Child's Right to a Safer School: Lessons from Asia

From an Effort to Turn Local Tsunami Recovery into Regional Disaster Risk Reduction for the Poor

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In this issue

KEY IDEA

Society's Responsibility: Safer Schools

In any disaster situation anywhere in the world—be it a human induced or natural—children are among the most vulnerable groups. Especially if the disaster occurs during school time. If we critically examine the victims among the affected children, we find that girls are more affected. It could be due to their dress or any other reasons, which need to be critically looked into. There are several examples of such incidents where large numbers of innocent school children were killed by natural hazards in a matter of few seconds or minutes-such as Lyete mudslide in the Philippines, Pakistan earthquake, Gujarat earthquake, etc. There are many more unheard / unpublished stories of children dead due to both human-induced and natural disasters.

Similarly, there are several wonderful exemplary stories around the world where a young child was able to save hundreds of lives. This includes the story of Tilly Smith, who was able to predict tsunami in Thailand in 2004 and save hundreds of lives. There also is a story of Parth S. Sutaria, 14 who drew a family to safety when a flood occurred in their village. There are many of such undocumented stories.

From the above two examples we can conclude that children are prone to any type of disasters and if they have been imparted with appropriate information, skills and knowledge on disasters, they can save their own lives as well as the lives of others.

Therefore, disaster risk reduction education to all children anywhere in the world is a must for a safer world. Similarly, there are several other important elements that substantially reduce the disaster risk of the school children. These include a safe school building and safety facilities in the school such as fire escapes.

With all our recent experiences of disasters and their impact on children, we all know very well that the risk can be substantially reduced if we all (government agencies, donors, I/NGOs and local communities) work together. However, the primary role goes to the teachers, parents and children.

The ISDR campaign for 2006 / 2007 "Disaster Risk Reduction Begins at School" is very timely. However, the campaign needs to be translated into action. Productive action can only be fulfilled if all segments of a society work together with a "safer school... safer society' motto and the idea firmly instilled that today's children have a right to a safer school. ■

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Making Schools Safer Requires Contributions from All

A series of catastrophic events claims tens of thousand of lives of school children and creates serious concern among the policy makers and citizens. The 2006–2007 biennial worldwide campaign called "Disaster Risk Reduction Begins at School" launched by ISDR and other UN agencies and NGOs shows the urgent need for safer schools. The objective of the campaign is to ensure that disaster risk awareness is integrated into national school curricula in countries vulnerable to natural hazards and school buildings are constructed/ rehabilitated to withstand natural hazards. Only 33 countries such as Cuba, Turkey, Iran, Nepal and India have reported that they have disaster management related subjects in their school curricula. While in Mexico, Romania and New Zealand, teaching of disaster-related subjects is mandatory. Other countries such as Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba and Japan report significant primary and secondary teaching at municipal or state level.

The Right to Safer Schools Campaign is need of the hour because most of the schools are unsafe—an NSET study shows that 60 percent of schools are made of weak construction materials, located on fragile and low lying areas which are prone to multi-hazards. The death toll of 16,000 school children in the recent Pakistan earthquake is a result of poor design or location decisions, or both.

One of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is to enroll all children worldwide in school by 2015. To achieve the goal, 10 million new classrooms will be constructed over 100 countries in next one decade. Unplanned constructions will enhance the risk of students and teachers; therefore it must be made

First making schools safer against hazards and then using them to spread disaster awareness can be effective in inculcating a culture of safety.

mandatory to ensure that risk mitigation elements are systematically incorporated into new school building designs and locations and into the retrofitting of existing buildings. It is the right to every child to be safe in school; it is therefore the responsibility of government to ensure the physical safety and resilience of school buildings.

After the 2004 fire tragedy in a school in Kumbhakonam, Tamil Nadu, the Supreme Court of India issued an order to the central and state governments to formulate comprehensive time bound plans to ensure the safety of children in schools. The Central Board of School Education has also issued a circular to the heads of affiliated schools regarding the safety measures taken by school authorities and has introduced Disaster Management as a subject in school curricula. The Government of Gujarat has initiated the Gujarat School Safety Initiative project to raise awareness in schools.

AIDMI's Right to Safer Schools Campaign approach is unique, putting local capacity in the centre. One of the significant outcomes of this approach is the shift of focus towards community-based disaster management. A proper education through schools not only teaches children, but also reaches deep into the community through parents and teachers.

Key success to any campaign towards making schools safer and promoting a culture of safety through education requires contribution from all sectors. Governments should develop a legal and institutional framework for systematically implementing, monitoring, and evaluating school protection measures; the process should involve stakeholders from all levels. The Roundtable workshop on reflection on four year campaign and the First International Conference on School Safety which was held in Ahmedabad provides a platform to share the experiences and reflection of learning at the global level.

The challenge is really very tough and there are several hurdles and blocks between the current situation and disaster resilient schools. Governments have made their commitments to the Hyogo Framework for Action and now it is time to put words into practice. This is a matter of political will and commitment of government, as Iranian Parliament recently announced a new bill that will see the improvement in seismic safety of school buildings with a budget of US $4 billion. It is a time for NGOs, school authorities, teachers, students and communities to learn about local hazards and minimise their impacts. ■

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A Safer Tomorrow ... A Better Tomorrow

Losses to Disasters

History shows that human beings have always applied their wisdom, knowledge and technology to protect themselves from natural hazards. Significant progress has also been made over time, but natural hazards continue to be a major source of risk to life and property. According to an estimate, disasters during the last decade claimed over 600,000 lives and affected over 2 billion, and direct economic loss is estimated at US$ 700 billion. Accelerated population growth and concentration of assets and people in hazard-prone areas, unplanned development, global climate change, etc. have exacerbated the problem.

