

Reducing Risks, Saving Lives





Above, left and right

A cyclone drill by community members and the Cyclone Preparedness Program (CPP), Hassan Nagar Union, Bhola District, Bangladesh

Jeff Holt / Save the Children

Middle panel, left

Operation Reach Summer Day Camp program at the Lower Coast Algiers Community Center, Louisiana. The goal of the workshops is to ease anxiety related to the upcoming hurricane season by providing children with information and resources

Susan Warner / Save the Children

Middle panel, right

Kids at the Crosstown Learning Center, Oklahoma test new whistles included in backpacks provided to them by Save the Children as part of their disaster preparedness program. The backpacks contained supplies for disaster preparedness like flashlights, hygiene items, teddy bears and whistles

Michael Wyke / Tulsa World

Third panel, left

A young child eats some Plumpynut, a high-nutrition food for severely malnourished children, in southern Ethiopia. Global shortages of food and higher prices are drastically reducing children's access to health care, nutrition and education which they need to thrive

Colin Crowley / Save the Children

Third panel, right

Children perform dances Vietnam as part of a flood recovery and disaster risk reduction programme in a preschool supported by Save the Children in Northern Vietnam

AB Kyazze

Children and disasters

Disasters affect the poorest communities and the most vulnerable people the hardest. Children bear the brunt: they may not know when to flee or where to go; children separated from their parents and families are exposed to even greater danger; children may not understand what is happening. In most disasters, more than half of those who die are children.

A growing threat

Over the past two decades the number of natural disasters has quadrupled. Not only are there more floods, cyclones and droughts, but their severity is predicted to increase as a result of climate change. Glaciers and ice caps are melting, rainfall patterns are changing, drought conditions are affecting more and more of the world's land mass and water resources are becoming depleted.

The impact of non-climate-related disasters, such as earthquakes, is also increasing because of urbanisation and population growth. There is evidence that the number of conflicts is also growing – it is estimated that 1.8 billion children live in conflict-affected countries. Children's lives and well-being are also threatened by epidemiological disasters, such as the Avian Influenza pandemic, and technological disasters, such as the Chernobyl nuclear accident.

Children need not face such dire predicaments. Many of the disasters that affect children around the world are cyclical – droughts in the Sahel and the horn of Africa, flooding in India and the deltas of Bangladesh, and hurricane season in Central America. There is much that can be done to prepare vulnerable communities and children for disasters.



What is Disaster Risk Reduction?

DRR saves lives

In 2007, Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh killed around 3,500 people. But a year later, a similarly powerful Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar (Burma), claimed more than 146,000 lives. Given the similarity in geography and population density in the two countries, why was there such a huge difference in the death tolls from the two disasters?

In Bangladesh, around 1.5 million people on the coast were able to flee to shelters before the storm hit. The government's early warning system included broadcasting messages on the radio, mobilising volunteers and making announcements with megaphones.

The government had learned from terrible experiences. Cyclone Gorky hit the coast of Bangladesh in 1991, claiming more than 138,000 lives. Before that, in 1970, Cyclone Bhola killed more than half a million people.

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is any activity carried out by a village, community, aid agency or government that helps prepare for, reduce the impact of, or prevent disasters. These activities can be policies, strategies and practices that are developed and applied to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society.

DRR makes economic sense – the United Nations estimates that for every US\$1 invested in preparing for a disaster, US\$7 of losses can be prevented. It needs to become part of everyday development work, as a kind of insurance policy – unless we invest now in DRR decades of progress in poor and disaster-prone communities could be lost.

In January 2005, 168 of the world's governments agreed to adopt the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) – a global blueprint for disaster risk reduction efforts during the next decade. Its goal is to substantially reduce disaster losses by 2015 – in lives, and in the social, economic, and environmental assets of communities and countries.

Save the Children's approach to DRR

Children are particularly at risk in a disaster. It's essential that their immediate and longer-term physical and emotional needs are considered in any activities to prepare for, or mitigate, a potential disaster. Communities and local authorities need to listen to children to find out what risks they might face and how they might respond to them.

Save the Children has pioneered child-centred Disaster Risk Reduction. Our programmes seek to ensure that the needs of children are considered in how people prepare for, react to, and recover from disasters. And we work to make this happen at all levels – with children, communities, national governments and international organisations.



What does DRR entail?

The children's own role in DRR

In Cuba, as a result of Save the Children's DRR programme, children conveyed early warning messages before hurricanes to help spread the word of impending storms. In Brazil, Save the Children has taught children to measure rainfall to give early warning of floods or landslides.

In disaster-prone areas of Sri Lanka, Thailand, the Philippines and elsewhere, children have assessed the risks they face, helped draw up emergency preparedness plans and maps, took part in drills and evacuation simulation activities, and raised awareness of the risks among their peers and adults in their community. As well working in their communities, children in Thailand and Sri Lanka have also advocated for their national governments to cater for children's needs in their emergency preparedness plans.

In Lebanon, following the conflict in 2006, Save the Children worked through schools and in camps to educate children and teachers about the risks of unexploded ordinance. In the Philippines, in partnership with the Department of Education, we've developed educational materials as part of the curriculum to teach children to stay safe when a disaster strikes.

Most DRR work falls into four main categories:

Preparedness activities enhance people's ability to deal with a disaster.

These include ensuring that communities and local government have emergency plans in place, mapping the hazards in a community and developing strategies to combat them, making sure people know where to evacuate to, and pre-positioning emergency supplies, such as food and shelter materials, in disaster-prone areas.

