

Vulnerability of Children in Disasters

Presented at
**The Second Ministerial
Conference on Disaster Risk
Reduction**

07-08 November 2007
New Delhi

Presented by
Amod K. Kanth, IPS
General Secretary,
Prayas

Prayas Institute of Juvenile Justice
59, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi-110062
Telefax: +91-11-29955506, 29956244
Email: kanthamod@hotmail.com
prayas@del6.vsnl.net.in, visit: www.prayaschildren.org



Sectors involved in the response to Disaster

- The Government – over bearing responsibility
 - Central Government
 - State Government
 - Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)&
 - Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)

- Corporate & Private Sector – subdued responses

- Voluntary Organizations – limited scope given , deeper involvement representing the affected community’s concerns with necessary actions.

Voluntary Sector & Children in Disasters

- In any disaster, the first response comes from the proximate community represented through community-based organizations
- State machinery moves subsequently: Fire service, Police, Army & Public Health, Works, Engineering, other Departments
- Voluntary organizations, a powerful partner in disaster response: Garnering maximum local & available resources
 - More effective in bringing people’s willing participation
 - Non-bureaucratic, non-formal & flexible in structure & operations
 - Prefer to work in a multi-sectoral framework
 - Catalysts for creating social cohesion to serve the needy, particularly the Children.

India’s Vulnerabilities to Natural Disasters: Prayas’ Presence

- Vulnerable to natural disasters due to unique geo-climatic conditions
- Floods, Droughts, Cyclones, Earthquakes & Landslides: a recurrent phenomena
- Coastal areas, particularly western & south-eastern states like Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and A&N Islands vulnerable to cyclones / Tsunami
- 60% of the landmass prone to earthquake, 40 million hectre prone to cyclone & 68% area susceptible to droughts
- 55% of total area in a seismic zones III-V & vulnerable to earthquakes including Gujarat, Delhi & Arunachal Pradesh
- The Sub- Himalayan & Western Ghats vulnerable to landslides and flash-floods including Arunachal Pradesh
- Operational areas of Prayas-Delhi, Haryana, Gujarat, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, A&N Islands: Vulnerable locations and live experience sharing

Disaster management in India: A Status Report

Prayas' Response to Disasters

Prayas Juvenile Aid Centre, a national level NGO committed to protect children's rights & meet challenges of their at-risk situations

- Emergency relief, short term & long term rehabilitation
- Focus on strengthening family support system for holistic development of child through promotion of community-based interventions and safety networks
 - 1988 – Prayas originated in response to a devastating fire in Jahangirpuri slums, Delhi
 - Remained constantly involved in disaster preparedness & response related activities
 - 1999 – Super Cyclone in Orissa, support to orphan children
 - 2001 – Earthquake response to Bhuj, Gujarat
 - 2005 – Tsunami response in Andaman & Nicobar Islands
 - 2007 – Recurrent floods in Samastipur, Bihar

Impact of Disaster: Need for CSOs / NGOs Intervention

Economic Impact

- Loss of houses, physical infrastructure & other Built-up areas
- Destruction of livelihood resources
- Loss of agricultural, livestock & poultry
- Loss of employment & resultant poverty

Social Impact

- Loss of near & dear ones
- Erosion of social & cultural barriers
- En mass migration to new places
- Difficulty in availability of food, fuel & water

Physical /Mental and Psychological

- Malnutrition & other health related hazards
- Increase in the number of the physically handicapped & other suffering from mental trauma
- Breakdown of safety networks creating isolation & sense of insecurity
- Burglary, theft & other crimes; abuse, exploitation and trafficking

Each area to be attended by Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

Children: The Most Vulnerable amongst Vulnerables

- Children, the worst affected in most disasters due to their physical, psychological & social vulnerabilities
- Among lives lost in disasters, at least one out of three is a child below 18 years & one out of four happens to be a woman
- Children, particularly most vulnerable to face the post-earthquake challenges
- Psychological stress, depression & anxiety besides physical & mental health hazards affecting children
- Denial / lesser availability of special care, protection & social support

