



## Working with Children for a Culture of Preparedness

**Insufficient knowledge on risks and risk reduction measures exposes communities to greater impact of hazards. Schools can play a major role in reducing the vulnerability of students and local communities. Educating school teachers and students on effective disaster preparedness and response mechanisms has a multiplier effect at household and community levels and will help create a 'culture of preparedness' that spans the generations.**

Parallel to working with local communities, the CBDRM project initiated activities in forty schools in the same hazard-prone areas. It followed the National Guidelines for School Disaster Safety, working closely with the educational authorities. Students were engaged in learning about the conceptual aspects of disaster risk assessment and management as well as its practical application on the ground. The project works in partnership with the Disaster Management Centre.

The project sought to make disaster risk management an integral part of the co-curricular activities of schools. Teachers and students in selected schools learned to improve their readiness for potential hazards.

*I like this programme because it is concerned about people and disasters. Flooding is a big problem here. Even today my sister's house has been flooded out. I've already been trained in first aid. I'll learn more about the subject.*

- Shalika Nishani Bapakele, Student,  
Yabaraluwa Vidyalaya, Biyagama



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Education is considered to be the best way for making a safe and disaster resilient community. School is an important agency to reduce disaster risk through knowledge, innovation and education. Teachers and students play crucial roles in the development of a culture of prevention and preparedness, because they can transfer knowledge and skills to the family and community. Therefore, the active participation of teachers and students in school disaster safety programmes is desired for moving the world towards a safer living place and a sustainable developed society.

**National Guidelines for School Disaster Safety:** Ministry of Education and National Institute of Education and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, 2008

The school disaster safety programme involves the following steps:

- Setting up a school safety team
- Creating awareness among the school community
- Identifying hazards/vulnerabilities and resources/capacities
- Forming and training a school disaster safety team and sub-teams with particular skills
- Preparing the school safety plan
- Publicizing the plan and conducting simulation drills
- Evaluating and updating the plan

School safety teams prepared historical profiles of hazards and risks in the school environment including their frequency and seasonality. A range of information sources was used for this purpose. Particular and potential hazards to which the school may be exposed were also identified. This was followed by the preparation of school safety plans which are simple, school-specific documents. The school map is an important part of the plan; it identifies places where emergency and safety equipment are kept and shows evacuation paths and safe assembly points.

The risk reduction plan is a crucial aspect of the school safety programme. It is important that each teacher and student and other school staff members are aware of and familiar with the plan and put into practice. Schools shared this knowledge through various creative activities like exhibitions, competitions and camps and through simulation drills.

*I am a member of the school safety team. I think we are fully competent to address a disaster situation when we next have to face one. Not just that, even in day-to-day things. When a child faints (we often do at assembly when it's really hot) we used to spray water on the face and fan her with a book. Not any more. We know exactly what to do.*

- S. Chinthani  
student and member of the first aid team  
Sri Rathnakara Maha Vidyalaya, Ratnapura

*The First Aid Room we built with SLRCS assistance ensures that there is less disruption in school when a child falls ill. It helps in the school administration process. The toilets have made a big difference too. I want to continue the programme with SLRCS systematically. This would involve more awareness creation about disasters and more first aid training as those we have trained have now left school. It may also be a good idea to train some teachers.*

- V. Mahinda Pathmasiri, Principal,  
Nuwara Eliya school



Shalika Nishani Bapakele



V. Mahinda Pathmasiri



Evacuation drill in Ratnapura school.

Students became more aware of the risks prevalent in schools as well as the resources available to strengthen resilience and mitigate risk.

*We identified even the smallest hazard in the school, beginning with the garbage dump. It was a definite threat to the health of the school community. We were able to address the threats systematically. I think I can say quite honestly that we are 100 percent prepared now.*

- S. Baladeva, Teacher  
Rathnakara Maha Vidyalaya, Ratnapura

Safe schools are likely to translate into safe communities. What the project is looking forward to is seeing the school disaster safety programme become part of the main curriculum of schools.