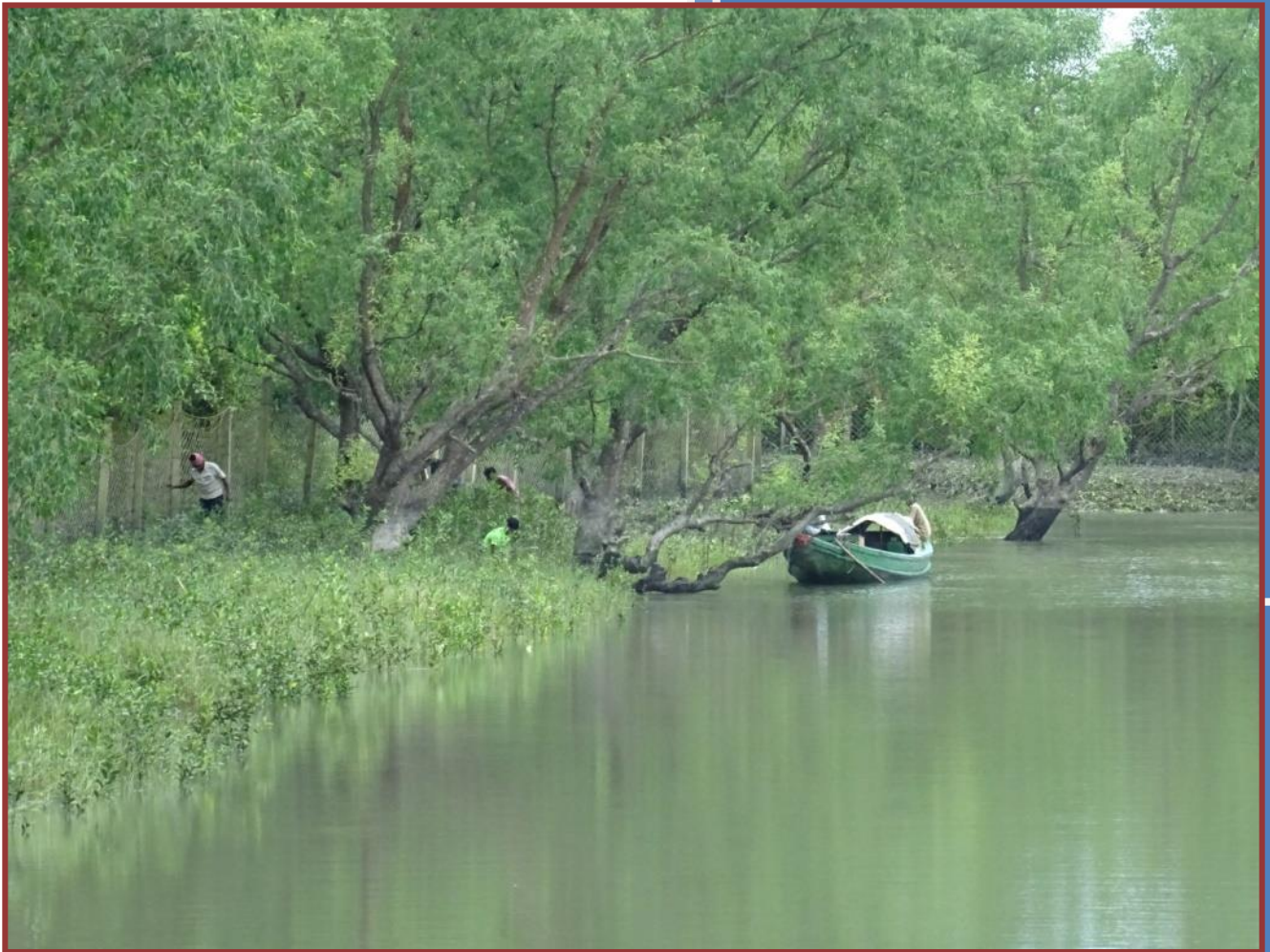


2015

Child focus DRR Guidelines and Tools

In Context to West Bengal, India



Executive Summary

Disaster Risk Management has been subjugated by top-down relief efforts targeted at adults, who are assumed to be adjusted to the needs of their families and the wider community, and to act harmoniously to protect their immediate and long term interests. Whilst a growing number of development approaches focus on reducing the risk of disasters, they tend to treat children as passive & submissive victims with a limited role to play in communicating risks or preventing and responding to any disasters.

This paper challenges these assumptions by examining how children's voices are represented and heard in disaster risk reduction (DRR) policy and decision-making spaces, and by assessing the level of capacity children have for preventing disasters vis-à-vis their parents. This challenge and the research presented here are prompted by the unreliable field reports provided by child-focused development agencies, which suggest that children in developing countries are making significant contributions to minimizing disaster risks.

Through this lens, the paper explores three linked areas of enquiry that help to frame the emerging '**child-centred approach to DRR**'. First, it considers a history of children empowerment through **children's active participation in decision-making forums**. Second, it looks at whether the international human rights architecture provides for a **child's right to protection from disasters**; and third, it asks whether **children can be effective as communicators of risk** within their own households and communities as an **advocacy tool**.

These **three elements contextualize** the results of **field research in Sundarban Area** particularly in Jogeshgunj and Kalitala Gram Panchayat of Hingalgunj Block of West Bengal, India, which explored what opportunities exist for the **voices of children** and their groups to be heard within local and State DRR policy spaces and the experiences and capacity they have for doing so. The concluding section considers why children may be suited to the role as **DRR advocates** and as communicators of disaster risk, and indeed probable space in program approach areas in DRR to make the overall community resilience.

