

# Children, Disasters and Cities of India



Photo: AIDMI.

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- The HFA2, to be adopted in March 2015 is expected to address the challenges of DRR for the next 20-30 years.
- An important consideration for the HFA2 is to address the exigencies of school safety which is pivotal for building the resilience of children against disasters.
- In the coming future the scope of school safety should be comprehensive and should cover the three pillars of school facilities, school disaster management and disaster prevention along with risk reduction education.

#### The Road Ahead

The HFA-2 offers a window of opportunity for comprehensive approach of school safety and to build on the past school safety interventions.

- The scope of school safety should be comprehensive and cover three main pillars: safe school facilities, school disaster management, and disaster prevention and risk reduction education (UNISDR, 2012).
- School safety shall be led by the Education ministry/ departments and the Disaster management ministry/ department shall play a support

role as education ministry/ department has systems and procedures to reach all schools. Also, school safety will help the ministry to fulfill its commitment of the right to education and the right to safety (ADPC, 2007).

- There is a need to develop or modify the database of schools and it should track the school safety on various parameters of all three pillars. These parameters should be at input as well as output/outcome level: the input level indicators include Development of school disaster management plan, Multi-hazard

resistant school buildings and DRR in school curriculum. The output/outcome level indicators include the number of schools damaged/destroyed due to disasters, the number of students injured due to disasters in the school premises and the number of days schools closed due to disasters (ADPC, 2014). ■

– Sudhir Kumar\*

\* He is a DRR Specialist with Papua New Guinea, UNDP. He has worked on school safety in India, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand.

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#### NEW PERSPECTIVES

## Why do Small Disasters Matter too for Children Living in Cities?

The fate of children in disasters has received considerable academic and policy attention over the past decade (e.g. Anderson, 2005; Wisner, 2006). However, most of this attention has focused on large events associated with rare and extreme natural and other hazards, including their impact on children's daily lives and access to education in cities. Much less interest has been given to small and more frequent disasters although increasing evidence suggests their significant impact on societies at large (United Nations

International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2009). Recent research conducted in Metro Manila in the Philippines points to similar cumulative and lingering effects on children's education (Gaillard et al., 2014).

Metro Manila is the National Capital Region of the Philippines and home to more than 12 million people, including more than 3 million youth between 5 and 24 years old, regularly attending school. The region has 518 public elementary schools and 251

public high schools<sup>1</sup>. Thirty four percent of these public schools are exposed to flood hazard, thus posing a significant threat to the education of more than 700,000 pupils. Flood hazard consists of two types of flooding: 1/ short but frequently recurrent small floods associated with continuous rain and tidal fluctuations, and 2/ larger and longer events triggered by cyclones or severe monsoon episodes that may also occur several times per year.

The impact of large floods for children is immense as these events damage school facilities and equipment, while access to education is often compromised because of the improper use of schools as evacuation centres. However, the cumulative effects of recurring small floods are similarly significant. In some coastal areas, the number of days of absence of pupils due to small events is close or higher than the number of absences associated with large flooding episodes. Although classes are not usually formally suspended, high tide events and frequent but relatively minor river overflows cause reductions in attendance due to unsafe access to and frequent health problems which force them to stay at home. In addition, recurrent small floods have a lingering harmful impact on school facilities, equipment and learning materials.

In Metro Manila and elsewhere in the Philippines, the impact of flooding on children and the education sector has stirred significant attention from local and national governments, NGOs and the private sector which have designed specific policies and response mechanisms (Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, 2010). However, both policies and response operations are based upon and activated following large-scale events which lead to suspension of classes. Recurrent small events which do not require official suspension of classes therefore go unnoticed in

spite of their cumulative and lingering impact on children and their access to education.

In this context of institutional neglect, initiatives to overcome the impact of small floods emerge from school communities directly confronting these problems. In Metro Manila, for example, this includes the *Regional Emergency Disaster Response Association* (REDIRA) of school personnel identified as focal points for risk reduction and disaster management activities, as well as the volunteer and collaborative actions of students', teachers' and parents-teachers associations. Where encouraged, these leaders initiate measures for risk reduction, preparedness and educational continuity. They also facilitate the exchange of information and sharing of resources for quicker post-flood recovery. In fact, they often find alternative solutions, such as donation campaigns, to replace damaged school facilities and learning materials without much relying on government aid. Yet, in the absence of systematic support these local initiatives often prove insufficient.