All photographs in this issue: AIDMI

Encouraging awareness and practice of disaster preparedness can be easy and fun.

The impact of hazards has been disproportionate on different population groups. In the Maldives, those aged 65 or over constitute 17.3 per cent of the total deaths to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. They, however, comprise only 3.1 per cent of the population, i.e. they contributed five-and-a-half times more compared to their proportion in the population. Elsewhere, the tsunami typically claimed more of the under-15s and the over-50s[1].

Disaster Tragedies and Children

Children are more vulnerable when disasters occur during school hours. During an earthquake in Pakistan-administered Kashmir in 2005, over 16,000 children were crushed to death in schools that collapsed. The total death toll was near 73,000. The 2001 Gujarat earthquake killed almost 900 school children. Ninety-three students perished in a fiery blaze in a secondary school in Kumbhakonam, Tamil Nadu, in 2004. They were among 190 younger students trapped in a second-floor classroom after the fire had blocked the only way out.

Children are hope for families, societies, nations and all of humankind. A great deal of investment is made to provide them with quality education. However, adequate attention has not been paid to ensure that the environment in which they get their education is safe from hazards. Better construction would have prevented many schools from collapsing in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Gujarat State of India.

Working on Building Safer Schools

Amidst these tragedies, there have been some positive indications as well. Various governmental, non-governmental and international agencies are expressing their concerns over the safety of schools and those inside them. The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015, a policy adopted by 168 governments and the UN / ISDR to address disaster risk, advocates using schools to spread disaster risk reduction knowledge and protecting and strengthening critical public facilities like schools and hospitals[2]. In other words, the Framework raises two key issues:

- Promoting safety *through* schools, i.e. using school education to build a safer tomorrow;
- Promoting safety *of* schools, i.e. making schools sufficiently resistant to hazards so that tomorrow is safe inside them.

So far, 32 nations have reported to the UN / ISDR that they have disaster related subjects in their national school curricula. Countries like Cuba, Nepal and Turkey are investing to retrofit important public facilities like schools and health centres and applying building codes to new similar constructions. Several civil society organisations have also joined hands towards making schools safer against hazards and making tomorrow safer. The following articles will discuss various issues concerning school safety and share some good practices. ■

1 Telford, J. and Cosgrave, J. (contributing author Houghton, R.), 2006. Joint evaluation of the international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami: Synthesis Report. Tsunami Evaluation Coalition

2 For more, see: UN / ISDR, 2005. Hyogo Framework for Action: building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters (www.unisdr.org).

Urban School Safety: Who Contributes and How

Campaign towards making schools safer and promoting a culture of safety through education requires contribution from all sectors of society. States and regional and international organisations, including the United Nations and donor agencies; civil society, including non-governmental organisations, media and community-based volunteers; scientific communities; the corporate sector; and all other stakeholders need to converge their efforts. The figure below graphically illustrates the roles different stakeholders may play.

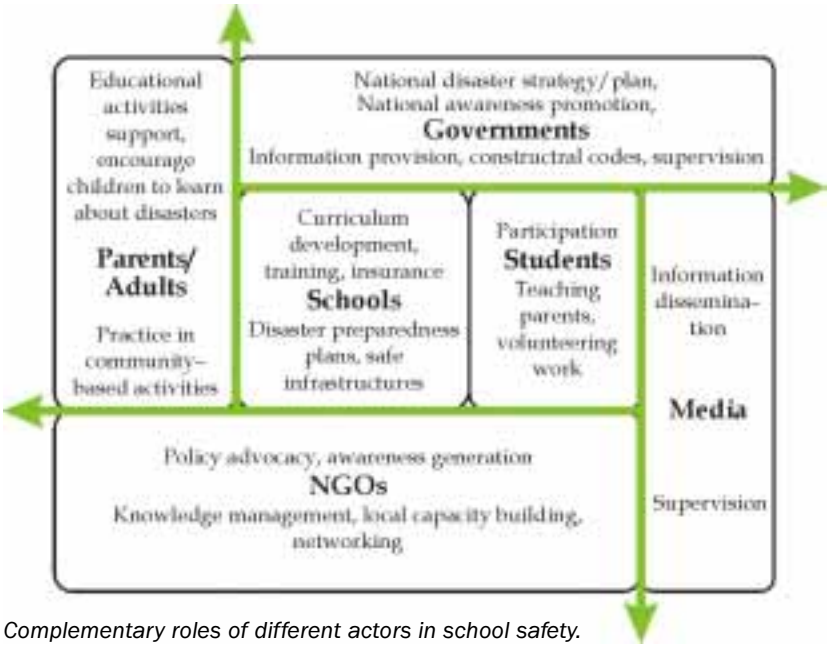
Recently, several municipal schools in Ahmedabad, India, have teamed up with NGOs to learn about addressing fire hazards.

