

# Children and the Tsunami



**Engaging with children in disaster response, recovery and risk reduction:  
Learning from children's participation in the tsunami response**

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# Foreword

This study is both an important work and counter-intuitive. When a major natural disaster of the magnitude of the December 2004 Tsunami or the October 2005 Pakistani earthquake strikes, the instinctive reaction of all concerned is to do whatever is necessary to save lives. The focus is on the immediate needs of food, shelter, medical help and the necessary essentials to sustain life; the victims are treated as just that – victims at the receiving end of the assistance pipeline – and they are rarely consulted about their longer term needs in these critical few days and weeks after the disaster. The concerns of children – often nearly half of all those affected – are not fully taken into account. The unintended consequences of such efforts are that we run the risk of creating states of dependency and depression in the very people we are trying to help.

This important work makes a plea to all of us who go into disaster situations with the best of intentions – listen to the survivors, especially the children. It is their right to participate in decisions that affect them. They have valuable things to say about their situations if we are willing to take a moment to ask questions, listen to their responses and be prepared to act on the basis of what we hear.

We at Plan have seen the concrete results of such listening in a school in Aceh designed to take into account the special needs/concerns of the children who will go to that school. We also saw the fruits of children's inputs into the design of a village in Sri Lanka. The list of examples goes on and on ... and is only limited in instances where we do not take the time or effort to ask questions and listen to what children have to say.

One could respond that asking the children we serve for inputs is fine when time is not of the essence, but there simply is not enough time to do so in a crisis situation. We at Plan believe that it is exactly such situations where children's inputs are most valuable because they address an important but often neglected right of children – the right to take back control of their lives after being overwhelmed and rendered powerless by major natural disasters.

This publication makes it clear that if we just address immediate physical needs and neglect other rights of children such as the right to participation, development and protection, we run the risk of seeking short-term fixes at the expense of doing longer-term permanent damage. It concludes by asking us all to think through the consequences of our efforts in disaster situations and not ignore the voices of those we are trying to help.



**Tom Miller**

Chief Executive Officer  
Plan International

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## **“This is how we helped.”**

### **Helping friends and community**

#### **Thailand**

- When the waves came, I helped disseminate the news.
- I brought injured people to hospitals. (When they were well, they came back and gave me some gifts.) I helped my friends build and repair houses. I also helped people of other villages that were damaged. I helped them collect things and garbage.
- I volunteered to help in my village and other villages. I constructed and repaired my house. I collected garbage, cleaned my house, removed damaged things and helped my parents when people or organisations came to distribute things.
- I helped contact the guidance section at the school when there was distribution of scholarships.
- I helped type the names of villagers who were suffering and damaged for the village. I also contacted and helped bring and distribute things to the villagers when people or organisations came to help.
- I helped construct coffins and collect the village’s garbage.
- I watched over and took care of assets in the village.
- I advised, encouraged and heartened friends who lost somebody or something.
- I shared food with other people. When somebody came to distribute things, I kept some for those who were absent.
- When someone came to distribute things, I let people who were not aware of it know.
- I helped maintain security at temporary shelters, helped fix up tents and repair the roofs of houses.
- For three months, from 7–10 p.m., to ease the people’s tension and to encourage them, I organised a radio programme free of charge.
- I talked with friends about hardships.



Sonu Madhavan

## Chapter 1 Time to listen

**“When we tried to tell the adults of any gaps in the services, they were angry with us. They told us that children should behave like children and not interfere in adults’ work. We do not think it was fair for them to say so.” *From Ampara, Sri Lanka (12–17 years old)***

Tens of thousands of children lost their lives in the Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December 2004. Many more children would have survived if they had had more information and skills related to disaster reduction and response.

The violent exposure to the tsunami and the loss of family, friends, homes, schools and communities affected the surviving children in many ways. These children also played a role in the rescue and emergency stages, a role that has hardly been acknowledged. One year on, many children are frustrated and disempowered by the long delays in re-building their homes, schools and family livelihoods. They yearn for opportunities to play a more active part in reconstruction rather than becoming bored and dependent during the protracted period of displacement.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognises that a child “is a subject of rights who is able to form and express opinions, to participate in decision-making processes and influence solutions, to intervene as a partner in the process of social change and in the building of democracy.” The case is now strongly made that initiatives that involve children benefit children and also benefit the family and wider community.

As the interpretation of the CRC develops, many child-rights-based organisations have begun to highlight the need to extend this participatory principle in disaster recovery. If we believe in the ability of those involved – be they adults or children – to articulate their needs, express their views, establish relationships with those who are there to assist them and take actions to improve their circumstances as essential to development, it must be even more critical in the humanitarian context. As children often constitute such a significant proportion of the affected population in disasters, ignoring their capacity means undermining capacity of the community as a whole to cope with the situation.

However, there are still questions about what exactly “participation” means and how it should be supported and promoted, questions that inevitably arise in a study such as this: What are our expectations of the outcomes and impact of children’s participation in such a complex process as dealing with the impact of the tsunami when there is no consensus or clarity about the role children do or should play in their homes, schools or communities? This document provides example and views of children on what participation means to them.

The conclusions of this report are that the active engagement of children can mitigate the impact of loss of loved ones and assets resulting from natural disasters, and that such children’s involvement is essential to the recovery of the community in the short, medium and long terms. The clearest, most interesting and insistent ideas of the children consulted for this report concern the information, knowledge and skills that they, and their communities, need to be better prepared for future disasters.

The children’s quotes included here come from the consultations in four countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami: India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. They are presented anonymously to protect the children and young people who spoke openly with us. The conclusions and recommendations of this report derive directly from listening to surviving children in each of these countries and collating their experiences and opinions.

The consultation also included representatives of agencies that responded to the tsunami in those countries. They were asked how they engaged with children. Their responses implied a strong resistance to treating the needs of children separately. In particular, the right of child participation was not recognised, nor understood. As an interviewee from one of the biggest donor agencies in Asia put it, “*We’re not dealing with those little things [involving children in their programme planning].*” Children’s participation was not judged to be essential at such a time, although most of the children’s immediate physical needs were met by governments and humanitarian agencies. Firm commitments to involving children and young people in the process are needed because they form 40–60 per cent of the affected population and are the most affected by a disaster.

The aid agencies’ accounts and children’s observations are combined to illustrate their different perspectives on the same issue. Where these perspectives appear to differ enables us to see how children could have contributed to the aid agencies’ activities.

The survival of children after a disaster must be a priority. Meeting physical survival needs is not sufficient to ensure that the disaster does not impair children’s mental, social and emotional development. However, despite the increased recognition of the importance of education, psychosocial support and protection measures, there is no common attitude or set of interventions that go beyond meeting these needs.



In this report we identify the types of approaches to the management of disasters that include children both as beneficiaries and actors. As beneficiaries, children benefit from the fulfilment of their basic rights to survival, development and protection. As actors, children have special capacities. They can provide useful knowledge of their communities, neighbourhoods and family assets (such as livestock). With their capacities, they can actively contribute to disaster relief and recovery efforts.

The information and perspectives provided by the children and young people help us understand the problems that occurred after the tsunami and the effectiveness of the various assistance programmes that governments and private organisations provided for communities. They describe the problems children and young people encountered, particularly their concerns that their voices and opinions were not taken into consideration more in the post-tsunami activities.

The terrible South Asian earthquake of October 2005 has yet again emphasised how prone Asia is to natural and human-made disasters. The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) suggests that the occurrence of disasters have increased threefold since the 1970s, and it is expected to continue increasing. Therefore, it is critical that lessons from this study lead to an improvement in the overall quality of emergency response by broadening the consensus on children's capacity to be valuable actors in emergency relief, thus giving them better control over their lives at times of crises.

The tsunami, followed by the South Asian earthquake, has spurred governments and organisations, including most that cooperated in this research, towards drafting disaster preparedness plans. We believe this research is timely, as it presents a unique opportunity to make firm commitments to include children and young people in future community-based disaster-preparedness planning. Although recommendations have been made<sup>1</sup> at the international level, our research suggests that measures to involve children in disaster-reduction strategies are still minimal and that we should be concerned over the lack of consultation and participation evident in current humanitarian practice.

Each new disaster brings new demands for swifter response, but there is a danger that they strengthen and centralise the power and authority of the technical and sectoral agencies, which in turn strengthen fast-moving, non-participatory practices that undermine the ability of local communities to respond.

The theory that information can reduce suffering in the wake of a disaster and that disaster risk reduction strategies must be based on participatory principles, is well established. We are concerned, however, based on our research into the response to the tsunami, that the mind-set of those who will put this theory into practice does not yet extend to a genuine integration of children and young people into plans for disaster response, recovery and risk reduction.

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<sup>1</sup> *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015: Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters*. Final report of World Conference on Disasters.

## “This is how we helped.”

### After the tsunami – children’s contributions, skills and strengths

#### Sri Lanka

##### Children aged 9–12 years

- Helped to clean the camps
- Helped to cook the food by scraping the coconuts, packing the food
- Cared about the old people and collected their food and dry rations for them
- Stood in queues until mother/older sister came to collect the water or clothes that were distributed
- Helped mothers select the clothes
- Was happy with what we had
- Played with children who lost their family members
- Talked with friends who were sad to make them feel better
- Tried to improve the services by talking with the adults
- Gave first aid.

##### Children aged 12–17 years

- Helped trace families who were scattered in different camps
- Helped clean the camp and make it suitable to lodge in for several days
- Did not fuss about the food or demand what we wanted
- Helped old people and those with small children to collect cooked food and, later, the dry rations that were distributed in a disorganised manner
- Told volunteers the type of milk powder wanted rather than just be unhappy with what was given
- Helped pack the cooked food for distribution in the camp
- Helped clean and paint two halls allocated by the host school
- Went to school, although we did not have proper clothes or books and did not feel welcome in the host school.

#### Indonesia

- Roadway: children cleared trees and branches from streets and suggested road reconstruction to replace the damaged ones.
- Camp perimeters: children cut down *kuda-kuda* (barricade trees) to make fences to prevent cattle from coming inside, planted new trees, and they put gravel on the ground so it would not get muddy.
- Shelters: once a week children work together to clean the terrace, toilets, and bathrooms; they help build gates and help advocate for continuous electricity.
- Kitchens: children help clean the tables, floors, cooking utensils and water containers.
- Soccer and volleyball fields: children cleared the tsunami rubble, measured the size of the field, cut down palm trees to make poles for goal posts and put up the net.
- Mosques: children cleared the rubble thrown up by the tsunami.
- Plan’s kindergarten/Early Childhood Care and Development Centre: children assisted in building schools. Some of the children teach younger children from Monday to Saturday, clean and tidy up the bailee.
- Children lead activities, such as counselling, child’s rights, reproductive health and drugs awareness.
- Children cheer up their parents so that they won’t be too depressed.
- Children work as volunteers/teachers who teach their younger friends.
- Children lead prayer groups.