It is increasingly important that education sector disaster risk management is conceptualised to support participatory, school-based engagement in risk reduction, preparedness, disaster management and educational continuity planning in response to all sizes and manner

of threats to children's well-being and education. Research and policy attention to small-scale floods and any other hazards that disrupt education is of concern for cities everywhere. This should begin with measuring hazard-related disparities in children's access to the normative number of school days and teacher-student contact hours. Policy attention should be particularly given to constructing schools to be safe and accessible, not only from rare and extreme events but also from small and frequent hazards. These hitherto neglected events pose a threat to children's rights to safety and development. Will the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction embrace these ideas? ■

- **JC Gaillard**, The University of Auckland, New Zealand; **Marla Petal**, Save the Children Australia; **Jake Rom D. Cadag** and **Emmanuel M. Luna**, University of the Philippines Diliman; **Lourdes L. Pambid**, Save the Children Philippines

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- Despite receiving attention during and after disasters, the fate of children suffers from being neglected in the face of small disasters.
- Small scale disasters can also tend to have an adverse impact on children's education and well being.
- These impacts are cumulative and lingering and result in as much loss of education in terms of missed classes and health risks as caused by large scale disasters.
- To address this challenge, in Metro Manila an initiative called REDIRA has been launched to overcome the institutional neglect suffered by children during small scale disasters.

# Floods in Kashmir: Impact on Children



Photo credits: Charlotte Ulenberg, MSF.

MSF Clinical Psychologist giving information on Mental Health and Floods.

The unexpected catastrophe that hit Kashmir in September 2014 left a trail of destruction. The floods killed hundreds, left thousands homeless and bruised the psyche of millions. Natural disasters like such usually leave an impact on the psychology of the victims and no age group is immune to its trauma and consequences. Children, in particular, are a vulnerable group. A traumatic experience often disrupts their family world, including people, places and routines that otherwise give structure to their lives and normally make them feel secure.

How children perceive a crisis situation depends on their age and developmental stage which further differentiates their reactions from the reactions of adults. Children may find it hard to anticipate events like danger, may not (fully) understand what is happening around them and may find it difficult to understand or express their emotions. Common reactions of children exposed to a traumatic event include disturbances in sleep and appetite, stomach cramps and headache, irritability, temper tantrums, flashbacks of the event, feelings of insecurity and dependent behaviors, especially when separated

from their caregivers. Children already suffering from a psychiatric disorder are put at a higher risk of relapse or might experience an intensification of their existing symptoms.

Traumatic events can also have a negative impact on the learning process of children. As children often exhibit problems in concentration following a horrific event that they can't stop thinking about, they may experience a decline in grades or even a decline in IQ<sup>1</sup>. Their apprehension about handling exam and everyday stress at school could result in disinterest in school activities and more days of absence. Friendships may also get disrupted as a result of family relocations, which can cause a feeling of loss to children and can hinder with their adjustment at school.

There are many ways in which different caregivers can help a child cope with these situations. Teachers can encourage children to share or talk about their experience of disaster related events in a safe and accepting environment by organising activities like drawing, stories and music.

Parents play a crucial role in modulating children's reactions by their way of handling. They can provide a secure environment for children to deal with their insecurities by comforting them and remaining calm. Caregivers can give extra time and attention to their children, give clear answers about what happened, remind them that they are safe and explain that they are not to be blamed for things that occurred. Also important for parents

- The floods of September 2014 left an indelible scar on the psyche of the children of the state.
- Apart from loss of sleep, appetite, irritability, insecurity, over-dependence, etc. exposure to traumatic episodes may also adversely affect the learning process of the children.
- Parents, teachers and caregivers play a crucial role in helping children deal with their insecurities by providing them with a safe and free environment to relate their insecurities and anxieties.
- After the September floods, Doctors without Borders has been training the primary and middle school teachers on helping children cope with traumatic experiences such as natural disasters.