What Schools Can Do

As the Hyogo Framework for Action suggests, school management should see that disaster knowledge is included at all levels of school curricula. School management should provide opportunities to teachers to enhance their disaster knowledge and should insure school infrastructure, students, teachers and administrators against disaster-induced losses. Schools should adopt safety guidelines in construction. They should also develop and update disaster preparedness and response plans.

What Governments Can Do

It is necessary for government to ensure that all children within its territory are safe in schools. Governments should set up a comprehensive national strategy, with targets and indicators, towards safety of schools (including building codes, school-centred early warning systems and insurance) and promoting Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) through school education. Governments should create an environment conducive for all actors to contribute and concentrate their efforts.



Complementary roles of different actors in school safety.

What NGOs Can Do

NGOs can significantly contribute towards achieving desired impacts of those activities targeted at and rooted in communities. Regarding school safety, they can work alongside both governments and communities, and bridge the gap between policy and practice, such as organising volunteers to help practice initiatives in schools and other communities and conduct trainings to inform teachers about professional knowledge on school safety. Other important areas where NGOs can contribute are policy advocacy, awareness generation and influencing governments to adopt appropriate policies. As the following article will discuss, NGOs are directly involved in implementation as well.

What the Media Can Do

The media, including print and electronic, can be active in uplifting public awareness by disseminating disaster and school safety related knowledge. It is well known that the dynamic involvement of media like television can have a significant impact on the public. Thus, various manners of resilience information dissemination such as story telling and series of animations are greatly encouraged. Meanwhile, they can serve as watchdogs of other actors like governments, school managements and NGOs and bring transparency and efficiency to their work.

What Parents/Guardians Can Do

Parents should share with their children the ways of preventing, and surviving during, disasters. They should encourage their children to take part in education and other activities about disasters organised in schools or elsewhere. Parents' associations, as civil society organisations, can work together with other stakeholders.

What Students Can Do

Students themselves tend to be neglected when people address school safety working for them. They are to be encouraged to not only teach their parents, work as volunteers in community-based activities about disaster resilience, and conduct self-rescue, but help younger and senior citizens when hazard occurs.

An estimate says roughly one billion children aged 14 or below are living in seismically hazardous areas and millions of them are at risk while attending schools. The situation becomes more frightening when risks arising from other hazards such as floods, landslides, cyclones and volcanoes are considered and alarms are concerned to act urgently. Collaborative efforts from all, however, can turn this frightening situation into a hazard-resilient tomorrow. ■

Publications Under The Right to Safer Schools Campaign

Organisations actively engaged in the campaign on school safety have compiled many kinds of materials and publications to highlight the importance and good practice on the issue. The following publications have been prepared by All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) under the Right to Safer Schools Campaign.

- "Kutch to Kumbhakonam" – issue of *Afat Nivaran* published in Gujarati *and Vipada Nivaran* published in Hindi language.
- "A Need for a Regional School Safety Campaign" – issue of *southasiadisasters.net*
- Experience Learning Series (ELS):
  - Planning Guidelines for Safer Schools and Education against Disaster, based on the January 2001 earthquake in Gujarat.
  - Impact of Earthquakes on Children: Current situation of earthquake-affected children, in their own words.
- Preparedness Pocketbook Series (PPS):
  - Emergency Medical Response (Disaster First-Aid)
  - Disaster Preparedness for School Safety
- Awareness materials:
  - Awareness displays on school safety and first-aid during disasters.
  - Awareness brochures on school safety; role of disaster mitigation teams; and do's and don'ts before, during and after earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, cyclones, etc. are developed in local languages and circulated in schools. ■

Children Themselves: Real Heroes

This year, 24 children were honored in India with the National Bravery Awards for their remarkable courage to save the lives of strangers.

The Indian Council started the national awards for bravery in 1957 The award was to recognise and honour children who performed outstanding deeds of bravery and selfless sacrifice. The first award was given in 1957, Since then the council has conferred awards on children below the age of 16, every year. **Parth S. Sutaria, 14 years old, drew a family to safety when a flood attacked their area.** Their extremely encouraging behaviours convinced us that children have strength and can be trusted when disaster occurs.

A ten-year-old British girl named Tilly Smith became famous for predicting a tsunami in Thailand in 2004 and saved many lives. She had learned about the signs of tsunami in her geography class.

All these cases urge us to recognise that a children can be real heroes and play significant role at the time of a crisis. The society should reinforce them with professional methodology and knowledge. ■

Source:
Bravery awards: An MP representation, http://www.centralchronicle.com/20060120/2001281.htm; India Today, Volume 27 Number 6, 2007

Growing School Safety Initiatives in India

The frequency of disaster occurrence and the impact disasters have upon children have increased through the past several decades. More and more children go to schools that are exposed to fires, earthquakes, floods, cyclones, pollution, food poisoning, stampedes, and other hazards. The year 2005 witnessed the death of 16,000 young lives in Kashmir when due to an earthquake, 8,000 schools collapsed. In 2004, 94 school children perished in a fiery blaze in Kumbhakonam, Tamil Nadu and in 2001, 931 students died during the Gujarat earthquake. These catastrophes have prompted many in South Asia, a multi-hazard prone region, to act towards preventing such mishaps in future. The following paragraphs offer two examples of school safety initiatives taken in India.

Explanation of the science of Fire Safety and Disaster Occurrence at Anumanthai High School, a tsunami-affected school of Villupuram district, Tamil Nadu.

