York-Presbyterian Hospital and Hinduja Hospital), and Project Mumbai Voices (an on-going project organised since 2006 to collect the voices of survivors from terrorism incidents in Mumbai).

So far, EMExes have been held in India's most disaster-prone cities - Mumbai (2008, 2010), Chennai (2011), Delhi (2012), and most recently, Guwahati. Their activities consist of training courses covering a range of emergency management skills, such as advanced life support, triage, and emergency hospital management, a table-top exercise where all the participants had to develop responses to simulated scenarios, and a mass mock field-drill. The Guwahati Emergency Management Exercise (GEMEx), held from 29 October 2012 to 4 November 2012 was unique as for the first time, upon the instigation of UNICEF and AIDMI, more than 60



Children are learning to operate fire extinguishers in Assam.

children from local schools participated in the event and responded extremely positively. Jenefar Rabha, a 9th standard student from Holy Child Higher Secondary School, Guwahati, stated for instance:

"I learned to handle fire extinguishers. How to deal with fire was the most important part in disaster response that had been taught to us. The sessions were very interesting and helped [us] to understand the problems associated with disasters. What I learnt today was very knowledgeable. It helped me to have practical experience. I got to know how the Police and Medical team respond to disasters. It was a wonderful experience being part of it."

Reshma Khatun, another student from the same school, said:

"I learnt what to do and how to act in a disaster situation. We need to save ourselves so that we can save others. We became [mock] victims so as to be able to judge how and what the Doctors do in such a situation. Whether hospitals are prepared or not. When we visited the hospital, they treated us very nicely and we are proud of them."

Other student attendees spoke of how they enjoyed the live demonstrations, the opportunity to meet with international experts, and their exposure to how the police, fire, and medical services worked. For the organisers though, the most rewarding moment was when the students said that they now knew how to respond and prepare themselves for disaster situations.

The GEMEx experience shows that EMExes are an ideal forum for building the capacities of schools, staff and students in a highly interactive, participatory, multi-stakeholder, and community-based environment. One important feature



Children in Assam are practicing a mock-drill on Earthquake.

is that unlike conventional school safety/disaster preparedness training sessions which are based solely on the campus, GEMEx/EMEx trainings for staff and students take place within the wider community, thus allowing participants to understand how their city's emergency management system works, and how their role and actions fit into it. Another critical feature is that by highlighting the roles schools, teachers, and students can play in a city's emergency response, policy-makers, emergency response managers, emergency management planners, government authorities, and institutions/organisations involved in emergency-related fields, can gain insights into how children and child-protection concerns should

be factored into disaster management plans and actions.

EMExes are therefore much-needed context-setters. They are mechanisms for fostering collaboration and well-functioning communication channels amongst stakeholders. They are a means for building communities. They are tools for identifying strengths and weaknesses in emergency management; they are tools for strengthening and making cities more resilient, for enabling cities to 'build back better'. Most importantly, they are a step towards achieving child-centred disaster risk reduction and achieving the goal of protecting child rights. ■

- Vandana Chauhan with
Sanchit Oza

Advancing Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction in Guwahati, Assam



Our participation is important while Emergency Management Exercise is being conducted.

For more than a decade, the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) has been at the forefront of promoting child rights and school safety in India. In 2001 it launched a national school safety campaign and has since taught over 900 schools across the nation basic disaster risk reduction strategies and school safety principles. This number continues to grow by the day. AIDMI also works closely with local and international partners, such as UNICEF and Save the Children, to carry out child rights advocacy activities and implement child-centred disaster risk reduction measures.

AIDMI was a key partner in the Guwahati Emergency Management Exercise 2012 (GEMEx). It facilitated the school and higher education training tracks and worked with UNICEF, the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), the National Disaster Management Authority, and other GEMEx organisers, to include children in the table-top exercise and mock field-drill.

The GEMEx school and higher education preparedness training

courses were preceded by a preparatory workshop conducted by AIDMI and the ASDMA. Held on 19 and 20 October 2012, the 'Preparatory Workshop on Disaster Preparedness for School Safety' was a continuation of previous training sessions on developing school disaster management plans and conducting mock drills. Participants had to finalise their School Disaster Management Plans so that they could be discussed and refined at the workshop. 23 individuals from 13 schools in the Kamrup (metropolitan) district attended the workshop.

