



Reducing Risks, Enhancing Resilience

Save the Children and Disaster Risk Reduction and
Climate Change Adaptation



Cover photo: Sarrah (not her real name), 9, reciting her poem on Refugee Day in north Lebanon. The children were encouraged to write about their positive memories of Syria and their hopes for the future.
[Save the Children](#)

Above: Save the Children provide practical and emotional support to vulnerable children in South Africa orphaned through parents with HIV/AIDS. Our programs respond to the children's needs in a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach.
[Adam Hinton / Save the Children](#)

I Introduction

Most people in most countries have been doing steadily better in recent decades. But many are left behind and far too many are badly affected by disasters. Universal progress on human development is not only a matter of their chance to be educated, be healthy, have a reasonable standard of living and feel safe. It is also a matter of how secure these achievements are and whether conditions are sufficient for sustained and resilient human development. Are they? The situation is already very precarious for many millions of people, and if scientific forecasts and tipping point scenarios about climate change, for example, are realistic, almost everyone's future is threatened. Development is never disaster neutral; it creates, exacerbates or reduces risk. Disaster risk reduction is a no-regret investment that protects lives, property, schools, businesses and employment.

“Social and economic losses from disasters are out of control.” according to Ban Ki Moon. In the last 20 years the impact of disasters has been devastating. 4.4 billion people affected, more than half of them children, 1.3 million people killed and US\$2 trillion in economic losses.¹

Disaster risk is on the rise globally largely as a result of the complex interplay between environmental, demographic, technological, political and socio-economic conditions. Climate change, environmental degradation, population growth, increased urbanization, unsustainable development in hazard-prone areas, risky technologies, and growing social and economic inequalities have all contributed to a dramatic increase in the impact of disaster events. Disasters can cancel progress on poverty reduction. There could be up to 325 million extremely poor people living in the 49 countries most exposed to the full range of natural hazards and climate extremes in 2030.

These challenges are all contributing to a trend which is showing an increase in vulnerability to shocks and stresses. For example over 200 million more people will live in urban coastal floodplains in Africa and Asia by 2060, compared with 30 million today. Also some of the largest disasters on record have occurred within the challenging context of violent conflict.

Save the Children is committed to continue working to minimise the risks facing populations around the world, and it is doing this by designing programs that aim to build the resilience of individuals and organisations. Save the Children, naturally, focuses attention on children.

Save the Children believes that although children are vulnerable, they have the potential to mitigate risks, improve preparedness and act as agents of change. They are capable of actively participating in the decision-making processes that will ultimately affect them, their families and the wider community. Focusing on children builds a culture of safety that should protect generations to come.

II Key concepts

a. Disaster Risk Reduction

Save the Children has adopted UNISDR's definition. Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is the systematic development and application of policies, strategies and practices to minimise vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society; to mitigate and prepare for adverse impacts of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development.² DRR saves lives. It can reduce deaths and help minimise the impact of disasters on people's health and wellbeing. Examples of DRR activities include early warning systems that allow governments and communities to prepare in advance of a hurricane or drought and identifying potential hazards to allow hospitals and other health facilities to be built to withstand them. This means people are more likely to have access to healthcare in the aftermath of a disaster.

b. Climate Change Adaptation

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the leading international scientific body that works under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The IPCC defines climate change adaptation (CCA) as "adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climate stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities". For Save the Children, adaptation is the process of helping children and their communities respond to the additional risks of climate variability and change brings to their lives and livelihoods, and building the knowledge and skills to effectively address these risks while continuing to develop in a harsher climate. Effective adaptation requires incorporating a set of practical measures across programming, policy and advocacy that reduce vulnerabilities, build on existing adaptive capacity and, ultimately, increase the resilience of children and their communities to the negative impacts of climate change.

Right: A young boy crosses a flooded paddy field after heavy rain near Dudhkumar river in Kurigram district in Bangladesh. Low-lying Bangladesh remains prone to natural disasters and especially susceptible to the effects of climate change.

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2. www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology



Left: School Children participating in a CPR contest called ‘Save a friend’s life in a storm’ in Vietnam. Such emergency preparedness exercises are crucial in ensuring that children are prepared and know what do in the event of a disaster. [Save the Children](#)

Right: Students during a Disaster Reduction Drill at a school in Leogane Haiti. This school was built with Save the Children’s support using innovative yet simple techniques that make it more hurricane and earthquake-resistant. [Susan Warner/Save the Children](#)



Climate change is one of the most significant economic, social, developmental and environmental challenges of our time. There is a clear scientific consensus that the emissions of greenhouse gases from human activities are driving climate change, and children and their communities in vulnerable locations are already experiencing its impacts. While it is clearly established that modern climate change is largely a result of human activities, it is impossible to predict with certainty the future impacts and costs of climate change. We can no longer look to the past as an indicator of future climatic trends, and as the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events – such as floods, droughts, storms and wildfires – increase over the coming years, the poorest and most vulnerable will bear the brunt. They are the human face of climate change.

c. Resilience

Resilience is the ability to ‘bounce back’. It means doing well against the odds, coping, and recovering. Building resilience is an ongoing and never ending process that should be a priority for all development and humanitarian actors. “Resilience is the ability of individuals (including children) households and countries to resist, to adapt and to manage change by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses, without compromising their long term prospects.”