1 (Delaney-Black et al., 2003)

is to resume their regular routine, even if the family is not staying in their own house and to ensure that young children are not separated from them or other loved ones. It is important to remember that children have their own resources for coping. Parents can emphasize their positive ways of coping (eg playing, asking questions/ being curious, showing emotions and helping others) and stimulate contact with other children. In some cases, parents may be less available to provide support to their children because of their own distress and feelings of being overwhelmed. In these situations, children may develop a state of confusion. Under these circumstances special attention should be given to the parents themselves. It is important that parents know how their feelings and behavior can influence the behavior of their child. When parents are not able to deal with the emotions of the child themselves, they may consider receiving external help.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) / Doctors without Borders is an international humanitarian medical aid organization and has been working in the Kashmir valley since 2001. MSF offers psychological support (e.g. individual counselling) in different clinics in Srinagar, Pattan, Baramulla and Sopore. In the recent flood aftermath, MSF is training primary and middle school teachers on different ways of coping with children after a traumatic experience like this natural disaster. ■

– **Asiya Niyaz and Shabnum Ara**, MSF India  
*The writers are clinical psychologists and work with MSF's mental health program in Jammu & Kashmir.*

**BUILDING RESILIENCE**

# Where are the Children of Kashmir?

**I**n the thick of an unprecedented deluge unheard of in last 60 years, 10,136,063 population (about 4.25 million children) have experienced large scale inundation. Out of this, about **8.1 million (approx. 3.43 million children) have been indirectly affected** while **1,949,790 (approximately 818,911 children) have been severely impacted**. With no safe drinking water, food, medicine, connectivity cut, roads damaged, their word came to a standstill for days and nights.

On September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014, entire nation was shocked to learn the heart wrenching news of infants who had perished in a hospital during the floods. While we may count numbers, describe in detail, how unprepared everyone had been and how children's suffering multiplies manifold due to disasters, there have been large scale suffering to children and other vulnerable communities even prior to this disaster, be it due to conflict, mine blasts, etc. Some of the children, women and households have been hit more than once.

**Children Issues Post Disaster**

In no order of ranking or prioritization, there are huge concerns and challenges that children are facing.

- Psycho social issues among children are rampant. – When it rains children cling to parents and caregivers with absolute fear. This further results into negative coping mechanisms.
- Schools. ICDS are closed still in far flung areas. This itself is a huge burden for a child when she/he does not meet peers and play with them.
- Winter fast approaching this year, this results into a huge stress on children.
- Major Hidden problem among children of Kashmir is malnutrition. A study called 'Hunger in the Valley' outlined that before floods 30 – 35% children suffer from malnutrition, stunting and underweight. There is an overall deficit of 70% food deficit. As always, deluge of this nature experienced by the valley exacerbates this risk to children. ■

– **Ray Kancharla**, National Humanitarian – DRR/CCA Manager, Save the Children, India

- It has been estimated that the floods of September 2014 affected nearly 1,949,790 children in the states of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Psycho social issues, inability to mingle with the other children due to closure of schools and a harsh winter are the main causes of concern for the children of the state now.
- Malnutrition is also one of the problems children of the Kashmir valley face.
- Save the Children has established Child Friendly Spaces and Temporary Learning Centres as 'one-stop-shop' for children in disaster affected areas.



Mubarak Ali, student of Baba Budhan Ali Shah School in Khandwal showing his wet assignment– other assignments drying in the background.

# Floods in Jammu & Kashmir

Approximately one year after the disastrous floods in the Indian state of Uttarakhand, another Northern Indian state was devastated by floods and landslides generated by heavy rain falls. During the month of September 2014 it was the North Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir which faced the ire of floods brought about by excessive rainfall and a rise in the level of the river Jhelum. In particular, the districts of Anantnag, Pulwama, Badgam, Kulgam, Rajouri were severely affected. The inundation also led to several landslides, most notably in the south of the Pir-Panjal range.

The havoc wreaked upon the state of Jammu and Kashmir by these floods can be gauged by the heart wrenching deaths and displacement of victims along with substantial financial losses. For, during the month of September, the deadly floods led to death of 300 people along with displacing almost 600,000 people from their homes. According to the Indian Economic times newspaper the economic loss from the floods amounted to Rs. 5,000 crore (US\$ 1 billion).

## Causes

The opinion of many experts is that the excessive rainfall received from 2nd to 9th September, 2014 as being the prime cause for the floods. However, the unprecedented human suffering and material destruction which transformed this extreme weather event into a disaster merit a deeper inquiry. An uncomfortable truth is that the state of Jammu & Kashmir has been witnessed inappropriate land use and land exploitation over the past several years.

