Children as agents of change for Disaster Risk Reduction: Lessons from El Salvador and the Philippines.

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Summary

Disaster management has been dominated by top-down relief efforts targeted at adults, who are assumed to be attuned to the needs of their families and the wider community, and to act harmoniously to protect their immediate and long-term interests. Whilst a growing number of development approaches focus on reducing the risk of disasters, they tend to treat children as passive victims with a limited role to play in communicating risks or preventing and responding to disasters.

This paper challenges these assumptions by examining how children's voices are represented and heard in disaster risk reduction (DRR) policy and decision-making spaces, and by assessing the level of capacity children have for preventing disasters vis-à-vis their parents. This challenge and the research presented here are prompted by the anecdotal field reports provided by child-focused development agencies, which suggest that children in developing countries are making significant contributions to minimising disaster risks.

Through this lens, the paper explores three linked areas of enquiry that help to frame the emerging 'child-centred approach to DRR'. First, it considers a history of youth empowerment through children's active participation in decision-making forums. Second, it looks at whether the international human rights architecture provides for a child's right to protection from disasters; and third, it asks whether children can be effective as communicators of risk within their own households and communities.

These three elements contextualise the results of field research in El Salvador and the Philippines, which explored what opportunities exist for the voices of children and their groups to be heard within local and national DRR policy spaces and the experiences and capacity they have for doing so. The concluding section considers why children may be suited to the role as DRR advocates and as communicators of disaster risk, and indeed, whether this is desirable, before raising a number of further questions emerging from this research.

Acknowledgements

Contents

1.0   Introduction

Mainstream approaches and theoretical debates in disaster management tend to ignore the role of children and young people as communicators of risk and as facilitators of disaster risk reduction (DRR). Instead, disaster management is dominated by top-down relief efforts targeted at adults, who are assumed to be attuned to the needs of their families and the wider community and to act harmoniously to protect their immediate and long-term interests. At the same time, disaster events and their severity in terms of human well-being are increasing internationally. In many areas, the impacts of climate change are adding to existing shocks and stresses and presenting new risks in others, while widespread poverty and inequality, particularly in developing countries, reinforces vulnerability and exacerbates impacts (e.g. White et al., 2004).

With this rising tide of disaster events, disproportionate numbers of women and children are being killed (Enarson and Morrow 1998; Cutter 1995; Fordham 1999), exemplified by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami where only one in three survivors were women or children under the age of 15 (Synthesis Report of the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition 2006). Between 1991 and 2000, the lives of an estimated 77 million children were affected by disasters and conflict (Plan UK 2002). However, while gender issues in disasters have enjoyed a higher profile in recent years (Enarson and Morrow 1998; Fothergill 1996; Fordham 1998; 2004), current research tends to assume children are passive victims with no role to play in communicating risks, participating in decision-making processes, or preventing disasters (Ansell 2005). None of the more recent theoretical models of risk communication (Ronan and Johnston 2005) or guidelines for good risk communication practice (Twigg 2004) single out the unique needs and potential role of children as advocates or agents of DRR. This is despite the fact that almost all models and guidelines detail the heterogeneous nature of those at risk and the wider socio-economic and cultural differences in the process and delivery of DRR.

Many practitioners have considered the merits of communicating and educating children about the risks of natural hazards to support disaster preparedness (for a summary see Wisner 2006), but only a small minority have evaluated the benefits of teaching children about disasters for the benefit of the family and wider community (see Ronan and Johnston 2005). The ability of the children to act to reduce their vulnerabilities and risk of disasters has been largely ignored outside of the development field. The vast majority of the literature on the role of children in disasters is devoted to the psychosocial impacts they endure (Norris et al. 2002; Ursano and Norwood 2003) and this has commonly focused on younger children, rather than older children and youth (Chen and Thompstone 2005).

Despite positive, yet unpublished, anecdotal evidence from child-centred DRR approaches being pursued by development agencies such as Plan International, UNICEF and Save the Children, analytical research on the capacity of children to reduce the impact of disasters is missing. In many developing countries, children form the bulk of the population and a high proportion of the death tolls in a disaster (Wisner 2006). Excluding children from the disaster planning process threatens their safety when the disaster strikes and ignores a valuable resource for risk communication, education, advocacy, and help with practical risk reduction

activities. Experience of working with youth volunteer teams in El Salvador, Haiti and the Philippines on community risk mapping and mitigation activities, has shown that children and young people have a much greater capacity to participate in DRR than many people assume (Plan UK 2002).

This paper and the research on which it is based, represents a preliminary attempt to critically analyse child-centred DRR, to present the related empirical findings in a systematic way and to provide a set of debates, which contribute to developing a conceptual background and rationale for working with children to reduce disaster risk. Specifically, it examines the opportunities and capacities for children's voices to contribute to DRR policy spaces; and will be a key input to a larger study addressing the issues and utility of children as communicators of disaster risk1. Through this lens, the paper begins by exploring three linked areas of enquiry that help to frame the emerging child-centred approach to DRR and the specific research question relating to children's voices in DRR policy spaces. First, it considers a history of youth empowerment through children's active participation in decision-making forums. Second, it looks at whether the international human rights architecture provides for a child's right to protection from disasters; and third, it asks whether children can be effective as communicators of risk within their own households and communities.

The main body of the paper outlines the methodology and findings from empirical research conducted in the Philippines and El Salvador, which explored child-centred DRR by asking what opportunities exist for the voices of children, and their groups, to be heard within local and national DRR policy spaces and what experiences and capacity they have for doing so. The research results from each of the four field sites visited (two in each country) are compared in a short discussion section, before the conclusion considers the implications of these findings for child-centred DRR and sets out some ideas as to why children's agency on DRR may be stronger than previously thought. As this paper is a first step within a broader research programme on understanding and informing a child-centred DRR approach, the paper finishes by outlining further questions emerging from this preliminary research that may help to shape future investigations.

2.0   Key Concepts

As research on children's voices, participation and rights is more advanced in other development fields, it is important to frame child-centred DRR within a wider understanding of such concepts.

2.1   Child Participation and Voice

There are many ways of defining what is meant by child and youth participation. In 1975, the US-based National Commission on Resources for Youth defined 'youth participation' as:

> "…the involving of youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and/or decision-making affecting others in an activity whose impact or consequence is extended to others — i.e., outside or beyond the youth participants themselves."
> *(National Commission on Resources for Youth, 1975)*

A more contemporary, yet still broad definition is provided by the Save the Children 're:action toolkit', which described it thus:

> …[children] sharing ideas, thinking for themselves, expressing their views effectively, planning, prioritising and being involved in the decision making process.
> *(Save the Children, 2000: 13)*

Practitioners and researchers have since been working towards establishing a code of conduct for meaningful child participation, by recognising the need to nurture the strengths, interests, and abilities of young people in order that they can take charge of the decisions that affect them. Accordingly, Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2001) define youth participation as a process where young people have real influence in the decisions that affect their lives and not just a token or passive presence in adult agencies. Participation, then, is measured by its quality. In terms of community evaluation, youth participation is defined as the involvement of youth in knowledge development, defining problems, gathering information and using the results (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster 2003). By participating in community evaluation, young people can define what they perceive to be problems, rather than having to accept issues that have been identified and mediated by adults or authorities. Despite this progress Chawla (2002) claims that the inclusion of the voices of children and youth represents a new frontier in participatory policy development.

The idea of 'child and youth participation' and what it means in practice, remains contested. Hart (1997) adapted a model developed by Arnstein (1969) to be youth specific.

It depicts a continuum or degrees of participation on the rungs of a ladder; the bottom rung represents non-existent or minimal participation with full participation seen on the top rungs of the ladder. This is exemplified in Table 2.1a below.

Table 2.1a 'The ladder of child and youth participation', Hart (1997)

Rungs of the Ladder	Degree of Participation
8. (Top) Children and young people initiated, shared decision with adults	Children and young people have the ideas, set up the project, and invite adults to join with them in making decisions.
7. Children and young people are directed	Children and young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.
6. Adult-initiated shared decisions with children	Adults have the initial idea but children and young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but they are also involved in taking the decisions.
5. Consulted but informed	The project is designed and run by adults but children and young people are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.
4. Assigned but informed	Adults decided on the project and children and young people volunteer for it. Adults respect their views.
3. Tokenism	Children and young people are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.
2. Decoration	Children and young people take part in an event, e.g. by signing, dancing or wearing t-shirts with logos on, but they do not really understand the issue.
1. Manipulation	Children and young people do or say what adults suggest they do, but have no real understanding of the issues, or are asked what they think. Adults use some of their ideas but do not tell them what influence they have had on the final decision.