For example, in Afghanistan, Save the Children works with communities to understand the risks of flooding, especially for children, and how they can prepare themselves ahead of time. In Vietnam, we help children take part in community meetings to assess risks and hazards; children produce risk maps and action plans for schools. In Colombia, Save the Children has trained community leaders and local authorities on child protection in emergencies to ensure that children's need and rights are considered in preparedness and response.

Early warning activities give people time to respond to a disaster.

In Ethiopia, Save the Children has worked with the government since the 1980s to develop and run early warning systems for food crises. And in Sri Lanka, we worked with district-level disaster management committees and provided megaphones and loudspeakers to be used during early warnings to alert communities.

Mitigation activities reduce the risks from disasters.

Vietnamese children who participate in our DRR program have identified areas where flooding was a risk and came up with ways of reducing the risk, such as building embankments and strengthening bridges. In Myanmar (Burma), Save the Children is helping to reinforce schools to ensure that children and adults will have a safe place to seek shelter in the event of another cyclone. And in India the local community was hired to build a 5 km sea wall to mitigate the risk of flooding and speed up the natural desalination of agricultural land.

Activities to promote resilience enhance communities' capacity to cope and recover after a disaster strikes.

Save the Children has pioneered the Household Economy Approach (HEA) in Kenya, which can predict food crises by understanding the impacts of droughts on the ability of different groups of people to access food for their families. We also annually transfer food or cash to reduce the risk of food crisis among poor families. In Zimbabwe, we encouraged farmers to use drought-resistant crops and provided livestock. And in Mozambique, our grants were vital in helping flood-affected families recover livelihoods and replace possessions.



Left

Students at Ban Talaynork School in Ranong province, Thailand, crosscheck a "risk and resource" community map they developed showing areas that are at risk and those that are safe

[Save the Children](#)

Right

Fatema, a water and sanitation field facilitator, instructs Limon and Nayeem, both age eight, on proper hand washing techniques at a school-based awareness session in Bangladesh

[Jeff Holt / Save the Children](#)

Save the Children reduces risk through five areas of focus:

Advocacy and Policy – ensuring that government plans take into account the needs of children in disasters. For example, in Vietnam, to ensure that the needs of children are considered Save the Children has successfully advocated for and supported the participation of the Head of the Children's Division from the Department of Social Welfare in the National Disaster Committee.

Institution Strengthening – ensuring that relevant institutions are able to implement effective policy around children and disasters. For example, in Indonesia, Save the Children has piloted primary school curriculum around DRR and worked with the National Education Department to develop a national level curriculum and teacher trainer guide.

Local Government & Partners Capacity Building – ensuring that these crucial agencies have the skills necessary to protect children during their preparation for disasters and their response. For example, in Colombia, we trained community leaders and local authorities on child protection in emergencies to ensure that children's needs and rights are considered in preparing for and responding to disaster.

Community – empowering communities and families to mitigate identified risks of disasters. For example, in the United States of America, Save the Children supports families to create family based response plans and builds on children's natural resilience. In Tajikistan, communities are give small grants to plan out mitigation activities which decrease the vulnerability children face during a disaster.

Children's Role in Disasters – allowing for the meaningful participation of children to increase their resilience. For example, the United States of America, our school based program focus on children creating family plans and builds on children's natural potential for resilience. In Myanmar (Burma), children take part in developing community maps and illustrating the safest place in the village in the event of another cyclone.





Left

A young girl plays at school in Northern Vietnam. Save the Children is focusing on DRR work in Vietnam following severe floods in October 2007, which destroyed harvests and forced many people to leave their homes
[AB Kyazze](#)

Right

A young boy works on a map of his village in the Irrawaddy Delta, Myanmar (Burma). Save the Children is helping children identify the dangerous areas and safer places if there is another cyclone. Two thirds of the children in the village were killed when Cyclone Nargis swept across the delta in May 2008
[Tina Salsbury / Save the Children](#)

Front cover

A child and another villager sit in their wrecked homes in the village of Kan Sake Myanmar (Burma). In the nearby villages around Kan Sake, out of a population of 5,000, about 1,000 people were killed by the cyclone. Cyclone Nargis hit the southern delta region of Myanmar on 2 May, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake
[Christian Holst / Reportage by Getty Images for Save the Children](#)

Moving forward

Save the Children has made DRR a priority. We already have DRR programmes in 30 countries and are currently expanding this work.

Save the Children has identified 20 emergency-prone priority countries where we will initially concentrate activities to enhance our DRR work. These include: Bangladesh, the Philippines, Vietnam, Kenya, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Sudan, Mozambique, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Haiti, Nigeria, Uganda, Afghanistan, India, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Lebanon and Nicaragua. The selection of these countries is based on a variety of criteria including: the likelihood of emergencies, children and communities' vulnerability to emergencies, the different types of emergencies and Save the Children's presence in these countries.

In addition, Save the Children will seek to incorporate DRR into its programme planning worldwide so that it becomes standard practice at the local level. And, we will build an evidence base for DRR models that are replicable, scalable and can be easily introduced in other countries.

Our recommendations

- All governments should develop emergency preparedness plans that directly address children's needs
- Donors should commit an additional 10 percent of the money they currently spend on disaster response to preparing for disasters
- We urge all signatories to the Hyogo Framework for Action deliver on their commitments to reduce the risks of disasters and report back on the progress they are making
- Children who live in disaster-prone areas should be taught how to respond to emergencies and should be involved in all levels of disaster risk reduction projects in their communities