The result of this is that the natural drainage of the natural water reservoirs were disrupted or altered significantly. According to experts and environmentalists Natural drainage and reservoir systems such as lakes and canals have been reduced and destroyed giving the water no choice than floating into the inhabited areas.

Deforestation in the catchment areas of rivers, unplanned construction in flood plains, rampant dumping of garbage in the rivers, and overuse of chemical fertilizers by farmers have emerged the most cogent reasons for making the floods so deadly and destructive.

This problem of badly managed natural and manmade drainage systems is not uncommon to India and in an event of massive rain falls it can easily generate a major disaster.

On the other side it is now almost unanimously agreed upon that

- The September 2014 floods in Jammu and Kashmir killed almost 300 people, displaced 600,000 people and resulted in the loss of US\$ 1 Billion.
- Deforestation in the catchment area of the rivers, unplanned construction in flood plains, rampant dumping in rivers, etc. are widely held culpable for making the floods so deadly.
- To avoid a recurrence of this disaster, the state of Jammu and Kashmir should follow the model of Climate Compatible Development which pursues economic growth and material welfare without imperilling the environment.

climate change is responsible for the excessive flooding. This is worrisome because the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report and all other future weather models indicate that rainfall on higher altitudes will increase as there will be 30% increase in the incidence of extreme rainfall in Asia.

South Asia and India are especially vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change such as extreme rainfall. According to The World Bank Climate Change will be directly responsible for increased flooding and more intense cyclones in South Asia.

## Relief

The relief operation were led by the Indian Armed Forces which deployed its specialised troops which distributed relief material managed a lot of affected people. On the other hand the armed forces had to admit that there were still a lot of people which they could not reach during the initial stages of the relief operations. It has to be realised that the major reason behind the inability to reach out to a greater number of victims was the lack of a robust disaster management structure in the state. It is not surprising that this problem was relevant in India, where the Disaster Management Act of 2005 has been implemented to only a limited extent.

## Recommendations

The floods have not only caused widespread death and destruction in Jammu and Kashmir but have also thrown back the precarious development process of the state. In

fact it must be realized that a share of the extent of the disaster is a result of unplanned development. As unplanned development activities at the expense of the environment intersect with the threat of climate change, such disasters are bound to recur. It should be understood that the acceptance that Climate Change is real and that not only it is necessary to try to reduce it but also that society's must learn to co-exist with it is the first important step for community resilience towards hazards.

The most effective way to prevent such disasters from recurring is to follow an alternate model of development known as 'Climate Compatible Development'. Under this paradigm of development, the exigencies of economic growth and material welfare are pursued without imperilling the environment. This can be achieved by taking institutional steps such as stricter rules and regulations against unbridled deforestation in the catchment area of the river, banning unplanned construction on flood plains, punitive measures against dumping in the rivers, etc.

Another long term measure that can build the resilience of the state to such large scale disasters is state wide capacity building on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA). The state of Jammu and Kashmir stands to gain a lot by undertaking capacity building measures as they will drastically improve the capacity of the state to respond to future emergencies and disasters. This can be achieved by strongly implementing the actions mandated of a state by the Disaster Management Act of 2005.

At a State level it is important to know about the hazards to which the region is exposed to and being able to predict events to a maximum extent. In the state of Kashmir there is the scope for improvement of extreme climatic events forecasting as well as creating a better communication between forecasting and disaster management organizations.

The shift from Disaster Response to Disaster Preparedness is crucial for India to effectively address the risks

associated with disasters and climate change. ■

- **Ennio Valentino Picucci**,  
NHTV University of Applied Sciences  
Breda, The Netherlands

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CLIMATE CHANGE

## Jammu & Kashmir Floods: What went wrong?

On September 03rd, the state of Jammu & Kashmir along with its adjoining areas started receiving very heavy rainfall at a time when it was drawing close to the end of the monsoon season. Two days later, the rivers swelled and triggered large scale floods and caused landslides in several areas. The flood water swelled well beyond the river courses as the water discharge was recorded much higher than the carrying capacity of rivers and led to at least 277 deaths (official figures) on the Indian side of Kashmir,

besides a heavy toll on property and infrastructure. It is imperative to understand what went wrong that lead to the greatest disaster in the history of Jammu & Kashmir.