The 'ladder of participation' is an effective method for evaluating the level of meaningful child and youth participation. In the DRR context, children may help with short term actions such as planting trees or communicating information to their family, however, it does not become true participation until children take control and their views become actions through their own agency. The table also highlights some important issues regarding the ethical grounding for youth involvement and the need for a truly inclusive and transparent process. At least half of the 'rungs in the ladder' involve some element of manipulation of children in order to achieve ends that they may not have been consulted on or of which they were not even aware. Thus, despite the rhetoric reflected in many reports, publications and speeches, the realities of youth participation are often misunderstood, misdirected or controlled for purposes that are at odds with the interests of children and young people (Driskell 2002; Hart 1997; Chawla 2002).

Traditionally, the aim for those who work with and communicate with children and youth has been to invest in their future; to educate and empower tomorrow's adults. Although valid, this perspective often causes actors to overlook the abilities of children and youth to make positive changes to the community and wider contexts today. While the emerging youth development field has recognised the value of children and young adults as both decision-makers and drivers for positive social change, designing successful interventions and programme formats, which allow children and young adults to participate on an equal level with other actors, is difficult for many organisations and societies to fully accept or sustain (Moore 2000). This is despite the fact that children in developing countries often take on adult responsibilities as part of their daily lives. Children may support household income generation, undertake household chores and care for family members.

Roshani (1997) notes that many projects do not succeed due to the target population being treated as bystanders rather than active participants. By failing to be given ownership in a project, young people often become overly dependent upon others for programme development, organisation and leadership. Roshani (ibid.) identifies that a sense of pride and empowerment are developed through active involvement in the planning and development of programmes. In addition, programmes benefit greatly from youth involvement, as they are more aware of the needs of their peers and the best ways to reach them. As Roshani states, 'each young person who is involved will gain knowledge and a sense of being connected to something, while the community will benefit from having a successful project' (ibid. p.2).

The notion of youth empowerment is not new and has the support of numerous policy documents and white papers, for example: the Lisbon Declaration (1998); The European Commission White Paper on Youth (2001); and the Youth Pact (2005). Yet despite these high profile initiatives, it appears they represent little more than a desired outcome and contain limited evidence of child and youth empowerment and decision-making in action. Successful participation, it seems, requires a significant shift in public attitudes towards a society which not only encourages children and youth to express their opinions, but also involves their voices in the decision-making process.

Nonetheless, a number of authors have criticised child and youth participation for concentrating on the good it will bring society rather than the positive and

sometimes negative effects for the children and youth themselves. Similarly, some see it as a form of social control that is frequently driven by an adult agenda (e.g. Prout 2000; Shucksmith and Hendry 1998). In addition, the process and methods used in child and youth participation and consultation have been observed to create wider, more negative effects. As the Education, Culture and Sport Committee note:

> A small minority of chosen or self-selected individuals enjoy and benefit from ongoing participatory activities and groups, while the majority who are not consulted or have experience of short one-off consultations tend to feel resentful, alienated and cynical.
> *(Scottish Executive 2002: 4)*

In order to ensure that approaches to youth involvement do have children and young people's interests at heart, and to increase the chances of successful outcomes, a number of guidelines, standards and definitions have been devised. For example, Driskell (2002) defines meaningful participation in the following terms:

Local - While participation might be implemented on a regional, national scale and even international scale, its implementation is focused on the needs and issues of the local community.

Transparent - The aims of the participatory project are clear to all involved.

Inclusive - Accessible to all members of the community.

Interactive - A community wide dialogue with children and adults talking and listening to each other.

Responsive - Facilitators need to be flexible in order to respond to changing conditions and needs. The process must not be rushed, with enough time given to enable all children and young adults to voice opinions and listen to others.

Relevant - Participation involves combining children's local knowledge and unique perspective with information and skilled perspectives from outside the community that is considered needed by the young participants and facilitators.

Educational - A learning process for all - sponsors, officials, facilitators, etc.

Motivations and Obstacles for Children's Participation

There are a number of reasons why young people may choose to participate or not. These may stem from concerns about the world around them, seen from a perspective quite different to the adult world, or are qualities and characteristics of the child themselves. The International Youth Foundation developed a set of 'given competencies' (the 5 Cs) they believe children need in order to participate successfully (Table 2.1b). These skills are developed through opportunities for participation, enabling children and youth to become successful partners and stakeholders in society (Golombek 2002).

Table 2.1b The five Cs (Golombek, 2002 p.7)

1. Character	Responsibility and accountability
2. Confidence	A sense of self worth based on their ability to take the initiative and make choices
3. Connection	A sense of belonging to their community
4. Competence	Are able to develop and learn the educational and or vocational skills needed to earn a living
5. Contribution	A civically minded responsibility to invest their time, ideas and talents to improve their communities

It is recognised however, that a child's motivation to participate may also reflect less prescriptive characteristics and situations. For example, an excluded child may also be driven to participate in a campaign or social movement. Arguably, this personal experience of exclusion may make the child's participation even more powerful, influential and successful.

While there may be clear benefits of child and youth participation for young people, Iyengar and Jackman (2003) describe the trend of political disengagement among young people, noting that in developed countries participation in political processes continues to decline among youth groups. In particular, Iyengar and Jackson (ibid.) highlight the consequences of age-related imbalances as political figures respond to the preferences of voters, not non-voters, leading candidates and parties to ignore the rights, needs and issues affecting the young. This again highlights the importance of youth participation with clear pathways between youth voice and political influence, as without voting rights, children can only become active and responsible citizens, who realise their policy influencing power, through participation (Chawla 2002; Hart 1997; De Winter 1997).

Table 2.1c on the next page, presents a number of reasons for child and youth involvement or lack of involvement.

Table 2.1c 'Motivations of children and youth to participate'.
Summarised from Molloy et al. (2002)

What motivates children and youth to participate?	Why do some young people not want to participate?
Belief in the importance of expressing their views	Have other priorities
Belief in the possibility of influencing decision making	Scepticism about the efficacy of their participation. Believe young people cannot influence change
A drive to make a difference	Not motivated to make a difference as others are paid to take the responsibility and/or those in charge know what they are doing
Are aware of the ways young people can participate	Not aware of how they can participate
Parental / family influence (having parents, family or friends involved in the area)	Not involved in social or family groups where involvement occurs
Background knowledge and an interest in the area (also developed through participation)	Lack of interest or knowledge
Self confidence (this is also developed through the act of participation)	Lack of self confidence
Brush-off and ignore peer group attitudes	'It's not cool' - negative peer group influences

Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003) also recognise this uneven motivation to participate, but also highlight that the family and community context in which children live often presents barriers for their engagement:

> Young people participate, but their participation is uneven. Some young people participate with fervour, whereas others express interest but are unsure how to proceed, whereas others try to proceed but lack support from adults or face obstacles in the community (p.21)

Iyengar and Jackman (2003) discuss the question of potential 'treatments' of the problem of politically disengaged children and youth. Citing evidence from the U.S., they suggest that in some cases classroom-based civic learning courses have attempted to foster attitudes towards community that are known to encourage greater child and youth engagement. Other examples point towards participation in non-political community activities as a catalyst for the development of pro-social and participant orientations. Nevertheless, they conclude that such attempts at civic education are still insufficient to get young voters to the polls when they reach the legal age.

However, more often than not, the desire of children and youth to become involved often requires a supportive enabling environment through the facilitation of an outside group to help them gain access to the decision-making process. Without this facilitation, it is apparent from the research literature that children and youth generally feel powerless and excluded from the adult realm of political processes. In areas of local and national government, the experience of those who have been permitted to participate in council and parliament meetings has often been one of observation rather than taking part:

> 'it was made clear that we were to sit at the back and keep quiet' *(Molloy et al. 2002: 72).*

This lack of commitment by decision-makers to accept youth views and the failure of organisations to adequately represent youths can lead to a process that is neither empowering nor effective in influencing change.

However, as with all participatory processes, the children and youth who are willing and able to participate are often unrepresentative of the communities in which they live. As Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003) observe, socio-economic factors and levels of education are very influential predictors for participation, and they note that adults often perpetuate the inequalities in child and youth participation by involving further those who are already involved or who hold key positions in the community. Chawla (2002) concurs by stating that

> 'children are not a homogeneous group and like the rest of society are made up of people with different backgrounds, circumstances and needs. It is therefore important to reach out and include those who are most vulnerable and who are easily overlooked' (16-17).

Those who are most vulnerable are often, depending on the nature of gender identities in the community, either girls or boys, the youngest participants, and those from marginalised ethnic or social groups.

How is successful participation gauged?

How then is successful participation gauged? For example are actual legislative and policy changes required to indicate success? Or, recognising children's evolving capacities and the constraints of different social and political climates, could an initiative that enabled children's views to be taken into consideration but was not directed by children be considered successful?

Bridging the generation gap

Mixing adult, child and youth partnerships is fundamental for successful participation of young people. Traditionally this relationship has been one-sided with adults communicating to and working on behalf of young people. Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003) emphasise that child and youth inclusion should not merely be seen as the involvement of yet another community group. Rather, it represents the involvement of an excluded group whose participation is not familiar to most adults and has the potential to challenge the status quo in a more fundamental way. In order to effect change of a community's entrenched values, it is necessary for old norms to be challenged, prejudices to be overcome and new ideals and skills to be embraced, by adults and youth groups alike. Common problems and areas of conflict between adults and youth are set out in Table 2.1d.