Initiatives by GSDMA and SEEDS

The Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA) and SEEDS, an NGO, took up the Gujarat School Safety Initiative. The project addresses two issues:

1. Understanding and preparedness amongst school children, teachers and parents to reduce disaster risk in schools and to be prepared to act appropriately in an emergency;
2. Disaster management appreciation amongst teachers so that they are able to impart disaster education to children more effectively. Direct implementation of school based preparedness activities is being carried out in 175 schools and teachers' training is being conducted across 25 districts.

The project aimed to:

- promote a culture of disaster safety in schools,
- reduce disaster risk in schools through structural and non-structural corrections,
- prepare School Disaster Management Plans,
- establish school safety clubs and task forces in schools and provide training to them,
- prepare tools like manuals, games and activity kits for training school teachers and students in disaster management,
- train teachers for creating a culture of safety in schools, and institutionalise the programme through training of trainers.

The project has directly benefited about 105,000 students across 175 schools. The teacher-training component of the project has raised 100 teacher trainers and has directly trained over 9,000 teachers[3].

An Example from AIDMI: The Right to Safer Schools Campaign

AIDMI has conducted many people-centred DRR projects and trainings. This provides an example of how AIDMI promotes DRR by putting local capacity in the centre.

The Right to Safer Schools Campaign aimed to mitigate the impact of hazards on school children, teachers, administrators and infrastructure and to foster a culture of disaster prevention and mitigation through schools. The project encompassed the following activities:

1. **Fire Safety Equipment Demonstration and Installation:** As it was essential that the supported groups know how to use fire extinguishers: demonstrations on using them were organised. A technical expert led the demonstrations. Afterwards, school staff and students were encouraged to demonstrate the same. The size of a school and the number of classrooms and students determined the number of fire extinguishers to be installed.

2. **First Aid Kits:** Along with the installation of fire safety equipments, first aid kits were also handed over to the supported schools.

3 For more, visit www.seedsindia.org

3. **Insurance Policies:**
School children, teachers and administrative staff of the supported schools have been insured against accidents of any kind. The insurance is not limited to school hours.

4. **Awareness Materials:**
The supported schools have been provided with displays, pocket books and relevant publications of AIDMI. Most of the materials distributed were produced in local languages.

5. **Training on School Safety:**
Training programmes on Disaster Preparedness for School Safety were conducted. Several teachers and administrative staffs from the supported schools took part. Training programmes for school students were also conducted with practical mockdrills and scientific knowledge on disaster occurrence.

6. **Demand Based Support:**
Based on damage assessment and surveys with disaster affected schools, AIDMI's support to needy schools has been provided with respect for needs. Examples of requested support include safe drinking water facilities, a compound wall for schools located near the highway, repair of electrical work for safety, construction work for kitchens and toilets and monsoon preparedness.

7. **Economic Support to Needy Students:**
The Campaign provides economic support to the students and parents who are from poor families, struggling in recovery from disaster. Support to continue their study without dropping out is important. In response of tragic incident in schools, AIDMI identifies poor families and supports them as per their need. Livelihood support to poor families of Kumbhakonam fire tragedy and financial support for further education to poor tsunami-affected students are examples of these activities.

8. **Education Centre:**
Open education centres in disaster affected slum areas are supported for education in different disaster-affected areas such as Kheda, Ahmedabad, Bhuj of Gujarat and tsunami-affected villages of Tamil Nadu. These education centres are operated by local community members.

9. **Research Activities:**
AIDMI's focuses on research in order to guide future work on school safety among various groups. Learning from research is shared with concerned stakeholders through publications. Examples include, the review of AIDMI's school safety training, and a survey of teachers perception on school safety.

So far, this campaign has reached more than 300 schools including poor and underprivileged schools from disaster affected areas through the above activities. These disaster-affected areas are located in the states of Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Jammu and Kashmir. This project was supported by American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC), American Jewish World Service (AJWS), Reuters, and Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC).

Several key NGOs such as PLAN International and Save the Children, UN agencies such as UNICEF, and governments such as Government of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu are leading this growth. ■

School Safety Issues from the News...

Several news articles in Indian newspapers suggest that the safety of students – both in schools and school-related activities – still needs improvement.

July 18, 2004, *The Statesman.*

A fire at a private school at Kumbhakonam in Tamil Nadu killed 90 students. The school was not built according to fire safety rules, making escape for the students impossible when the fire broke out. The Statesman writes, July 20, 2004: "The school-building had a thatched roof – a tinder box waiting to go up in flames. Fire extinguishers were not in sight, the lane of the school building was so narrow that fire-tenders had problems getting to the spot. About 900 children were crammed into the three-storied building with only a single narrow staircase serving as both entrance and exit." Another major criticism went to the teachers, who according to the witnesses did little to help the students.

September 17, 2005, *Indian Express.*

When a driver lost control over a van, 10 school children miraculously escaped. These accidents are not rare, and the State Transport Department has therefore issued a notification stating that no more than six children are allowed in auto rickshaws and 14 in vans.

January 28, 2007, *Times of India.*

A wing of a school collapsed in Tichakpura village of Vyara Taluka of Surat District, killing 11 schoolgirls and injuring 14 others. Parents claimed that the reason for the accident was delay in repairing the building.

February 21, 2007, *Times of India.*

A boat accident in the Periyar River in Ernakulam District killed 19 school children and three teachers. ■

Let our Children Teach Us!