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1. Introduction

1.1 About Sundarban

The target area includes forest and saltwater swamps that form the lower part of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna delta. The entire delta has become an increasingly disaster prone area, highly vulnerable to frequent and extreme weather events, poor capacity and an underlying vulnerability of the population. In West Bengal, 50% of the population is considered to be living

below the poverty line (BPL) and the situation is even worse in the communities proposed by the action. A high rural population density (738 persons per km²), extreme remoteness and little development further limit the capacity of the population to prepare for and respond to natural disasters. Hingalganj block is among the most vulnerable area of West Bengal, both in terms of socio-economic



Fig1: The jungle side of Kalitala Gram Panchayat

development and susceptibility to multiple hazards given their geographic locations and topology. Socio-economically, the area is affected by high migration rates, including a particularly acute problem of human trafficking towards urban centers. As a result there is a significant rate of highly vulnerable female-headed families. The area and in particular the specific target GPs have a high concentration of socially vulnerable groups, with a Schedule Caste (SC) percentage of 45.4% and a Scheduled Tribe (ST) percentage of 24% (Gol Census, 2001). Most vulnerable households living in semi-permanent mud constructions are even more affected by adverse weather conditions and tidal surges, which cause displacement and loss of shelter and livelihoods. Livelihood options are limited, with most households engaging in fishing and monocrop paddy rice as the main sources of income. The average land holding is 0.92 acres per land-owning household. The Sundarbans, where North 24 Parganas district is situated, is regularly devastated by cyclones which pose tremendous hazards and risks to the lives and properties of the people living there because of the heavy saline water inflow that destroys their houses, livestock and farmlands. The 3,750 km man-made embankment in the region is the only defense in Sundarbans. The Aila Cyclone in May 2009 resulted in a loss of livelihoods, deterioration of health conditions, extensive damage to infrastructure, livestock and harvests and increased food

insecurity and malnutrition. The impact was more severe due to the absence of disaster preparedness and coping strategies. The subsequent drought and localized floods have compounded these problems. The coping mechanisms of households have been completely exhausted by these disasters. In addition to being earthquake prone, another risk, and one that will be planned for within the activities implemented by this project, is that a cyclone will occur at the same time as a high tide, which would result in unseen devastation in the area. Furthermore, the area is also earthquake prone and under seismic zone IV. Children's are more frequently attacked by crocodile, tiger and snake in few villages near jungle.

Children and community lack access to proper early warning, shelter, drinking water and sanitation facilities, protection and entitlements. The disaster management programme initiated by Government of West Bengal and other agencies have implemented different projects and made functional District & Block Disaster Management Committees as per guidelines of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) under Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India. However Children are still deprived of their needs which include their nutrition, education, psychosocial and protection issues. So in conclusion children always remained as passive recipient of services.



Fig2: Students going to their schools near the embankment in Jogeshgunj HS School

1.2 Context

Mainstreaming DRR approaches and theoretical debates in disaster management tend to ignore the role of children as communicators of risk and as facilitators of disaster risk reduction (DRR). Instead, disaster management is dominated by top-down relief efforts targeted at adults, who are assumed to be attuned to the needs of their families and the wider community and to act harmoniously to protect their immediate and long-term interests. At the same time, disaster events and their severity in terms of human well-being are increasing across the globe. In many areas, the impacts of climate change are adding to existing shocks and stresses and presenting new risks in others, while widespread poverty and inequality, particularly in developing countries, reinforces vulnerability and exacerbates impacts.

Contemporary wave of tragedy events, disproportionate numbers of women and children are being killed exemplified by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami where only one in three survivors were women or children under the age of 15. Between 1991 and 2000, the lives of an estimated 80 million children were affected by disasters and conflict. However, while gender issues in disasters have enjoyed a higher profile in recent years, current research tends to assume

children are passive victims with no role to play in communicating risks, participating in decision-making processes, or preventing disasters.

None of the more recent theoretical models of risk communication/ guidelines for good risk communication practice single out the unique needs and potential role of children as advocates or agents of DRR. This is despite the fact that almost all models and guidelines detail the heterogeneous nature of those at risk and the wider socio-economic and cultural differences in the process and delivery of DRR.

Many practitioners have measured the merits of communicating and educating children about the risks of natural hazards to support disaster preparedness but only a small minority have evaluated the benefits of teaching children about disasters for the benefit of the family and wider community. The ability of the children to act to reduce their vulnerabilities and risk of disasters has been largely ignored outside of the development field in almost all developing countries. The huge majority of the writing on the role of children in disasters is devoted to the psychosocial impacts they and this has commonly focused on younger children, rather than older children. (Plan 2009)

Despite positive, yet unpublished, anecdotal evidence from child-centred DRR approaches being pursued by development agencies such as Plan International, UNICEF and Save the Children, analytical research on the capacity of children to reduce the impact of disasters is missing. In many developing countries, children from the bulk of the population and a high proportion of the death tolls in a disaster (Wisner 2006). Excluding children from the disaster planning process threatens their safety when the disaster strikes and ignores a valuable resource for risk communication, education, advocacy, and help with practical risk reduction activities.