Table 2.1d Common Areas of Conflict between Children and Adults. Adapted from Iyengar and Jackman (2003: 29).

According to adults, children are…	According to children, adults are…
Lacking in commitment	Too demanding
Self absorbed	Unwilling to give personal space
Undisciplined	Too regimented
Not interested in long-term plans	Oblivious to the here and now realities
Temperamental	Not interested in the emotional aspects
Inexperienced	Not ready to give chances
Only interested in having fun	Boring

Pravah, a non-profit organisation in India which helps to facilitate a process whereby young people can become leaders for social change, has tried to overcome these areas of conflict in a number of ways. The following points are largely based on their experience supplemented by other literature (Iyengar and Jackman 2003: 30-34):

> Children and youth are often expected to be engaged in processes conceived by adults. Instead, they must be supported to carry out their own projects and enabled to conduct scoping research in areas they feel are important. This may mean that adults have to support and facilitate projects they do not agree with.

> Children and youth are still developing and thus need space and opportunity to do so. They need experience within organisations and sectors of society in order that they can face social realities with time for reflection and freedom for independent action.

Rules and regulations are normally dictated to children. Instead, with meaningful participation, there should always be an initial process of consensus building, between adults and children, to decide what the rules of engagement will be.

If youth are involved in the initial planning, it is easier for them to relate to longer-term plans. However, adults also need to realise that idealistic dreams, hope and a drive to make a difference today are a critical resource for community development. These dreams, which are often missing in older generations, must be nurtured and supported.

Adults often interpret children's emotional attitudes as a weakness, while adults are often considered too stoical. Young people need to feel free to express their feelings while at the same time learning how to think more objectively by separating facts from emotions.

Because of their age, young people will often lack experience when compared to adults. However, many adults will often be inexperienced in working with children and appreciating the benefits of child-centred programmes. Therefore, a good child-centred programme will build and widen the experience of both youth and adults.

Adults are considered boring while children are assumed to only want to play and have fun. Again, appropriate participatory techniques, activities and responsibilities which engage children and maintain their enthusiasm whilst being productive are necessary. In addition, children are often immersed in the entertainment of pop-culture and those who are more privileged will be technologically savvy. Techniques to engage children must therefore keep pace and remain innovative.

Getting the voice of children heard

A number of methods for advocating youth interests, issues, and concerns have been identified as being particularly successful. Below are a number of these methods rated by children and youth according to their potential to generate attention and to strengthen their voice in the decision-making process (after Molloy et al., 2002: 61-62):

Petitions – popular and easy but need to be accompanied by media attention to be effective.

Protesting – will raise the profile of an issue but not thought to be an effective way to influence change and may be dangerous.

Letter writing – needs persistence, and letters from the young are easily ignored.

Attending local authority and council meetings – face-to-face meetings where children can discuss their concerns were considered most effective.

Additionally, children and youth in the UK were found to perceive that social status would influence the impact of their voices, with 'better off' families more likely to be listened to and have influence upon decision-making (Molloy et al. 2002). However, importantly, cultural and language barriers were only considered to be a problem for older generations. Children within ethnic groups were considered able to adapt more effectively than their parents and were more comfortable with their new environment, sometimes acting as translators between their parents and the local government authorities (Molloy et al. 2002). The role of children as translators of information between an outside agent and their families is highlighted repeatedly and is an important consideration for later discussions in this paper on the role of children and youth as conduits and mediators of risk information. This 'translator role' increases the power of the child, and can be supported by the child's language skills, where their parents and grandparents do not understand the language in which the information is communicated but the child does. This may also be relevant to poor and marginalised communities, where children may be more exposed to education, have higher levels of literacy than their parents and more opportunities to engage than their parents. It can also describe the child's knowledge of technology, which may be considerably more sophisticated than that of the older generations.

For example, Iyengar and Jackman (2003) consider young people's over-representation as computer and internet users as a great advantage in terms of access to information and each other. However, this access is not even, those who are able to will use mobile phones and computers to pass messages on to peers, while others will have to rely on the process of word of mouth and other less organised and slower, lower impact means. This differentiated access has important implications in terms of understanding the ways that young people perceive community and personal identity and redefine decision-making processes in order to take such factors into account. Perhaps most crucially, child and youth participation must help young people fulfil their needs: to find interesting and entertaining things to do; to achieve security, safety and employment; to socialise with their peers; to take risks; to be independent and to feel successful.

2.2 Supporting a Child's Right to Safety?

From the previous section, it is clear that organised child and youth participation is desirable if conducted in a manner that adds legitimacy to the voice of children, on the child's own terms, while also underpinning their personal development and motivations. However, in many cases, there is little to compel political agencies or other external actors to secure the participation of young people in decision-making. Consequently, distinctions have to be drawn between the legal and moral responsibility for children's voices to be heard and for their safety and security to be given added attention. This section draws on international child rights literature and architecture to explore how current legal frameworks support a child's right to protection from disasters and their right to participate in measures to reduce disaster risk in their communities.

In this regard, it is important to draw a distinction between the rights a person may have under law (also known as 'positive' rights) and rights they may have morally (Archard, 2004). Over the years, the rights of children have been identified and advocated for until they were incorporated within the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (DRC). Though non-binding, these instruments were considered 'soft' laws. It was however not until the introduction of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 that children's rights were officially and legally recognised. Nevertheless, legal and moral rights are not two mutually exclusive sets of rights (Archard 2004). A right a person may have under law may be the same as a moral right. At the same time, however, the law and morality do not always perfectly coincide. Many institutions and organisations have already adopted a rights-based approach to disaster management, which usually encompasses human rights as recognised in international law and also other rights which the organisation believes should be recognised as human rights on a moral basis (Twigg 2003). For example, the child's right to safety and protection from disasters may be based on the fact that children are greatly affected by disasters, and as they are in a position of greater vulnerability due to their age, they thus require special protection from the impacts of disasters, in order to uphold their rights to survival, protection and development. Further, as children are not passive victims but are capable of advocacy and action, they should not only be accorded the right to protection but also guaranteed the right to participate in their own protection, specifically in the disaster mitigation and recovery process. It may therefore be argued (which many disaster and development organisations do) that children have the right to protection and disaster mitigation on these moral grounds despite the fact the right has not yet been explicitly recognised in law.

If moral rights are able to gain wide enough global acceptance and recognition, they may eventually culminate into an international convention. Precedents of this include the International Labor Organisation (ILO) Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor was adopted in 1999 and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict was adopted in 2000. These are examples of the development of children's rights and how moral rights may eventually be encapsulated into legal international conventions, which may be ratified by States Parties. Until then, however, moral rights are

technically not considered legally binding or enforceable.

Two international instruments deal specifically with the rights of the child – the CRC, which is the most widely ratified international convention, and the DRC, which is only declaratory. Despite being merely declaratory, the DRC has played an important role in the recognition of children's rights as it reflected a change in perception of children as not merely 'objects' or 'little adults', but persons who deserve not only equal protection to adults, but special protection due to their unique position of vulnerability.

The Geneva Declaration and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child

The Geneva Convention as adopted by the League of Nations in 1924 originally had five articles (Last 1994). It was amended and extended to become the DRC, which was adopted in 1959 by the UN General Assembly. There are three principles in the DRC, which are particularly relevant to the child's right to safety and protection from disasters. Principle 2 of the DRC declares that:

> The child shall enjoy special protection, and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means, to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity. In the enactment of laws for this purpose, the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration.

It is clear that the impact of a disaster would hinder a child's development and, as such, it can be easily concluded that 'special protection' must be provided to the child from these negative impacts. In this way, disaster mitigation is an important component in minimising risk of disaster and fulfilling Principle 2 of the DRC so that the child may be able to develop in a 'healthy and normal manner'. It is also noted that the type of disaster intervention required here must go beyond just the provision of physical survival needs. Principle 2 requires a holistic approach to the protection of the child, to ensure that the child's mental, social and emotional development must not be impaired as well.

Similarly, Principle 4 of the DRC requires that the child 'shall be entitled to grow and develop in health'. Though the wording of the Principle refers specifically to pre- and post-natal care of children, it is not limited to this. The Principle goes on to provide that '[t]he child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services'. Children, therefore, should be provided with an environment where he or she may grow and develop in health (therefore, not one of high disaster-risk, being instead protected as much as possible from the occurrence of disaster and all its negative effects) and be provided with good housing, nutrition and medical services. This principle can therefore be used to support DRR interventions to build resilience. Further, as this Principle is not restricted to times of normality (cf. times of disaster), the Principle can also be used for grounds that disaster relief in the form of food, housing and medical services be provided to children in the event of a disaster and throughout recovery. The rights of the child affected by calamity or conflict are explicitly set

out in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the NGOs in Disaster Relief (1994); and the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (2004).