"Let our children teach us!" was published as a contribution from the UN ISDR System Thematic Cluster / Platform on Knowledge and Education, by Books for Change. It is a review of the role of education and knowledge in disaster risk reduction. The purpose of this review is to examine and communicate good practices to reduce disaster risk through education, knowledge and innovation all over the world.

The premise of the review is that disaster risk reduction is an essential part of sustainable development. Making sure that schools are safe places for children to learn represents a vital commitment to future generations. Over the past 20 years, training courses by various NGO's have made an important impact on local efforts at risk reduction, and the schools are brought to the forefront as a focus for local disaster risk reduction. On a higher level, the UN has understood the importance of this topic, and we are now already a couple of years into the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014). The focus of this review lies on the dangers of earthquake, but other hazards, like flooding, cyclones, tsunamis and landslides are equally dangerous for schools.

Below are two examples of different approaches to reduce disaster risks through education. The first example is from Nepal. This country can be used as an example of the range of challenges faced and strategies adopted to improve school seismic safety. Schools in Nepal, both their buildings and occupants, face extreme risk from earthquakes. A study of 900 schools showed that more than 60% of the schools are made of weak construction materials. In addition, none of the schools in the survey were earthquake resistant. As a response to this, a Nepalese NGO, the National Society for Earthquake Technology Nepal (NSET) has conducted an innovative programme to strengthen existing school buildings and promote earthquake resilient school building construction. The NSET programme built on the fact that most school construction in Nepal takes place locally in a decentralised, traditional and informal manner. By focusing on schools, the programme reaches the whole community, as lessons trickle down to parents, relatives and friends.

A student presenting a risk assessment for his school during school safety training by AIDMI in Kutch. Active participation of students in designing school safety measures ensures their better response during emergencies.

Another example comes from China. In 2004, a textbook for senior middle school on natural hazards was published covering natural hazards and their mitigation. It is a thorough introduction to natural hazards all over the world with a specific focus on China, which also includes preparedness and disaster risk reduction.

According to this review, clearly synthesised by Ben Wisner, a global champion of safer schools, there are three important strategies to improve school safety. Firstly, we need the promotion of more and better teaching about hazards and risk reduction. Secondly, we need to develop schools into important centres of risk reduction in their communities. Finally we need to be able to protect schools against multiple hazards. The review indicates progress towards synthesising knowledge and practice in disaster risk reduction, and is a valuable resource for school administrators and others. However, one problem still remains. A large part of the burden is placed upon the shoulders of already busy educators, and the examples in the UN ISDR review will only be valuable if these educators and other actors provide yet another service to children. ■

The name of the booklet is "Let our children teach us", and is a Review of the Role of Education and Knowledge in Disaster Risk Reduction. It was published as a contribution from the UN ISDR System Thematic Cluster/ Platform on Knowledge and Education.

School Safety Programmes in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu is carrying out school safety programmes with increasing enthusiasm this summer. There, they are working in socially poor, tsunami-affected locations, with students who come from weak economic backgrounds.

The project in Tamil Nadu is based on a pilot project in the state of Gujarat, and a wide range of activities are carried out by AIDMI. Firstly, they install direct mitigation measures (fire extinguishers) with the purpose of mitigating risks. Then, a technical expert offers a demonstration of how to use these fire extinguishers for school staff and students. Secondly, first aid kits are handed out to different schools, as most of the schools are located at a distance from basic medical facility and people in these remote areas are used to applying traditional or myth-driven practices for treatment. Thirdly, AIDMI provides school children and staff with Disaster Insurance. The coverage is not only limited to students, it also covers school staff and it also is not limited to school times, but applies 24/7.

All together, 30 schools in Tamil Nadu have been covered under this scheme, including 11,358 students and 378 members of the staff (teaching/non-teaching). The maximum payment any victim can receive, is INR 25,000. Fourthly, AIDMI hands out Awareness Material, a set of 33 displays on the subject of "School Safety". These laminated posters cover topics from Emergency Preparedness Plan for Schools, Useful and Hazardous Things, Activities for Students' preparedness, First Aid for Various Injuries etc. These posters help generate awareness among school administration, teachers, parents and students when it comes to school safety. Finally, AIDMI conduct school safety training for teachers/administrative staff of the targeted schools. The purpose of this training is to teach them how to make their own schools safer.

Fire extinguisher handover to PUP School in Koonimedukuppam.

The targeted schools are directly affected by the tsunami waves of 2005. Before they recover from the impacts of this catastrophe, the coastal Tamil Nadu state where these schools are located, experienced floods during the 2006 monsoon. Many supported schools are on the East Coast Road—a key highway belt for transportation in the coastal Tamil Nadu—that counts many fatal accidents. So, children and staff members of these supported schools are vulnerable against many natural and manmade disasters.

Activities carried out under the School Safety programme have benefited school administration, staff and children in many ways. The programme has shown them how little things can reduce their vulnerability and provide them strength to cope with disasters. It has provided them with an opportunity to contribute to safeguarding their own and others lives. The accident insurance covers their medical expenses incurred due to accidents. As most of the students belong to economically and socially weak families, this particular initiative would prove very useful to them. Even their family members are benefited with financial assistance through the insurance scheme for accidental loss of their family breadwinner. The family of a student from one of the targeted schools, who lost his life in an accident has already been compensated by the insurance company under the scheme.