This paper and the field study on which it is based, represents a preliminary attempt to analyse child-centred DRR, which contribute to developing a conceptual background and rationale for working with children to reduce disaster risk. Specifically, it examines the opportunities and capacities for children's voices to contribute to DRR policy spaces; and will be a key input to a larger study addressing the issues and utility of children as communicators of reducing risk. Through this lens, the paper begins by exploring three linked areas of enquiry that help to frame the emerging child-centred approach to DRR and the specific research question relating to children's voices in DRR policy spaces. Firstly, it considers a history of Children/ youth empowerment through children's active participation in decision-making forums. Secondly, it looks at whether the international human rights architecture provides for a child's right to protection from disasters; and thirdly, it asks whether children can be effective as communicators of risk within their own households and communities.

The paper outlines the methodology & findings from field study conducted in Sundarban area of Hingalgunj Block of West Bengal, India, which explored child-centred DRR by asking what opportunities exist for the voices of children, and their groups, to be heard within local and state DRR policy spaces and what experiences and capacity they have for doing so. The research results from each of the four field sites visited (two in Gram Panchayat- Jogeshgunj and Kalitala) are compared in a short discussion section, before the conclusion considers the implications of

these findings for child-centred DRR and sets out some ideas as to why children's agency on DRR may be stronger than previously thought.

As this paper is a first step within a broader research programme on understanding and informing a child-centred DRR approach, the paper finishes by outlining further questions emerging from this preliminary research that may help to shape future investigations which will be submitted further to the West Bengal State Disaster Management Authority for further studies/research and/or incorporation of findings in existing DRR guidelines to transform it to Child Centered DRR guidelines.

2. Key Concepts

As research on children's voices, participation and rights is more advanced in other development fields, it is important to frame child-centred DRR within a wider understanding of such concepts.

2.1 Children Participation & their Voices

There are many ways of defining what is meant by child participation. In 1975, the US-based National Commission on Resources for Youth defined 'youth participation' as:

“...the involving of child & youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and/or decision-making affecting others in an activity whose impact or consequence is extended to others — i.e., outside or beyond the youth participants themselves.” (National Commission on Resources for Youth, 1975)”

A more present-day, yet still broad definition is provided by the Save the Children' reaction toolkit', which described it thus:[Children]sharing ideas, thinking for themselves, expressing their views effectively, planning, prioritizing and being involved in the decision making process. (Save the Children, 2000: 13)

Practitioners and researchers have since been working towards establishing a code of conduct for meaningful child participation, by recognizing the need to look after the strengths, interests, and abilities of Children in order that they can take charge of the decisions that affect them. Accordingly, Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2001) define youth participation as a process where young people have real influence in the decisions that affect their lives and not just a token or passive presence in adult agencies. Participation, then, is measured by its quality. In terms of community evaluation, youth participation is defined as the involvement of youth in knowledge development, defining problems, gathering information and using the results (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster 2003). By participating in community evaluation, children can define what they perceive to be problems, rather than having to accept issues that have been identified and mediated by adults or authorities. Despite this progress Chawla (2002) claims that the inclusion of the voices of children and youth represents a new frontier in participatory policy development.

2.2 The ladder of child and youth participation

Level	Rungs of the Ladder	Degree of Participation	Percentage in context to field
8 th Top	Children initiated, shared decision with adults	Children have the ideas, set up the project, and invite adults to join with them in making decisions.	0
7 th	Children are directed	Children have the initial idea and decide how the project is carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.	0
6 th	Adult-initiated shared decisions with children	Adults have the initial idea but children are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but they are also involved in taking the decisions.	0
5 th	Consulted but informed	The project is designed and run by adults but children are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.	0
4 th	Assigned but informed	Adults decided on the project and children volunteer for it. Adults respect their views.	1%
3 rd	Tokenism	Children are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.	1%
2 nd	Decoration	Children take part in an event, e.g. by singing, dancing or wearing t-shirts with logos on, but they do not really understand the issue.	30%
1 st Bottom	Manipulation	Children do or say what adults suggest they do, but have no real understanding of the issues, or are asked what they think. Adults use some of their ideas but do not tell them what influence they have had on the final decision.	68%

The 'ladder of participation' is an effective method for evaluating the level of meaningful child participation. In the DRR context, children may help with short term actions such as planting trees or communicating information to their family, however, it does not become true participation until children take control and their views become actions through their own agency. The table also highlights some important issues regarding the ethical grounding for youth involvement and the need for a truly inclusive and transparent process. At least half of the 'rungs in the ladder'

involve some element of manipulation of children in order to achieve ends that they may not have been consulted on or of which they were not even aware.

Thus, despite the rhetoric reflected in many reports, publications and speeches, the realities of youth participation are often misunderstood, misdirected or controlled for purposes that are at odds with the interests of children and young people.

In order to ensure that approaches to youth involvement do have children and young people's interests at heart, and to increase the chances of successful outcomes, a number of guidelines, standards and definitions have been devised. For example, Driskell (2002) defines meaningful participation in the following terms:

Local - While participation might be implemented on a regional, national scale and even international scale, its implementation is focused on the needs and issues of the local community.

Transparent - The aims of the participatory project are clear to all involved.

Inclusive - Accessible to all members of the community.

Interactive - A community wide dialogue with children and adults talking and listening to each other.

Responsive - Facilitators need to be flexible in order to respond to changing conditions and needs. The process must not be rushed, with enough time given to enable all children and young adults to voice opinions and listen to others.

Relevant - Participation involves combining children's local knowledge and unique perspective with information and skilled perspectives from outside the community that is considered needed by the young participants and facilitators.

Educational - A learning process for all - sponsors, officials, facilitators, etc.

2.3 Motivations & Obstacles for Children's Participation

There are a number of reasons why young people may choose to participate or not. These may stem from concerns about the world around them, seen from a perspective quite different to the adult world, or are qualities and characteristics of the child themselves.