### **Encroachment of Wetlands in Kashmir**

Some of what happened in Uttarakhand is true for Kashmir too! Just as the economy of the parts of Uttarakhand that were severely affected by ravaging floods in July 2013 were dependent on religious tourism, Kashmir is also a tourist driven economy. Thus, as was the

case in Uttarakhand where unregulated and illegal construction of houses continued, it boosted such construction in Kashmir too, apart from construction of concrete structures by local populations. Thus tourism catalysed the increase in the built-up area in the state quite remarkably. As Kashmir region is the rich base for wetlands comprising of Ponds, Lakes, Streams and Rivers, the ever expanding construction of concrete structures and the construction of earthen embankments has choked the flood

- As Jammu and Kashmir comes to terms with the floods that wreaked havoc in the state in September 2014, a lot of experts are trying to find what went so wrong.
- Illegal construction and encroachment on wetlands by human activity, weakened earthen embankments and climate change induced heavy monsoons are being cited as the reasons for the devastation caused in the wake of the floods.
- Counteractive measures ought to include climate change adaptation strategies along with robust local level measures to ensure sensible land use and renovation and regeneration of wetlands in the state.

plains of the rivers and limited the carrying capacity of rivers. Also, the encroachments of wetlands like Dal Lake by ingress of large human populations and the construction of buildings on lake body has limited the area of these water bodies. It is common knowledge that Dal Lake has shrunk to about the half the size in about last 50 years due to such human interventions. This massive reduction in the size of the Dal Lake in Srinagar city has reduced its water storing capacity also to half. This was the reason behind sudden swelling of water levels in the lake when Jhelum River waters started filling it. Thus, it also reflects how the hydrology of the region is affected as the capacity of the lake to absorb excess water is limited by such human interventions. The settling of more population by the construction of concrete structures in the catchment areas has further choked the flow of water to the lakes and ponds. Surely, the flood levels would have been considerably lesser (certainly not 20 feet in depth) especially in areas close to such water bodies if such illegal and unauthorized construction had not taken place.

Another aspect that needs greater attention among various potentially devastating human interventions is the construction of embankments. The entire stretch of Jhelum River in the vicinity of the Srinagar city is surrounded by earthen embankments. However, weakened areas in these embankments caused

breaches from at least 4 different locations that allowed rush of water into the city. While these engineered embankments are considered to be means to prevent spreading of water into the city, it is these that lead to the rise of river beds due to deposition of silt. Thus eventually, these engineered solutions will in due time fail as the water would start overflowing (if not breach) even on relatively less voluminous water discharges. It can be clearly understood that this will only manage to keep deluge at bay, only to give rise to something even more powerful.

In the aftermath of these floods, the damages done to these embankments due to breaches were taken up to be repaired by the Irrigation and Flood Control department. The contractors hired for the process procured soil for the construction of embankments from saffron growers' fields. As off-season rains this year caused very large scale damage to the Saffron plantation, and a very high rate of Rs. 1.2-2 lakh per kanal of land was offered, the farmers agreed to it. However, this is likely to cause a very large scale and long term damage to the prospect of growing highly priced Saffron crop. The livelihoods of these people are certainly going to suffer for many years to come.

#### **Climate Change and the Changes in Rainfall Patterns**

The poorly undertaken localised development is certainly one of the

biggest factors for this disaster. But at least an equally large share of the blame, if not more, can be placed on the climate change effects as well. The El Nino phenomenon caused changes in the rainfall pattern almost all across India during the monsoon of 2014 with several regions showing rainfall deficit until late in the season. As per IMD records, the state of Jammu & Kashmir was reeling under a rainfall deficit of 32% until 03<sup>rd</sup> September, 2014. However, by 06<sup>th</sup> September, it had received 250 mm of rainfall to turn into 20% excess rainfall state. These incidents of heavy rainfall (over 100 mm/day) and very heavy rainfall (over 150 mm/day) have certainly increased over the last several years. As a result, while the number of rainy days decreases with changing weather patterns, the periods of intense rainfall in a limited period continues to increase.

Due to climate change, it may also happen as suggested by some studies that the amount of rainfall may also increase, apart from the instances of heavy or very heavy rainfall which could lead to multiple disasters like this within the same season. If this happens, it will ensure that it goes much beyond the capacity of administrations and governments to respond to disasters. At the very least, it can be confidently said that the carrying capacity of the rivers can't be increased so much that it is able to prevent over flow from the river channels.