## Chapter 2 Why did we *not* engage children?

**“Children are not listened to. Children do not have any right to speak and express opinions. Adults do not give us opportunities because they think that children are only children and do not have ideas and importance.” *From Thachatchai, Thailand (13-18 years old)***



Wannawut Thanivet

All four country studies concluded that children's participation was minimal despite the fact that children and young people have so much to offer and that the participation of all those affected by the disaster was limited. One Sri Lankan staff member in a UN organisation remarked, "If there was no consultation with adults in designing and implementing the relief programmes, how can you expect the agencies to consult children who are considered a passive lot in our society anyway?"

The tsunami response in all four countries, particularly during the early phase, was driven by the need to provide for the basic survival of affected populations in general, without attention being paid to mobilising the energies, resilience and coping abilities of children. In spite of international conventions, such as the CRC and the experience of past disasters that highlighted the need for focusing on the special needs and capabilities of children in such situations, neither national nor international emergency response paid much attention to the relevant concepts and approaches. To the extent children did receive attention, they were identified as defenceless victims of the disaster who deserved external assistance and protection against potential abusers. Many agencies and the media deliberately mobilised children to draw sympathy, attention and humanitarian assistance towards affected communities. Differences among age groups and gender did not receive adequate consideration in the designing and implementing of relief operations.

Despite the increased interest in promoting children's participation in recent years, as with adult participation, there is a gap between stated positions and practice that appears to be due to more than the practical difficulties experienced in an emergency. What are the constraints on involving children to a greater degree? The research carried out with agencies and the children suggests that some constraints are due to the emergency context and the attitudes and approaches of external agencies and some exist within the society that is experiencing the disaster.

## **Constraints: External factors**

### **Efficiency and speed**

Participation as a term used by development specialists has become part of aid agencies' programmes, and it is assumed that successful participatory processes depend on several variables, including trained personnel and time. Most respondents, not surprisingly, shared the perception that participatory processes are difficult, if not impossible, in an emergency stage, particularly with children. Numerous consultations and high levels of participation tend to lengthen project planning and implementation and are not seen as viable options during an emergency phase. In general, child participation initiatives have tended to concentrate on assessing needs rather than entrusting children with any degree of involvement in, or control over, the programme planning. This makes it harder to introduce and sustain higher levels of participation in the later stages of the project cycle.

The recent emphasis among humanitarian agencies on accountability and performance has led to prioritising efficiency and speed of delivery. While essential to a relief effort, such prioritisation leaves little room for participatory processes. There is a powerful and prevalent assumption that there are predetermined relief "packages" of programmes and goods that are meant to work at any time and in any emergency.

Huge infusions of emergency funds often have led agencies to opt for activities that can absorb large funds. Participation is not seen as a requirement for such projects.

### **Coordination and proliferation of agencies**

The need to coordinate humanitarian responses is well understood, and mechanisms have evolved and improved in the past two decades. If humanitarian action is to be effective, then duplication, waste and competition among agencies must be avoided. Agreeing on the institutional, administrative and operational dimensions of coordination is another matter. Speaking of the Indian response to the tsunami, an experienced staff member of an international non-government organisation (NGO) observed, "Coordination in Gujarat was much easier – there were far fewer agencies involved, and UNDP took on the immediate coordination role. Here, because of the media, there has been a huge local response, which is commendable, but has made things more complicated."<sup>2</sup> Experienced relief workers also observed that the issue was not a lack of attempts to coordinate relief efforts, but that coordinating forums proliferated. Undoubtedly the more humanitarian actors there are, the harder it is for agencies to foster community participation as an integral part of their response. Thus more time is spent negotiating, sharing information and coordinating with other humanitarian actors rather than with the affected communities. As agencies competed for space, the initial assessments aimed to determine where an agency worked, fulfilling an organisational rather than a humanitarian need.

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<sup>2</sup> Saji Thomas, currently UNICEF's Child Protection Officer, then Programme Coordinator of Save the Children Foundation UK, quoted in an article entitled, "Analysis – A Coordinated Response to the Tsunami," published on SC UK's Website.

This was particularly evident when tsunami victims were moved into temporary camps and shelters. Most of the shelter construction projects were farmed out to relief agencies on a quota basis. With few exceptions, in each relief camp, no single international NGO or other was allowed to provide for the entire displaced community. Therefore, in most relief camps there was a multi-agency presence, which in subtle ways tended to divide communities into groups and subgroups.

**“People very frequently asked children the same questions. These people were many and came from many organisations. We felt bored and did not want to answer. But for the school’s sake, and fame, we had to answer.” From Ban Kalim, Thailand (7-12 years old)**

### **A sectoral approach requiring technical expertise**

This situation was accentuated as more agencies with sectoral expertise became involved with the provision of water and sanitation facilities, distribution of boats and nets, etc. Most of the relief efforts were compartmentalised into sectors, such as food, non-food items, emergency shelter, permanent shelter, water and sanitation, health, education, nutrition, livelihoods, protection and psychosocial support. Activities in each sector were guided by technical experts with limited understanding of community dynamics. Children’s issues received considerable attention in protection and psychosocial support programmes and some attention in education and health, but this compartmentalisation prevented any mainstreaming of social issues in general and child issues in particular. Undoubtedly, there are certain essential survival interventions that require technical expertise, and the evolution of sectoral competencies among agencies has avoided the duplication of effort in many emergencies. However, this inevitably leads to aid agencies employing more technical experts than social mobilizers. It may also lead, especially in the initial stages of a sudden disaster such as the tsunami, to agencies hearing the voices of those who may be less affected but who have the ability and willingness to speak to outsiders.

Another major finding of this research is that the sectoral approach, as used by governments, the United Nations and the humanitarian community in all their activities, including their response to disasters, does not integrate “children” into the response because they are not the main responsibility of the agencies or departments with the most human and financial resources at their disposal. It is assumed that child rights-based agencies will take care of children. However, such agencies do not make up a large proportion of the agencies involved in the response to a large disaster.

### **Lack of experience**

Almost half the agencies involved with tsunami relief and rehabilitation had little or no disaster management experience. They were not conversant with Sphere<sup>3</sup> standards and had no comparable standards of their own. Some of their early actions were conducted without local participation, making it harder to foster longer-term and more sustainable initiatives. The competitive atmosphere also undermined the ability of the tsunami survivors to continue to develop their own response with flexibility and speed. Even experienced agencies ignored standard principles, such as participation and a commitment to sustainability. For example, boats and nets were provided to fishing communities in excess of their needs without consideration of long-term sustainability of coastal marine resources or the way such boats were traditionally manned.

Several large INGOs and international agencies have country and regional experts who can be deployed to deal with emergencies, but in this instance their staff resources could not match the scale of the disaster. Experienced staff members were in great demand and, as funds flowed in, many leading agencies found their staff lured away. Teams that organisations had invested in over time disbanded themselves voluntarily to take individual advantage of “market opportunities”. These staff changes took a toll on efficiency when it was most needed.

Tamil Nadu provides an example of how few agencies had existing knowledge of the areas affected. Knowledge and understanding of local needs and people is desirable for devising effective response strategies and delivery systems. However, very few agencies had experience of working with the coastal communities; those that did included the South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS), PREPARE, Action Aid and Christian INGOs, such as Brot fur die Welt and World Vision. Few of these were able to deliver relief in the areas of their existing projects, and fewer still were of a child rights-based orientation. A considerable number of organisations, therefore, including child rights agencies,

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<sup>3</sup> Sphere: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response

entered the area with inadequate experience of working with coastal communities. Partnering local NGOs, which have such experience, offset this disadvantage to some extent. Yet, in practice, it was not possible for many donors to ensure that a majority of their partners had this experience; of those that existed, very few were child rights- focused NGOs with staff ready to interact with children.

Our research suggests that most of the organisations that became involved in the response lacked a rapport with the communities with whom they engaged. In many cases, this was due to their lack of experience. However, many “experienced” agencies also lacked the capacity to respond and resorted to personnel who did not have experience in working with children and the communities. Drawing lessons from these events is difficult but suggests that there needs to be a re-appraisal of the basic skills necessary, if not essential, to all staff likely to be involved in the response to a disaster.

### **Perception of participation as a programme**

Many of the agency staff interviewed considered participation as a separate activity or programme. While understandable, this reinforces both the sectoral approach and mystique of technical expertise necessary to making “participation” attainable. It is assumed that participation programmes require preparation, SMART<sup>4</sup> objectives, targets, specially trained personnel, resources and a clear strategy. The lack of time available to follow these procedures is the basis on which some agencies say that mobilising people effectively in an emergency is impossible. On the contrary, the very nature of participation is voluntary, spontaneous action that is part of the process of attaining entitlements.

### **The role of governments**

In India, and to a lesser extent in Sri Lanka, the government re-emerged as the key player in disaster response and rehabilitation. Its central role was legitimatised by the need for an authority to regulate disaster relief and rehabilitation as the humanitarian community became larger and more competitive. In general, governments control demographic and other data, which form the basis for planning humanitarian action. They derive power as they allocate relief camps/villages to NGOs for shelter programmes, water and sanitation, etc. Humanitarian organisations now believe that community participation, particularly of women and children, must receive greater attention, especially in the rebuilding phase because of their concern that decision making is over-centralised by the government agencies established for the purpose.

Governments are extremely vulnerable to criticism if they are judged not to fulfil their role, as was seen in Thailand. In attempting to avoid censure, they prioritise delivery and maintenance of law and order, which are not seen as requiring community involvement.

**“During the hardest time, local organisations, particularly subdistrict administrative organisations, did not come in and seriously take care of us. They came in only when things became almost normal. They took action only when they were followed up. They are not zealous and do not continuously take care of us.” *From Thachatchai, Thailand (13-18 years old)***

**“Directly responsible people should come in and take care of the reality. Sometimes, they only sign the documents so as to certify for the matter to pass through. They do not come in and take care of the real situation.” *From Thachatchai, Thailand (13-18 years old)***

### **The role of the media**

The tsunami was so extraordinary and created so much devastation that it was inevitable that both adults and children affected by it have been regarded as “victims”. Humanitarian motivated aid has been sent in an unplanned and ad hoc manner. In the case of children, the notion that victims would/should be grateful for whatever assistance that comes their way is particularly high because even in “normal situations” children are expected to respect adults and be polite and obedient; and the media boosted that image rather than challenge it.

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<sup>4</sup> SMART is an acronym for specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound.

The media, immediately after the tsunami, often resorted to highlighting children separated from their families or displaced. The reporting of children who have coped effectively with the tsunami portrayed them as having extraordinary skills. Contrary to this, many children, especially of low-income families, cope with the impact of natural hazards quite naturally. But because the skills and strengths of the “victims” are not identified by policy makers, practitioners and media, their victimhood is reinforced and their dependency on aid is increased. Poor recognition of children’s abilities and their contribution to the emergency recovery and reconstruction phases is a reflection of this general situation.

## **Constraints: Internal factors within the affected communities**

### **Culture, tradition and children’s participation**

**“If we’re in class, we are just heard if we are right, but if we are wrong, we won’t be heard. And if we do bad things we will be hit and punished.” *From Aceh, Indonesia (6-12 years old)***

Many agency respondents to this research, both those expressing the need for greater engagement with children and those more resistant to it, noted cultural constraints. There is no tradition of consulting children; it is assumed adults know what is best for them. There are, therefore, few accepted or well-known examples to promote children’s roles in the society. In the Thai tradition, it is difficult for youth to be taken seriously by adults. In the Indonesian context, it was noted that the reason children were involved in helping their parents and communities was because “children must be devoted to their parents and not because of participation rights.” One child in Indra Patra, Indonesia said, “Never be a rebel to your parents.” In general, children have little power compared to adults, and adults underestimate the capacity of children. Religious leaders are traditionally authoritarian. It was noted that Sri Lanka is a multi-culture and multi-religion country, but common to all of its cultures is the high level of obedience and discipline expected from children.