Principle 8 specifically declares that '[t]he child shall in all circumstances be among the first to receive protection and relief'. The Principle was originally declared to address the plight of children during wartime. There is nothing in the DRC, however, which would prevent this Principle from being extended to cover the situation of children during times of disaster. Though clearly stated and accepted by the UN General Assembly, this principle has been criticised for being impractical, unacceptable in many cultures, simplifying complex issues and elevating children's rights beyond what is necessary (therefore, above that of the responsibility of adults) (see Last 1994). The Principle had originally been Article III out of the original five, but was dropped down to Article V in the ten articles of the 1948 DRC and then to Principle 8 in 1959. Nevertheless, the Principle recognises clearly that children shall 'receive protection and relief' even though it may not be as widely accepted that they should be the first to receive it. The principle therefore remains valuable in the advocacy for the provision of protection and relief for children in times of disaster.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

The CRC represents children as the subjects of rights, possessing fundamental entitlements that must be protected. They are recognised as having agency and as having a voice to be listened to. As mentioned previously, the CRC does not specifically mention the right of children to be protected from disaster or the right of children to disaster mitigation. Though the CRC has traditionally been interpreted to cover a political, legal and development context, it is evident below that the CRC also deals with many matters relating to disaster mitigation.

Firstly, the CRC guarantees that all actions taken by public entities (including private social welfare institutions) have the best interests of the child as a primary consideration. Article 3 of the CRC states:

> 1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 3 of the CRC also requires the States Parties to 'ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being…and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.' It is clear that the occurrence of a disaster would have a negative impact on a child's well-being and would not be in the best interest of the child. As such, it could be argued that disaster mitigation by the States Parties is imperative to the protection of the child's well-being. It can therefore be argued that in order for States Parties to comply with this requirement, they must ensure sufficient 'legislative and administrative measures' are taken toward disaster mitigation so that the child's well-being would be adequately protected and cared for.

Articles 6, 24 and 27 of the CRC are all relevant to the protection of the child against the adverse effects of a disaster. Article 6 of the CRC recognises

a child's inherent right to life. It requires that States Parties 'ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child'. Article 24 of the CRC recognises the right of the child to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health and to 'facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health'. It provides in detail the appropriate measures that States Parties are to take in implementing this right, including diminishing infant and child mortality, ensuring the provision of medical assistance and healthcare and combating disease and malnutrition through the 'the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution'. Further, Article 27 of the CRC protects the right of a child to have a standard of living that is adequate for his or her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. The primary responsibility for the fulfilment of this right has been placed on the parents or guardians of the child 'within their abilities and financial capacities' but States Parties also have to 'take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing'.

Along with Article 3 of the CRC, Article 6, 24 and 27 places responsibility on the States Parties to recognise the rights of a child to life, health and adequate standard of living for development (by accessing adequate nutrition, clean drinking water, clothing, housing, etc.).

As these rights are not restricted to times of normality (cf. during times of disaster), these rights in effect also call for the protection of children against harm caused by disaster. It is clear that disasters can severely inhibit a child from realising his or her right to life and may clearly have an adverse effect on the child's health and ability to develop. It is in this sense that these rights recognised by the CRC culminate together in making the child's protection from disaster and access to disaster relief a 'right' which belongs to the child.

In relation to participatory rights of a child in the disaster mitigation process, Article 12 of the CRC guarantees the child's right to express his or her views freely in matters affecting the child. Article 12 states:

> 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Similarly, Article 13 of the CRC also protects a child's right to the freedom of expression, which includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas. Article 13 states:

> 1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

This right would incorporate the right of a child to receive information in relation to their risk of disaster as well as the right of the child to express and impart their ideas in response to this information in any way they wish, whether 'orally, in writing, in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice' [2].

The CRC is however limited in a number of ways. Like other international instruments, the CRC does not have a significant impact unless it is enacted into domestic legislation. States ratifying the CRC are required to bring their national legislation in line with its provisions and are required to report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (the monitory agency) on their progress of implementing the CRC (Hammarberg, 1990). It is, however, recognised that signatory states pay no more than lip service to the CRC (Archard 2004). States fail to submit annual reports on time and widespread abuses of children continue despite State ratification. As the CRC only requires States to report and does not provide for any stronger enforcement powers to the Committee, the CRC has had limited practical and legal impact. There is, for example, no international court where cases of alleged breaches may be brought, and where signatory states are bound by the final decisions of the court (such as the European Court of Human Rights). Further, Article 4 of the CRC gives many States Parties a way out of full compliance with the CRC. Though Article 4 of the CRC requires 'States Parties [to] undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention', it only requires States Parties to undertake 'measures to the maximum extent of their available resources' in relation to the economic, social and cultural rights found in the CRC. This means that States Parties may use the 'excuse' that they do not have the necessary resources to comply with the CRC in protecting these economic, social and cultural rights. These types of rights specifically are important in relation to the provision of disaster relief [3].

Human rights approach to disaster mitigation and relief

Apart from specific international instruments dealing with children, there are other international human rights instruments (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)), which may address the right to protection and relief from disasters in general. As with those specific to children, none of these explicitly guarantee the rights of a person (whether adult or child) to protection or relief from disasters but it is evident that such rights are implied by various international human rights instruments.

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[2] It is noted however that the Convention does not guarantee that the child's opinion be given any weight (therefore, there is no obligation for someone, such as an organisation/adult/parent/guardian, to actually do what the child says). The Articles only guarantee the child's right to express their views and ideas and not necessarily for these views and ideas to be implemented (Archard 2004). What is required, however, is that decisions relating to a child must be made in his or her best interests in accordance with Article 3 of the CRC.

[3] For example, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami destroyed freshwater supplies in many of the affected areas which severely hampered the ability of the survivors to access clean water. About 70 per cent of the water supply in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, was damaged, and many wells, water pipes, hand pumps and public taps were destroyed in Sri Lanka and Southern India. The situation also created the potential for water borne diseases to spread (Penrose and Takaki, 2006).

For example, Article 3 of the UDHR states that '[e]veryone has the right to life, liberty and security of person'. Article 25 of the UDHR guarantees that:

> [e]veryone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

It is implicit in these articles that people, whether young or old, should be protected from circumstances that would affect their 'life, liberty and security' and that would stop them from having an adequate standard of living. This would include the right to food, clothing, housing, medical care and the necessary social services in the form of relief in times of disaster.

Article 19 of the UDHR also guarantees the person's right to access information, for example, regarding the risks faced in their community, to express their views and opinions, and in effect, participate and comment on any disaster mitigation process that may be in progress. Article 19 states that:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Where there is no disaster risk reduction process being undertaken, Article 19 guarantees the right of a person to advocate for the need of one.

The ICCPR also guarantees the right to life (Article 6) and the right of people to 'seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds' (Article 19). The ICESCR guarantees a person, and his or her family, rights to an adequate standard of living, including to adequate food, clothing and housing (Article 11) and the right of everyone to enjoy the 'highest attainable standard of physical and mental health' (Article 12), including States Parties' responsibility to take the necessary steps for '[t]he improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene' (Article 12.2.(b)), which includes:

> …the prevention and reduction of the population's exposure to harmful substances such as radiation and harmful chemicals or other detrimental environmental conditions that directly or indirectly impact upon human health (emphasis mine)
> (UNESC 2000)

It appears that Article 12.2(b) is broad as it also embraces 'an adequate supply of food and proper nutrition, and discourages the abuse of alcohol, and the use of tobacco, drugs and other harmful substances' (UNESC 2000). Further, Article 12 also requires States Parties' to take the necessary steps for '[t]he prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases' (Article 12.2(c)) which is particularly relevant in a post-disaster environment, as well as to create '[t]he conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness' (Article 12.2(d)).

All these provisions are relevant to ensuring that people, as well as children, are protected from disasters, that steps are taken toward DRR, that people's views (whether children or adults) have a right to be heard in these DRR processes, that all have a right to access information regarding disaster risks, and that they are provided with the necessary relief should a disaster occur.

2.3 Children as Communicators of Risk

These provisions supporting a child's right to safety and wellbeing, provide important pillars for a rights based, child-centred approach to DRR. However, it is also important to evaluate what added value a child-centred approach to DRR can offer. Do children possess the skills and qualities required to be successful advocates for DRR and effective communicators of disaster risk? In this area, the body of literature is not as well developed as for child rights or participation; however there are successful examples of children acting as communicators of health risk information. Children learn about water, sanitation and health risks and pass this information onto their peers, parents and the wider community (Child-to-Child Trust 2002; Gibbs et al. 2002). In addition to health care projects, these 'child-to-child' and 'child-to-adult' risk communication approaches have been adopted by NGOs including Save the Children and the Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency as part of their mine awareness campaigns in Afghanistan, Yemen and Iraqi Kurdistan (Child-to-Child Trust 2002; Aziz Hamand 2007).