Motivations of children and youth to participate

It has been revealed from the interaction within the children in Hingalgunj field in which shared their experience of Aila Cyclone and also the motivation and de-motivation level of their participations are as follows

What motivates children and youth to participate?	Why do some young people not want to participate?
Belief in the importance of expressing their views	Have other priorities
Belief in the possibility of influencing decision making	Scepticism about the efficacy of their participation. Believe young people cannot influence change
A drive to make a difference	Not motivated to make a difference as others are paid to take the responsibility and/or those

	in charge know what they are doing
Are aware of the ways young people can participate	Not aware of how they can participate
Parental / family influence (having parents, family or friends involved in the area)	Not involved in social or family groups where involvement occurs
Background knowledge and an interest in the area (also developed through participation)	Lack of interest or knowledge
Self confidence (this is also developed through the act of participation)	Lack of self confidence
Brush-off and ignore peer group attitudes	'It's not cool' - negative peer group influences

Few Children said 'it was made clear that we were to sit at the back and keep quiet' This lack of commitment by decision-makers to accept youth views and the failure of organisations to adequately represent youths can lead to a process that is neither empowering nor effective in influencing change. However, as with all participatory processes, the children and youth who are willing and able to participate are often unrepresentative of the communities in which they live. As Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003) observe, socioeconomic factors and levels of education are very influential predictors for participation, and they note that adults often perpetuate the inequalities in child and youth participation by involving further those who are already involved or who hold key positions in the community.

2.4 How is successful participation gauged?

Mixing adult, child and youth partnerships is fundamental for successful participation of young people. Traditionally this relationship has been one-sided with adults communicating to and working on behalf of young people. Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003) emphasize that child and youth inclusion should not merely be seen as the involvement of yet another community group. Rather, it represents the involvement of an excluded group whose participation is not familiar to most adults and has the potential to challenge the status quo in a more fundamental way. In order to effect change of a community's entrenched values, it is necessary for old norms to be challenged, prejudices to be overcome and new ideals and skills to be embraced, by adults and youth groups alike.

Common problems and areas of conflict between adults and children

According to adults, children are...	According to children, adults are...
Lacking in commitment Too demanding	Self absorbed Unwilling to give personal space
Undisciplined Too regimented	Not interested in long-term plans Oblivious to the here and now realities
Temperamental Not interested in the emotional aspects	Inexperienced Not ready to give chances
Only interested in having fun Boring	
Lacking in commitment Too demanding	Self absorbed Unwilling to give personal space
Undisciplined Too regimented	Not interested in long-term plans Oblivious to

	the here and now realities
Temperamental Not interested in the emotional aspects	Inexperienced Not ready to give chances

Children and youth are often expected to be engaged in processes conceived by adults. Instead, they must be supported to carry out their own projects and enabled to conduct scoping research in areas they feel are important. This may mean that adults have to support and facilitate projects they do not agree with.

2.5 Supporting a Child’s Right to Safety

From the previous section, it is clear that organized child and youth participation is desirable if conducted in a manner that adds legitimacy to the voice of children, on the child’s own terms, while also underpinning their personal development and motivations. However, in many cases, there is little to compel political agencies or other external actors to secure the participation of young people in decision-making. Consequently, distinctions have to be drawn between the legal and moral responsibility for children’s voices to be heard and for their safety and security to be given added attention. This section draws on international child rights literature and architecture to explore how current legal frameworks support a child’s right to protection from disasters and their right to participate in measures to reduce disaster risk in their communities.

Two international instruments deal specifically with the rights of the child – the CRC, which is the most widely ratified international convention, and the DRC, which is only declaratory. Despite being merely declaratory, the DRC has played an important role in the recognition of children’s rights as it reflected a change in perception of children as not merely ‘objects’ or ‘little adults’, but persons who deserve not only equal protection to adults, but special protection due to their unique position of vulnerability

2.6 The Geneva Declaration and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child

The Geneva Convention as adopted by the League of Nations in 1924 originally had five articles (Last 1994). It was amended and extended to become the DRC, which was adopted in 1959 by the UN General Assembly. There are three principles in the DRC, which are particularly relevant to the child’s right to safety and protection from disasters. Principle 2 of the DRC declares that:

“The child shall enjoy special protection, and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means, to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity. In the enactment of laws for this purpose, the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration.”

It is clear that the impact of a disaster would hinder a child’s development and, as such, it can be easily concluded that ‘special protection’ must be provided to the child from these negative

impacts. In this way, disaster mitigation is an important component in minimising risk of disaster and fulfilling Principle 2 of the

DRC so that the child may be able to develop in a 'healthy and normal manner'. It is also noted that the type of disaster intervention required here must go beyond just the provision of physical survival needs. Principle 2 requires a holistic approach to the protection of the child, to ensure that the child's mental, social and emotional development must not be impaired as well.

Similarly, Principle 4 of the DRC requires that the child 'shall be entitled to grow and develop in health'. Though the wording of the Principle refers specifically to pre- and post-natal care of children, it is not limited to this. The Principle goes on to provide that '[t]he child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services'. Children, therefore, should be provided with an environment where he or she may grow and develop in health (therefore, not one of high disaster-risk, being instead protected as much as possible from the occurrence of disaster and all its negative effects) and be provided with good housing, nutrition and medical services.

