

1. Produced a **village vulnerability map** that identified the safe places, low risk areas, highly vulnerable areas and the estimated number of families residing in each of these zones.
2. Catalogued the number and location of the **vulnerable groups** such as the elderly, disabled, lactating mothers, pregnant women, seriously ill persons and small children in their village. Information related to the number of persons belonging to each of these categories was also collected.
3. Described **history** of earlier floods and elaborated in detail the damage that occurred in the 2000 floods. The plan also mentioned the key elements at risk such as life, health, property, livestock and livelihood, the resources required/at hand for bringing down the level of risk.
4. Listed **key activities** that the community would do before, during and after the flood. The key activities identified before the flood were flood warning, household readiness regarding the positioning of family survival kits and safe keeping of valuables and important documents, formation of different task forces, training on health and first aid, water and sanitation, and rescue and relief.
5. Identified **key local resources** such as bamboos, banana plantations, and so on, for use in the preparation of *machans* (temporary shelters) and local rafts. The community also identified hand pumps that needed to be raised above the flood level to protect their source of water.
6. Stated the **specific places** where the affected community would go along with their cattle to take shelter in event of a flood. Some of them also acquired the technology to construct small boats, life jackets and other materials for successful rescue operations.
7. **Specified the roles of different stakeholders**, quantitative and time schedule for all activities including mock drills. Overall the activities were prioritised and thus requirements became more realistic.

SPECIAL NOTE ON CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN EMERGENCIES

Emergencies push children to discover new roles for themselves in the face of difficult and unstable situations. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the basic principle that should guide UNICEF's programming in child and adolescent participation in emergencies - that children and adolescents have the right to appropriate information, the right to be heard and the right to have a meaningful involvement in the emergency response, according to their best interests.

From a November 2005 discussion in Thailand among child-focused NGOs, UNICEF and with tsunami affected children from, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Thailand⁹ who were involved in various ways in the tsunami response, here are some arguments put forward in favour of children's participation in emergency situations:

- Children and their associations – child clubs, child ‘parliaments’, children’s unions, etc. make important contributions to relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, for example in health and sanitation services and in the distribution of relief supplies;
- Children’s participation can make the delivery of relief more effective. They can identify who needs what, where, how;
- Children can be effective communicators in their families and among their peers
- Children have strong connections and networks among themselves and can become effective agents of behaviour change in the community;
- Children’s views and concerns differ from those of adults. Rapid emergency assessments are of better quality if they are also based on information from children.
- Children who are informed about relief efforts are better able to survive and to protect themselves;
- Children provide emotional support in their community. Their participation has proven to promote psychosocial healing;
- Children provide valuable feedback on relief efforts;
- Children know their communities and have access to some information and knowledge that adults may not have;
- Children are a large segment of the community;
- Children are willing to help, to participate and to mobilise others;
- They can foster cohesion among affected community members during times of crises.
- Children can save and care for other children;
- Children are best placed to build rapport and trusting relationships with other children;
- Children can be more resilient than adults – they can bounce back faster;
- Children are less concerned with social and economic divisions in their communities than adults. They are more inclusive;
- Children are less attached to material things than adults; and
- Children find it easier than adults to understand other children.

Save the Children offered some recommendations in involving children as social actors in emergencies and transition phases:¹⁰

- **Involve children as social agents or “social entrepreneurs” in their own right, with the capacity to influence their situation and their communities in a positive way.** Supporting children’s wellbeing requires the perspective not just that children need special protection, but that they have valid insights into their well being, valid solutions to their problems and a valid role in implementing those solutions for their own benefit and that of their communities.
- **Approach children with a focus on their competencies and strengths, on regenerating resiliency as understood by those children and their elders.** Through participatory approaches, educators and development workers can be encouraged to learn about children’s own perspectives and understandings of adversity and their own ideas about coping and resilience.

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AFGHANISTAN: Adolescent girls raise their hands in class at a girls' high school in Faizabad, capital of the north-eastern province of Badakhshan -- part of the less than 10 per cent of the country not controlled by the Taliban.

- **Focus on rebuilding a sense of community through the restoration of normal every day routines and activities.** Where possible, such strategies could include rebuilding family and community networks, re-establishing productive capacity, providing opportunities for recreation and play, developing mechanisms for justice and retribution, among other interventions.
- **Understand that relief and reconstruction efforts have a psychosocial dimension,** where needs are defined by local people and reconstruction efforts engage the people to meet their own basic needs and recreate the necessary social spaces for social healing to take place.
- **Recognize that psychosocial needs are long-term, and therefore it is essential to give attention to participatory processes to address issues of sustainability.** Ensure that all efforts contribute to the promotion of girls' and boys' ongoing and long-term development in the best ways possible.
- **Base relief, emergency and development processes on an accurate assessment of capacities and vulnerabilities with full participation of girls, boys, women and men of the affected communities.** All information should be disaggregated according to gender, age, as well as other social variables.
- **Ensure efforts are non-discriminatory.** No child should be discriminated against due to gender, ethnicity, caste, religion, disability, or nationality. Monitoring efforts should include a focus on which children are included or excluded in relief and emergency efforts.
- **Engage with girls, boys, women and men from the target population as agents of their own recovery,** so that relief efforts do not increase the recipients' feelings of powerlessness and dependence.
- **Include a focus on capacity building - training, mentoring, resources - for local caregivers to work with children,** rather than sending foreign psychosocial workers to work directly with war-affected children for short-term missions.

- **Encourage opportunities for girls and boys to express issues which concern them and involve them in discussing issues of immediate local concern.** This will help them to learn problem-solving skills and to gain a sense of control over their lives. Sharing grief with others may help children to overcome their sense of loss.
- **Maximise opportunities which make use of space for creative forms of expression such as art, drama, story telling, play, poetry, music, puppetry and other cultural art forms.**
- **Develop child protection approaches which build upon local resources and local understanding of girls, boys, women and men.**
- **Promote programmes which encourage children's active participation in decision-making, problem-solving, team building and peer mentoring to reinforce individual attributes in children that contribute to self-esteem, self-efficacy and coping.**
- **Encourage cultural activities, games, sports and recreational activities which enable children to relax, to have fun and to cooperate with one another.**
- **Provide safe spaces for interaction with peers and promote positive opportunities for girls, boys and youth to come together and to organize themselves and their own programmes.** There is considerable evidence that social support from peers can enhance children's resilience. Furthermore, through collective organization, children can learn the art of self-protection, self-representation and self-advocacy.
- **Promote and support peace and respect for human rights.**
- **Cooperate, coordinate and integrate work with other agencies**
- **Take every opportunity to promote efforts by other agencies which respect children as competent social actors, and validate self-efficacy and decision making ability of girls, boys, women and men in the affected communities.**

RESOURCE BANK

Further reading

1. Bhatti A, Ariyabandu M.M., *Disaster Communication, A Resource Kit for Media* ITDG Sout Asia, Duryog Nivaran, Islamabad, 2002
2. Burke, A., *Communications and Development. A practical guide*, DFID, London, 1999.
3. McKee, N., et al., (editor), *Involving People, Evolving Behaviour*, UNICEF, Penang, 2000.
4. Oxfam, *Guidelines for Public Health Promotion in Emergencies*, Oxfam UK, 2001.