In both Thailand and India there was a tendency to see child participation as entertainment only and to organise fun activities. There was a reluctance to arrange psychosocial interventions to help children accept the deaths of their relatives.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, many children were in a state of shock; they had never been listened to before and feared that their views would not be accepted. They believed that they should not speak up or take the initiative until they are adults. It is considered “rude” to do so. Generally, the children consulted did not think they have been listened to. They were disappointed that adults in the community were not receptive to their views or their initiatives to improve services to the community. Discussions also highlighted that although they survived the disaster and showed consideration for others, they were not aware of this as a skill or strength. It is possible that adults in the community have not even recognised and acknowledged what these children did during or after the emergency. Only in one or two instances were the children appreciated with gratitude for alerting a family member/ neighbour and saving their lives. Sadly, some children remember with bitterness that when they warned others, the adults in those families ridiculed or scolded them.

**“When a boy warned a family, he was scolded and chased away. This could have happened because they did not want to take a child’s word seriously or because they were from a different community.” *From Ampara, Sri Lanka (13-17 years old)***

Skills such as swimming and tree climbing have come to the forefront with the tsunami experience. There is clearly a need to develop life skills among children from a young age and to have systematic, inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches is doing so. However, gender issues were revealed in the attempts to address these skills.

In Hambantota, Sri Lanka, of the 200 children now attending swimming classes, only 20 are girls and they are younger than 11. However, the girls present at the consultations were reluctant to talk about it. It is assumed the reason for the low participation of girls is that they are hesitant to dress in swim wear. Discussions with the parents or children on how best girls could be included in the programme and how this training could be organised in a more culturally acceptable manner has not taken place. Considering the fact that more women and girls died in the tsunami due to

their inability to swim,<sup>5</sup> it seems essential that organisations explore ways in which swimming and other useful skills can be imparted in a culturally acceptable manner, making them more accessible to girls.

In all countries, respondents to this research and other reports think that gender issues had been overlooked when implementing programmes for children.

**“Only boys or smaller children went to the events organised by agencies. Older girls did not go for these games. There were no programmes especially organised for them. Yours (children’s consultation) is the first time that we girls have attended.” *From Ampara, Sri Lanka (13-17 years old)***

**“There is no privacy for girls (for sanitation purposes). It is very difficult during periods. We wash our menstrual cloths at night and wake up early to collect them after they have dried.” *From Nagapattinam, India (13-18 years old)***

Anecdotal evidence suggests that people receiving psychosocial support during disaster response are more likely to be socially active than others who did not and/or received only material benefits. Additionally, the evidence suggests that projects that target special social categories within the population, such as women or children, are more likely to foster greater involvement than generic projects affecting whole population groups or projects with men.

### **Barriers to inclusion**

It was noted in the consultations that, despite the extraordinary generosity of individuals, groups and institutions, certain cultural barriers persisted that prevented effective consultation with certain groups. This appears to have happened with migrants and tribal people in Thailand. A combination of behavioural, attitudinal and political obstacles caused frustration among children and communities.

**“For different people, caring was different. For Burmese, assistance was small, possibly because they were illegal immigrants.” *From Ban Nam Khem, Thailand (13-18 years old)***

Among children, there are groups, such as ethnic minorities, castes or those with disabilities, who occupy a weaker position than others. During the consultations, concerns were raised in particular about disabled children. After the relocation of schools, for example, it was noted that a host school has not provided a classroom for children with special needs due to the lack of space. As a result, some children who had been learning basic skills and who had been proud of attending school are now restricted to their homes.

It was also observed in some contexts that “participatory” activities were mostly games, which only some children enjoyed. The requirement that children become members of the associations formed by these organisations, and the adults’ fears that such organisations are intent on converting the children to other religions, seems to deter children’s interaction with outside agencies. In some contexts, it was observed that there are children in the community who seem to be marginalised due to their poverty, family issues or because they are more shy or less popular than other children. There is little or no attempt to identify such children and include them in the programme.

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<sup>5</sup> “The Tsunami’s Impact on Women,” Oxfam Briefing Note; March 2005, Oxfam International.



## Chapter 3 Children's participation in the post-tsunami operation

"Today we learned that children did a lot of clever things to save themselves and other children. We did not know this before. This should be told to everyone." *From Sri Lanka*



Karen Baker

## The aim and structure of this section: Children's rights and emergencies

This section combines an analysis of the interviews conducted with representatives of agencies that responded to the tsunami with an analysis of the consultations held with children who were affected.

In all four countries, more than 100 individuals from national and local authorities, international institutions, INGOs and national and local NGOs that had mounted relief operations and were engaged in rehabilitation and reconstruction activities were interviewed about how they engaged with children and young people during each stage of the response. Each agency was asked about its existing policies, guidelines and philosophies as well as its approach to children's rights, including participation.

Consultations were also conducted to ascertain from children what happened to them at the time of the disaster and what they did to help themselves and others. The children also were asked their opinions on the efforts made to assist them in the relief, recovery and rehabilitation stages and whether and how they were encouraged in each of those phases. The researchers carried out consultations in at least two of the affected areas in each of the four countries. More than 330 children in representative groups were consulted within appropriate gender and age groupings.

The findings of the research are organised within the categories of children's rights that are often used to illustrate the holistic nature of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- **Children's right to survival** (initial spontaneous behaviour and short-term relief and recovery)
- **Children's right to protection**
- **Children's right to development** (education, psychosocial support, rebuilding habitats and livelihoods)
- **Children's right to participation** (emergency phase, rehabilitation and reconstruction phases and disaster risk reduction).

In times of disaster, children have the same rights and potential as they do in normal times. Even in an emergency, when the priority must be to save lives, these categories of rights remain mutually dependent and their fulfilment must be pursued together; none of them can be put on hold.

During the early tsunami response, protection issues became urgent and these were covered after survival rights. Development rights are shown to include psychosocial support as well as education and the reconstruction of homes, schools and livelihoods. Participation rights are linked to the other three rights, but following the common child rights framework, are also discussed independently.

This section begins with a summary of the existing policies of agencies and how they influenced implementation and practice.

Information is grouped by country and reference is made to the different phases of the response within these categories.

## Existing policies of agencies on children in emergencies

### United Nations, multilateral and bilateral donors

All UN agencies treat children as a vulnerable group, taking them into account in policy and programmes. UNICEF has an extremely comprehensive Emergency Field Handbook covering the role of UNICEF staff in meeting children's needs in emergencies. Participation does not appear in the index, but "participation activities" are included in the list of uses for "child-friendly spaces".

Bilateral donors and multilateral agencies subscribe to international conventions and treaties. The Sphere standards, the CRC and principles such as community participation are taken to underpin their policy framework. However, few specific policy or guidelines concerning children's participation were identified among multilateral or bilateral donors in our research.

### Governments

Each government has different institutional arrangements for disaster preparedness and response, but in emergency situations, child participation is not explicitly addressed.

**India's** central Government and 14 states have introduced new, more comprehensive bills for disaster management. The new policy framework is intended to replace the existing reactive approach with one emphasising disaster preparedness and mitigation. The policy promotes community participation, particularly of vulnerable sections of society, as a prerequisite for sustainable disaster risk reduction. Children are grouped together with other categories, such as women, older people and the disabled, within the definition of vulnerable sections of society.

In **Thailand** the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation within the Ministry of the Interior has the immediate responsibility for response. Relevant existing laws include Thailand's 2003 Child Protection Act, which requires the setting up of provincial child protection committees.

The Department of Social Development and Welfare, and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) have responsibilities covering child protection. The MSDHS provides information on procedures for child adoption and foster care, according to the Child Adoption Law. It liaises with the Immigration Office on suspicious cases of children leaving the country. This ministry provides emergency relief for children in terms of funding to enable them to go to school.

In **Indonesia** child participation has been regulated constitutionally through Child Protection Act No.23/2002, particularly in Articles 2, 4 and 20, and through Presidential Decree No. 30/1999 on the ratification of the CRC. Child participation is also included implicitly in the vision and mission of some of the government agencies dealing with children's issues, such as the Ministry of Women's Empowerment.

There are no government institutions responsible for children's issues at the local level. In Indonesia, as elsewhere, assumptions are made because the Government has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulates that children in disasters shall have special protection.

## **International NGOs**

All INGOs should adhere to the NGO Code of Conduct, and most are signed up to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response detailed by the Sphere Project. However, the participatory principles incorporated in these standards are not specifically focused on children. In all four countries, the research appeared to confirm an assumption that there are two broad subcategories of agencies when considering approaches to children: those that are child rights based and those that are community focused, and within this latter subcategory, there are specialist organisations with expertise in, for example, water and sanitation, health or housing.

The leading international children's rights agencies working in tsunami-affected areas have clearly defined guidelines regarding rights, protection, empowerment and participation of children and youth. These agencies provide training to other NGOs that work with children to develop their internal child protection procedures and reporting mechanisms.

## **National and local NGOs**

For the most part, the non-government agencies that responded with immediate relief to tsunami-affected areas have no general guidelines on children's involvement and protection. Those agencies with a longer-term recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction programme have an assorted range of guidelines, practices and philosophies for children's protection and participation.

Although community-focused and specialist agencies, foundations and faith-based groups approach children's issues in ways different than child rights-based organisations, almost all understand the essence of the CRC. Several agencies in India have taken up issues involving child labour, rights or education. All are deeply committed to participatory processes, though mostly focused on adults. In Thailand, most of these groups proved to have had previous experience of dealing with and understanding the rights of children, having gained experience on youth and child protection issues from working in Bangkok, the North, the Northeast or other regions of Thailand.

## **Implementation and practice**

The research in all four countries concluded that the vast majority of organisations involved in post-tsunami operations did not have a specific child focus. For example, the directory prepared by the United Nations Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC) for Sri Lanka in January 2005 lists a total of 890 agencies involved in post-tsunami operations in Sri Lanka, of which only 40 (4 per cent) had a child focus in their activities. The majority of the programmes for children were designed to meet their immediate physical needs. The relief packages of most agencies provided for basic needs, such as food, shelter, health care and sanitation. Except for the few leading local and international children's

rights organisations, none had existing training programmes for staff on how to deal with or respond to children in disaster relief operations. While many government bodies, international organisations, international, national and local NGOs have statutes or guidelines that, in theory, conform to the principles of the CRC, it is only a minority that appears to translate these principles into guidelines, approaches and plans of action.