The preparatory workshop gave participants an idea of what to expect from the GEMEx and time to consider what issues they wanted to discuss. The GEMEx school (29 to 31 October 2012) and higher education preparedness (31 October to 1 November 2012) training tracks were attended by school teachers, students, and higher education administrators from local schools and colleges. They learned about basic disaster risk reduction concepts, school insurance, and psychosocial assistance during

disasters. They also gained a whole range of practical skills in developing school/education institution-based emergency responses, such as conducting safety audits, using fire extinguishers, carrying out Hazard Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments, developing disaster management plans, and holding mock drills. All the attendees also took part in the mass mock drill, whereby they had to simulate their response to an earthquake and terrorist attack.

The participants responded extremely positively to the training sessions and developed a number of follow-up activities for their schools/education institutions. Students in particular were very enthusiastic, participating with much vigour in the fire extinguisher demonstrations and asked the trainers many questions. Similarly, in the field-drill, the students commented that they now knew how to respond to disasters, understood the roles various emergency responders play in a crisis, and wanted to be more actively involved in their school's and community's disaster response.

For AIDMI, the GEMEx has demonstrated that just as having child-centred disaster risk reduction measures and developing awareness in child rights are extremely important, it is equally critical to ensure that children themselves are involved in child-centred activities. Children can not be seen as passive individuals. As their enthusiasm and eagerness to learn showed, children must be regarded as vast stores of energy and ideas who have the capacity to become agents of change in their communities and schools. ■

- Sanchit Oza with
Vishal Pathak

Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction and Child Rights

In India, many NGOs, civil society organisations, humanitarian agencies, and the disaster-affected victims themselves, have successfully implemented child safety, child-centred disaster risk reduction and child rights measures. In the Ego village of Leh, the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) and its local partner, the Centre for Sustainable Development and Food Security, used a whole-of-the-community participatory approach to rebuild a school which had been severely damaged by the 2010 Leh cloudburst and flash floods, thus ensuring that children have the right to safe uninterrupted education. In the frequently flooded state of Bihar, Save the Children established Child-centred Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction programmes in 100 villages. Its key features included children's groups, Child Protection Committees, Child Friendly Spaces, and school safety.

Similarly across the Asia-Pacific region, there are many examples of good child rights initiatives. The Centre for Disaster Preparedness in the Philippines used singing and other creative activities to train and

stimulate children's interests in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation measures, while in Indonesia, organisations from the Netherlands-based alliance 'Partners for Resilience' developed a 'bio-rights' approach to integrate climate change adaptation, ecosystem management and restoration, and disaster risk reduction methods together. It was hoped that this approach would significantly improve disaster resilience and enable children to live in a safer, healthier environment.

Currently information about successful initiatives such as these are primarily contained within isolated reports and articles, many of which may never see the light of day. The experiences of those who implemented them also for the most part remain undocumented. This situation urgently needs to be addressed as better knowledge about successful measures, both local and international, can reduce duplicity in efforts, increase the effectiveness of present and future measures adopted, promote greater collaboration, conserve limited resources, and improve disaster management and

child rights protection approaches as a whole. Learning from overseas can also help promote cross-cultural learning and understanding.

Local Development Academies ('LDAs', formerly known as Citizenry-based Development Academies) can be a useful forum for facilitating solution exchanges, learning, networking, knowledge-sharing, collaborative work relationships and cross-cultural dialogue. Established in 2010 by the United Nations Special Unit for South-South Cooperation (UNSUSC) in partnership with local and national organisations, LDAs draw together community members, field practitioners and community-based organisations from across the Asia-Pacific region to share and discuss their successes, challenges and lessons learned on specific disaster management issues, such as the recovery from the 2001 earthquake in Bhuj, India, and citizenry-based development-oriented disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation initiatives. Their highly interactive, discussion-oriented and case study-based approach makes LDAs an ideal place to showcase best



Policy makers and practitioners are planning on how to make children safer.



Role of youths in disaster risk reduction must be defined.