This principle can therefore be used to support DRR interventions to build resilience. Further, as this Principle is not restricted to times of normality (cf. times of disaster), the Principle can also be used for grounds that disaster relief in the form of food, housing and medical services be provided to children in the event of a disaster and throughout recovery. The rights of the child affected by calamity or conflict are explicitly set out in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the NGOs in Disaster Relief (1994); and the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (2004).

2.7 Convention on the Rights of the Child

The CRC represents children as the subjects of rights, possessing fundamental entitlements that must be protected. They are recognised as having agency and as having a voice to be listened to. As mentioned previously, the CRC does not specifically mention the right of children to be protected from disaster or the

right of children to disaster mitigation. Though the CRC has traditionally been interpreted to cover a political, legal and development context, it is evident below that the CRC also deals with many matters relating to disaster mitigation.

Firstly, the CRC guarantees that all actions taken by public entities (including private social welfare institutions) have the best interests of the child as a primary consideration. Article 3 of the CRC states:

"In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration"

Article 3 of the CRC also requires the States Parties to 'ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being...and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.' It is clear that the occurrence of a disaster would have a negative impact on a child's well-being and would not be in the best interest of the child. As such, it could

be argued that disaster mitigation by the States Parties is imperative to the protection of the child's well-being.

2.8 Human rights approach to disaster mitigation and relief

Apart from specific international instruments dealing with children, there are other international human rights instruments (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

(ICESCR)), which may address the right to protection and relief from disasters in general. As with those specific to children, none of these explicitly guarantee the rights of a person (whether adult or child) to protection or relief from disasters but it is evident that such rights are implied by various international human rights instruments.

2.9 Children as Communicators of Risk

These provisions supporting a child's right to safety and wellbeing, provide important pillars for a rights based, child-centred approach to DRR. However, it is also important to evaluate what added value a child-centred approach to DRR can offer. Do children possess the skills and qualities required to be successful advocates for DRR and effective communicators of disaster risk? In this area, the body of literature is not as well developed as for child rights or participation; however there are successful examples of children acting as communicators of health risk information. Children learn about water, sanitation and health risks and pass this information onto their peers, parents and the wider community

In addition to health care projects, these 'child-to-child' and 'child-to-adult' risk communication approaches have been adopted by NGOs including Save the Children

Two explanations are ventured for children not figuring in these traditions. Firstly, risk communication has always been associated with information flows from the top downwards, with scientific institutions at the top and the public at the bottom, though this has been repeatedly challenged by many sociologists of risk (e.g Wynne 1992; Wilbanks and Kates, 1999). This has diverted attention away from the diversity within communities and placed it on relationships between science and society. The second relates to paternalism, and the commonly held belief that parents make decisions about the level of risk their child faces (Adams 1995). Therefore, risk communication models assume parents have the responsibility, capacity, will and free reign to make choices about risks their children face - without questioning the rights and agency of the child to make a difference.

3. Research Study

As set out above, child-centred DRR is the product of thinking on child rights, on child and youth participation, voice and empowerment; and of hypotheses relating to the power and agency of children as effective communicators of disaster risk. However, while some initial experiences of

child-centred DRR programming have been positive, this is a new area of research and practice with an accompanying set of unknowns and questions to be answered.

Consequently, the research presented here, the product of field studies in Jogeshgunj and Kalitala Gram Panchayat, represents a first attempt to explore some of the issues a child-centred approach to DRR provides. In terms of specific research questions, we ask:

What opportunities exist for the voices of children and their groups to be heard within local and national DRR policy spaces and; What experiences and capacity do children and their groups have for doing so?

The research was conducted as a comparative study of Jogeshgunj and Kalitala Gram Panchayat, two Panchayat. It was also designed to compare two communities in each Panchayat, one community where FADV supported child-centred DRR programme had yet to be implemented and one community where it was well established. This allowed the research team to test the efficacy of a child-centred DRR approach as measured against a 'control' community.

A participatory approach was adopted with a focus on self-assessment of coping and capacity. The research was conducted through focus group discussion sessions and visioning exercises with children and youth groups, their parents and local policy makers. In-depth interviews were used with policy and decision makers at the national and regional level. A set of guiding questions were used to facilitate discussion that included the causes of disasters, past disaster events and their consequences, and current response and coordination. At community level, methods included risk mapping and ranking, visioning exercises, transect walks, stakeholder and influence mapping and theatre. The methods employed were flexible in order to adapt to the dynamic research environment.

3.1 Methodology

The overall study involves the following methods of data collection:

1. **Primary data**, to enable the integration of warning system components, emphasizing the importance of incorporating human and organizational factors into any CCDRR planning and development processes. It is collected through –

a. **Key Informant Interview (KII)** with stakeholders throughout the systemic chain, responsible for channelizing and disseminating the early warning information. The interviews were conducted with the Disaster Management Officers at the State, District, Sub-Division and Block levels, the Block Development Officer and the Police stations nearest to and responsible for the field area.