In other words, resilience is the result of effective development and humanitarian work that is sensitive to shocks (emergencies), everyday dangers and stresses (challenges such as changing climate and urbanization).

A child, whose rights are respected and progressively being realised, can grow more resilient. However, resilience is not absolute nor is it fixed – it is a dynamic state and a child’s level of resilience may be degraded by a shock just as it may be enhanced by avoiding a shock. And, just as children’s rights are indivisible, so too is programming and advocacy for resilience. This means it features across all Save the Children’s work, cross-cutting in all sectors.

Save the Children focuses on the enabling environment and the building of local and national systems that are themselves resilient (able to cope with shocks and stresses) and also are specifically designed to strengthen the resilience of children.

III Our approach

Save the Children seeks to ensure that children's needs and capacities are considered in how people mitigate risk, prepare for, react to and recover from disasters and adapt to long-term trends. We work to make this happen at all levels by building partnerships and collaborating with children, communities, civil society, local and national governments, and regional and international organisations. Governments as primary duty bearers have the main responsibility for the implementation of the post 2015 DRR framework, and we support them in it.

Save the Children integrates risk reduction and resilience building into sector-based programming "full spectrum"; meaning that it is considered in both development and humanitarian contexts. It is crucial that we reduce risk where we can. When this is not possible, it is crucial that we build resilience in high-risk areas before disaster strikes, so that the communities we work with are better able to manage the challenges during crises and recover quickly.

a. Child-centred

Child-centred risk reduction and resilience building focuses on the specific risks and dangers children face in particular contexts. Most importantly, it actively involves children. Child-centred programming means listening to their voices and opinions about building resilience and facing up to the challenges of the changing climate, of conflict and disasters. It is about early intervention to prevent irreversible harm to children at risk. It understands that children do not form one homogenous group and that their needs and capacities differ.

Child-centred DRR and CCA considers children holistically: all rights for all children in all circumstances. In contexts of increasing risk, children's ideas and capacities are often ignored. The right to survival and to health are key; however, children and their parents emphasize how extremely important continuity of education is for them. Children also stress that they have a right to information about their future and to be heard in decisions affecting them. Save the Children supports children to provide their inputs on local/national policies and practices and to hold their governments accountable. Our approach takes into account wide spectrum of hazards, as children themselves point out dangers of violence or technological hazards as much as the hazards traditionally considered 'natural'.

The child-centred approach is about directly targeting children, particularly those most vulnerable and marginalised. It is equally about engagement with support structures and institutions, including families, communities, local and national governments, and international organisations, to minimise adverse impacts and reduce the risks that affect children's lives.

Children's Charter

The Children's Charter for DRR was developed in 2011 in consultation with over 600 girls and boys in 21 countries, outlining their top five priorities:

1. Safe schools and uninterrupted education
2. Child protection before, during, and after a disaster
3. The right to participate and access information
4. Safe community infrastructure, and relief and reconstruction that reduces future risk
5. DRR that reaches the most vulnerable

In 2013, a progress review of the Children's Charter for DRR, in consultation with 1,299 girls and boys in 17 countries, called on governments to:

- Protect and empower the most vulnerable, marginalized, and hard to reach children;
- Set measurable targets to strengthen systems of DRR reporting and accountability;
- Improve mechanisms for data collection and reporting, including the disaggregation of data by gender, age, and ability;
- Embed multi-hazard risk management and resilience within broader development strategies; and
- Increase the participation of children and young people in local, national, and regional processes.



Above: Save the Children distributed over 600 disaster hoods for children to wear in the event of another emergency, protecting them from heavy blows by falling debris and from possible fires. School children in Japan participate in regular emergency preparedness drills. [Save the Children](#)

b. Integrated

Sustainable development can only be achieved, if programmes consider risks and how to mitigate them. For DRR and CCA, it means considering climate, disaster risks and resilience-building options when planning, implementing and monitoring all development and humanitarian programs. This can mean for example that development projects will have sub-objectives related to building resilience or that humanitarian interventions are specifically designed to build back better.

