

Risk Management during Natural Disasters and Inclusive Education

Save the children, Georgia Country Office

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South Caucasus is a disaster prone region, with earthquake as the main hazard which is reflected in regional hazard/probability maps. The Caucasus is one of the most seismically active regions in Alpine-Himalayan collision belt according to the Seismic Hazard Assessment (S. Balasanyan, T. Ashirov, T. Chelidze). Vulnerability to disaster is increasing in the region as urbanization and developments occupy more areas that are prone to the effects of significant earthquakes, as demonstrated in the last few years by the devastating earthquakes in Turkey (1976 and 1983), Armenia (1988), Iran (1990 and 1997), Georgia (1991), Turkey and Georgia (1992)".

Children with disabilities or other causes of institutionalization as well as very young children are at increased risk in the face of disasters: the analysis of Spitak earthquake (Armenia, 1988) revealed that children suffered more than adults because they were in school at the time of the quake. According to the Armenian National Mental Health Research Centre (1993) almost 2/3 of total deaths were children and adolescents.

Many factors contribute to the physical, psychological and educational vulnerability of children in disaster emergencies: children, especially those with physical and mental disability, are more vulnerable than others to severe physical and psychological impact. In post-emergency situation, very young and special needs children may experience severe trauma, become hyper agitated, aggressive and unable to function normally. Their teachers/caretakers may be especially challenged during and after emergencies due to the huge responsibility for ensuring safe evacuation and protection of children with little or no ability to help themselves (worldwide research sources, including Children With Disabilities in the Context of Disaster: A Social Vulnerability Perspective by Lori Peek & Laura M. Stough). At the same time, worldwide and in particular in the South Caucasus, they are often excluded from DRR interventions. As it was revealed during assessment in Armenia in inclusive schools the responsibility to alert and evacuate children with various disabilities is put on teachers and for children with mobility problems the evacuation is challenged by poor non-adapted infrastructure.

The lack of DRR for children with disabilities at the regional level was acknowledged during the Knowledge Management Workshop on Mainstreaming DRR in Education in Istanbul organized by UNICEF in February 2013. It was clear from the feedback of the audience, representing Disaster Preparedness ECHO (DIPECHO)-funded partners from 8 countries of Central Asia and Caucasus that apart from SC/DIPECHO initiative the issue of inclusive DRR was not reflected elsewhere.

Furthermore, analyses of the primary and secondary data of the recent Save the Children (SC) assessment exposed the following major needs and problems:

-Overall weak resilience of institutions: (a) the targeted institutions are found vulnerable to natural hazards, especially to earthquakes and fire; (b) 100% of educational, care and housing facilities assessed in Armenia, and 50% of educational and 100% of the assessed living facilities (dormitories) in Georgia do not meet evacuation/safety standards taking disabled children's need into account and lack necessary emergency equipment; (c) 70% of institutions assessed in

Armenia and 100% of institutions assessed in Georgia lack functional Disaster Management Committees and Plans; (d) no regular safety drills or simulations are conducted in any of the kindergartens assessed in Armenia, in inclusive schools of Armenia the drills are conducted annually, however there is no procedure in place to organize evacuation of children with special needs.

In Georgia, with the support of Emergency Management Department (EMD) fragmented simulation exercises are carried out in 4 of the Tbilisi special schools, but none of these establishments and 100% of those out of Tbilisi have regular safety drills or simulations. (e) there is a lack of age and ability appropriate DRR/CCA educational materials and methodologies; (f) Children do not participate in development of disaster preparedness plans (DPP)s and are passive recipient of guidance and information; (g) the staff in 100% of assessed institutions in both Armenia and Georgia do not have up-to-date DRR information and knowledge and hence lack capacity to protect children.

The capacity and awareness of service providers, communities, state institutions requires substantial improvement: (a) existing National/Regional/Local Management Disaster Plans do not consider children, especially those with disabilities; (b) in numerous communities in both Armenia and Georgia there is lack of awareness/special focus of key national DRR stakeholders to this target group; (c) in some communities there is a lack of a comprehensive system for post-disaster assistance (protection, education, health and nutrition, etc); (d) In Georgia DRR/CCA topic is not included in education curricula of primary grades and there is no preschool education legislation or a state policy regarding DRR subject. (e) children in target institutions have no access to the relevant DRR and CCA information.

Worldwide SC offers comprehensive approaches engaging various-level stakeholders to achieve lasting and positive change in children's lives. With this and our primary goal in mind to reduce risk and build resilience of children, SC's intervention strategy consists of the following 4 main components:

(1) Engaging children in meaningful DRR education: SC works directly with children, institutions and community structures to ensure that they can participate meaningfully in discussions and decisions affecting them. This action fosters further integration of DRR into operational system and educational curricula of education institutions contributing to increased resilience of children and caregivers.