The education department, school authorities, staff members and children have appreciated this initiative of AIDMI towards making school safety a reality. It has been experienced during conduct of each activity of the programme. Many of the school administrators as well as education department officers have assured to spread awareness to other schools and contribute in making more schools safer.

Experience with these projects, both in Gujarat and in Tamil Nadu, have been positive. However, it is important to keep in mind that in order to achieve the best possible results with such a school safety programme, a long term plan for School Safety is necessary. ■

Round Table on School Safety: Reflection of a Five Year Campaign

Each year, disasters in India challenge both community and state efforts to improve standards of living. Damage is especially seen in schools, where children are concentrated in buildings that are often unsafe. However, with proper safety mechanisms, the impact of disasters on schools—and those inside them—can be effectively minimised. Yet, recent surveys find that safety against hazards like fires, earthquakes, and cyclones is often not a high priority for schoolteachers, administrators and civil society alike. Efforts to improve safety are usually project-specific and one off.

Tony Vaux, R.N.Vakil, Milind Bonkil, A.M. Prabhakar, Mihir R. Bhatt and Nalini Poptani light a lamp to inaugurate the voices from the round table in Ahmedabad, India.

From this reason, AIDMI hosted the January 10, 2007 Round Table on School Safety and Disaster Risk Reduction in order to:

a) Review and consolidate the lessons and experiences gained in the last four years of the Campaign and to
b) Plan a way to move the Campaign efforts forward to new areas and sectors.

Fifteen experts and 20 key schools and officials attended the Roundtable from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kashmir, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu. Three panel of discussion were organised in the meeting. Experts and practitioners in the first panel shared their experiences related to disaster risk reduction and long-term recovery with an emphasis on Gujarat. The second panel of experts spoke on different perspectives of School Safety from Risk Reduction, Civil Society, and the Municipal School Board. The third discussed specific initiatives that have contributed to safer schools in three states of India, which are Jammu, Kashmir and Gujarat.

The panelists and commentators of the Round Table strongly emphasised the importance of school safety and its role in sustained development efforts. There was significant agreement that something is to be done on both local and national levels across India.

Some of their constructive suggestions and perspectives on school safety are as follows:

- Establish and use government bodies such as GSDMA and NDMA to meet school safety needs.
- Focus on both civil society and local governing bodies like *panchayats*, "safety committees", etc.; need way for civil society to be statutorily recognised; *panchayats* should promote school safety: teacher salaries may flow through them, establish "safety committees".
- Schools should be used as hubs (highest education level per sq. meter of any city) for all knowledge and disaster activities; build-up and communication of small lessons is key for spreading awareness.
- Televisions are potentially powerful tools for communicating widely with public but they might be unavailable to the poor.
- Instead of simply rebuilding schools, there is a need to work with children; proper desks alleviated children's back pain and improved attendance; similarly, need for proper toilets, and fans.
- Mock drills should be conducted regularly.
- Preparedness such as drills should be instilled and schools are excellent place to do so.
- Schools need contingency funds for disasters.
- Instead of focus on improving schools, need focus on keeping from slipping further into poverty. ■

A Community-based Approach for School Safety and Education for Disaster Reduction

Knowledge management and education can help communities located in hazard-prone areas gain a better grasp of the ways to cope with risks. Education has been recognised as an essential element in sustainable development and is entirely linked with disaster risk reduction strategies, since it accelerates the progress of societies toward disaster resilience.

Furthermore, safe schools and educational buildings, well known as potential 'havens' against industrial and natural hazards, have proven effective in saving lives; their importance therefore needs to be emphasised in disaster risk management.

Even countries with limited financial resources can serve their populations well by providing them with schools that are resistant to natural and technological disasters. The disasters can damage school-building structures or have lethal consequences for students and teachers.

Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at the local level is a community-based, participatory process designed to create public awareness of hazards and to ensure that communities are adequately prepared to respond. As will be seen in the following paragraphs, it applies equally well to schools.

What is a safe school?

A safe school is either a school that is located in a hazard free area, or one that has been constructed so as to withstand the hazards to which it is exposed. A safe school will not collapse if a disaster occurs.

A safe school can be achieved through several complementary measures that begin with land use planning, and pass through structural reinforcement (for earthquakes, landslides, hurricanes, explosions, toxic releases), flood proofing (for floods and tsunamis) and preparedness plans, amongst others.

Humanitarian Organisations should give priority for publishing awareness materials in local languages.

What does it take to have a safe school?

Each community that endeavours to be prepared for disasters will have to adopt and implement specific policies that are inherent to its cultural, social and economic concepts and practices. These policies often require changes in established practices. The protection of school buildings against disasters does not require enormous changes, nor mobilisation of extraordinary resources. In the first instance, it requires political will.

What is education for disaster reduction?

Formal education is the formal inclusion in the basic school curriculum of issues and subjects related to: (i) identification and understanding of risks and its linkages with sustainable development; (ii) learning of risk reduction measures; and (iii) learning about disaster preparedness and response.