Security, Care, Protection, Welfare and Rehabilitation of Children

Children affected by disaster essentially fall in the category of 'children in need of care & protection' (Sec-2 IX of JJ (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 & the National Plan of Action 2005

- Trauma, lurking fear in the mind of young children necessitating trauma counseling / psycho-social support
- Need for restoration of social security & safety of child survivors of disasters
- Shelter, Drop-in-centres for homeless children
- Protection against trafficking & gender violence
- Restoration of children to their biological families or placement with adoptive families / foster families
- Provision of adoption / Foster care for long-term rehabilitation

Enhanced Vulnerability of Children in Disaster

- ❑ Younger the children, greater their vulnerability to disaster
- ❑ Greater inability to escape hazardous / risky situations
- ❑ Greater susceptibility to malnutrition & water borne diseases
- ❑ Inability to communicate with rescue teams, especially in case of very young children
- ❑ More prone to exploitation by anti-socials, children's inability to fend for themselves
- ❑ Subjected to crass apathy at the hands of governmental bureaucracy or even NGOs professing to promote child rights & welfare
- ❑ Internalization of the impact of disaster & its effect on their personality
- ❑ Longer lasting impact of traumatic situations on their personality
- ❑ Occasional indulgence in violent & / or anti social behavior
- ❑ Difficulties encountered in identification, restoration, empowerment & subsequent rehabilitation

Role of the UN/INGOs in addressing disasters effectively

Meaningful role played by International Child Rights Organizations like UNICEF, Save the Children & Action Aid

- ❑ Rehabilitation of neglected children, orphan children & the community at large in coping with the consequences of disaster
- ❑ Enhancing community's capacities to cope with the future disasters
- ❑ Investing in people's knowledge-building rather than just physical infrastructure
- ❑ Improving livelihood options, empowering individuals, so that they can meet their own needs
- ❑ Strengthening local institutions using local resources, & transferring appropriate technologies

Disaster Management Program - The Government's Policy Framework

- ❑ Till recently, Disaster Management was under the Ministry of Agriculture more concerned with droughts, famines and floods
- ❑ Now under the Ministry of Home Affairs : Step ahead but limited intervention to reduction of vulnerability of children and child protection
- ❑ The crucial Ministries/Departments addressing children issues (Ministries of Women & Child Development, Social Justice & Empowerment, GOI)
- ❑ MWCD's National Plan for Action 2005 refers fulfillment of shelter, education, health, rehabilitation and prevention from exploitation of children affected by disasters
- ❑ The National Disaster Management Framework (NDMF) silent on child protection issues & disaster management strategies for child protection, risk reduction, survival & rehabilitation
- ❑ The NDMF : pro-active in bureaucratic practice, reactive in promoting voluntary initiatives

Child Protection Laws, JJA & Disaster Management Act, 2005

- **Section 34 (L):** to ensure that the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) carry out their activities in an equitable and non-discriminatory manner
- The **JJ Act 2000** provides for care, protection & rehabilitation of children, ensuring the setting-up of child protection units and voluntary organizations participation

This represents a sense of mistrust and defeats the objective of building partnership instead of encouraging civil societies which often be a case in emergency responses

There remains an urgent need to accord a pro-active role for NGOs in prevention and mitigation of disaster in the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and its operational framework.

Existing Government Schemes & Programmes

The existing schemes & programmes of GOI includes:

- A Programme for Juvenile Justice
- Scheme for Working Children in need of care and protection
- Integrated Programme for Street Children
- Shishu Greha Scheme
- CHILDLINE-24 hour help line for children in distress
- Rajiv Gandhi national crèche scheme for the children of working mothers
- Pilot Project to Combat the Trafficking of Women and Children for Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Destination Areas
- General Grant-in-aid Scheme to support Pilot Projects, which are not covered by regular Schemes

No special reference / allocation to children affected by disasters or scheme available in the government for relief & rehabilitation.