Thus, there is a need to undertake measures at the world wide scale to prevent global warming that's fostering climate change, while at the same time some real stern measures need to be adopted and enforced on the local communities that ensures sensible land-use, renovation & regeneration of wetlands and flood channels in the regions that are at risk. ■

- Varun Kapil, AIDMI

# Advancing Children's Rights through Data

Advancing the rights of children has emerged as one of the most desired goals of humanitarian action across the world. This is because children have been routinely exploited and have had their rights continuously infringed upon. This relentless pursuit of the ideal of building up the resilience of children is evidenced from the agendas of several humanitarian frameworks. For instance, the consultation process for a post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (HFA 2) has identified 'Building Community Resilience' as a key area of action. Within this key area, the resilience of certain vulnerable groups like children has been accorded a high priority. Similarly, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) has a children charter for disaster risk reduction.

Furthering this cause, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) released its flagship report titled '*The State of the World's Children 2014 in Number: Every Child Counts*'. The objective is to present data on children in a comprehensive manner to reveal disparities and advance children's right.

The data revealed in this report points to some very disconcerting as well as promising facts about the state of children in the world today. Furthermore, it reveals the areas of action needing immediate attention for addressing the needs of children

1 THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2014 IN NUMBERS Revealing disparities, advancing children's rights, <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2014/numbers/documents/english/EN-FINAL%20FULL%20REPORT.pdf>

2 ibid

3 ibid

for engendering positive change in their lives. Some of the highlights of this report include the following<sup>1</sup>:

- Almost 6.6 million children under 5 years of age died in 2012, mostly from preventable causes in violation of their fundamental right to survive and develop.
- Fifteen percent of the world's children are put to work that compromises their right to protection from economic exploitation and infringes on their right to learn and play.
- Eleven per cent girls are married before they turn 15, jeopardising their rights to health, education and protection.
- The world's poorest children are nearly 2.7 times less likely than the richest ones to have a skilled attendant at their birth.
- About 90 million children who would have died if mortality rates had stuck at their 1990 level have, instead, lived past the age of 5.
- Deaths from measles among children under 5 years of age fell from 482,000 in 2000 to 86,000 in 2012, thanks in large part to immunization coverage, which increased from 16 per cent in 1980 to 84 per cent in 2012.
- Improvements in nutrition have led to a 37 per cent drop in stunting since 1990.
- Primary school enrolment has increased, even in the least developed countries: Whereas in 1990 only 53 per cent of children in those countries gained school admission, by 2011 the rate had improved to 81 per cent.
- Nearly 1.9 billion people have gained access to improved sanitation since 1990.

Much of the data represented in this report has been compiled by from household surveys and in particular

the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). These MICS have been conducted in more than 100 countries. Furthermore, the interviews conducted in more than 650,000 households in 50 countries<sup>2</sup>.

One of most striking features of this report is the comprehensive nature. For, the data presented in this report has been based on several indicators that present an accurate picture of children's issues on several development parameters. These indicators include<sup>3</sup>:

- Underweight/Stunting/Wasting
- Use of insecticide treated nets
- Violent discipline
- Use of improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities
- Birth registration
- Immunization coverage
- Exclusive breastfeeding
- Care for pneumonia and diarrhoea
- Comprehensive knowledge of HIV
- Skilled attendant at birth
- Primary and secondary school enrolment
- Youth literacy and adult literacy rates
- Child labour
- Use of mass media
- Adolescent pregnancy

This report reveals extremely important data on children and can help in devising strategies and interventions that can lead to a healthy, safe, happy and prosperous global posterity. The data presented in this report will help national governments, humanitarian agencies, field researches and other interested professionals and experts frame policies and promote practices that advance the rights of children worldwide. ■ - Kshitij Gupta, AIDMI

## A Commendable Journey for a Safer Environment in School

Schools in Assam have different dimensions of safety considering ownership, location, type, construction, age, dominance and location. A state which is prone to multiple hazards have different issues to deal with and each issue has varied degree of importance depending on the context. While the general belief says government schools are more vulnerable to any hazards considering the dearth of resources, the picture here is multifaceted. Some of the common comparisons can be seen as reflected in the table:

| Government   |   | Private  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| Strength   | Weakness  | Strength   | Weakness   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government support (Technical and material)</li> <li>• Experienced teachers</li> <li>• Simple infrastructure</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of timely and proper maintenance</li> <li>• Dependency and lack of pro-activeness</li> <li>• Lengthy procedures</li> <li>• Rigidity</li> <li>• Dearth of resources at hand</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources at hand</li> <li>• Competitive nature</li> <li>• Simple and less time consuming decision making</li> <li>• Interest in new and creative efforts etc</li> <li>• Interest of School Management</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More number of students and complex infrastructure</li> <li>• Busy and tight academic schedule</li> </ul> |