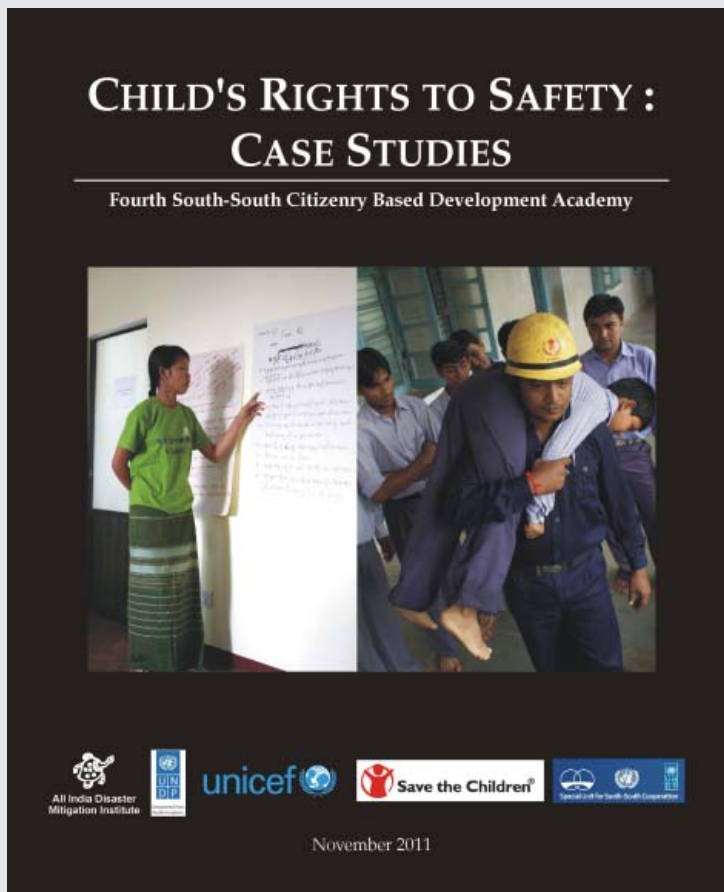
practices, meet people from a diverse range of cultural and professional backgrounds, and to exchange ideas.

The 2011 LDA was convened specifically on the child's right to safety and was organised by the UNSUSSC, AIDMI, UNICEF, Save the Children and the United Nations Development Programme. Held from 28 to 30 November 2011 in New Delhi, India, it was attended by around 53 participants who were all disaster management and community development professionals, and who had extensive experience in working with children. Introductory speeches on child rights by Mrs. Zenaïda Delica-Willison (UNSUSSC), Mr. Mihir Bhatt (AIDMI), Dr. Muzaffar Ahmad (NDMA), Ms. Margarita Tileva (UNICEF India) and Mr. Ray Kancharla (Save the Children) set the background context, while presentations from the participants (of whom about a third came from other Asia-Pacific countries) on their organisations' child safety initiatives gave many insights into the diverse range of methods which can be used to protect children. The LDA also featured student presentations on school safety audits in Odisha and their experiences of learning about disaster risk reduction methods in Bihar.

The LDA was important for highlighting the fact that children must actively participate and be continuously engaged in disaster risk reduction activities. It was also important for showing that the child's right to safety is a right which feeds into broader issues of quality education, non-discrimination, proper health services, sustainable development, child labour, migration, civic participation and climate change. It intersects with social, political and economic issues at the local, national and even transnational level. Yet perhaps its most valuable aspect was that by showing what worked and what did not, those working with children could gain an idea of what actions they must take to further their work. ■ - Vandana Chauhan

KNOWLEDGE RESOURCE

Child's Right to Safety: Case Studies from the Local Development Academy November 28–30, 2011 Handbook



At the end of December 2011, the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute published a handbook featuring all the case studies which were presented at the 2011 Local Development Academy on the Child's Right to Safety in New Delhi, India.

The case studies were arranged according to three main themes: school safety initiatives, community-based child safety initiatives, and ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction initiatives. Each thematic section would be preceded by a background note explaining the context, introducing the case studies, and highlighting their key points. For each study, there would also be a 'key facts' box summarising the child rights issues being addressed and the methodology used to do so.

By consolidating the case studies together, LDA participants as well as all those who work with children would have a reference point for developing further child rights and child-centred disaster risk reduction programmes. The handbook also provides a useful method for recording and sharing the experiences from the LDA. ■

Launch of State Platform for Children in Bihar

Bihar is a special state of India, not only now but for the past two thousand years. And the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) has realised this in its work with the people of Bihar since 2007. The communities in Bihar know the risks, are eager to find a way out, and are focused on the process and results of reducing disaster risks. This is AIDMI's direct experience with communities. This is not only true when the AIDMI team is in Bihar, but also when communities from Bihar come to join AIDMI's work in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu and participate in community-to-community interactive activities to learn about disaster risk reduction. There is indeed something special about communities in Bihar.