Prayas' Approach in Disaster

- Work in tandem with local administration, Community and existing leadership in affected areas
- Partnership model for coordination, cooperation & channelization of efforts in relief, rehabilitation & implementation of government and non-government programs
- Targeted interventions to serve the 'Children In Need of Care & Protection'
- Prayas approach geared to set up & strengthen the Protective and Rehabilitative / Programmes of the local government and civil society organizations:

- To reach-out the most Un-served Areas
- Seek strategic programme tie-ups
- Logistical support
- Conduct joint information gathering & analysis
- Contribute to capacity building efforts of NGOs & civic society



Prayas team in community consultation meeting at Ramkrishna Pur Hut Bay, A&N Islands.

Prayas' Intervention

Orissa

- Large number of orphan children in the aftermath of super cyclone
- Prayas responded with interim crisis support
- 18 children brought to Prayas with the support from local NGOs & the resident Commissioner
- Children faced problems in adjusting to the new environment

Gujarat

- Prayas joined hands with disaster management agencies including VOs to support children, women & the affected people in 36 villages of Bhuj in 2001
- Sneh Karmis: Youth & women Group for restoration, empowerment & rehabilitation services
- Awareness building for future disaster preparedness & new planning
- Training on capacity building against disaster, of school children

Prayas Intervention in Gujarat

- Prayas joined hands with the disaster management agencies, including VOs to support children, women & the affected people in 36 villages of Bhuj district in 2001
- Social Audit as in input in Action Planning in 36 villages of Bhuj
- Sneh Karmis: Youth and Women Groups for rehabilitation services
- Awareness building for future disaster preparedness and new planning
- Capacity raising in sustainable livelihood activities
- Training on capacity building against disaster of school children

Prayas' Strategies for Tsunami Victims : Children & Women



- ✓ Address issues of vulnerability reduction, child survival, protection & rehabilitation
- ✓ Childline project, a partnership model for coordination, cooperation & channelization of VOs & local administration efforts in rescue, relief, rehabilitation & implementation of govt. and non-govt. programs
- ✓ Outreach Childline (1098) facilities to the worst affected areas : Car Nicobar, Nan Cowry & Campbell Bay Islands
- ✓ Targeted interventions in programmatic areas of trauma counselling, livelihood opportunities, education, accessible health & facilitating other agencies reconstruction & rebuilding of affected areas.



Prayas' Intervention in Bihar Samastipur Flood

- Samastipur Dist in Bihar worst hit by a devastating floods in July-August 2004 & 2007
- Children & women comprising the worst affected
- Prayas team rendered invaluable relief & rehabilitation services to the flood affected children, women & families
- Cope with challenges of rescue & rehabilitation along with the local administration
- Working in collaboration with Samastipur's disaster management team & other development agencies
- Delayed Response of the Local Administration, no attempt to associate the Local NGOs and Community
- National and State Authorities addressed, Disaster not recognized

Protecting Children : Recommendations

- The Disaster Management Act of 2005 & its operational framework for action must recognize the strengths of community-based organizations & NGOs in vulnerability reduction and disaster responses
- Communities as first and most effective responders must be encouraged to have a stake in identifying, planning & Implementing disaster response
- Governments in consultation with civil society organizations & local communities may frame an enforceable time line for completion of rehabilitation work including disaster mitigation
- Child protection, Care & Rehab, agenda must be an over-arching priority in all sectoral and sub-sectoral plans & programs of disaster management
- Immediate Safety, Relief and Rehabilitation must be recognized and upheld as the top priority and an inalienable Children's Rights agenda
- Clear need for inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial mid course correction for cooperation between NDMA & MWCD since the child protection agenda has not received any visible reference and falls in the mandate of MWCD.
- At State, District, Block & Village levels need focused and meticulously planned Action converging Governmental and Non-governmental services targeting Children.



Relief only brings temporary succor to the people affected by a disaster. Challenge, therefore lies in preparedness, prevention and rebuilding the Hopes and Life.

.....FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Amongst the vulnerable, children and women naturally deserve the most. Let them have the First Call and create space and special protection in all policies and programmes.

Thank You.