## Children's right to survival

**"I was going on a trip with my aunt's family. I live with them. When the waves came, my father and I ran to warn another aunt. They did not listen to us. They shouted at us and we rushed back. Everyone was trying to board a bus. A girl cousin gave me her infant baby to hold while she got on the bus. I held the baby and could not enter the bus. Later I gave the baby to another passenger and tried to climb in. Then I saw a small boy cousin of mine struggling to get in. He was alone. I did not want to leave him there. So I got off the bus. We were left behind. I ran with my little cousin. We somehow managed to get into a van. It took us to a temple far away. We stayed there one day without knowing what happened to our families. I looked after my little cousin and tried to find our families. I told the police and the priest of the temple. They sent us to another camp nearby but my family was not there. On the third day a person from the village said he saw our family in another camp. We stayed in this camp for several weeks before we moved to a temporary house." *From Hambantota, Sri Lanka (13–17 years old)***

### Initial spontaneous behaviour

The tsunami produced local, national and international responses within a short time, but the swiftness varied in each country. Most countries in the region had had little experience preparing for and responding to a disaster of this magnitude. The majority of international, national and local organisations were caught off guard.

In all affected areas, the immediate response was led by the survivors and local communities – some directly affected, some unaffected – organised relief activities. These local responses varied but are noted in all countries, including Indonesia, where, despite the extent of the devastation in Aceh, survivors, extended families and neighbouring communities provided immediate relief and shelter without outside assistance. Voluntary groups and religious institutions collected food, clothing and medicines from the public and distributed them to the affected communities without consideration for their ethnic, religious or caste identity.

**"On the first day, the people who rushed to safe places received packets of cooked rice and curry. The people in the nearby areas had prepared food and came and distributed these. We did not have to ask for food. There was tea and milk for children too. After the first day there was more food than we needed for a day." *From Hambantota, Sri Lanka (13–17 years old)***

<sup>6</sup> De Silva, Harendra, "Human and social tragedy in the aftermath of tsunami: Some thoughts," Asian Tribune, June 2005.

The spontaneity of community solidarity in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami demonstrates the potential of the affected communities, including children, to take charge of events and dispels the notion that they are passive victims. In all four countries, the consultations indicate that children acted instinctively when faced with the disaster and used whatever skills and knowledge they had to save themselves and help others. Their concern and care for other children, especially those who are younger than themselves, stand out in their accounts.

**“On the day of the tsunami, I did not understand how the sea could come to our doorstep. I panicked but lifted the 2-day-old baby and took the two small boys and ran to the terrace of my house when it started flooding.” *From Nagapattinam, India (16-year-old girl)***

**“I was playing cricket with my friends near the sea. Suddenly I heard a loud noise and saw the sea coming towards me. I tried to run but fell down. An older boy saved me. My younger brother and older brother died. I ran and saw that my home was not there. I climbed a tree and waited till I was rescued.” *From Vedaraniyam, India (15-year-old boy)***

However, many of them recall seeing acts of selfishness, lawlessness and inequity, which clearly continue to trouble them.

**“A girl who was wounded asked for help and was on a roof; some adults had been inconsiderate and had refused to help. Some adults did not seem to care about the plight of the children during the disaster.” *From Ampara, Sri Lanka (13-17 years old)***

**“For Thais and Westerners, treatments were also different. If Thais and Westerners got stuck on an island, they would help the Westerners first by sending airplanes to pick them up. If Thai corpses were discovered, the relatives would be asked to pick them up on their own. If the corpses were Burmese, they would be left there. The treatment for Westerners was better than for Thais, and treatment for Thais was better than for Burmese.” *From Ban Nam Khem, Thailand (13-18 years old)***

### **Short-term relief and recovery**

In **India** and **Sri Lanka**, the spontaneous community participation demonstrated in the emergency phase waned quickly with the arrival of politicians and humanitarian workers and the setting up of temporary camps and shelters.

In **India**, media coverage led to a surge of compassion and the initial trickle of local and international humanitarian groups swelled to a flood. An estimated 500–600 institutional actors were involved with relief by the end of January, excluding individuals and informal groups. It led to a situation where there were too few affected villages to accommodate all the players. Inappropriate aid was often deposited at the first available relief camp or community, whether it was wanted or not, while others were ignored. Well-motivated attempts to coordinate relief activities led to a proliferation of INGO–NGO coordinating fora, which added to the confusion. Instead of providing a common voice, a unified purpose and combined action, the problems of duplication and competition persisted.

**“Children are not satisfied by the manner in which aid was distributed, as many that were rich benefitted but the poor suffered.” *From Tamil Nadu, India (8-18 years old)***

**“Dalit children in Kovalam are discriminated against.” *From Kovalam, India (13-18 years old)***

In **Sri Lanka**, the response followed a similar pattern. Many of the well-established local and international NGOs rapidly expanded their operations, more than doubling staff numbers. Many INGOs came to the country for the first time, leading to increased competition among agencies for space to operate and qualified personnel.

In **Thailand**, national and international NGOs rushed to the affected areas; as one representative commented, “There are more NGOs looking for villages to work in than villages available.” The provincial authorities screened NGOs not already registered in Thailand. Although few NGOs and foundations worked in the South, several nationally-based development organisations, such as Raks Thai Foundation, the Mercy Foundation and the Duang Prateep Foundation, responded immediately, building on their experience from elsewhere in the country.

Disparities and inequities in the distribution of relief were perhaps inevitable consequences of the inexperience of many of those involved in the immediate response. Children noticed gaps in the way aid was distributed and experienced the negative effects of disorganised and ad hoc aid distribution. Their wish to be involved in a fairer distribution of aid reflects the discrepancies they noted as well as a strong sense of justice.

**“No one asked us or even our parents what we wanted. They just brought loads of stuff and gave it out. As a result, there was much quarrelling to get things. Sometimes it became so difficult to control that foreigners who brought stuff went away without giving things out. We feel both they and the people were wrong. They could have made a list of what people needed before bringing the stuff.” *From Hambantota, Sri Lanka (17-year-old boy)***

**People who had no damage claimed that they did so as to get donations. There were donated things that came through the village head and did not reach the people. Some villages did receive donations while some others did not. The same thing happened to clothes distribution. The persons in charge would keep new clothes for themselves and distribute the worn ones to people. Donations went through steps, from members of the subdistrict administrative organisation to the subdistrict head and finally the affected people received just a little from the subdistrict head. *From Bang Muang, Thailand (7-12 years old)***

Unfortunately, these observations by children were almost never shared with the aid agencies.

In the relief and recovery phase, governments and agencies prioritised the provision of necessities and the prevention of epidemics.

In **India**, according to the Chief Relief Commissioner of Tamil Nadu, the state response during the relief and recovery phase focused on obligations to protect the right to life of all citizens, including children, without discrimination. In the chaotic aftermath of the tsunami, the State also had an obligation to maintain law and order; an obligation it discharged even though this required sealing off affected villages, forcefully evacuating people considered to be at risk, bulldozing dead bodies into mass graves and by giving “shoot-on-sight orders” to police and paramilitary forces in case of looting. However, the order was never exercised.

**“After the disaster, we should conduct the ceremony for the dead.” *From India***

In **Sri Lanka**, essential commodities like food, water and medicines reached all affected populations, including children, as soon as supply lines were established. There was, however, limited consultation with children in the design and implementation of relief programmes. Only a few of the organisations interviewed mentioned that children’s own choices were taken into account in the supply of cooked food to the camps within the first week after the disaster. Health education messages were sometimes targeted to children, including youth volunteers, but as one evaluation pointed out, these education programmes, not being interactive, often involved one-way transfer of knowledge from adults to children.

In **Aceh, Indonesia** the priorities of the Indonesian Government were the distribution of food, water, medicines, clothes, blankets, tents and attention to sanitation and health. UNICEF was already involved in the province and initiated additional emergency response through existing partners. It supported food distribution, health, shelter, water and sanitation programmes. To extend the emergency response, UNICEF recruited many volunteers and staff (including some from the local community and many professionals from elsewhere). They were all given training and workshops to provide a comprehensive understanding of child rights.

## **Children’s right to protection**

**“Many children became orphans. Even though many organisations came in and helped, any item that is given cannot replace what they have lost. We have been asked a lot by many people of many organisations. Sometimes, we don’t want to talk repeatedly and we feel sad every time.” *From Thachatchai, Thailand (13-18 years old)***

Following the tsunami, the care of orphans and child trafficking became the major child protection issues, partly as a result of a media alert. Governments reacted quickly to the needs of children who lost one or both parents. In general, their approach was to support the extended families and communities who they found to be already taking care of orphans, rather than take children from their communities into institutional care. UNICEF and INGOs such as Plan, Save the Children, World Vision and the Christian Children’s Fund were also quick to act on child protection issues and appointed child protection officers/advisers. Camp coordinators of child rights organisations supported child protection functions and took measures to sensitise staff and volunteers on child rights and protection policies. Child rights agencies also used their networking and coordination activities to promote awareness of possible child protection violations and to exert influence on government bodies to take action on these issues.

In **India**, the Government agencies were quick to act and there is no evidence of child trafficking or abduction in Tamil Nadu during the post-tsunami chaos. The Ministry of Social Defence banned the adoption of tsunami orphans by foreigners. Orphans were identified and taken to government and specially-approved orphanages. The Government reinforced traditional community care by announcing a compensation package for each orphan who was adopted by community members. This is to be paid only when the child reaches maturity and then only in instalments. The Central Social Defence Ministry announced that there were a total of 529 tsunami orphans from five tsunami-affected states in state-run homes and orphanages.

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<sup>7</sup> Rawal, Vivek, Charlie Fautin, Judy-Leigh Moore, Stylevester Kalonge, Vivien Margaret Walden and Abhijith Bhattacharjee, “Realtime evaluation of multi-agency tsunami response in Sri Lanka and India” June 2005.

Also in India, in the first week of January, on the initiative of Save the Children, an informal coordination forum formed among child rights-based agencies. Receiving unconfirmed reports of trafficking, this forum immediately called a joint press conference and took a clear stand against adoption, particularly by foreigners.

In **Sri Lanka**, the legal framework for the custodianship of children who lost one or both of their parents during the tsunami was created by the Tsunami (Special Provisions) Act of 2005. A database of children needing protection and support was established, and it was made mandatory for custodians to register. Of nearly 5,000 Sri Lankan children who lost one or both parents in the tsunami, only 15 are reported to be totally unaccompanied and without any close relatives who are willing to take charge of their custodianship.

In **Thailand**, the MSDHS provided NGOs with information on adoption and foster care procedures. It liaised with the Immigration Office on any suspicious cases of children crossing the border. It deployed social workers and psychologists to work with the children in the tsunami areas and took care of 208 orphans whose parents came from other provinces. Although in theory, Provincial Child Protection Committees had been set up under the Child Protection Act, these were not functioning at the time of the tsunami. After public criticism of the weak enforcement of the protection law, the Provincial Child Protection Committees from the six tsunami-affected provinces now have begun to meet together to coordinate responses. In Thailand, Save the Children developed a standard for child protection through the establishment of a Setting the Standards Training Unit for NGOs and community-based organisations.

As mentioned, the orphan issues were effectively handled by the authorities and few cases of trafficking were substantiated by facts. Other protection issues, however, were sidetracked or neglected. There should have been much more attention paid to protecting children from the influence and impact of outside aid workers and media flooding into their villages. This could have been achieved by appointing a child protection focal point, establishing the reporting mechanism for any abuse cases with the focal point, protecting identity and maintaining confidentiality and ensuring the (re)issuance of birth registration. These issues may seem minor compared with the fate of orphans and trafficking, but protecting children from the secondary harm caused by strangers should be among the top priorities of all agencies.