(2) Building capacity of service providers: to ensure integration of children's right to protection in policies, SC supports institutional capacity building of state institutions and service providers. This means supporting the development of operational framework and making this a life document; building the capacity building of caregivers and decision-makers as a basis for institutionalization of DRR into day-to-day school operations.

(3) Partnering with Local and National Governments: it's a prerequisite for effective resilience building that local actors - both government and non-government - have the necessary skills and capacities to protect children and fulfill their rights. The action is implemented in close partnership with relevant ministries and local authorities and service providers involved in DMR in order to foster coordination mechanisms as part of the preparedness and response strategies.

(4) Advocating for inclusive DRR policies: a core part of our work is advocacy for national policies to reflect realities of children with and without disabilities. SC aims to ensure that outcomes of DRR project are reflected in national policies to guarantee wide coverage and replication in respective countries.

The risk of natural disasters is increasing rapidly all over the globe. Sound education - is one of the strongest leverages to mitigate risk of disasters; knowledge about what might happen, preparation of people how to act before during and after disasters might be the effective mechanism to prevent the risk and reduce damage and losses. Education institutions are the best designed to spread out DRR knowledge, especially compulsory education structures with the primary objective to prepare children for independent life. These institutions offers the unique opportunity to involve children, their family members and even communities in preparedness and management of DRR actions.

Education system of Georgia is strongly encouraging inclusive education principles on primary school level (National Curriculum of Georgia 2011-16). Term inclusive education is characterized to its bodies having organizational culture and services available to offer high quality education to children with wide range of disabilities (UNESCO, Salamanka Statement).

It is proved by the practice that there are extremely vulnerable groups towards natural disasters among population. Their vulnerability is triggered by social imparity (low income, poor education, age, gender, power, dependency on social services) and barriers such as lack of accessibility to services and infrastructure. Georgia joined The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in December 2013 and took over responsibility to take necessary measures to guarantee the safety and security of PWD during emergency situations and disasters.

Inclusive education is based on a rights-based approach. All members of society have the same rights as others. However for DRR this is crucial to create an inclusive environment on the one hand, and to strengthen the most vulnerable groups and communities on the other hand. It is important to break the stigma that PWD need only help and assistance. This is key to increase their capacity by transferring skills/knowledge, and enable PWD to participate and contribute to DRR actions, thus increasing the level of their involvement and participation in civil society.

Environment of Children with special needs is full with barriers, and disasters make them more vulnerable. Therefore it is necessary to well prepare them in advance how to operate in emergency situations, This is important to take into the account the individual experience of PWDs with all stakeholders; rescuers, school administration, regional authorities.

In Georgia, SC has a long history of protection programming, in particular, within USAID/Unicef-funded programs related to education and care of children with disabilities, therefore, SC seeks synergies with ongoing protection programs, through sharing of knowledge, tools and expertise from following success cases: (a) SC was an initiator of Inclusive Education Reform and supported government in developing new tools, procedures, guidelines, and training manuals for reform participants for effective inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools; (b) SC led Deaf Education Reform and implemented it with significant outcomes: the first Georgian Sign Language Grammar (GSL) Book was created; GSL training manuals for basic, intermediate, and advanced levels were developed and piloted; Textbooks for first and second grades in Math, Georgian Language, and GSL were created and piloted; Standards, modules, procedures, policies in deaf education were developed as a regulating framework for deaf education; (c) New Disability

Assessment Model - to evaluate how disability affects an individual's everyday life and what additional needs exist for better functioning and participation - was developed; (d) The first National Disability Database (software) has been created to collect and with disabilities in support of the State for better planning and service delivery.

SC Georgia country office prepared DRR Guide Book for teachers working with children with all kind of disabilities and different special needs. This book can be used for special classes as well. It guides teachers how to plan lessons and covers the following topics: climate change, earthquake, drought, landslide, flood, thunder, avalanche, wind. The Guidebook gives teachers flexibility to conduct lessons in accordance with individual needs and interests of a child. Strategies provided in the Guidebook can be adapted to mental, visual, physical and hearing disabilities. Moreover during teaching process teachers can apply for support to various consultants; occupational therapist, psychologist.

It will be up to teacher(s) to define sequence and frequency of the DRR topics, taking into account specifics of the region. The Guidebook is not limited by grade and age of the students , but it is strongly recommended to transfer this knowledge to primary grade children. Teachers shall integrate classes with existing subjects and repeat actions regularly. Process will be followed by evacuation drills.

This Guidebook was prepared in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science, Emergency Management Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and schools' administration. SC together with its partner organizations will keep on advocating with the Government of Georgia to integrated this Guidebook into the National Curriculum of Georgia.

Materials and methods tested during the DIPECHO III Action will become the assets of government institutions/duty bearers in both countries for further use/scaling up. SC will organize and/or participate in other organizations' end of project events for all stakeholders to share experiences and lessons learned about inclusive DRR education implementation. Finally, SC reports, inclusive DRR policies, examples of local inclusive DRR plans and teaching materials will be published and disseminated widely.