Lessons from the wider literature on risk communication may further help to contextualise the benefits of engaging young people in DRR. In the last two decades, there has been a substantial challenge to dominant modes of risk regulation and conventional top-down expert-to-public risk communication (Kasperson and Kasperson 2005). A focus on human, rather than only physical, dimensions of vulnerability has been vital to this shift, and has informed a more rigorous examination both of uncertainty, and greater participation and deliberation in risk discourse and communications (Wisner 2006; Wynne 1992). Resulting risk communication theories can be clustered in four traditions: a systems tradition, with sources, messages, channels, and receivers (Lee 1986); a behavioural tradition, based on perceptions, attitudes, and cognitive mapping (Slovic 1986); a cultural tradition, where values, equity and rights determine viewpoints on safety (Rayner 1984); and most recently, a participation tradition, which advocates early deliberation between public and other 'risk' stakeholders to determine acceptable levels of risk (Chilvers 2005; Wynne 1995). To date, however, discourse on risk communication, which has drawn heavily from the public understanding of science literature, has failed to fully explore the role of young people as either sources or recipients of risk knowledge (Kasperson 1992; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982; Kasperson and Kasperson 2005).

Two explanations are ventured for children not figuring in these traditions. Firstly, risk communication has always been associated with information flows from the top downwards, with scientific institutions at the top and the public at the bottom, though this has been repeatedly challenged by many sociologists of risk (e.g Wynne 1992; Wilbanks and Kates, 1999). This has diverted attention away from the diversity within communities and placed it on relationships between science and society. The second relates to paternalism, and the commonly held belief that

parents make decisions about the level of risk their child faces (Adams 1995). Therefore, risk communication models assume parents have the responsibility, capacity, will and free reign to make choices about risks their children face - without questioning the rights and agency of the child to make a difference.

To consider how child-centred-DRR approaches fit into risk communication models, it is crucial to review the relative levels of trust placed in different communication sources (Haynes et al. 2007; Lindell and Perry 2004), and the decision-making processes people go through in receiving, verifying and acting on risk messages. Additionally, researchers have found that risk messages must have cultural and individual meaning to be effective, but this is neither obvious nor easy to achieve (e.g. Bye and Horner 1998). Within this context, child-centred risk communication can be related to the child's willingness to trust information sources, ability to convey messages with a meaning shared by their families and friends, and their ability to be impartial and trusted by recipients, as they are not political or powerful actors. Children tend to be less influenced by religious, supra-natural and fatalistic beliefs (Pilgrim 1999) and are less subjected to indoctrination. They also have time to meet and participate in activities; they can stay focused and can understand messages and retain them (Aziz Hamad 2007). In addition, as most children are also embedded within the family, this relationship means risk information and mitigation actions may be continually re-affirmed, whereas external sources rely on small windows of opportunity to convey messages and influence actions. From a conceptual viewpoint, such understanding will also frame potential incompatibilities between adult-centred and child-centred approaches to risk communication, between dominant risk discourses emphasising the role of science and expert knowledge, and those emphasising uncertainty and different ways of framing risk (Wynne 1992; Wisner et al. 2004).

Parker and Handmer (1998) note the importance of unofficial or informal communication networks which evolve within communities. Tapping new messages into these informal information mechanisms is a perpetual challenge for risk communicators and it is anticipated that utilising the networking abilities of children will greatly improve the efficacy of this process. This however, remains conjecture, but a minority of studies have identified that children can pass messages on and have a positive impact on their parent/guardian and other adults' awareness of issues (Saphir and Chaffee 2002; McDevit and Chaffee 2000; Crawford et al. 1990; and Ronan and Johnston 2001). Ronan and Johnstone (2003) identified that a programme initiated at school, which emphasised interaction and homework to be completed with parents and guardians, to be an effective format to increase levels of family disaster preparedness. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all children in vulnerable societies live in a 'perfect' family environment.

3.0   Research Study

As set out above, child-centred DRR is the product of thinking on child rights, on child and youth participation, voice and empowerment; and of hypotheses relating to the power and agency of children as effective communicators of disaster risk. However, while some initial experiences of child-centred DRR programming have been positive, this is a new area of research and practice with an accompanying set of unknowns and questions to be answered.

Consequently, the research presented here, the product of field studies in El Salvador and the Philippines, represents a first attempt to explore some of the issues a child-centred approach to DRR provides. In terms of specific research questions, we ask:

> What opportunities exist for the voices of children and their groups to be heard within local and national DRR policy spaces and;

> What experiences and capacity do children and their groups have for doing so?

These research questions were the product of negotiations between the lead partners in delivering this research - the Institute of Development Studies and Plan International - and are areas of enquiry that are designed to inform Plan International's current child-centred DRR programming across a number of countries. The research was conducted as a comparative study of El Salvador and the Philippines, two countries in which Plan's child-centred DRR work is most advanced. It was also designed to compare two communities in each country, one community where Plan's child-centred DRR programme had yet to be implemented and one community where it was well established. This allowed the research team to test the efficacy of a child-centred DRR approach as measured against a 'control' community.

A participatory approach was adopted with a focus on self-assessment of coping and capacity. The research was conducted through focus group discussion sessions and visioning exercises with children and youth groups, their parents and local policy makers. In-depth interviews were used with policy and decision makers at the national and regional level. A set of guiding questions were used to facilitate discussion that included the causes of disasters, past disaster events and their consequences, and current response and coordination. At community level, methods included risk mapping and ranking, visioning exercises, transect walks, stakeholder and influence mapping and theatre. Sessions were recorded through a digital voice recorder, video, photographs, notes and typed notes. The methods employed were flexible in order to adapt to the dynamic research environment.

Field Sites

El Salvador and the Philippines are exposed to significant meteorological and geological hazards including hurricanes/typhoons, earthquakes, landslides and floods. Recent events include the 2001 El Salvador earthquake and the 2006 Guinsaugon landslide in the Philippines. As these events suggest, disasters are a development concern, predominantly caused by poverty, inadequate land use planning, poor construction standards and dysfunctional or absent institutions. Raising the basic level of awareness about disaster risks and risk reduction is therefore a major requirement across all sections and sectors of society in order to reduce the vulnerability of exposed populations.

The fieldwork was conducted during March and April 2007 in the following locations:

Location	Purpose
Manila, Philippines San Salvador, El Salvador	To interview key stakeholders involved in disaster management at the national level.
Chalatenango, El Salvador	To interview key stakeholders involved in disaster management at the regional level.
Southern Leyte, Philippines Petapa, El Salvador	To work with children in a community where Plan has a strong presence and has initiated their child-centred DRR strategy.
Albay, Philippines El Jocote, El Salvador	To work with children in a community where Plan has recently initiated engagement but on themes other than DRR. These communities provide a good baseline comparison.

4.0   Findings

The following section presents the findings from the research studies
in the Philippines and El Salvador.

4.1   The Philippines
Formal and informal pathways

Analysis revealed a number of official and unofficial pathways for children and youth groups to communicate their views about the disaster risks they face and how they would like these risks to be reduced. These include talking informally to their families, their friends and their teachers; more formal classroom discussions and through the student's seat on the Parents, Teachers and Community Association (PTCA); through official representation at youth forums and councils; theatre productions; NGO newspaper articles; and art exhibitions. Box 4.1 highlights the example of a children's theatre group who have communicated their views about landslides in Southern Leyte through street theatre.

Box 4.1

Example of Street Theatre on the Guinsaugon Landslide 2006 - Philippines

Theatre was cited by the children and youth as a very popular means of transferring their concerns to the wider community. Themes of recent productions have included landslide disasters (causes, event and recovery), child trafficking, ecology, family relationships, HIV, substance abuse and birth registration. The scripts are written by the children but facilitated by the youth leaders who take the roles of directors and choreographers. The theatre is a mobile 'street production' performed from one village to another with limited props and some lighting and music. On occasion, the theatre group (Teatro Basillik) is also invited to perform to visitors and tourists. Donations are accepted following the performance in a 'pass the hat' fashion. This income is managed by the children for further productions or to help with wider needs in the community, such as school uniforms.

The theatre play has two main objectives. Firstly, it is seen as a form of stress release and recovery, as the children, many of whom are survivors of recent disasters, can share their stories and experiences. Of equal importance is the power of the production to also communicate the children's views and messages in support of the right to protection and for DRR. After each performance, a discussion is facilitated to allow the audience to express their opinions and reactions to the topic presented. Previous productions, for example following the Punta, San Francisco landslide in 2003, have been shown in Manila and in Europe. These have helped spread the children's message beyond Southern Leyte aided by press conferences following the performance, where the media have asked the children about their experiences.