Informal education or non-formal education is the development of awareness raising campaigns to reach out to the public at large (civil society, workers, decision-makers, etc.) with messages related to disaster reduction, better understating of how human activity can link to disaster and what can be done at the individual level to contribute to disaster reduction. Technical education for local builders (including masons) and construction firms is extremely important to sustain risk reduction initiatives in the community. ■

Source: UNDP Publication (2004). *Reducing Disaster Risk: A Challenge for Development*
ISDR Publication (2002). *Living with Risk*
UNEP Publication (1988). *APELL Handbook*

Preparedness Month: A Practical Guideline from the Government of India

Since 2004, the Government of India has planned to launch a programme to promote school safety. By emphasising school safety on the educational agenda as soon as possible, the government called for nation-wide attention and contributions to the safety of our children.

In order to involve all related resources into this issue and conduct it professionally, a district-level School Safety Advisory Committee was suggested, which shall include but is not limited to a key Administrator, Coordinator BRC / CRC, Representative of PTA / MTA, Municipal Commissioner, Vice Chairman Development Authority, Chief Fire Officer, Chief Medical Officer, School Principals and Teachers (Municipal / Private), representative from the students, emergency response agencies / officials, key institutions, Indian Red Cross, Civil Defence, ward representatives, committed youth groups, clubs, volunteers, representatives from corporate sector, NGOs and other stakeholders[4].

Besides, a guiding plan as a country level strategy has been presented, which adopts school safety plans at two levels: 1) A District-wide School Safety Plan; 2) A School Building-Level Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan. Specific examples and models are given for related departments and schools to implement as well.

Furthermore, the government suggests some activities aiming at increasing awareness through education practice. One of the campaigns is "Preparedness Month" throughout the whole country. All schools around the nation are supposed to facilitate this unique and significant campaign annually; meanwhile all related stakeholders are encouraged to contribute to this issue as well. The government has proposed a model layout of a timetable and agenda as a practical guideline for all. ■

(see model sheet on the next page)

4 Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, National Disaster Management Division (NDMD): School safety: A Handbook for Administrators, Education Officers, Emergency Officials, School Principals and Teachers, 2004.

Boat Tragedy: When Schools Plan Picnics

At 6:40pm on February 20, 2007, 15 children and 3 teachers died when they were crossing a river with a tattered boat on their way back from a picnic. Altogether 216 students and 12 teachers went together but few of them knew how to swim. A hole in the boat was discovered when they were boarding but none paid much attention to it. That the boat was overloaded was clear, but everyone was in a rush to get back with the unlicensed private boat before it was too late in the evening.

The school authority and local government responded immediately after the accident but lives lost could never be recovered.

Too many tragedies have proven the importance of promoting school safety and taking every measure to ensure children's security when they

No more boating at Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary.

are studying in school. Whereas, the calamity reminds us of something important: providing disaster resilient school buildings, desks and evacuation routes in schools. It is required to ask questions such as: Is there anything sharp to cause injuries in classrooms? Are there any poisonous chemical in laboratories? Do children play proper games leading fewer serious injuries? Do they know how to get on and get off buses on the way to school? Do they know how to cross the road? Do they know how to deal with strangers who accost them pretending friends of their parents? Do they know what they should do if someone falls into a lake asking for help? In a word, school safety is far beyond the inside of the school but also around the school and outside the school.

Thus, the essential mission will be raising awareness towards possible dangers in everyday life, which can be achieved through education. We can imagine that if swimming were learnt as a normal skill, the loss on that boat would be less, and that if the boat ride was refused after the discovery of the hole… None of the detailed miscellaneous items of everyday life can be ignored addressing the issue of safety through school. ■

Preparedness Month – Schedule of Key Events (Model sheet)