Some agency representatives reflected during the research interviews that children could have been more directly involved in protection measures, but this was often overlooked.

## Children's right to development

### Education

The role of education in the normalisation of the lives of children affected by disasters is now established, and a number of child rights-based agencies consider methods of restoring education to be an essential part of preparedness – although it has been a long struggle to get this recognised more widely. “School in a Box” is an initiative carried out by several NGOs. The evidence suggests that the value of having prepared and standardised materials outweighs any disadvantages arising from not being able to include the views of the affected children in designing the relevant intervention.

In all the affected countries, international and national NGOs created child-friendly spaces. Opportunities for play and recreation are considered to be vital for the development of all children,<sup>8</sup> promoting self-confidence, cognitive and communication skills, as well as relieving stress and anxiety, especially where displacement makes formal schooling difficult or impossible. The child-friendly centres are used for a wide variety of purposes, including indoor games, tuition classes, peer activities and pre schools. They have enabled children to have a space for their own activities so that they are not merely on the periphery of adult activities. Given the space limitations in tents, temporary shelters and other types of accommodation, child-friendly spaces have fulfilled important needs for peer interaction, recreation and fun.

The re-opening of schools in some places has been a slow process due to the destruction of a large number of facilities, the loss of teachers, and the use of school buildings for accommodating the displaced.

In **India**, the Government, UNICEF, and international and national NGOs moved quickly to re-establish education. The Government re-opened schools within three weeks of the tsunami's impact, supplied textbooks free, waived school and examination fees for tsunami-affected children and provided free residential tuition for those undertaking board examinations. UNICEF and several NGOs established child-friendly spaces immediately and initiated many activities that normalise the lives of children, giving them a sense of safety, structure and predictability through drawing, puppet making

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<sup>8</sup> UNCRC Article 31: the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and arts.



and playing, drama and songs, story telling, sports and various types of non-formal education. In addition, several NGOs set up preschool centres, began the renovation and reconstruction of schools, adopted government schools, conducted school enrolment campaigns and undertook tuition.

Despite the severe shock they had suffered, tsunami-affected children in Tamil Nadu recently registered pass levels 3 per cent above the state average in the board examinations. This was unprecedented; children of the fishing and coastal communities had previously recorded pass levels below the state average. The Chief Relief Commissioner attributed the results to the effectiveness of the psychosocial and educational interventions of both government and humanitarian agencies.

However, children still pointed out room for improvement.

**“All children in the group are attending the school. Yet there are not enough buses to go to school. Small children get crushed in the bus due to the crowd. Some children in Kovalam cannot continue their studies after school due to the lack of money and loss of certificates in the tsunami. Some children in Vedaraniam found it difficult to go to school as it was far away and they had to walk quite a distance.” *From Tamil Nadu, India (13-18 years old)***

In **Sri Lanka**, the reconstruction of school buildings has been held up in some areas by a decision to relocate the affected schools at least 2 km from the sea. Collaborative efforts between Provincial Councils and NGOs such as Plan, Save the Children, World Vision and the Christian Children’s Fund have school rebuilding underway in several areas. Well-funded efforts by several NGOs to provide other requirements in schools, including library and laboratory facilities also have contributed to the process of normalisation. Children also were involved in supporting the opening of the learning centres.

However, many children are still experiencing different forms of marginalisation in host schools and feel the lack of library, laboratory and playground facilities. They lack supplementary reading material, especially older children studying for examinations.

**“The first day in the host school, the principal and teachers of our own school told us that we had to prepare the two halls in which we will have our classrooms. We, the older children, helped to paint the walls. The other children helped in cleaning the place. No one from the host school came to help us. Nothing was organised to welcome us. We did not feel very comfortable having to come to this school. We can’t use the library of the host school and the organisations that provided aid did not give any supplementary reading books. However, the most difficult things are having to study in a congested hall and not having a playground. The teachers of the host school do not like us to be there.” *From Hambantota, Sri Lanka (13-17 years old)***

Some children reported that the conditions they face and the availability of easy cash gained by working for NGOs to do clean-up jobs have motivated some students to leave school.

Children of the hosting schools also endure burdens. Their educational circumstances have worsened since the tsunami because of overcrowding.

While the children are grateful for what they have received, they are worried by waste. In Sri Lanka, they described how school materials were excessively distributed.

**“I don’t know how many exercise books I have: a whole box full. Everyone came and gave copies. Then shoes – they just gave them out. Children have six, four or two pairs. It is the same with school bags. I have four. They gave loads of stuff.”**  
*From Ampara, Sri Lanka (10-year old)*

In **Thailand**, the Ministry of Public Health established child development centres in the temporary shelters to provide assistance to mothers and children. Social development officials contacted other organisations, both locally and overseas, to provide assistance to children in the form of sponsorship programmes and educational funding. Emergency funds were provided to enable children to go to school. Each of the 568 orphans in Phang-Nga received cash as a form of support for clothes and education. The King’s Project sponsored children in government boarding schools.

The Duang Prateep Foundation built on its experience of working with disadvantaged children elsewhere in Thailand by setting up activity centres that provided mother and child care, and a range of activities for children and young people, including crafts, sports and toy libraries.

In **Aceh, Indonesia**, many local NGOs have had a major influence in implementing the programmes and policies of the international agencies, including Plan. In the education field, these include the building and establishing of Islamic schools and child centres that the Ministry of Social Development set up, counselling, teaching the Koran, music, sport, technical skills training and playground activities. Children have been consulted since the assessment and design stages so that the activities are based on their ideas and aspirations. School-aged children also were involved in the evaluation phase by giving feedback on the programme implementation.

**“At Plan’s kindergarten and daycare centre, we assisted in building schools. Some of us teach younger children every Monday–Saturday, clean and tidy up the places.”** *From Aceh Besar, Indonesia (13-18 years old)*

### **Psychosocial activities**

**“We were of course very depressed following the tsunami. We attended trauma counselling activities through tent schools and other recreational activities sponsored by international aid agencies. With the activities, we thought that we could continue on living. We helped our parents with the daily chores so that our parents did not get stressed too long.”** *From Aceh Besar, Indonesia*

Psychosocial support programmes of many forms have been linked to the attempts to re-establish education in all countries, although questions have been raised in some cases about their suitability and applicability. The research in all four countries reveals different practices and differing views on what is appropriate. There is still a dominant view that addressing the psychosocial well-being of children affected by such a profound disaster must be built on the expertise of skilled adults. But in a disaster of such magnitude it cannot be possible to find enough skilled adults. Some agencies, such as Action Aid in India and World Vision in Thailand, turned to volunteers or formed links with professional institutions. Under these circumstances, children naturally and rightly sought emotional and moral support from the adults around.

**“Most children do not want to move to some other school because they want to stay with their families and have family members as advisors.” *From Bang Muang, Thailand (7-12 years old)***

**“We talked with everyone in the camp about the shocking thing that happened. But we did not talk with them about the fears we have and when we were sad about losing our relatives and our possessions, we talked with our mother.” *From Hambantota, Sri Lanka (13-17 years old)***

In **India**, Plan learned from children that their fears after the tsunami included fear of the tsunami occurring again, fear of losing parents, fear of going out in the dark and being alone, fear of being separated from their families, fear of the tsunami happening at night, fear of losing friends and school, fear of ghosts, fear of bathing in the sea and fear of noise.

Despite the nature of the communities affected by the tsunami, the nature of the fear and the lack of professional psychosocial experts, many of the efforts to mount psychosocial interventions were based on an individual, adult-led approach rather than socially oriented ones, such as child-to-child, youth-to-child or mother-to-child. There were some examples of adopting these practices, such as Plan’s child development centre activities that were designed to create a sense of togetherness through children’s own interaction. However, some organisations even imported the methodology developed elsewhere without adapting it locally. There was little or no evidence to suggest that involving children in the design and monitoring of the psychosocial programmes or in their implementation was even considered.

In **Aceh, Indonesia**, similarly, some agencies were positioned to take on psychosocial work although the numbers of trained workers were very inadequate.

In **Sri Lanka**, programmes have included the training of community-based volunteer counsellors, play therapy, art therapy, speech therapy, meditation programmes, group counselling and peer-support networks, although few were assessed for their effectiveness in the local setting. One NGO interviewee in Sri Lanka referred to a “psychosocial industry” being developed and implemented by certain agencies, without really examining the needs of the affected communities. However, some community-based psychosocial support programmes that already existed in war-affected areas of Sri Lanka were satisfactorily adapted to the demands of men, women and children affected by the tsunami.

### **Rebuilding habitats and livelihoods**

**“Tents tend to be too small for large families. There are lots of mosquitoes. Lighting is very poor with one bulb per tent. Wires and fuses catch fire easily. Tar from the rooftop melted and fell on to floor this summer. Lots of noise.” *From Nagappatinam, India***

Several representatives of agencies interviewed believe the delay in rebuilding homes and schools and the recovery of livelihoods are having greater effect on children’s development than the psychological effect of the tsunami.

In **Sri Lanka**, children say that the main issue that affects their lives currently is the inability to move into a house of their own. These delays also threaten the opportunities for them to think about community rebuilding, for as long as individuals are not re-settled permanently, enthusiasm for acting collectively as a community will diminish.

In **India**, permanent housing construction, plagued by controversy, has been slow to take off. In Chennai, the government has announced its intention to upgrade temporary shelters to semi-permanent rather than speeding up permanent housing. This is viewed by NGOs as a step to affect slum clearance under the cover of tsunami relief, with communities being prevented from returning to the site of their original homes.

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<sup>9</sup> In India, the first set of 87 permanent houses was handed to tsunami victims at Pudukuppam village, Cuddalore on 5 September 2005. Each house measures 350 sq ft, cost 150,000 rupees and were constructed by the Mata Amritanandamayi Math.

As long as communities remain in relief camps, they get used to receiving relief materials, which kills their spirit of self-reliance. Their enthusiasm for involvement in direct implementation of water and sanitation projects, for example, diminishes if they consider they are only living there temporarily. In each country, concerns have been raised that the long delay in returning to some degree<sup>10</sup> of normal life is leading to dependency, and changes in attitude and behaviour away from autonomy and self reliance.

Children also are worried that they might have to move out of their village if land for relocation is far away. The uncertainty of where they will live worries the older children.

**“Nothing will be like before until we move into our own house. As long as we live in a hut, we will remember the tsunami and what happened.”** *From Ampara, Sri Lanka*

**“Long houses with rooms were constructed on Had Kamala beach. Most people did not go to stay there. They stayed with relatives because they were afraid of stealing. They were worried about their assets.”** *From Ban Kalim, Thailand (7-12 years old)*

**“Some youths who used to be good persons turned to drugs. They roamed around at night. Every night, they look for quarrelling.”** *From Ban Nam Khem, Thailand (13-18 years old)*

**“Children are scared about their future, as they always thought of fishing work in the sea. At present, they are not sure.”** *From Tamil Nadu, India (8-18 years old)*

In **Thailand**, concerns have been raised about the economic problems caused by the destruction of livelihoods. It was noted that an increase in depression and frustration among the adult population can lead to abusive behaviour while the temporary housing arrangements, with so little privacy, can lead to social problems.