While the children and youth talked about informal means of getting their voices heard, there are few examples of formal pathways. This can partly be explained by the predominantly reactive disaster management system in the Philippines, where at many levels, disaster preparedness seems to be confused for DRR. There appear to be numerous organisations and councils with overlapping responsibilities for disaster management, all are burdened by institutional redundancy, and few function effectively. Within this disorganised system, there is no effective avenue (official or unofficial) for the voices of children to directly influence DRR policy. The children identified a number of obstacles affecting their ability to communicate on DRR, which included: a lack of time due to competing demands; financial constraints meaning they needed to help their families; a lack of interest and support from their parents; and an unwillingness of the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK – Philippines Youth Council) and official local government organisations to engage with disaster risk issues.

However, the transition of children to youth leaders, and in turn, to becoming influential members of the community, was noted by the children and youth as an important route for them to impact on policy. The children often cited the SK as a possible route for children's voices to be heard. However, many of the children and youth felt that the youth council was either not active or those involved were not interested in the views and concerns of the children in the community, but only in furthering their own political careers. Even when the SK did consult with them, no further action was taken, generating a lack of trust and cynical view of the power and integrity of the SK:

> "The SK are irresponsible and are always busy doing nothing."
> *Male, out of school youth, Nahulid, Southern Leyte*

In addition, political affiliations were cited as a serious barrier to policy change, with people blocking or not listening to the ideas of those who were not in a favoured or particular party. These obstacles are exemplified by the experiences of children following the 2006 Guinsaugon landslide [4], where youth leaders working with children in the temporary evacuation camps had found their interaction with the Disaster Coordinating Council 'very disappointing'. They stated the officials did not want to listen and were apathetic to the needs and views of the children. However, the ability of children to voice their view on DRR is more positive than this example suggests as in other administrative districts, such as Nahulid in Southern Leyte, children's voices are more formally represented on the Barangay Development Council. This is the result of the barangay captain (local mayor) being particularly aware of the important perspectives children can bring to community development issues. On the occasions where children's voices were being listened to by policy bodies, it almost always coincided with an adult in a position of power being sympathetic to the voices of the children. Identifying these key actors and working to sensitise them to the insight and power of children's voices appears to be a key component for the success of child-centred DRR programming.

[4.] The Guinsaugon landslide occurred between 9am and 10am on the 17th February 2006, killing approximately 1000 people within the municipality of Saint Bernard in Southern Leyte. The Barangay of Guinsaugon was completely destroyed. The local school was attended by 246 students and only one pupil was rescued.

The willingness of an adult in a position of power to listen to the views of children was also crucial in the case of the school relocation in Santa Paz, the most significant example of the power of children's voices on disaster risk found during the field visit in the Philippines. The Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) conducted a risk assessment of landslides in Southern Leyte in 2006, determining that eight barangay were at high risk within the Municipality of San Francisco. These included Santa Paz Sur and Santa Paz Norte, with the MGB recommending that exposed households should be relocated. These two barangay were home to a high school and an elementary school, both of which were considered to be extremely exposed. Following debates about whether and how to relocate the school, the headmaster opened the decision to a community-wide referendum to include a vote for each of the children of the school. Broadly, the children were in favour of the relocation, and their parents against it, because the parents were concerned about their children having to travel to school in a different community and the loss of livelihoods associated with the relocation of a school (e.g. loss of lunch business for local shops, as well as loss of political power generated from having an education facility based in their barangay). In addition, different political affiliations of the leadership in the two barangay led to confusion over the exact detail of the risk communication from the MGB, with opposing politicians highlighting contrasting interpretations to their supporters. The children's organisations in the school (Supreme Student Council and Student Government Organisation) embarked on an education campaign about the physical processes of landslides and large numbers of students wrote to the School Division Superintendent expressing their desire to relocate. The actions by the students helped them to win the vote by 101 to 49, signalling the relocation of the school.

Due to concern from the Provincial authorities, a more protracted timetable for the school's relocation was shortened to just two days following heavy rains. A temporary tent school was erected over one weekend with children and parents helping to put up the tents and children digging drainage channels due to the temporary school's location close to a paddy field. The tents, water supply and toilets were provided by Plan Philippines, along with a scholarship programme helping poorer students to afford uniforms and school supplies. The children reported feelings of excitement about the whole process and did not express any regret about the decision to move. They did report difficult conditions in the temporary school, particularly the heat in the tents, though the children helped to line the tents with banana leaves to cool them. In 2007, a new school opened in Pasanon, a safer location a few hundred metres from the temporary school. The new school includes earthquake mitigation measures such as steel ties on the roof. Toilets have also been built in each classroom in order to prepare for its use as an evacuation shelter. However, the opening of the new school was met with protests from parents still unhappy with the relocation and with the headmaster's role in facilitating the move.

Children and their Families

The result of the vote was partly attributed to the children's ability to influence their own families, and parents reported being swayed by the passion and actions of their children. This was reflected in interviews with the children who stated that within their own families they could discuss their concerns and views with their mothers but not their fathers. They stated that their mothers would then pass this information on to their fathers if they felt it was important. Participants gave very few examples of positive direct communication between the child and their father about their concerns and issues. This phenomenon was further reinforced by a discussion with a mothers group, who all unanimously agreed that their children would always come to them first with issues and problems. Children felt that mothers were more likely to believe and listen than the fathers who were 'not that open' to their children.

> "The mother is the first person that the children approach when they want to say something rather than their father… the mother becomes the middle woman."
> *Mother from the temporary evacuation centre, St Bernard*

Participants in Southern Leyte spoke anecdotally about the actions of children prior to the Punta landslide in 2003 who, alerted by the heavy rain, tried desperately to drag their parents out of the house. However, many perished as the parents would not listen to their children, did not balance the risks in the same way, and instead had a fatalistic attitude. Furthermore, from the research, it appears that some of the children are more aware and concerned about high magnitude and less frequent hazards (such as landslides and typhoons) than their parents, who are more worried about dangers on the road, drowning, illnesses and house fires. Consequently, it appears adults place more emphasis on the day-to-day hazards, which they feel they have some degree of control over, but children place greater emphasis on less controllable, low probability but severe consequence events. This finding requires triangulating with further research, but provides a hint that child-centred DRR may be supported by children's innate framing of risk and hazards.

While the research found that children in the Philippines generally had a sophisticated understanding of how to reduce disaster risk, Filipino culture restricts their influence, as adults and parents have the authority in decision-making and children are expected to follow. In addition, those most respected in the community are the village elders. It was clear that all the children hoped that their parent's perspective could be changed to 'children can offer something', as children felt they had the power to act and could make a substantial contribution instead of maintaining a passive role. From these initial research findings, it is clear that child-centred DRR cannot focus on children in isolation, and must be seen as a community-wide programme involving their parents and community leaders too. In the case of the Philippines, it will be particularly important to involve fathers in order to promote a trusting and valued attitude towards children's communications within the home. This process could go further to take the form of well-evaluated action research where children are encouraged to communicate and educate their family about the risks they face and make changes around the home to reduce the risks identified.

In a wider context, and as DRR policy spaces are generally closed in the Philippines at present due to weak and disorganised institutions, it is important for the agency facilitating child-centred DRR not to just focus on programming at the community level but to look into launching advocacy initiatives both locally and nationally. National and local DRR organisations and institutions must be built side-by-side with child-centred DRR programmes and they must be sensitised to the value and power of children's voices. Until policy spaces exist at a national and regional level, it is very difficult for children to be heard on disaster issues and the research suggests it is unlikely children have the experience, capacity or agency to launch advocacy campaigns in isolation. Nonetheless, it is important that advocacy campaigns are conducted as partnerships between children's groups and the external facilitating agency, as this helps to transfer skills and experience to the children. Additionally, children are found to be effective voices within campaigns, particularly when leveraged through the media.

One further observation from the research in the Philippines is that participatory focus groups with children and the children's theatre group were overwhelmingly dominated in number by girls. In turn, the workshop for the 'out of school/work' youth was dominated by boys. This is supported by the wider trend seen in the Philippines as a whole, where there are more girls than boys in school. This difference becomes more marked in secondary and tertiary education. However, within the research meetings with children and youth, neither boys nor girls voices dominated, though participation from girls was considerably higher. No discernable difference was noted between girls and boys vis-à-vis their understanding of DRR, though this element was not carefully researched. As a result, it is important for the facilitating agency to address biases in representation, whether gender-related or of one particular socio-economic, religious or ethnic group. This may be achieved by hosting meetings and events solely targeted at one group to understand the barriers and issues surrounding their lack of participation, before exploring ways to integrate them into the wider programme.

4.2 El Salvador
The power of children's voices in reducing risks

The risk mapping, ranking and guided walk exercises in Petapa clearly demonstrated the ability of the children's community emergency committee to identify and communicate risks from their own perspective. Beyond this, they have also been able to identify actions necessary to reduce these risks and to articulate these needs in different local policy spaces to generate concrete actions. A wide range of risks were identified during participatory exercises, including those related to natural hazards such as hurricanes and earthquakes, and those where human activities were considered to be the key determinant of disasters by raising vulnerability, such as burning slopes to clear them for cultivation. Water-related concerns, including contamination, over-abstraction, and erosion/flooding ranked highly in both communities.