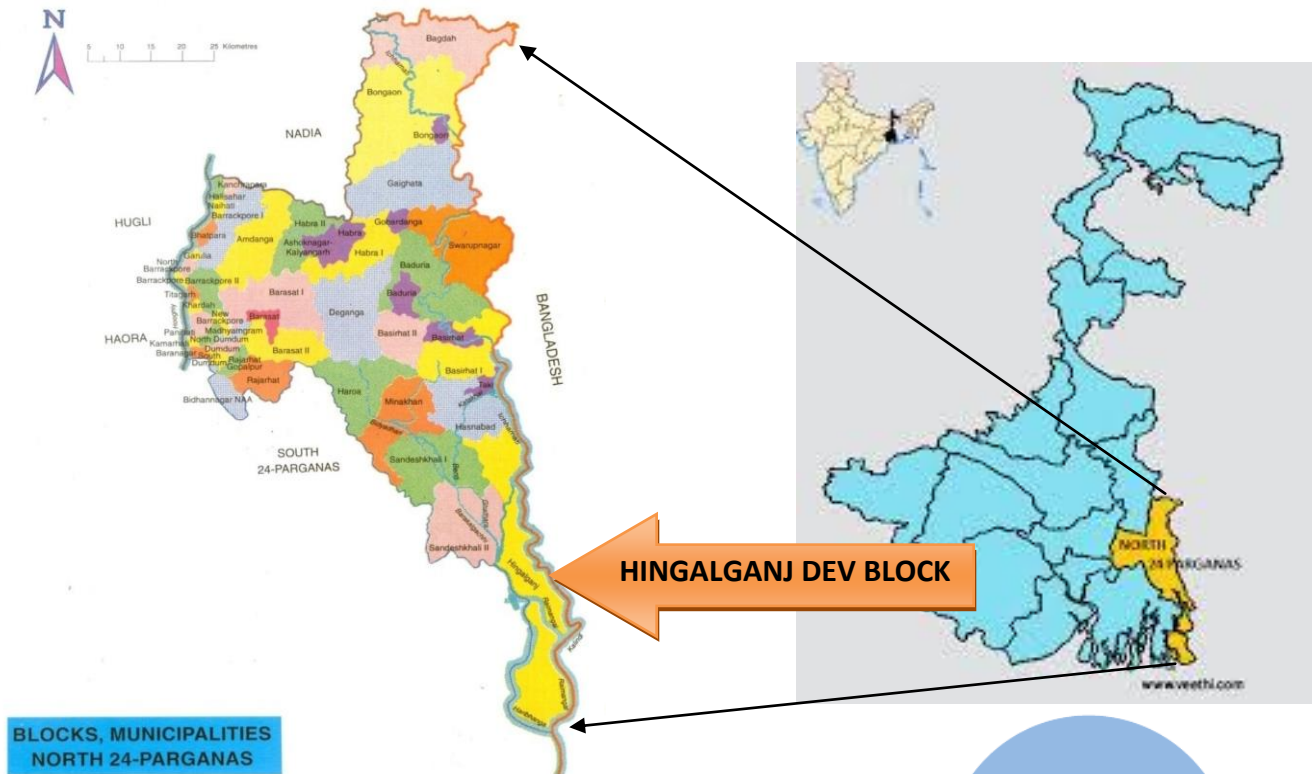
b. **Focus Group Discussion (FGD)** with the community. The two FGDs were conducted with a heterogeneous group in each GP, comprising of mutually non-exclusive representation from

- i. Small farmers
- ii. Vulnerable dwellers, in terms of social, economic and geographical vulnerability
- iii. Forest dependents
- iv. Representative of local government
- v. Women / SHG members
- vi. Children
- vii. Anganwadi workers
- viii. ASHA workers and One homogenous groups comprises with Children from age group 5 to 18 years old to understand their views and opinion

2. **Secondary data**, to provide a general framework for describing the concept of Child Centric DRR guidelines and tools kit that need to be defined. It is to be collected through –

- Desk Review and analysis of available references and policy documents of different International agencies including Save the Children, Plan International and UNICEF.

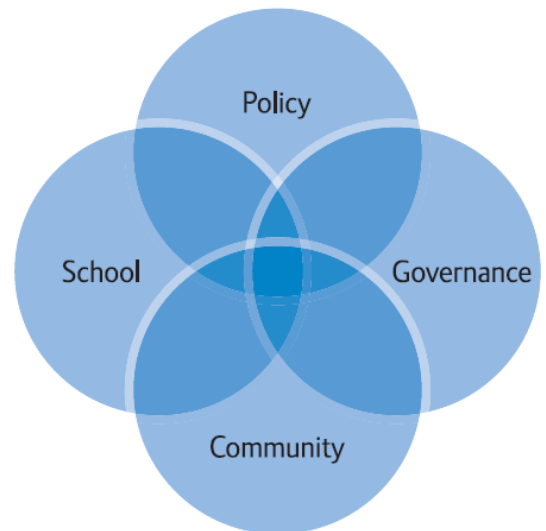
3.2 Field Sites



4. Findings from the Research Action - Child-centred Disaster Risk Reduction

Child-centred Disaster Risk Reduction is an innovative approach to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) that fosters the agency of children and youth, in groups and as individuals, to work towards making their lives safer and their communities more resilient to disasters. It is empowering for children, and respectful of their views and rights as well as their vulnerabilities.

Child-centred DRR is a flexible rights-based approach combining child-focused (**for** children) and child-led (**by** children) activities with interventions geared towards bringing about change in community, local and national duty bearers. It applies strategies such as awareness raising,



capacity building, group formation, institutional development, research and influencing and advocacy across a range of arenas.

4.1 Role of Children in Implementing the Sendai Framework of Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) aims

1. Understanding disaster risk is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation – **promoting and supporting children’s rights.**
2. **Involve children and young people to** strengthen disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk
3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for Priority Understanding disaster risk resilience and using knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels, **because children are our future.**
4. **Involve children and young people to** enhance disaster preparedness for effective response, and to «Build Back Better» in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction

In their approach to disaster risk reduction, States, regional and international organisations and other actors concerned should take into consideration the key activities listed under each of these five priorities and should implement them, as appropriate, to their own circumstances and capacities.