**“It is not yet a normal condition. Houses are not yet ready. The construction is not yet completed. Tourist locations are not yet well fixed. Vocational equipment and the mental condition of fishermen are not yet good. We want to rehabilitate the condition to return to normal, to have mangrove forests as before and to have better tourist locations. Reforestation, environmental improvement and community garbage management are needed. As before, we need tourism. We would like to have a good atmosphere. The youths in the community are ready and happy to help in this rehabilitation.”** *From Ban Nam Khem, Thailand (13-18 years old)*

## **Children’s right to participation**

There is a danger in listing participation as a separate category as it may perpetuate the idea that it is a discrete activity (as illustrated, perhaps, by the suggestion in the UNICEF Emergency Handbook that child-friendly spaces are for “participation activities”). The reason for maintaining participation separately is to stress the importance of linking children’s right to express their opinions (and to seek and receive information) to the achievement of their other rights. This report is not aiming to insist on participation “activities” in the aftermath of a disaster but to demonstrate the need to view children as active, capable and resilient young people with skills, resources and energies to offer – as well as people with particular vulnerabilities. The evidence for this report suggests that this is not yet accepted.

<sup>10</sup> Observations from Aceh Besar where different interviewees provided similar views: “Now people do not want to clean their own houses even though they are dirty. They say there are other people to clean our houses/shelters who are paid. I will clean only if I am paid.”

## Engaging with children in the emergency phase

In the early relief efforts, the focus was very much on affected populations and families in general, with no particular emphasis on children. Whether or not agencies had relevant existing policies, representatives of those agencies interviewed expressed the view that it is impractical and virtually impossible to consult children during the acute stage of a disaster. Remarks from a number of programme managers interviewed in Sri Lanka for this report typified this attitude: "In an emergency situation, we cannot pay special attention to any one group among the affected people or practise any high social ideals. We have a job to do in terms of finding accommodation and distributing food and other necessities to the large numbers who have been displaced. We assume that by helping the family unit we are helping all, including children, women and the elderly. Where we do find any unaccompanied children the objective was to locate other family members or some other relatives who can take care of the children at least temporarily." Adding, "There are better and more urgent things to do in a disaster." In interviews, officers with several child-focused agencies made the point that their experience in other emergencies had ensured that their response is geared to children's needs.

Many organisations simply implemented programmes conceived by experts from outside. Some organisation officers noted that talking to parents or talking to teachers or other adults who are in contact with children is adequate for the purpose of designing community-based programmes.

Yet, consultations with the children showed that they had been very active in the immediate aftermath (see descriptions what children did in Sri Lanka and Indonesia page 8). Their actions ranged from the very active and physical to the very caring and contemplative; from rescuing people at the moment of crisis to routine community activities. The children's descriptions of their actions display a strong sense of community and shows that they are clearly driven by the desire to assist and protect their communities. These instincts could have been built on to a greater degree.

## Engaging with children in the rehabilitation and reconstruction phases

**"I wish there was a children's council through which children could share ideas on various matters. Children also have ideas and plan to help one another." *From Ban Kalim, Thailand (7-12 years old)***

Most interviewees spoke of increasing their level of involvement with children in the later stages of the response. However, in many cases "participatory" activities have been single programmes, such as magic shows or games aimed at providing enjoyment and distraction, with no follow-up measures. In some locations, for example in Ampara, Sri Lanka, the focus on children has been dropped. There are no longer any regular or systematic programmes conducted for them. Children think that there is now less interest shown in them by the many organisations that poured in after the tsunami. As one child said, "Earlier, there were so many things for children. Some sort of entertainment, like magic shows every week. Now nothing much happens." In Thailand, a UNICEF representative expressed the view that there had been "over-kill" on recreational activities in the early rehabilitation stages. There are exceptions, as some organisations are working with children on regular and long-term programmes.

**Indonesia** presents an example of how involving children became more systematic. UNICEF, through the progressive development of psychosocial activities, is now designing activities that require the opinions and stimulate the participation of children.

Local NGOs have been involved in several projects involving children, including Aceh's Children Congress, the establishment of a Child Council in every subdistrict, workshops on child rights in cooperation with Plan and the University of Syah Kuala Banda Aceh, the election of a child ambassador (in cooperation with UNICEF and Muhammadiyah), and legal advocacy and legal assistance programmes organised by the Children's Legal Assistance Foundation (*LBH Anak*). *LBH Anak*, in cooperation with the Australian Embassy, is also planning for paralegal training regarding the fulfilment of child rights in legal aspects and the general improvement of people's awareness on child rights.

During the reconstruction and recovery phase in Indonesia, the State Ministry of Women Empowerment (Meneg PP) managed tracing programmes as well as child centres with children participating actively. Meneg PP has been involved in designing, implementing and evaluating the programmes in the child centres. There have been efforts to develop

child participation in the post-tsunami relief phase by involving children in activities, such as speech contests and creativity fairs. The Government organised an annual Conference of Children, involving Children's Councils and Children Consultations, which are organised by children.

One of the government agencies specifically established for the Aceh rebuilding programme, the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Body (BRR), conducted research to find solutions to improve and build community capacities through information networking. The main programme is aimed at improving the capacities of local communities, and children are involved indirectly, in accordance to their age and capacity.

**"If our opinion is good, we will be heard. I met the village chief on Monday, I greeted him and he replied while smiling at me. Then I said to him, 'There's no bathroom nor toilet in my village. I and other people want to have bathrooms and toilets. Could you make them for us?' Then he answered, 'I'll get my bathroom constructor to build one in your village so that you all can take a bath in the new bathroom.' We all thanked him after the bathroom construction was finished. We always take a bath in the new bathroom." From Aceh Besar, Indonesia (6-12 years old)**

Some agencies have tried to involve children in plans for the future. In India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, for example, Plan consulted children in designing new houses and settlement schemes for displaced families.

In **Sri Lanka**, Sarvodaya Movement carried out consultations with children, women and men in a fishing community in Hambantota. The consultation results revealed that while women and children preferred to move to safe interior areas because of their fear of the sea and greater proximity to the school, men preferred to stay close to the sea to carry on fishing from the beach. Child consultation was part of the development planning cycle for World Vision, with child concerns also included among the indicators used in monitoring development activities. Soon after the tsunami, Plan actively involved children in the design of permanent houses and new settlements.

Plan also conducted action research with children and communities in February 2005 to determine the direction of its psychosocial support. The result was that many children and adults naturally coped with the initial shocks and their concerns were more centred on the future rather than the past. As a result, Plan focused on getting the lives of children and adults back to normal through the support of education, permanent housing and income-generation projects. At the same time, Plan chose to avoid short-term psychosocial activities that paralleled the government system. Instead, it supported teachers and counsellors in schools who provide children with continuous long-term support.

Some organisations have employed more active measures to take children's participation beyond consultation. Some have identified and trained youth volunteers for specific tasks in the community, such as health education and psychosocial work.

Also in Sri Lanka, young medical interns from the Galle Medical College have trained young people in psychosocial work with the support of UNICEF. In camps served by Sarvodaya, training was given to adolescents and youth to foster suitable leadership for relief and recovery operations. Children's clubs and child-to-child activities organised through these clubs were run by Sarvodaya Movement, World Vision, Save the Children and the Christian Children's Fund. In the child clubs, Sarvodaya Movement's and Save the Children's child-to-child activities involve non-tsunami affected children side by side with tsunami-affected children to try to avoid isolating the victims of the disaster. Recovery work carried out by Sarvodaya in many of the camps initially revolved around the preschool as a useful entry point to community development activities in general. As the children grow, they are expected to move from *Singithi Haula* (child association) to the *Yowun Haula* (youth club) and from there to adult organisations.

In **India**, Plan has commenced an attempt to carry out social equity audits with children. The aim is to empower children to cope in a crisis situation and take responsibility for rehabilitation efforts by monitoring and evaluating the post-tsunami aid activities in their villages.

## Engaging children for disaster risk reduction

In all of the tsunami-affected countries, more attention now is being paid to disaster preparedness and risk reduction. This presents a unique opportunity to involve children who have indicated, as in this consultation, that they are ready to learn about the reasons for disasters and how to prepare for them and minimise their impact. In Sri Lanka, for example, the United Nations Development Programme and several other organisations are working with the National Institute of Education to integrate disaster preparedness into the school curriculum and related textbooks. Plan has developed some useful booklets and videos to distribute among children to help them cope with future tsunamis or other disasters. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) has developed a set of brochures in local languages that aim to educate children about the environmental impact of the tsunami and possible ways to minimise the adverse impacts through collective and preventive action.

Despite these examples, however, the researchers in Sri Lanka and elsewhere thought that the full potential of involving children in the preparation of communities for future disasters is not being fully explored in the wake of the tsunami.

In the consultations, the children were given the opportunity to discuss how they and their communities can be better prepared for future disasters, including tsunamis. They are very aware of the risks but also are convinced that more lives can be saved if they are prepared. Their recommendations instinctively fall into the categories shown in the following diagram. Their extensive ideas on preparedness include the development of warning systems, efficient evacuation plans and families having an awareness of potential disasters, with common medicines and important documents on hand. Some of their ideas link to environmental sustainability and the reduction of risk through appropriate construction methods, planting of trees and protecting the mangroves. Children's consideration of protection includes older people, younger children, disabled people and minority groups; and their ideas about saving to be prepared for future disasters suggest a natural resilience that should be encouraged.

There has been a succession of attempts at the international level to develop disaster risk reduction strategies in the context of sustainable development. Increasingly, the emphasis is on the need to inform and involve people in all aspects of disaster risk reduction in their own communities. The priorities outlined within the Hyogo Framework of Action include integrating a gender perspective into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes and a recommendation that cultural diversity, age and vulnerable groups should be taken into account when planning for disaster risk reduction. There is a strong recommendation that disaster risk reduction knowledge should be introduced into school curricula and that other formal and informal channels should be used to reach youth and children. Governments need to reassess their plans to follow these recommendations in light of the role children played in the response to the tsunami. As the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, Hyogo, 2005 concluded, "Disasters can be substantially reduced if people are well informed and motivated towards a culture of disaster prevention and resilience, which in turn requires the collection, compilation and dissemination of relevant knowledge and information on hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities."