High frequency risks were also commonly cited, with the blocked access road particularly important in El Jocote. The children's group in Petapa identified the everyday dumping of litter as the highest priority risk due to the spread of disease, contamination of air, soil and water, and the potential to block waterways leading to flooding and landslides. The children's emergency committee has consequently undertaken regular clean-up campaigns in their communities coordinated with the adult emergency committee. In addition, an environmental education programme in Petapa has targeted awareness-raising of risks created by tree felling, burning of field slopes to clear for cultivation, and the extraction of sand and rocks from the River Sumpul. For example, tree felling was the subject of a mural drawn on the school buildings and signs were erected by the committee to forbid the extraction of rocks and sand from the river for personal use. Within the School Emergency Committee, set up as part of a national response to the 2001 earthquakes and the precursor to the current young people's committee, children identified risks within the school grounds. These included potential damage to classrooms from earthquakes and the presence of steep drops next to walkways. With assistance from Plan, children lobbied for installation of railings for these walkways.

The research findings exemplify children's active role as responsible citizens concerned with the wellbeing of their community, and suggest that there is considerable potential for children's and young people's voices to act as agents of change. The children involved were quick to express pride in their involvement in the group and in its achievements to date. This contrasted with earlier stages of the process in Petapa, when children had felt shy about expressing their views and were mocked by their peers. By identifying risks and working with others in the community, including the adult emergency committee, the children's group has created tangible changes that bolster self-belief and enthusiasm. Although concrete actions have not been taken to date in El Jocote, the topic was also met there with enthusiasm and interest.

This research suggests that such concrete actions may be crucial in allowing children to develop confidence in their own capacity to act as agents of change within and outside their community context. The research exercise itself allowed the children to reflect on their abilities and achievements, as well as to consider their communication channels and levels of influence to create change. The results highlight the importance of using a risk management framework to allow identification of low impact / high frequency 'everyday' risks as well as disaster risks influenced by more occasional seasonal hazards such as hurricanes and earthquakes.

These elements are an important part of a long-term approach to facilitating DRR through engagement at community level, and are well represented in the contrasting evidence between field sites in Petapa and El Jocote. In contrast to Petapa, both adults and children in the smaller location of El Jocote had more limited experience in valuing their own and each others' perspectives and harnessing the potential agency of all community members. The process of empowering community members with a belief in both the value of children's point of view and their ability to take action to affect change is a valuable outcome of child-centred DRR programming in El Salvador in its own right. Such empowerment and self-belief in children's voices as an agent of change may be regarded as a crucial pre-requisite to fostering the regular management of disaster risks.

Policy Spaces - Opportunities for Engagement

The study of policy spaces for children's voices was necessarily limited to the Petapa case due to the relative infancy of the El Jocote community in disaster-related work and the younger age profile of children participating in the research activities. Policy spaces were identified through participatory stakeholder and influence mapping exercises, and during informal discussions during breaks and on guided walks. A range of both official and unofficial pathways were identified for children and youth to communicate information about risks and risk reduction actions. Informal pathways focused on talking with family members and friends, and with teachers and the priest - a major authority in rural communities in El Salvador. Formal pathways included links with teachers through the School Emergency Committee, with adults by meeting with the community emergency committee, and by direct liaison with local leaders in various bodies.

Table 4.2 below summarises communication levels and perceived degree of influence with a variety of these formal channels in Petapa.

Table 4.2   Communication Levels and Degree of Influence, Petapa

Actor	Communications	Degree of influence
Teachers	Very good	High
Local water board	Very good	High
Adults in the community	Very good	High
Midwives	Very good	High
Community Priest	Excellent	High
Municipal Mayor	Poor	Medium
Community Development Association (ADESCO)	Poor	Medium
Health worker	Poor	Low

Policy spaces within households and communities

Informal communication pathways were found to exist primarily within their households and the immediate community. Although parents and siblings were mentioned during discussions as providing the most immediate communication pathway for children in Petapa, they were not included in their stakeholder mapping, which focused on formal pathways and actors. The results suggest a positive relationship between the children's emergency committee and that constituted by adults in the community. The presence of family members in both adult and children's emergency committees in particular, created positive linkages and fluidity between formal and informal pathways. These links can also help to build trust, open further pathways and spaces, and increase influence with other local actors, as evidenced in Petapa between children and the local water board. The operation and actions of the children's group extend into the neighbouring community of Olosingo in Honduras. This is particularly important given the collective action necessary for risk reduction related to common property such as the riverbed and riverbanks.

Early experiences in Petapa highlighted the importance of including parents and other community members in the process of forming and facilitating children's groups. When parents are excluded from the process of awareness raising, action and empowerment, they may question the motivation or activities of their family members. In the past, this has led to parents denying permission to children to attend training, drills or campaign activities. The research suggests that there has been some improvement in Petapa in this regard as the work has progressed, but facilitating agencies need to be aware of potential problems around exclusions, particularly in communities where disasters work is less advanced.

External policy spaces

Interviews, focus groups and visioning exercises with policy- and decision-makers at regional and national level suggest a sound understanding of the disasters context. Participants noted both the high levels of disaster hazards in the country due to its geographical position and geomorphology, and the contribution of high poverty levels to enhancing vulnerability. Solutions tended to focus on aspects of vulnerability rather than hazard prevention, which should favour community-based bottom-up solutions.

The impact of children's groups supported by Plan El Salvador at community level is both tangible in terms of actions undertaken and intangible in terms of empowering the voices of children. Although the research was limited in terms of time and location, the findings suggest that despite these successes, there has been limited engagement to date within policy spaces outside community boundaries. Such engagement is vital if children are to affect policies and processes shaping development necessary for DRR, rather than affect actions based solely around hazard prevention, disaster mitigation and preparedness (see Box 4.2). Research with actors outside the community suggests that this limited engagement may be due to a variety of factors; not least among these

was the limited awareness of the existence of children's groups and their relationship with the national Schools Protection Plan (PPE). Generally, focus group participants acknowledged a major shortfall between the potential role of children in a normative framework for disaster reduction and their current limited engagement with policy and decision-making processes outside their communities. Children were candidly acknowledged as playing no current role in DRR, but there was enthusiasm for including them in the future. This highlights the importance of the role a facilitating agency can play in targeting individuals in strategic positions in order to prepare an enabling environment that allows children to initiate and sustain dialogue with them in the longer term.

Box 4.2

Safe policy spaces: At risk from risk reduction?

The River Sumpul forms the border between the study communities and Honduras, generating large flows during the wet season with the power to cause significant scouring and riverbank erosion. The children of the Petapa Emergency Committee identified the un-regulated extraction of rocks and stones from the river as a major risk, leading to increased erosion and vulnerability to flooding of houses near the river. Signs prohibiting extraction for personal use have since been erected with the agreement of the local leaders.

Children recounted the story of the arrival of a lorry from outside the community to load stones from the river. Acting on the strength of their convictions and buoyed by their previous activities, a number of children went to the river to protest at this activity, sitting on top of the lorry until it agreed to leave. Although for personal use, this collection had apparently been sanctioned by local authorities, revealing power relations central to the challenge of risk reduction.

Empowerment of children's voices is likely to lead in future to children's groups directly challenging vested interests and power relations that adversely affect vulnerability. These challenges, including direct action as seen in Petapa, while laudable in their convictions, may inadvertently put children in positions of potential danger. Such possibilities need to be carefully monitored by facilitating agencies, who may be in a strong position to mediate in such situations and ensure that action does not put children at risk unacceptably.

Key barriers to strengthening children's voices

Research with both children and focus groups revealed a number of barriers to risk reduction practices embedded within national development processes. Despite the well-developed understanding of DRR among focus group participants, organisations and institutions remain geared largely towards emergency activities and preparedness at best. Coordination mechanisms between organisations are largely ad hoc and based on interpersonal relationships rather than formal structures. The language and terms within the disasters field and literature was also an issue raised by focus group participants. Frequently changing terminology, definitions and emphases have the potential to cause confusion for practitioners and policy-makers alike.

Resource constraints and limited wider awareness of disaster risks were cited as factors limiting capacities to work beyond emergencies and preparedness measures, and to proactively include children within their work. The differentiated access to and distribution of resources based on political and religious allegiance was also cited as a problem, providing perverse incentives for relief and rehabilitation rather than preparedness or risk reduction. Cultural factors also create barriers, in part instilled by widespread poverty, and often causing a dislocation between identified risk priorities and everyday actions. These include a reticence to relocate away from high-risk areas even when assistance is provided and the continuation of traditional but vulnerability-enhancing cultivation practices in the absence of alternative practices or livelihood options. While litter was identified as a top ranking problem for example, many participants in the exercises regularly dropped their litter during breaks as part of normal cultural practice.