With the above scenarios and the emerging need it became vital for the State to think of both the standards and strategies to guide both the segments for ensuring safety. All India Disaster Mitigation Institute's involvement in this mission justified the validity of experience in this. Team AIDMI through this journey has spearheaded a commendable journey of learning and have also furnished visual results with schools.

The journey which began with drafting of school disaster management plans (SDMPs) where different stages of involvement of teachers and students in conducting school safety audit, Hazard and vulnerability assessment could be ensured. On the one hand their proximity to school helped in yielding productive data and information and their involvement in drafting the plan ensured the ownership.

For the first time ever, a systematic and synergistic attempt was made in these four schools for implementing the drafted School Disaster Management Plans. This approach was innovative but involved many challenges to be dealt with. These challenges were not innate physically but were sufficient to threaten the mission. The first and foremost

requirement was capacity building. The implementation began with efforts of capacity building through technically competent agencies like Civil Defence. The first challenge that emerged was time shortage for both categories of school which prevented full-fledged swing to this effort. However, given the challenges the execution was made accordingly and could obviously leave some impact behind but not as desired. This will need specific and time bound follow up on the part of the schools. Now, the question is whether they will they follow up or not?

Similarly, Mock Drills were conducted after capacity building of the teams in schools for conducting the same. This effort was so designed as to reduce dependency on the part of the school on external agencies for such exercise to be conducted in school. These mock drills helped the school in clarifying and finalizing their emergency evacuation and response plan. This however is the beginning and lot will depend on how the schools carry on with their annual DRR calendar where periodic mock drills form the most dominant part.

Non-structural mitigation (NSM), as the term indicates has a very broad framework and addresses interrelated

and cross-cutting issues. The implementation of identified NSM is in progress and has raised many important questions. For the private schools where the infrastructure is big and allied accessories are also large in number, the NSM has to be regularly reviewed and maintained. They do have resources but, can they keep up the momentum gained over these few months of association with SDMP? The Government schools have resource constraint no-doubt but will it be the sole reason. The accessories are limited and infrastructure to a large extent is simple and small on an average. But, even then age and maintenance are dominant factors. Can the NSM initiated in these schools be maintained by them in the long run?

These questions will remain dominant even at the end of the intervention by AIDMI. But, the best impact is the schools have in place a structure to address these issues and also the awareness on importance. Regular and positive monitoring from administration and ongoing support can push these further. The journey was small but highlighted different issues and learning for both policy and practice and will help in shaping such interventions in future. ■

- Anand Prokash Kanoo, AIDMI

## CASE STUDY

# Ensuring Fire Safety in Panbazar Girls HS School: Making of a Model for Replication

Pan Bazar Girls Higher Secondary School is situated in the busiest and crowded area of Guwahati city. It is surrounded by high rise buildings, busy roads and markets from all sides. The School has a mix of old and new buildings of which one is RCC and three are Bamboo-Cement buildings. The Status survey conducted by Assam Engineering College also renders the school as structurally vulnerable. AIDMI while planning for School Disaster Management through school safety audit (HVCA) considered a number of factors and had initiated a number of actions ranging from fixation of falling hazards to conduct of skill development trainings with school. Considering fire safety as an essential component for school safety, audit of the measures undertaken by school has reflected a number of issues such as:

1. Existing four fire extinguishers were expired and the school was



lacking financial resources for refilling

2. The location of extinguishers was haphazard. While the building having Principal's room and teachers common room had two and the three storied classroom building contained the rest on the first and second floor leaving an entire floor without any equipment. The kitchen also lacked any extinguisher within its vicinity.

3. Though fire extinguishers were exiting, the teachers and students community were not skilled in its use. This lack of skill and also lack of opportunity to use in practical has also left different questions the basic trust on the equipment on its compatibility and reliability. AIDMI jointly with school ensured that the School DM plan addresses the fire safety needs of the school sufficiently. ■ - Sonali Das, AIDMI

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