### Diagram: How we can mitigate the impact of disasters

#### Environmental Sustainability

Watershed management, costal resource management, community forestry, sustainable agriculture, rural/urban development planning

*Children can contribute to all of these*

#### Preparedness

Knowledge, information, chain of early warning system, risk mapping, disaster simulation and drilling, skills training, rescue training, infrastructure improvement

#### Creating Resilience

Poverty reduction, social coping mechanisms, inclusion of all, access to information, participation, realisation of child rights and human rights

Children's participation in the post-tsunami operation

# “This is what we will do.”

## Ideas for being prepared for a similar event

### Thailand

- Learn all of the natural symptoms, such as signs that there will be a volcano, i.e. the well getting dry, animals that live in the mountain move down. The tsunami signs are dark sky, enormous earthquake and there is an explosion sound after the earthquake.
- There should be an alarm tower at the beach or in the sea. News should be given periodically. We should have a radio to follow up the news. Children can inform everyone if the government makes an announcement.
- Construct alarm signals. Having heard the sound of the alarm, flee to a high place. Place signboards for exit route.
- Be prepared with a vehicle for exit, have all important documents, (birth certificate, examination certificates, passbook, ration card, bankbook, ID card) and necessary items, such as food, utensils and common household medicines.
- We have to know where the safe places in our area are. Then when a disaster happens we will know where to go. Children should be shown the interior roads that lead to such places. The main roads may be blocked or damaged.
- Even in case of no event, people still need to be regularly informed so that they can be sure that they will be safe and do not need to leave.
- Write down all important phone numbers.
- Rehearsals on tsunami alarm should be organised in each district.
- To cope with this event, there should be preparedness in regard to accommodation, tents, vehicles and traffic. Everywhere close to the bridge, the cars are parked. As a result, the traffic cannot flow properly. Arrangement should be made to enable cars to move out on time when a wave comes.
- Children should not play by themselves near the sea.
- Disabled people and old people should be safe.
- Save money to start a new life, if needed, elsewhere.
- Children can learn first aid.

### India

- When disaster strikes, people should think of only saving their lives and not money or jewels.
- People should grab whatever is there to keep them afloat.
- People should climb trees for safety.
- People should not scatter and run but instead take shelter on the terrace of a building or go to a higher place.
- People should be brave and not frightened. People who are frightened should be counselled with patience.
- Electricity should be cut off.
- Houses should be locked.
- Rope, nylon, clothes (saris) and poles can be used to save people.
- If possible, use vehicles to take people to safety.
- Everyone should help each other and not help only their relatives or people of their communities.
- We should help children and elderly people.
- People should not be discriminated against because of their caste.





Shonu Chandra

## Chapter 4 Time to act: Recommended first steps

**"We were glad that people who came to help didn't turn their back on us. We received encouragement, love and warmth from a lot of people." *From Thachatchai, Thailand (13-18 years old)***

This report shows that there is a fundamental gap between what aid agencies perceive as participation and what children and young people see as their participation. Agencies should seek the highest level of participation, both from adults and children, which requires professional skills, experience, time and resources. On the other hand, children and young people – who experienced the disaster – are contributing to their families and societies in their own way.

Just at the time when humanitarian agencies agree that considering the participation of children and young people is difficult, if not impossible, children and young people perceive themselves to be “participating” to the highest degree.

We must move away from thinking of children simply as beneficiaries and move towards appreciating them as survivors and contributors. What we can learn from the children’s perceptions includes:

1. The most fundamental level of “participation” is acting or reacting to the events that influence individuals and communities; this may range from impulsive and instinctive actions to thoughtful and strategic efforts to protect and care for oneself and others.
2. Humanitarian workers may inadvertently undermine or destroy valuable actions/reactions that are already taking place.
3. Acknowledging and appreciating what children have done and can do, and listening to them, are forms of allowing children to participate.

If we start to think of children’s participation in this way, we will see that participation can be encouraged in a more spontaneous way. Readiness to listen, acknowledge, involve and support children can easily become part of an aid worker’s skills set. It should not require special training, but it does require awareness and a change of attitude to recognise that children know and contribute to what is best for them.

After emergencies, aid agencies strive for recovery, rehabilitation and re-entry into the development cycle. How we work with children and people in emergencies will have an impact on how we work with them in recovery, rehabilitation and the rebuilding of communities.

As more and more development agencies (some without disaster expertise) and relief agencies (some without development expertise or local knowledge) are forced to work together in disaster settings, it is essential for all agencies to find a pragmatic way to blend the best relief practice with the best development practice. And the key phrase is “ownership of the whole process by the people themselves,” especially children and young people.

The following suggestions, which are based on the recommendations from children in the consultations, will help us take the first steps towards closing the gap between the perception of participation among the external agencies and the meaning of participation among the children and young people whose lives are directly affected by the disaster.

## **Behavioural and attitudinal change**

Being prepared for future disasters in a way that integrates children’s participation will necessitate behavioural and attitudinal change. However, to bring about shifts in the mind-set of most adults, the local culture, philosophy and customs must be understood and respected.

- Observe children and young people’s actions in society, and listen to children in normal times.
- Start all initiatives with children and community members, based on their own analysis.
- Acknowledge what children do and can do, and demonstrate appreciation of them.
- Recognise the differences among children, such as age, culture, religion and ethnicity.
- Children who are marginalised in normal times become even more difficult to reach in times of disaster. Ensure that these children are included your activities.
- Remember that all assistance should create self-reliance and resilience among the survivors and not dependency.

## **Organisational development**

### **All agencies involved in disaster relief**

- Rapid assessment should identify what local children and adults have already done and are doing, as well as gaps.
- Do not assume that what adults tell you about the community covers children’s issues.

- Do not assume “relief packages” can fit any country at any time.
- Planning, implementation and monitoring of assistance should incorporate the views of children from various ethnic backgrounds, abilities and classes to ensure those most in need and difficult to reach are included, especially in the issues that will impact on them in the longer term: relocation, foster care, etc.
- If there is no in-house capacity, look for local or international child rights-based NGOs that can work with you to bring children’s voices into your programme.
- Pay special attention to the young people in the affected area. They are physically fit, often more educated than adults and have the energy to act in chaos. Encourage them to mobilise smaller children. Make their voices heard and commit to making their recommendations a reality.

### **For governments**

- Devise disaster preparedness, management and risk reduction plans that take into account children’s capacities, and involve them in each phase of the plan.
- In disaster preparedness plans, make it clear which single agency (both national and local) is primarily responsible for what, in order to protect children from secondary harm and to promote children’s engagement.
- Make sure the national disaster plan can be understood by children and adults, through school- and community-based activities.
- Invest more in the community-based disaster risk reduction.

### **For child rights-based international, national and local NGOs**

- Demystify “children’s participation” and promote dialogue regarding children’s evolving competencies and how this manifests in disasters.
- In acute onset disasters, offer outside relief agencies expertise on how to bring children and young people into programmes.
- Work with disaster-related training agencies and disaster-expert organisations to develop a module for interacting and engaging children in relief programmes.
- Listen to the aspirations of children and young people to build their capacity to react to disasters and train them so that they can take immediate actions to protect themselves and their loved ones.

### **For community-based development organisations that work in disaster-prone areas**

- Enhance the awareness and knowledge of disasters of different groups and organisations within local communities.
- Facilitate discussions on roles and responsibilities of different people and groups, including children and young people, mothers, teachers, religious leaders and health workers, in future disasters as an integrated part of existing programmes.

### **Legal and political**

Many agencies are interpreting the CRC and other international conventions that cover the rights of children in disasters. Whereas the Geneva Conventions and the CRC mention children in armed conflict and in other situations in which they require special attention, there is very little that specifically encompasses natural disasters. Given that the impact of natural disasters appears to be increasing (almost seven times as many children are affected by natural disasters than by conflict) more attention should be given to safeguarding the rights of children affected by them. The following mechanisms could be considered:

- When receiving reports from countries affected by disasters the Committee on the Rights of the Child explicitly requires an account of how children’s rights were met during the disaster and requests that information should be sought directly from children.
- An international body is established to monitor and review the enforcement of children’s rights during disasters.
- The terms of reference on the UN Special Rapporteur on Children in Armed Conflict is extended to include children in natural disasters.
- All reports and assessments on disasters issued by UN agencies include a mandatory section containing children’s input and details of their involvement.
- The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction undertakes a new programme to promote the inclusion of children’s participation in international and national disaster reduction strategies.

## Our future

“After the tsunami, there was no food. On the first day after the tsunami, little food was shared by many people. After five days, food was provided; it was not plenty, but it was sufficient. In a month, food supplies were sufficient. But water was hard to find. There was no water for a shower.

One month after the tsunami, many NGOs came to Aceh. In our camp, the French were the first to establish a hospital. Many people got wounded and had diarrhoea. Not only people in our camp came to the hospital but also people who were not affected by the tsunami. There was also aid from the local government and Jakarta. We have had good services. We have plenty of food now.

It cannot be said that we are already in a normal condition like before the tsunami. Students still need aids, such as books and school buildings, because learning activities are still in mosques or other public facilities. You can imagine that we don't have sufficient education facilities.

What makes us feel sad is that we lost our best friends. We used to be a group. It used to be six of us, but now just four of us remain. Even though our parents are safe, we can feel what our orphaned friends feel. Our life will never be the same again.

It may be impossible to get back to normal life. But we try not to think like that. It's so pessimistic. We are optimistic that our life will be improved. It's useless if we live in sadness. We must look for the future. We are still in high school. We have a long journey to go through. We will rebuild our future.

We don't know what to say. We appreciate people's concerns and aid whatever they are.”

*Young people, Aceh Besar, Indonesia*

# Scope and Methodology

## Scope

### Geographical coverage

To mark the first anniversary of the tsunami emergency, Plan International's Asian Regional Office commissioned a study in four of the countries affected by the disaster in which it had programmes and where it had been involved in the response: India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

### Timing of the study

The study took place between July and November 2005.

### Objective

The objective of the study was to assess what part children played in the response to the tsunami and the extent to which organisations that responded to the emergency situation engaged with children and young people in the different phases of the response: relief, recovery and reconstruction.

### Design of the study

The study was designed to allow Plan to utilise the processes and the results to improve children's involvement in its post-tsunami operation and to influence other agencies with the same issue. As such, **phase one** of the study called for the four country teams to conduct the agency research and a children's consultation in each country, according to the agreed-upon generic terms of reference. In **phase two**, the findings from eight independent papers were compiled into one document by the lead writer (this publication) and disseminated to the wider aid communities. In **phase three**, each country team will utilise both this publication and the individual research papers to feed back into the planning of the second-year post-tsunami operations.

### Children and individuals involved

In four countries, more than 100 individuals from a representative group of organisations and more than 330 children and young people in tsunami-affected communities were consulted for this report.

### Study team

A total of 16 individuals contributed directly to this study: a lead writer, 12 country-based team members (agency researcher, consultation facilitator and focal point in each country) and three regional focal points.

## Methodology: Agency research

### Desk research

Desk research was carried out in each country and at an international level and involved a review of published manuals, operating guidelines and standards, and other publications of agencies involved in the response to the tsunami. Reviews of newspaper reporting on the tsunami in the period from 26 December 2004 to 31 July 2005 also were carried out.

### Selection of agencies for interviews

Each country selected agencies that are considered to have substantial influence in the post-tsunami operations. The minimum number of organisations to interview was set at ten, including at least two INGOs and one local NGO. Plan was included in organisations to be interviewed.

## **Selection of interviewees**

Efforts were made to interview representatives of organisations at more than one level: national, regional and local. If there is a head office and a tsunami field office in a country, both management staff in the head office and the practitioners in the field office were interviewed where possible to compare the policy and the practice.