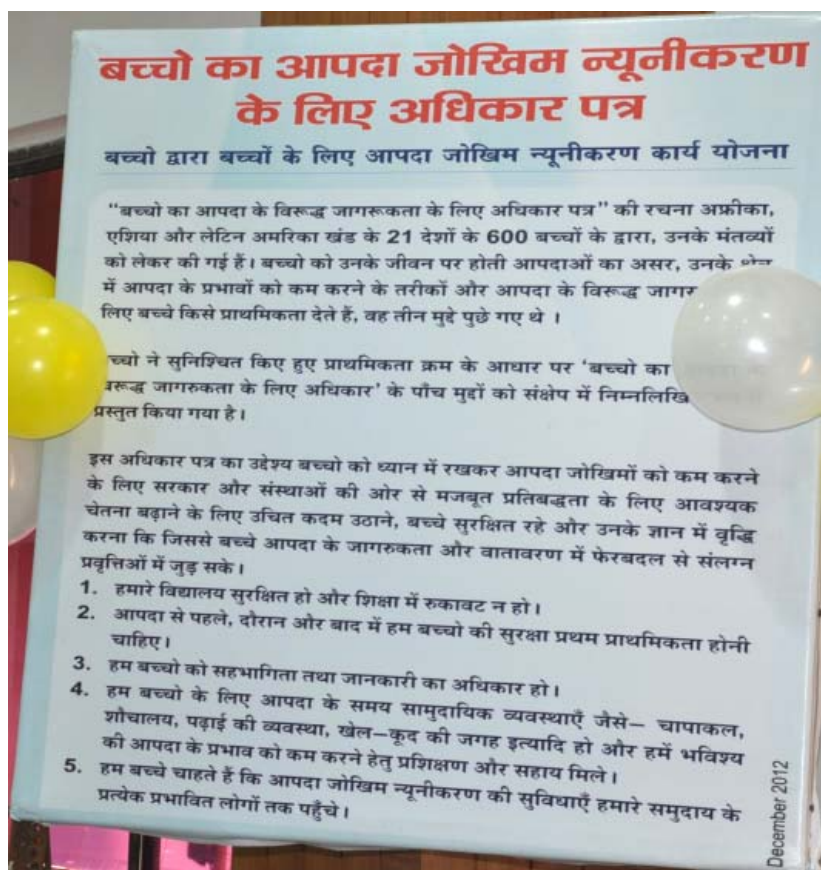
The launch of the platform for and of children in Bihar on 5 December 2012 builds on the above realisation. The children not only represent the above-mentioned strengths of Bihar's communities but also show their great potential for making disaster risk reduction a day-to-day reality in Bihar.

The platform must develop its own agenda for the short-term and set the overall vision. The agenda must come from the children. AIDMI has learned from Save the Children's good work in Bihar that children are able to set agendas which are both realistic and relevant. AIDMI has found from its work on District Disaster Management Plans with Caritas India in Bihar that it is not easy to

institutionalise child-centred disaster risk reduction. This is mostly because the children have limited voices. The children have limited resources. The children have limited opportunities. AIDMI's city-wide mock drills with UNICEF in Guwahati, Chennai and Mumbai have clearly shown that institutionalising child-centred disaster risk reduction needs planning, preparation and direct and long contact with children. And this is not easy. But what is easy is receiving the instant interest of children in building disaster resilience of vulnerable communities. AIDMI's work with Concern Worldwide India in Odisha and West Bengal with ECHO's support has shown how eager children are to creatively address risk issues. As Leena Sarabhai, a leading educationist who pioneered 'open education' for children in India since 1948 said, 'Let us learn from children'. The children have a lot to offer.

AIDMI aims to see more girl children in this platform and would be delighted if the platform is run under the leadership of girls. AIDMI aims to see more children from poor communities in Bihar on this platform and would be delighted to see that the platform aims at basic issues of protecting children's food, water, health, sanitation, and education from disasters. This platform is a small step towards Disaster Risk Reduction but a big leap ahead towards a safer Bihar.

Edited presentation at the launch of the Children's Platform in Bihar with the Bihar Inter-Agency Group, the Bihar State Disaster Management Authority and UNICEF on December 5, 2012. ■ - Mihir R. Bhatt



Launch of State Platform for Children Participation in DRR in Bihar



Policy makers in Bihar are taking pledge to ensure Children Safety and their Rights to Safety.



Children are discussing way ahead of state platform for children participation in DRR.



Children of Bihar are signing Children's Charter.

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