Perhaps most importantly, the research highlights a fundamental disconnect underlying the discussions with adults and children. The prevailing understanding of policy makers has conceptualised the role of children as passive participants and recipients across a range of potential policy spaces. Stemming from a view of children primarily as a vulnerable sector of society, children's voices are thereby contained and constrained, largely operating in the context of emergency systems. Their role is therefore one of receiving instructions and adding value to the efforts of externally generated activities, for example through community brigades under local government systems. This is in stark contrast to the vision of Plan as a facilitating agency and of children's groups themselves, where children take the lead and present their own vision of risks and risk reduction actions. They are therefore empowered to act as the protagonists, seeking and generating internal and external policy spaces, linking with adults in a horizontal dialogue on risks and priorities.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

In summary, the research explored what opportunities exist for the voices of children and their groups to be heard within local and national DRR policy spaces; and what experiences and capacities the children and their groups have for doing so. The research indicates that children and young people communicate their views about the risks they face through a suite of formal and informal pathways. Informal pathways included talking with family members, teachers and friends. Formal pathways included linking with teachers through the School Emergency Committee and Parents, Teachers and Community Association; linking with adults through the Community Emergency Committee; and direct liaison with local leaders from various bodies. Children and young people in the Philippines were represented at youth forums and councils (for example in Nahulid, Southern Leyte children are represented on the Barangay Development Council) and staged theatre productions to raise awareness. Young people in Petapa, El Salvador formed an Emergency Committee following the 2001 earthquake.

In addition to the identification and communication of risks, children and young people have also acted as agents of change particularly in the communities where Plan, as an external facilitating agency, has been active. Examples include the establishment of an environmental education programme in Petapa, El Salvador to raise awareness on issues such as tree felling and the extraction of sand and rocks from the river. Tree felling was also the subject of a mural drawn on the school buildings and signs were erected by the committee to forbid the extraction of rocks and sand from the river. A further example is the campaigning by the children of Santa Paz National High School in the Philippines, which led to the relocation of their school away from the landside prone slopes of Southern Leyte. The children's organisations in the school including the Supreme Student Council and Student Government Organisation embarked on an educational campaign about the physical processes of landslides. Students also wrote to the School Division Superintendent expressing their desire to relocate. The children subsequently won a community-wide referendum to relocate their school. Overall, the level of understanding of DRR and the confidence of the children and young people in Southern Leyte and Petapa, contrasts with those in Albay and El Jocote, demonstrating the positive impact of the interventions of an external facilitating agency, which is both tangible in terms of actions undertaken and intangible in terms of empowering the voice of children.

A number of common observations can be drawn from the research and are important by way of conclusion:

> Children's families are crucial actors in the process of child-centred DRR as households are policy spaces in themselves, with the same political dynamics, the same need for advocacy and lobbying, and the same issues with influencing knowledge and action. The child's role within the household can be scaled up to the local community and associated political spheres, particularly if parents or grandparents are active participants of particular committees or political bodies. The case of children's emergency groups in

dialogue and initiating joint programming with adult groups in El Salvador can partly be explained by communication channels being opened due to family relationships. Equally, family relationships and their socio-economic setting can provide obstacles to children's engagement and facilitating agencies must be careful to address these relationships too in their child-centred DRR programmes.

How and why children communicate risks within the household and how their understanding may be different from their parents or grandparents is still unclear. However, this initial research suggests that children have significantly different views on risk compared to their parents (children show greater concern over high magnitude, low frequency events whereas their parents worry more about low magnitude, high frequency events). Links can be made here with the work of Holdren (1983) who observed that 'people worry most about the risks that seem most directly to threaten their well being at the moment.......worries about more subtle and complex threats will materialize if, and only if, the most direct and obvious threats are taken care of'. Nonetheless, experience from El Salvador suggests that making progress with addressing low magnitude, high frequency events gives children's groups confidence, cements their position and agency within their community and provides a launch pad to stronger relationships with other bodies.

Children's voices on DRR in wider policy spaces, both within the community, regionally and nationally, is dependent on the existence of functioning institutions on DRR and the willingness of key actors within these institutions to value the voice of children and willingness to give them a platform to participate. In the Philippines, specific NGOs, community councils and provincial disaster management bodies were sighted as sympathetic to the view of children. Gatekeepers within these bodies are crucial, and the research suggests both children's groups and the external facilitating agency must target them if children's voices are to be heard in wider DRR policy spaces. At a national level, external agencies must partner children's groups in advocacy campaigns designed to strengthen DRR institutions and to open policy spaces in which children can participate and contribute in a meaningful way. Media involvement is desirable as a way to advocate change given that children's voices in the media are often welcomed and highlighted, but this may require external agencies to develop particular strategies in this regard. Many senior policy figures acknowledged the importance of involving children and listening and acting on their views, but almost all of those interviewed suggested this was an idealised future rather than a current practice.

Challenges for child-centred DRR

The children involved in the research cited a number of obstacles to their ability and willingness to participate in DRR programming, such as competing demands on their time, financial constraints in their families causing the need to work to support their family, and a lack of interest in the topic from their parents. This further reinforces the need to work with parents and other community members in the process of forming and facilitating children's groups. When parents are excluded from the process of awareness raising, action and empowerment, they may question the motivation or activities of their family members. In the case of El Salvador, this has led to parents denying permission to children to attend training, drills or campaign activities. A further concern is that the actions of the children's group in tackling disaster risk may put children in a situation of unacceptable risk, which may damage trust in the child-centred programming of external agencies.

Children and adults also considered that socio-cultural factors were barriers to tackling disaster risk at the community level. Findings in El Salvador suggest this may in part be instilled by widespread poverty, which causes a dislocation between identified risk priorities and everyday actions. These include a reticence to relocate away from high-risk areas, even when assistance is provided; and the continuation of traditional cultivation practices that inhibit attempts to reduce vulnerability, in the absence of alternative practices or livelihood options. Traditional hierarchical households and community structures, further constrained by vulnerable livelihoods, appear to find it more difficult to listen to the voices of children, as decision-making authority has never been considered open to children.

At a regional and national level, scaling up child-centred DRR and securing the participation and voices of children in policy bodies will continue to be difficult while countries pursue predominantly reactive disaster management governance systems, focused on preparedness for response. As a starting point, advocacy around DRR is crucial, in order to demonstrate that DRR is not just seen as a way of helping communities to be better prepared for a relief effort, but rather as a crucial part of every development sector to ensure development does not inadvertently increase vulnerability to disasters. Children can be part of this advocacy effort, but until there are functioning DRR institutions in place, the pathways for the voices of any group to be heard on this issue remain narrow.

However, the biggest challenge for child-centred DRR programming is the prevailing adult perception that views the role of children and young people not as proactive protagonists, but as vulnerable recipient-participants targeted within externally generated disaster risk reduction plans and programmes. This requires sensitisation and advocacy efforts towards changing perceptions, beliefs and values, and means it is vital for child-centred DRR to draw on the child rights and participation literature as a way of entrenching the power and importance of children's views within the prevailing socio-cultural setting. Long-term engagement with politicians, community-leaders, families and children and young people is vital if attitudes are to be changed and DRR advances are to be made. External agencies need to commit resources to child-centred DRR programming in the same community for the long term. This will help child-centred DRR achieve an aim of seeing programme participants go on to be high-profile DRR policy actors who make space for children's voices to be heard on DRR issues. Demonstrating and

communicating the successes of child-centred DRR, however small, must be of paramount important to external facilitating agencies.

Are children suitable DRR protagonists?

While the research presented here does not provide enough evidence to be conclusive, it is hypothesised that informed young people can network among a community as trusted and potentially politically neutral actors dispelling competing beliefs, convincing adults of new risks, and instilling more balanced views. However, it is also well understood that knowledge and comprehension do not necessarily lead to risk reduction activities and actions based on a rational translation of this knowledge (Sims and Baumann 1983; Kirschenbaum 2005). Building on this, evidence from El Salvador suggests that the children themselves recognise the wider nature of risk reduction, for example, seemingly unrelated external factors such as abuse and lack of love, can greatly influence their vulnerability. Thus, children and youth should be considered as dynamic agents of change rather than simply vehicles for risk communication.

However, the positive role that children and youth can play in DRR activities must be viewed with caution. Is it too much to ask children to take on the responsibility that is generally afforded by adults alone? Their innocence, which is a powerful tool for message delivery can also be exploited by others with competing agendas. By facilitating children to realise the powerful positions they hold in society we may be in fact, contributing to their vulnerability. There is a need to ensure that national policies and legislations can protect the Rights of the Child (as per the UN Convention) to ensure their positions of power are not abused and children are not taking on the responsibility of adults. The responsibility of having to make decisions for the family at a young age, arguably deprives the young person of their desire to just be children. However, it is important to consider the childhood realities of the south. Here children are seen to take on adult responsibilities including household chores, supporting income generation and caring for others, as part of their daily lives. Arguably therefore, engaging in DRR may be to their benefit rather than affecting their childhood innocence. With this in mind further investigations should focus on the role of children and youth as risk communicators and as knowledge intermediaries in their own families; and examine the impacts, both positive and negative, that such involvement may have on children and their childhood.

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