Conducting comprehensive risk analysis whilst planning sector-specific work – such as education or health - is essential as this ensures that disaster risks that may undermine development gains can be reduced. The same imperative – advance planning for risk reduction - is equally important in the context of potential conflict or any other threats to children. Development is more likely to be effective if climate, disaster risk and resilience building are prioritised.

IV On the ground

While our approach provides the basis for our interventions, it is important to understand what this means for our programs once they become operational. The majority of Save the Children's DRR and CCA work falls within five overlapping categories. These categories are not distinct, and depending on the objectives of a particular project, they must work together to achieve sustainable impact. Save the Children's program portfolio has a strong focus on strengthening multi-level linkages for effective disaster and climate risk reduction, preparedness, response and adaptation. The five categories are:

Early warning: the set of capacities needed to generate and disseminate timely and meaningful warning information, giving people time to be alerted and respond to a potential disaster. Early-warning systems work with other DRR interventions to protect and support sustainable development. By responding early, families can protect themselves and their livelihoods, which places them in a much stronger position for recovery. For example, in the Horn of Africa, an early-warning model has been developed that uses two tools to continuously monitor multiple risks: a seasonal calendar and a map of key risks and resources. This mapping and monitoring exercise involves children, communities and field staff, and allows the

communities to discuss and analyse changes that need to happen to prepare for times of hardship and cumulative vulnerability. It surveys the sectoral trends as well as the underlying causes and the negative coping capacities of all actors.

Preparedness: enhance people's knowledge and capacity to effectively anticipate, prepare for, respond to and recover from disaster. This includes ensuring that communities and local government have response and recovery plans. For example, a Save the Children project in Nepal has worked with communities to develop, and build the capacity of, preparedness and response teams. The project has helped children and their communities to develop child-centred school safety plans, and it has also increased understanding of disaster risks and resilience by integrating DRR in the school curriculum. Children have also participated in updating district disaster preparedness and response plans, helping to achieve their right to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Disaster mitigation: reduce the risks of disasters. Disaster mitigation provides an important basis for disaster management. Communities often cannot prevent the adverse impact of hazards, but they can undertake various strategies and actions to substantially lessen the scale or severity of these hazards. Save the Children works closely with communities and the disaster management agencies of local governments, supporting the development and implementation of DRR action plans and sectoral planning strategies through locally defined disaster mitigation measures. In the Solomon Islands, DRR committees have been established in 47 communities, with the aim of empowering these committees to implement their own DRR action plans. Activities include planting mangroves along shorelines, incorporating safe construction principles into new community structures, and constructing barriers and bridges to protect children and communities from the impacts of high tides and flooding.

Disaster resilience: the ability of a system, community or society to resist, absorb, accommodate and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner. Save the Children works to increase children's and communities' resilience to disasters and climate change by helping to ensure DRR and CCA are integrated into sector-based programming. For example, in Laos, communities where we work have highlighted the need to pursue more disaster-resilient livelihood options. Local economies rely on agriculture, which supports more than 80 per cent of the population. In response, Save the Children has adopted integrated disaster and climate risks and resilience-building strategies into our livelihoods activities to sustainably increase household-level resilience and reduce asset loss and food insecurity.

Comprehensive School Safety

A framework for climate-smart disaster risk reduction, bridging development and humanitarian action in the education sector

At the core of these child-centred and evidence-based efforts is the recognition of children's rights to survival and protection as well as to education and participation.

The purpose of this framework for Comprehensive School Safety is to

- a) bring these efforts into a clear and unified focus in order for education sector partners to work more effectively and
- b) link with similar efforts in all other sectors.

The goals of Comprehensive School Safety are to:

- protect children and education workers from death and injury in schools
- plan for educational continuity in the face of expected hazards
- safeguard education sector investments
- strengthen a disaster-resilient citizenry through education.

The three pillars of Comprehensive School Safety

Comprehensive School Safety is addressed by education policy and practices aligned with disaster management at national, regional, district and local school site levels. It rests on three pillars:

1. Safe learning facilities
2. School disaster management
3. Risk reduction and resilience education

Multi-hazard risk assessment is the foundation for planning for Comprehensive School Safety. Ideally, this should be part of educational management information systems at national, subnational and local levels. It is part of a broader analysis of education sector policy and management in order to provide the evidence base for planning and action.



Above left: Abdikhani Ibrahim, 18, is a student at Habaswein Mixed Secondary School and its disaster risk reduction club, which teaches students and the community how to prepare for drought.