The Programmes Theory of Change

“Young citizens have the right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives and thus they have the right to participate in the governance of DRR ‘services’. Their participation results in better decisions, higher quality services, greater access to those services, and better development outcomes as a result of those services.”

Programme activities to operationalize the Theory of Change included:

- Working with children and youth groups to build awareness about risks and develop their capacities through participatory Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (HVCAs), risk mapping and training on disaster preparedness, prevention and mitigation;
- Reducing vulnerabilities by providing small grants to children’s groups to support children’s awareness raising, and small scale risk reduction interventions Engaging children in producing videos, radio programmes and street theatre performances to raise community awareness of risks and influence local duty bearers to priorities risk reduction;
- Raising the awareness and strengthening the capacities of adults, education practitioners, communities, media and local government for better management of DRR, risk management and child-centred contingency planning and disaster preparedness;
- Developing DRR curricula and teacher training modules on DRR;
- Working with Ministries of Education and national DRR agencies to develop school safety manuals;
- Influencing government to include children’s participation in DRR governance structures and decision making processes;

- Creating opportunities at national and global levels for young people to express their views and concerns on DRR and climate change adaptation;
- Contributing to networks and alliances on DRR, Climate Change Adaptation, Education in Emergencies and Child Rights;
- Building partnerships with research institutions to document Child-centred DRR practices and impact.

Results

- Children's knowledge of risks and DRR skills has increased
- Children are taking action to reduce risks in their communities and their schools
- Children have greater capacity to contribute to disaster response
- Children's school environment is safer
- Children are more involved in DRR governance structures
- Communities are better prepared for natural hazards

4.2 Key findings from the Child Centric DRR project in Sundarban particularly in Jogeshgunj and Kalitala Gram Panchayat.

Children are a vulnerable group. Children are too often overlooked in DRR programming and policy interventions despite the fact that they make up between 50% and 70% of the population of most countries at-risk of natural hazards. Organizations working on reducing vulnerability can maximize the impact of their interventions by building the capacity of the largest proportion of the population, and the largest cohort of those on the frontline of disasters – children. In Sundarban due to certain climatic and geographical vulnerabilities children are always at risk and this is the perception of their parents however being children at risk, children of Sundarban are enough capable of mitigating these risk with their inbuilt coping capacities. After interacting with several children through focused group discussions it came out that children know their daily and potential risk from the natural hazards however they know what to do when which means children of these two particular Gram Panchayat know how to mitigate however not in a organized way. In this CCDRR projects children are enough participating in all the activities and finding themselves more capable in mitigating and strengthening their coping capacities in a more organized way.

Children have a unique and holistic perception of risks. Children have a comprehensive approach to perceiving risks, encompassing natural hazards, personal safety and social and economic threats. Their perception influences their behavior and determines their readiness to mobilize for action in a range of disaster and development arenas. They often have a longer term perspective of risks than adults, who are primarily concerned with meeting day-to-day needs, in particular with regard to the environment. They have regularly identified immediate risks in their communities (such as road security, unsecured electric cables or child abuse), and social risks such as child abuse including bad touch and good touch and domestic violence – which may be overlooked by adults.

Children are effective risk communicators. ACID DRR project has evidenced that children have the capacity to communicate effectively on risk and risk reduction with their parents, siblings and peers and through informal communication networks. With appropriate support, children can effectively communicate risks to the wider community and larger audiences. Children hold a pivotal position in many communities for addressing the impacts of natural disaster, for example, through their increasing access to information from school, the media and rallies, drawing competition etc.. Children are enthusiastic innovators of risk communication tools. They can inform others on disaster prevention and vulnerability reduction, through creative messaging and media such as drama, songs and informative mural.

Empowered children are innovative agents of change. Children often have creative means and ambitious strategies to bring about change. They tend to be less constrained by social norms and fatalistic attitudes common among their parents. The ACID implementing the DRR project provided a wealth of examples of children's actions resulting in long-lasting change once taken up by adults.

Children can maximize the adaptive capacity needed to address climate change adaptation. Children's holistic awareness of risks gives them a sound understanding of the consequences of climate change on local livelihoods, and on their right to survival, development and protection. Harnessing children's adaptive capacity offers a strong potential for addressing environmental issues. Equipped with relevant knowledge and skills, young people can make informed decisions about how to adapt individual lives and livelihoods as well as ecological, social or economic systems in a changing environment. Children are forming task force in schools and receiving trainings on rescue including water and fire rescue in which it reveals that children are more fast learners and enthusiastic to adopt all coping mechanism against the unnatural calamities.

Children can change behaviors for more sustained development. As well as building a culture of safety and resilience and supporting children to take part in disaster management, Child-centred DRR can play a role in empowering young people to make informed choices and develop behaviour that reorient society towards more sustainable practices for sustainable development, which reduces local vulnerability and increases resilience.

Children are the leaders and decision makers of tomorrow. Child-centred DRR takes a long term perspective when investing in children's behavior change. With children involved in DRR governance structures today, a generation of young people can be better prepared for the disasters of tomorrow. In ACID DRR project it has been found that children are taking active participation in decision making process particular in mitigation activities

4.3 Suggestion and recommendation

For Implementation of Child- Centred Disaster Risk Reduction

There is no one particular way of working on Child-centred DRR. Different agencies will approach it differently depending on their mandate, resources, organizational culture, areas of interventions and networks. DRR is a challenging field that needs to be tackled realistically while acknowledging the complexity of operational environments and the diversity of people's views and interest's vis-à-vis external interventions.