## **Operational questions**

Head office interviews sought to determine whether organisations' pre-tsunami institutional policy and practise on emergency response integrated the participation or the involvement of children. Field office interviews were focused mainly on determining how children were engaged in the different phases of relief and rehabilitation in tsunami-affected areas. At both levels, interviewees were asked to what extent these policies and practices were adhered to during their response, whether they adapted them during the response to include the involvement and participation of children and if they have reviewed or will be reviewing them in light of the tsunami experience.

## **Methodology: Children's consultations (purpose)**

### **Selection of locations**

The locations were not limited to where Plan works as Plan's operational area does not necessarily cover the range of populations. Efforts were made to cover at least two locations that represent different groups, taking into consideration different ethnic, economic, political and social backgrounds and level of impact of the tsunami.

### **Selection of children to be consulted**

Selections were assisted by Plan's partners, schools and communities. Balance was sought in terms of age group and sex. Other considerations included social groups within a community, school attendance, caste and disability. Some children were living in shelters and some were in their homes; some had been affected by Plan projects but an equal number had not.

### **Minimum number of children/sample size**

A minimum of four consultations with 10–12 children and young people in each were conducted. In India and Indonesia, where children and young people's enthusiasm to take part in the consultation was considerable, facilitators did not limit the number.

### **Preparation**

Facilitators made preparatory visits to speak with some children and the adults of a community to obtain their consent. The parents/guardians of children were informed in advance about the objectives and methods of the consultations and gave approval for their children's involvement.

### **Techniques used**

Facilitators used a range of participatory techniques, including active games, confidence-building games, puppet shows, drawing, stories and discussion. Through these methods, children were invited to illustrate their current involvement in reconstruction activities and their experiences of the disaster and the rescue and relief stages. They were invited to make recommendations on what role they and others could play in the future: before, during and after a disaster.

### **Operational questions**

All activities were designed to withdraw children's account on what happened to them and other children when the tsunami struck, what has been done to help them, what other things should have been done and by whom, what they have done to help get life back to normal, what needs to be done now and by whom, and if such a disaster happened again, how people could react better, and how children and young people could get involved.

# Individuals and children's groups consulted

## Agency research

Organisation	Name and position	Location
<b>India</b>		
Government	State Relief Commissioner, S Santhanam	Chennai, Tamil Nadu
UNICEF	Godsen Mohandass, District Education, Consultant Sivakami, District WES Consultant, Saji Thomas, Project Officer – Child Protection	Nagapattinam Nagapattinam Chennai
ECHO	Oliver Brouant, Technical Assistant Syed Mohammed Aftab Alam, Assistant	New Delhi New Delhi
Asian Development Bank	Vijay Akasam, Adviser	New Delhi
National Institute of Disaster Management	Ajinda Walia, , Senior Research Officer	New Delhi
Action Aid International	Sujata Satepatty, Senior Research Officer	New Delhi
Christian Aid	Babu Mathews, Country Director Ravi Pratap Singh, National Team Leader, Tsunami Relief & Rehabilitation	New Delhi Chennai
Save the Children UK	TR Shyam Sundar, Emergency Programme Coordinator	Chennai
World Vision India	Utpal Moitra Lata Caleb, Director, Tsunami Rehabilitation	New Delhi Chennai
Development Promotion Group	VS Suratha, Manager, Tsunami Relief	Nagapattinam
Butterflies	Bhakther Solomon, CEO	Chennai
NGO Coordination Center	Rita Panicker, Director	New Delhi
South Indian Fisherfolk Federation	Annie George, Coordinator	Nagapattinam
SPEECH	Vivek Ananda, Representative	Nagapattinam,
PREPARE, Tsunami South India NGO Coordination Cell	V Murugan, Coordinator	Nagapattinam,
Young at Risk	Jacob D Raj, Executive Director	Chennai
Don Bosco Anbu Illam	Father George Kollashani	New Delhi
Rejuvenate India Movement	Father Alphonse, Executive Director and Rector	Chennai
T-ReART	A L Rangarajan, National Coordinator	Chennai
Human Rights Law Network	Staff team	Nagapattinam,
Plan International (India)	Geeta D, R Diwakaran, Advocates	Chennai
Plan India	Venkat R. Velagala, Disaster Relief Team Coordinator Bruno Oudmayer, Country Director George Fernandez, Tsunami Relief Coordinator	New Delhi New Delhi New Chennai
	Bhagyashri Dingle, Executive Director Saraswathi Rao, Program Manager	New Delhi New Delhi
<b>Indonesia</b>		
BRR (Reconstruction and Recovery Body)	Fuad Mardatillah	Banda Aceh
Ministry of Women's Empowerment	Hj.Sri Pardini Pudiastuti	Jakarta
Provincial Bureau for Women's Empowerment	Lailisma	Banda Aceh
UNICEF	Frederic Sizaret	Banda Aceh
ILO	Vicky Agung Wibisono	Banda Aceh
WHO	Rosilawati Anggraeni Sulasmi	Jakarta
Asian Development Bank	Hani Qonitah	Jakarta
World Bank	Muslahuddin Daud	Banda Aceh
AusAID	Eko Setiono	Banda Aceh
CIDA	Jamal D Gawi	Banda Aceh
DFID	Adam Burke	Banda Aceh
USAID	Burhanuddin Yusuf	Banda Aceh
Save the Children	Titing Martini Puspa, Heri Kerstin Fransson Lutfi Firdaus	Jakarta Jakarta Banda Aceh Bangda Aceh

Organisation	Name and position	Location
<b>Indonesia</b> (continued)		
CARD/ICRC	Alex Ross	Banda Aceh
World Vision	Masrawati Sinaga	Banda Aceh
Helen Keller International	Ir. Siti Halati M, Kes, Elviyanti Martini	Banda Aceh
Handicap International	Anne-Laure Letourneus, Nancy Rushford	Banda Aceh
MUHAMMADIYAH	M.Dinar, Rahmady M Sani Sp, Cheri Indrayana, Khoirul Anas	Jakarta & Banda Aceh
LBH ANAK	Mariaty S.H.	Jakarta
SPMAA	Gus Hafidh	Banda Aceh
YKAI	Winarti Sukaesih	Banda Aceh
Plan Indonesia	MK Ali, Country Director	Jakarta
	Richard Sandison, Tsunami Programme Manager Staff members (Ida Safitri, M. Tofan, Paulan Aji)	Banda Aceh Banda Aceh
<b>Sri Lanka</b>		
National Child Protection Authority	Hiranthi Wijemanne, Chair Amila Gunawardena, Monitoring and Surveillance Officer Harendra de Silva, former chair	Colombo Colombo Colombo
Ministry of Social Welfare	Amaratunga, Secretary	Colombo
Ministry of Planning	Bawa, Director	Ampara,
Department of Probation and Child Care	Rohan Kumarnayaka, Probation Officer Chandrani Kodituwakku, Child Rights Protection Officer Sandamali, Child Rights Protection Officer	Hambantota Hambantota Hambantota
TAFREN	Rachel Perera, Director, Donor Coordination	Colombo
UNICEF	Harischandra Yakandawela, Assistant Officer, Adolescence and HIV/AIDS Harini Amarasuriya, Protection Division Nimalan, Child Protection Officer	Colombo Colombo Ampara
OCHA	Reena, Field Coordinator	Colombo
UNHCR	Zofia Burdan, Protection Officer	Hambantota
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World Vision	Graham Tardiff, Child Protection Program Officer	Phuket
Center for the Protection of Children's Rights	Sanphasit Khumpraphant, Director	Bangkok
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Raks Thai/CARE	Promboon Panitchpakdi, Executive Director Anchalee Phonklieng, Field Coordinator, Ms. Anchalee	Bangkok Kuraburi & Phang-Nga
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## Children's consultation

Country	State/Province/District	Village	Sex & age	Days	Number
<b>India</b>	Tamil Nadu	Nagapattinam	Girls 13–18	2	27
		Kovalam	Girls 13–18	2	14
		Vedaranium	Boys 13–18	2	24
		Venpurusham	Boys 13–18	2	16
		Venpurusham	Boys & Girls 8–12	1	17
		Sirkali	Boys & Girls 8–12	1	23
		Sirkali	Boys & Girls 8–12	1	23
<b>Indonesia</b>	Aceh Besar	Indra Patra	Boys & Girls 6–12	4 x pm	51
		Lamkruet	Boys & Girls 6–12	4 x pm	12
		Keude Meria	Boys & Girls 13–18	3	20
		Lampaya	Boys & Girls 13–18	3	12
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	Hambantota	Kudawella	Boys & Girls 8–12	3	14
		Kudawella	Boys & Girls 12–17	3	11
	Ampara	Mararadamuani	Boys & Girls 8–12	3	16
		Mararadamuani	Boys & Girls 12–17	3	10
<b>Thailand</b>	Phang-Nga	Bangmuang	Boys & Girls 7–12	1	12
		Namkhem	Boys & Girls 13–18 (out of school group)	1	9
	Phuket	Kalim	Boys & Girls 7–12	1	12
		Thachatchai	Boys & Girls 13–18	1	16
				<b>Total</b>	<b>339</b>

# Definitions of disaster-related terminologies

**Hazard:** A potentially damaging physical event, phenomenon or human activity that may cause loss of life or injury, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation.

**Vulnerability:** A set of conditions and processes resulting from physical, social, economic and environmental factors that increase the susceptibility and vulnerability of a community to the impact of hazards.

**Capacities:** Positive factors that increase the ability of people and the society they live in to cope effectively with hazards.

**Disaster:** A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society, causing widespread human, material economic or environmental losses that exceed the ability of the affected community/society to cope with using its own resources.

**Disaster risk reduction.** The systematic development and application, within the broad context of sustainable development, of policies, strategies and practices to minimise vulnerabilities and disaster risk throughout a society, to avoid hazards (prevention) or to limit (mitigation and preparedness) the adverse impact of hazards.

**From the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR 2004)**

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## **Plan and Disaster**

Plan is committed to assisting children in developing countries both in the promotion of their rights and addressing their needs. These rights and needs can be threatened in times of disaster, and in such circumstances, Plan responds in the most appropriate manner and in line with its skills and capacities.

Plan is committed to its Child Centred Community Development approach in all its responses to disasters. Human rights and child rights, child centredness, local knowledge and community coping mechanisms, child and community participation, child protection, relationship building, accountability and transparency are what guide Plan in its disaster response.

## Plan's background

Founded in 1937 to help children orphaned during the Spanish Civil War, Plan now works for and with children, families and communities in 45 countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America. Plan carries out advocacy, development education and fundraising in 15 countries in the industrialised world. Plan has no religious or political aims or affiliations.

Through direct grassroots work, Plan supports the efforts of children, communities and local organisations to make a reality of rights to education, health, a safe environment, clean water and sanitation, secure incomes and participation. Plan works to protect children at special risk – e.g. child labourers – and to ensure all children's rights are recognised – e.g. through major birth registration programmes. By linking people in “the North” and “the South”, Plan strives to build a worldwide community working to defend children's rights and improve their lives.

Plan's work for children is funded mainly (more than 75 per cent) by more than 1 million individual sponsors and supporters worldwide, through regular monthly or annual donations. Plan also receives generous support from the governments of Australia, Canada, France, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States, from multilateral bodies such as the European Union and from private foundations and companies.

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