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DRR and Children's Rights

Disasters disrupt education and can also cause psychological trauma. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have inalienable rights in all circumstances – including disasters, when they are at their most vulnerable – and the right to participate in decisions that ultimately affect them. The Convention and DRR are mutually reinforcing. Restoring or maintaining schooling in emergencies upholds Article 28 (right to education). Educating children about disaster risk and empowering them to use that knowledge supports Article 6 (life, survival and development), while ensuring the participation and voice of children in DRR efforts upholds Article 12 (respect for children's views). UNICEF also recognizes the importance of gender in DRR – and that ignoring the different capacities of girls and boys means undermining communities as a whole to address disaster risk and cope with disasters.



Disaster Risk Reduction and Education



What is Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)?

Disaster risk is the potential loss expressed in lives, health status, livelihoods, assets and services, which could occur to a particular community or a society due to the impact of a natural hazard. Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is a systematic approach to identifying, assessing and reducing that risk. Specifically, the purpose of DRR is to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout a society to avoid (prevent) or limit (mitigate and prepare for) the adverse impacts of natural hazards, as well as to facilitate sustainable development. DRR is also recognized as a key climate change adaptation strategy.

DRR and UNICEF

UNICEF recognizes its crucial responsibility to integrate DRR into its development programmes. In 2005, UNICEF committed to the Hyogo Framework for Action (adopted by 168 countries) and, in 2006, it played a role not only in strengthening the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction system but by actively began participating in a number of global, regional and national networks and coalitions, such as Children in a Changing Climate (together with the Institute of Development Studies, Plan, Save the Children and World Vision) and the Inter-Agency Committee on the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. UNICEF's updated Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) include DRR and represent a set of principles, approaches and specific interventions that cover preparedness, response and early recovery, in efforts to bridge the gap between development and humanitarian programming.



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DRR, Education and Equity

UNICEF advocates for the protection of the rights of all children, particularly the most deprived and vulnerable, to help meet basic needs and to expand opportunities to reach their full potential. Disasters – including situations of chronic disaster caused by environmental degradation – exacerbate the conditions of the most vulnerable, negatively impacting on children’s rights and aggravating exclusion of some 68 million children out of school worldwide. As a consequence, disasters are rolling back years of progress towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals for education, and will affect the achievement of UNICEF’s equity agenda.

Moreover, the frequency and severity of natural disasters is on the rise due to climate change. In the late 1990s, the numbers of children affected by disasters was estimated at 66.5 million a year;

climate change impacts are projected to increase this to as many as 175 million per year in the coming decade (2010–2020). Evidence proves that investing in DRR strategies improves the resilience of populations to cope with recurring disasters and keep children in school. DRR and climate change adaptation measures at the school level ensure that the poor are particularly included in Back-to-School initiatives and that their vulnerability is reduced before, during and after emergencies.

DRR in Schools

There is increasing evidence that students of all ages can actively study and participate in school safety measures, and also work with teachers and other adults in the community towards minimising risk before, during and after disaster events. UNICEF’s added value is its capacity to link work at the school and community levels with the education sector and system planning and policies. Working in partnerships, UNICEF is in a unique position to empower the most vulnerable by not only **promoting safe schools** but by **teaching life skills** to children who, as agents for change, in turn teach their communities. Through the child-friendly schools initiative, relevant and quality education reaches the most threatened and marginalized **communities with knowledge, skills and attitudes** on the local environment and on how to reduce risks. Children are prepared and empowered to cope with and find solutions to the effects of climate change in their own lives and in their communities.



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Country initiatives from the Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transition programme

China engaged in building the capacity of education officials, school principals and teachers to prevent and prepare for emergencies due to natural disasters and accidents. Activities included a national workshop on guidelines on the management of building safe schools and the development of multimedia education programmes on disaster prediction, prevention, readiness and response to integrate safety education into the national curriculum and raise the awareness of schoolchildren.

Following Cyclone Nargis in **Myanmar**, more than 60 per cent of the affected schools were supported as part of the emergency response, with schooling re-established in 2,300 affected primary schools and 343 early childhood development centres, as well as access facilitated for more than 400,000 primary schoolchildren with minimum disruption. UNICEF supported the restoration of learning spaces to provided them with 1,000 sets of tables and stools.

Bangladesh strengthened national emergency preparedness and DRR programmes in the education system, and contributed to education reconstruction ('building back better') after the most recent typhoon/floods disaster affecting the country. Efforts included pre-positioning of teaching and learning materials in areas with a high risk of cyclones and flooding. Transitional schools were built to enable children to continue their education and withstood the impact of Cyclone Aila in 2009. Children also participated in activities to identify school vulnerabilities and, with the involvement of school management committees, developed DRR strategies and contingency plans, which have benefitted more than 83,000 children thus far.

Bolivia was hit repeatedly and heavily in the past two years by natural disasters, including floods due to El Niño and hailstorms, freezing conditions and landslides as a result of the La Niña phenomenon. The impact of natural disasters has also been compounded by social conflicts and armed confrontations. The New Sun for Community Well-Being initiative was designed as a response to natural disasters and subsequently extended to focus on mitigating the impact of conflict on the rights of children and young people, particularly their access to education.

UNICEF supported education provision in **Ecuador** for poor and indigenous population groups that are adversely affected by natural disasters and climate change, as well as a comprehensive risk and knowledge management programme that aims to prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies that impact the education sector. Peace-building was initiated in the country’s northern border areas, where there is a large refugee population.

The Child-Led Environmental Education Initiative (CLEEN) in **Albania** is an inter-agency initiative being carried out in cooperation with government ministries. It aims to introduce environmental education into classrooms through participatory teaching methods to support child-led actions at the community level. A 2009 evaluation shows increased environmental awareness in children attending experimental schools compared with control schools, as well as that 44 per cent of those children have adopted at least one environmentally friendly action at home.

In **Zimbabwe**, the Enhancing Food Security through the Empowerment of Schools project was initiated by the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture, UNICEF and the Food and Agriculture Organization in 2006 and was a component of the broader child-friendly schools initiative. The project has been successful in mainstreaming sustainable practices through the establishment of school gardens, boreholes and sanitation facilities, as well as the training of teachers in participatory, child-centred methodologies. An assessment of the project in 2010 indicated that children looked healthier and less malnourished, school environments were cleaner and greener and community-school relationships were strengthened.