Based on FADVs experience, below are some elements to be taken into consideration when engaging with Child-centred DRR.

Understanding the context

DRR is a complex approach that aims to reduce vulnerabilities to risks within the broad context of sustainable development. Understanding the social, political, cultural, environmental and economic environments in which children and communities evolve is critical to an appreciation of the breadth and depth of vulnerabilities to disaster risks and how they affect different groups of children (e.g.: girls, boys, adolescents, infants) within heterogeneous communities. How changing risks may aggravate the vulnerabilities of different groups of children also needs to be understood.

Approaches:

- Conduct a rights-based situation analysis and a power analysis
- Analyze where and how decision making for DRR takes place, paying particular attention to how decentralization processes play out in the devolution of and responsibility for DRR policy decisions and resource allocations;
- Map DRR actors at national, local and community level, identifying DRR structures, service providers, youth organizations, relevant CBOs and NGOs and specialized agencies;
- Identify DRR and developmental interventions in place, targeting specific vulnerabilities.

Working with children

Working with children has a real added value as outlined in the previous section. Children can be effective agents of change for DRR. Once properly supported and empowered, they can mobilise



Children can positively contribute to DRR through the followings roles:

- As analysers of risk and risk reduction activities;
- As designers and implementers of DRR interventions at community level;
- As communicators of risks and risk management options (especially communications with parents, adults or those outside the community);
- As mobilisers of resources and action for community based resilience;
- As constructors of social networks and capital;
- As monitors of progress in implementing disaster reduction activities in line with the SFDRR

Approaches:

- Engage with different groups of children and their networks to ensure equal opportunity for all children to voice concerns and to participate. Include existing groups at sub-national and national levels to guarantee greater sustainability of interventions, for example, youth associations, students' unions, sports, arts and leisure clubs, youth volunteer associations, youth media clubs, children's parliaments, etc;
- Tackle vulnerabilities and exclusion through working with all children, including the most marginalized and vulnerable, while being aware of the potential burden of participation on certain groups. Customize engagement with children in different age groups and genders: their knowledge, needs, capacities and protection requirements will be different;
- Trust children and involve them at all stages of the interventions. Children can bring about change when properly supported. They can also be active contributors to governance accountability mechanisms assessing local government budgets and delivery of public services;
- Harness children's creative potential to reduce disaster risks by encouraging their involvement in new media such as participatory videos, community radio programmes and performing arts;
- Train facilitators on DRR, Climate Change Adaptation concepts and on child participation. Working with young people on DRR and vulnerability reduction is not without challenges. The quality of the facilitation will significantly affect the quality of the intervention process, the outcomes led by children, and the overall experience of children.

PROGRAM APPROACHES

Components of Child focus DRR

1. **Child Centered Participatory Planning-** Sundarban communities including children undertake Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment and mapping and evolve their own Disaster Management Plans at the level of community and other levels with an objective to emergence of children as leaders in Risk Reduction in the community
2. **Early Warning System-** In order to preparedness actions to be successful, adequate early warning systems need to be in place. Ensuring minimum participation of children in the early warning system including four elements of early warning which includes Risk knowledge, Monitoring and Warning, Dissemination and Communication and lastly Response Capabilities. Children are also recommended to participate in practicing EW drills and involving in monitoring as well.
3. **Formation & strengthening of task force-** Task force are small groups for the community organized to be responsible for specific tasks. It is essential that 40% of the members are children in the age group of 12-18 years. Different need based task force groups can be formed according to the need of the community. Generally the task force at community level are Search & Rescue, First Aid, Psychosocial, Early warning, Shelter Management, WASH etc. in which children can also be integrated in these groups.

4. **Disaster Preparedness-** Based on the HVCA, children with support from communities will formulate a contingency plan, which is ratified by the local Panchayat. The contingency plan will include general information about the community, disaster history (Historic profile), seasonal calendar of disasters, distance of the service provider as Venn diagram/ Institutional relationship from the village, details of task force members along with location and mobile numbers and some of the mitigation/ preventive measures that minimizes the impact of future disasters
5. **School Safety Initiatives-** School based DRR consists of children undertaking HVCA with a specific references to their school settings, students, teachers, Principal, Management, and board of education need to be actively engaged. In particular, emphasis must be in teaching about the hazards and risk reduction in formal curriculum and in-formal teaching learning situations. Regular practicing of safety drills forms an integral part of success. School safety plan is need to be in place.

4.4 Discussion and Conclusion

In summary, the research explored what opportunities exist for the voices of children of Sundarban particularly in Jogeshgunj and Kalitala Gram Panchayat and their groups to be heard within local and national DRR policy spaces; and what experiences and capacities the children and their groups have for doing so. The research indicates that children and young people communicate their views about the risks they face through a suite of formal and informal pathways. Informal pathways included talking with family members, teachers and friends. Formal pathways included linking with teachers through the School Emergency Committee and Parents, Teachers and Community Association; linking with adults through the Community Emergency Committee; and direct liaison with local leaders from various bodies.

In addition to the identification and communication of risks, children have also acted as agents of change particularly in the communities. Children's families are crucial actors in the process of child-centred DRR project implemented by ACID and supported by FADV as households are policy spaces in themselves, with the same political dynamics, the same need for advocacy and lobbying, and the same issues with influencing knowledge and action. The child's role within the household can be scaled up to the local community and associated political spheres, particularly if parents or grandparents are active participants of particular committees or political bodies

4.5 References

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