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Events to be held Before Preparedness Month: ■ Profile generation of schools in the city ■ Initial consultations with all stakeholders. ■ Setting up of School Safety Advisory Committee (SSAC) ■ Orientation programme for Principal and Teachers of key target schools ■ Finalisation of IEC Materials					**Day 1 – 1st** Workshop for principals, teachers and key stakeholders	**Day 2 – 1st** Meeting of the SSAC and develop guidelines for District-Wide School Safety Plan (9)
Day 3 – 2nd Workshop for principals, teachers and key stakeholders (if required)	**Day 4 –** *School assembly to discuss the effects of* ***earthquakes*** *and the importance of proper preparation*	**Day 5 –** *School assembly to discuss the effects of* ***floods*** *and the importance of proper preparation*	**Day 6 –** Consultation meetings for Parents to be organized by Local Clubs and other Associations including the PTA.	**Day 7 –** Screening of the movie in the school / site visits to vulnerable areas.	**Day 8 –** *School assembly to discuss the effects of* ***landslides*** *and the importance of proper preparation*	**Day 9 – 2nd** Meeting of the SSAC for finalization of District-wide School Safety Plan (24)
Day 10 – 3rd Workshop for Principal and Teachers on developing of School Building-level emer Prep & Resp Plan. (19,26,28)	**Day 11 –** *School assembly to discuss the effects of* ***cyclones*** *and the importance of proper preparation*	**Day 12 –** *School assembly to discuss the effects of* ***local hazards around the school*** *and the importance of proper preparation*	**Day 13 –** Consultation meetings for parents to be organized by Local Clubs and other Associations including the PTA.	**Day 14 –** Screening of the movie in the school / site visits to vulnerable areas.	**Day 15 –** *School assembly to discuss the effects of* ***fire hazards*** *and the importance of proper preparation*	**Day 16 –** Day 1 Trainning of Children Task Forces and Staff (Master Trainers – MT) – in First Aid, Fire Fighting and Search & Rescue.
Day 17 – Day 2: Training of Student Task Forces and Staff (MT) – in First Aid, Fire Fighting and Search & Rescue	**Day 18 –** Master Trainers to demonstrate the exercises to respective school staff and students– over a week	**Day 19 –** *School assembly to discuss the effects of* ***chemical hazards*** *and the importance of proper preparation*	**Day 20 –** Consultation meetings for Parents to be organized by Local Clubs and other Associations including the PTA.	**Day 21 –** Screening of the movie in the school / site visits to vulnerable areas.	**Day 22 –** *School assembly to discuss* ***crowd incidents*** *and the importance of proper preparation*	**Day 23 – 4th** Workshop for Principals and Teachers on imparting GUIDELINES for MOCK DRILLS (25)
Day 24 – 3rd Meeting of SSAC and releasing of Final Report on District-Wide School Safety Plan Document	**Day 25 –** District wide Earthquake Mock drill 'DROP-COVER-HOLD' from 10:30–10:40am, followed by building evacuation	**Day 26 –** *Submitting of School Building-Level Emergency Prep & Response Plan (BLERP) to the SSAC*	**Day 27 –** *School assembly to discuss the* ***road safety and other hazards*** *and the importance of proper preparation*	**Day 28 –** School to associate with the community visited earlier and initiate work on possible risk reduction measures.	**Day 29 –** AWARENESS RALLY to observe SAFETY DAY.	**Day 30 –** Exhibition/ Display of IEC materials developed/ Stage – Rescue Acts, Fire drill etc. at the venue.
Day 31 – 5th Workshop for all Stakeholders involved in the School Awareness and Safety Programee and sharing of the experiences; Exhibition and distribution of Prizes; Road Ahead – Identification of Hazard Reduction Projects and new partnerships	**Events to be held Post Preparedness Month and throughout the year:** ■ Training of Staff and Children Task Forces ■ Working with the Media for public service announcements and coverage in the press ■ Working with the Law Enforcers for enforcement of regulations in accordance to building safety ■ Partnership with the business leaders and promote programs (such as "adopt-a-school") and activities ■ Observe regular mock drills; up gradation o plan; initiate school safety ideas and safety workshops ■ The fourth working week after the annual summer vacations to be observed as SAFESCHOOLS WEEK.					

Note: Number in (—) essentially highlights the follow up dates for the event.

Source: *Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, National Disaster Management Division: School safety: A Handbook for Administrators, Education Officers, Emergency Officials, School Principals and Teachers, 2006*

RIGHT TO SAFER SCHOOLS: ACTION IN PICTURES

Schools represent the capacity or vulnerability of our society.

What's our learning from past disasters and how do we reflect for making schools safer?

Hazards vary in nature and magnitude but the reality remains the same that safe education is the right of school students.

Regular drills and active follow-up are very important for mitigating the impact of hazards in schools.

The Right to Safer Schools Campaign resource kit has been developed based on the five year journey of school safety activities, and recovery experience of earthquakes, cyclones, tsunamis, riots, droughts, floods and fire incidents.

Contributors to the Round Table on 'Disaster Risk Reduction and Safer School Campaign' on January 10, 2007 at AMA.

Disaster Education: Japanese Experience

Japan lies on the Pacific Ring of Fire, a highly active tectonic zone where the Pacific Plate subducts beneath continental plates, and has numerous active volcanoes and frequently experiences earthquakes. Japan is at a risk to flooding if sea level is to rise due to ice-melting resulting from global warming. However, Japan is at the forefront of planning for climate change, with the major emphasis being on the implications for flooding of coastal areas, as sea-level rise will increase the risk of flooding due to surges and other flood mechanisms[5]. Earthquakes in Japan tend to result in lower mortality rates than in many developing countries due to better enforcement of building codes, better emergency response, and the generally high level of preparedness[6].

Moreover, Japanese school curricula include disaster education right from the beginning through all levels. Students in primary schools (grade 1–6) are taught about accidents in everyday life (such as road and household accidents), first aid and basics of disaster science. Activities include mock trials for disaster situations in and around schools. In junior schools (grade 7–9), students learn physical processes behind hazards, first aid for specific situations like haemorrhage and fractures, measures to avoid accidents during household activities like cooking and protective behaviours during disasters. Senior students (grade 10–12) learn basics of earth science, hazards in different geological formations, how to save themselves and help small children and senior citizens during disasters, and so on.

Teaching school children about disasters will help secure the future against disasters, as disaster reduction measures will be better integrated with development sectors.

Children are the future of a country. Inclusion of disaster education in school curricula helps create disaster-aware population inculcated with a culture of safety. Developing countries can draw many lessons from Japan in this regard. ■

5 Nicholls, R. J., 2006. Storm Surges in Coastal Areas published in Natural Disaster Hotspots: Case Studies. The World Bank, Hazard Management Unit, Washington, D. C., Disaster Risk Management Series No. 6, pp. 79–108.

6 Dilley, M., Chen, R. S., Deichmann, U., Lerner-Lam, A. L., Arnold, M. with Agwe, J., Buys, P., Kjekstad, O., Lyon, B., and Yetman, G., 2005. Natural Disaster Hotspots: A Global Risk Analysis. The World Bank, Hazard Management Unit, Washington, D. C., Disaster Risk Management Series No. 5.

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