[Save the Children](#)



Above right: Children's drawings show people replanting trees to protect from mudslides and storms, Thanh Hoa, Vietnam. Severe floods hit this region, destroying harvests and forcing many people to leave their homes. In the aftermath Save the Children supported this community with education and disaster risk reduction programmes. [Save the Children](#)

Adaptation: a process by which strategies to moderate, cope with and take advantage of the consequences of climatic events are enhanced, developed and implemented. For Save the Children, adaptation is about helping children and their communities survive and thrive in a harsher climate. Our goal is to increase knowledge and understanding of the implications climate change has for development, build capacity to plan for and manage likely impacts, and catalyse 'no regrets' adaptive actions (activities that reduce the risks of current climate variability while increasing resilience to future changes). For example, in Vietnam, Save the Children is working with children and their communities in climate-vulnerable locations to increase understanding of climate change and integrate climate risks and adaptation actions into local planning processes. For adaptive capacity to be sustainable, communities require engagement from policy makers, access to information for decision-making, and resources for implementation.

V Engaging at all levels

Institutional capacity and strengthening

If we wish to integrate and implement effective policies that address children's needs and capacities in DRR and CCA, we must ensure that institutional capacity and an enabling policy framework exist. A core part of Save the Children's work for children is advocating for national policies to reflect the reality of living in climate- and disaster-vulnerable locations. National-level policy change can, in turn, have an impact on international agreements and processes. In the Philippines, Save the Children has worked closely with the national government to enact a law focused on children in emergencies. This law enhances the role and participation of children in DRR planning and post disaster recovery.

The role of children

Save the Children works directly with groups of children – often via their school - to ensure their meaningful participation in discussions and decisions that affect them. We also work with their families and community leaders to draw on their existing knowledge, increase understanding and access to high quality information, in an effort to create safer environments for all. Children, while immensely capable, cannot generate lasting change on their own. They need to be supported by the community and institutional structures that are charged with ensuring their welfare. When these structures are more resilient to the impacts of disasters and climate change, children will be better protected. And when these structures operate in a child-centred manner, children become a respected part of decision-making processes, and their unique perspective is taken into account in the planning and implementation of actions designed to increase resilience. In Laos and the Philippines we work closely with the Department of Education to develop comprehensive safe school models and plans as a means to better include the roles of children, educators and local government as a means to further build resilience within the education sector.

If a project takes into account the full range of a community's aspirations, needs and capacities, and includes analysis of the full range of risks and hazards it faces, it is more likely to lead to community ownership of activities and to more sustainable outcomes. For example, in Bangladesh, children have used participatory tools to undertake hazard, vulnerability and capacity assessments (HVCAs) of their communities. The children consulted with their elders to gain a better understanding of the disaster history of the area. Armed with this information, and with the support of local agencies, the children proceeded to lead the development of community risk reduction action plans that have strong community ownership.

Local government and partners capacity building

One element that is integral to effective resilience building is ensuring that local organisations – both government and non-government – have the necessary skills and capacities to protect children and fulfil their rights. Building DRR and CCA understanding and capacity in local institutions will help improve development outcomes, reduce the risks posed by disasters and climate change, and help build broad community resilience. Local government and partners should be supported in their efforts to develop DRR and CCA activities at the local level that incorporate the views and priorities of children and communities. Save the Children works closely with local partners to ensure sustainability and to support government in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Save the Children signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Security to support the protection and rescue system in BiH. It aims to improve prevention and enhance the readiness of relevant institutions in responding to disasters, with special focus on the adequate protection of children during and after emergencies.

Below: Children going to school on a raised walkway keeping them above flood waters in Khulna, Bangladesh. Thousands of people were displaced after Cyclone Aila struck Bangladesh, triggering tidal surges and floods.

GMB Akash/Panos Pictures





Above left: Naima, 12, attends a religious school in rural Bangladesh. Her school is just one of 100 to receive support from Save the Children with school disaster management and contingency planning aimed at keeping children safe during and after disaster events. [Menaca Calyaneratne/Save the Children](#)

National and international policy

Government planning needs to take into account the specific needs of children in disasters and development programming to ensure children's voices are heard in the formation of sustainable policies. Governments must guarantee children's rights to participation and access to information at national, regional and international levels. The post-2015 framework aims to guide states, organisations and institutions in their approach to designing DRR programs. However, as children are often the group most affected by dangers and disasters, a framework that does not include their unique set of circumstances is not building sustainable resilience. Children cannot simply become an afterthought, and they should play a key role in both the formulation and the implementation of the post-2015 DRR framework.

VI Looking ahead

Save the Children continues to make building resilience a priority. Over the past ten years we have implemented DRR and CCA work in more than 45 countries. Save the Children has actively sought to integrate risk reduction and resilience building into all of our sector-based development and humanitarian programming; including education, health, child rights governance, child protection and child poverty. Save the Children believes that the resilience building approach that we have adopted will contribute to the sustainability of program outcomes in an increasingly complex and hazard-prone world.

Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for children. We work in more than 120 countries. We save children's lives; we fight for their rights; we help them fulfil their potential. We work together, with our partners, to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives.