



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

A Study on the initiative of the school safety programme of Gujarat: A Literature review

Ms. Anjela Gamadiya

Research Scholar,

Anand Institute of Social Work,

Sardar Patel University,

Vallabh Vidyanagar, Anand, Gujarat, India

Introduction

The school disaster management plan aims to identify and manage hazards in the school, prepare and respond to emergencies in school, and to mitigate the effect of disasters on the school. Disaster management planning begins with awareness on the part of teachers and students. The awareness raising exercise consists of a guided dialogue led by the teacher.

Teachers will then develop a disaster management plan. Identifying the vulnerabilities of the school will involve revisiting the history of disasters that have affected the school. Establishment of an annual calendar to take account of cyclical hazards that must be dealt with on an ongoing basis. Mapping the main physical features around the school will also support the disaster management planning process. The final planning document includes a resource matrix, details of coping capacity, and list of safe places and evacuation plans. The School Disaster Management Plan is to be updated and evaluated at a fixed time each year.

GUJARAT SCHOOL SAFETY PROGRAMME:-

With the view of building capacities for disaster resilience, Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority conducts various programs at institutional levels. Gujarat School Safety Week is one such initiative which aims at strengthening of one of the most vulnerable groups for disasters, that is, Children. Gujarat is geographically prone to hazards like earthquake, cyclones, floods, extreme temperatures, etc. The children of age group 4-15 years spend sufficient time in schools. Considering the vulnerability of institutions like schools for various hazards, there is a need of strengthening the capabilities by awareness generation, sensitization, trainings and Mock drills.

'Disasters', are defined as "a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources"¹. Due to a range of factors, including age, physical ability, gender, health conditions and, dependency on care givers, many children are extremely vulnerable in the event of a disaster. Such events cause a serious disruption in their healthy growth and development as well as overall well-being. Experiences of fear, violence, separation from parents and caregivers, exploitation and abuse, are some of the key risks that children face. Moreover, the loss of livelihood of their families can lead to homelessness and extreme poverty.

As with other infrastructure, schools are also exposed to disaster risk. Disasters have not only challenged the government and other stakeholders in providing access to education but also endangered the lives of children and those engaged in the pursuit of education.

Understanding School Safety

'School Safety' has been defined as the creation of safe environments for children starting from their homes to their schools and back. This includes safety from large-scale 'natural' hazards of geological/climatic origin, human-made risks, pandemics, violence as well as more frequent and smaller-scale fires, transportation and other related emergencies, and environmental threats that can adversely affect the lives of children. The concept has evolved over the last couple of decades as the threat to the physical well being of children has become more visible both globally and in the country.

Most school safety programs are presently being driven by social scientists and non-government organizations (NGOs). There are numerous projects and activities conducted by such agencies for risk reduction. Such activities go a long way in sensitizing teachers and students. However, the need for structural strengthening of school buildings for seismic resistance does not appear to be top priority with NGOs and social scientists. This may be possibly due to lack of appreciation of the importance of safe structures or reluctance to deal with issues that are outside their domain area. The state is supportive of such non-structural initiatives as they demand much smaller investment and yield high returns in terms of outreach and visibility. In the interim, school buildings continue to collapse in earthquakes.

National Policy on Children (2013): The National Policy for Children reaffirms the Government's commitment to the realization of rights of all children in the country. It recognizes that "every person below the age of eighteen years as a child and that childhood is an integral part of life with a value of own, and long term, sustainable, multi-sectoral, integrated, and inclusive approach is necessary for the harmonious development and protection of our children". The Policy has identified survival, health, nutrition, education, development, protection (including from emergencies/disasters) and participation as the undeniable rights of every child, and has also declared these as key priority areas.

National Disaster Management Act (2005): The National Disaster Management Act 2005 lays down the institutional, legal, financial and coordination mechanisms for Disaster Management (DM) at the national, state, district and local levels. Through the National Institute of Disaster Management, the Act envisages promotion of safety awareness among stakeholders including teachers and students.

National Policy on Disaster Management (NPDM), 2009: The National Policy on Disaster Management 2009 highlights the need for structural as well as non- structural safety in schools and educational institutions. In the chapter on Techno-legal Regime, in section 6.4.1, the Policy identifies school buildings as a national priority and enables provision for designing the school buildings/hostels with earthquake resilient features and equips them with appropriate fire safety measures. In the chapter on capacity development under section 10.2.2, the policy also emphasizes upon disaster management training in all educational institutions including schools. Section 10.5.1 makes a reference to the role of National Cadet Corps (NCC) and scouts and guides in schools and colleges for disaster management related work. Section 10.6.1 of NPDM discusses the introduction of subject of disaster management in the curriculum through the Central and State Boards of Secondary Education. National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968, Revised in 1992, the National Policy on Education calls for a "child-centred approach" in primary education, but does not contain a specific reference to school safety or disaster risk issues of children.

Vision The National School Safety Policy Guidelines apply to all schools in the country – whether government, aided or private, irrespective of their location in rural or urban areas. They apply to all stakeholders involved in delivery of education to children in India. The Guidelines stand for a vision of India where all children and their teachers, and other stakeholders in the school community are safe from any kind of preventable risks due to natural hazards that may threaten their well-being during the pursuit of education. The guidelines also actively promote that educational continuity is maintained / resumed even in the immediate aftermath of a disaster so that children are physically, mentally and emotionally secure within their schools. Right to Education is a fundamental right enshrined in the Constitution of India. In order to facilitate access of all children in the country with respect to the Right to Education, it is important to ensure that children remain safe as they access and enjoy their Right to Education.

Key Challenges for Safe Schools

Efforts on school safety at the National and State levels are at an evolving stage. Key challenges in implementation of school safety measures include:

- **Disconnect between institutions:** There is a visible disconnect between the ‘non-emergency’ schemes (Pertaining to Education) such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Disaster response / preparedness. Education programmes are executed in most states with little synergy or policy linkages with the SDMA / DDMA.
- **Limited convergence between schemes:** Resources required for effective implementation of a govt. scheme cannot be leveraged in the absence of a mechanism for collaborative working with other budget holders. For instance, land development within the school campus may be funded through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). However, close coordination between micro planning activity for

MGNREGA and School Development Plan preparation would be necessary for convergence. Limited understanding of school safety concept: It is evident that the existing education machinery in the country is keen to promote safe learning environment for children and teachers but actual implementation of programmes on ground points to limited understanding of the concept of safety. At best, new school designs incorporate earthquake safety features in many areas; however floods, cyclones, landslides have been given little attention in design and costing of schools. In addition non-structural elements are often not understood as threats to safety. At the level of teachers and students, safety issues are discussed and pursued as one off activities. School timetable and curriculum need suitable modifications to make safety understanding a routine activity.

The National School Safety Policy Guidelines emphasize on the need for active mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction in all the school education initiatives in the country. This would require a collaborative approach between the state education departments and the state disaster management machinery. Collaboration would be necessary especially for capacity development activities such as sensitization of officials, public awareness on disasters, training of students and teachers; pre-positioning equipments for emergency response, creation of educational material on disasters and, monitoring of risk.

Approach to Implementation

Fundamental principles that form the core approach of these guidelines are given below:

1 All hazard approach

School Safety efforts need to take cognizance of all kinds of hazards that may affect the wellbeing of children. These may include natural hazards such as floods and earthquakes as well as manmade hazards. Hazards include structural and non- structural factors. Structural factors include dilapidated buildings, poorly designed structures, faulty construction, poorly maintained infrastructure, loose building elements, etc. while non structural factors include loosely placed heavy objects such as almirahs, infestation of the campus by snakes and any other pests, broken or no boundary walls, uneven flooring, blocked evacuation routes, poorly designed and placed furniture that may cause accidents and injury, inadequate sanitation facilities etc. Safety of children, their teachers and parents needs to be approached holistically to include visible as well as invisible risks that may be sudden on-set or have built-up slowly over a period of time.

2 Strengthening existing policy

Provisions to make schools safer there has been substantial investment by the Government in creating infrastructure for the education sector. There is need to ensure that all the existing and new infrastructure is resilient to locally relevant hazards through the design and construction processes. Unsafe structures can increase the vulnerability of children who are the primary target group of such efforts. Thus it is important to ensure that all development actions taken even in non-emergency times are designed with a view to ensuring their performance during emergencies. It is imperative that the existing institutions at the national and state level are strengthened and capacitated to take responsibility of school safety planning and action. Such a step will not only

ensure that development policies and programmes are strengthened but also provide the necessary succour to safety actions.

3 School Safety as an indicator of quality for planning, execution and monitoring

School Safety is not a onetime effort but a continuous process. Safety principles need to be incorporated in the day to day functioning of the educational institutions in the country, cutting across the traditional stages of the disaster cycle: preparedness, response and recovery. Thus institutions involved in providing education in the country need to evolve a methodology and an approach of their own that looks at safety as a continuously monitored indicator of quality.

4 Objectives of the Policy Guidelines

The primary objective of the National School Safety Policy Guidelines is to ensure the creation of safe learning environment for children. The Policy Guidelines also seek to highlight specific actions towards school safety that can be undertaken by different stakeholders within the existing framework for delivery of education.

❖ Strengthening Institutional Commitment to Safe Learning Environment for Children

The first and foremost step in promoting safety of learning spaces is to sensitize and strengthen official structures and mechanisms responsible for safety at the State, District and Local levels.

Institutional strengthening at the State and District Level The institutional and regulatory framework as laid down in the various National Acts provides for realizing the Right to Education as well as Disaster Management in the country. For ensuring that students and their teachers remain safe in pursuit of education, it is necessary that the two institutional frameworks act in convergence with each other, through the phases of preparedness, response and recovery. The Right to Education Act (RTE) guarantees free and compulsory education to all the children in the country till the age of 14 based on minimum norms and standards that are mandatory for any school in the country to be “established, or recognized”. It recognizes the need for “all weather buildings” and limitations posed by difficulty of terrain, risk of landslides, floods, lack of roads and in general, danger for young children in approach etc.

The RTE Act thus serves as a strong base for promoting school safety. The framework for implementation of RTE-SSA has a strong focus on Disaster Management The National Disaster Management Act, 2005 mandates the State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMA) to provide guidelines for different departments to integrate disaster prevention and mitigation measures in their development plans and provide necessary technical assistance thereof. The SDMA needs to work closely with the State Education Department to support the school safety efforts at the state level.

There is a need to co-opt senior officials of the Department of Education at the State and the District level as part of the State and District Disaster Management Authorities for promotion of safe schools. In addition, a School Safety Advisory Committee may be formed to advise the education department on the subject. This will ensure that school safety can be practically promoted through convergent action by the SDMA / DDMA and the education machinery at the state and district level. As a direct consequence of this institutional dovetailing /

convergence, the state and district disaster management plans will include a focus on educational infrastructure and supportive action thereof, such as status of education, infrastructure from a risk resilience perspective, capacity building of different stakeholders on safety aspects, and large scale awareness on disasters among students and the community at large. In parallel, the education machinery also needs to strengthen their efforts with respect to promoting school safety for government, aided as well as private schools.

The District Education Officer must ensure that 'Recognition Certificate' under sub-rule (4) 15 of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2010 is issued only to those schools that comply with safety norms laid out in the Building Codes. This compliance needs to be monitored on a regular basis. In addition, a mechanism needs to be evolved by the District Education Officer and designated Regulatory Authorities for monitoring safety parameters in all schools on a regular basis. Any existing monitoring formats being used by the Authorities shall essentially include parameters on school safety as well.

References:-

- <http://www.unisdr.org/eng/library/lib-terminologyeng%20home.htm> on 13 October 2013.
- Sindhi, S. A. (2013). Creating safe school environment: Role of school principals. *Tibet Journal*, 38(1-2), 77-89. International Research Institute of Disaster Science (2015) "The Sendai Declaration, adopted at international forum for promoting education on disaster resilience: Development of a resilient community and improving disaster education and regional disaster preparedness", held on March 14, 2015 at Tohoku University, Sendai City, Japan. (http://drredu-collabo.sakura.ne.jp/cms/wp-content/uploads/20151101-3_en.pdf)
- European Commission. (2002). Adapting to change in work and society: a new Community strategy on health and safety at work 2002–06, COM (2002) 118 Final, p. 9. Hundeloh, H. and Hess, B. (2007). Promoting safety: A component in health promotion in schools. Munich: Bundesverband der Unfallkassen
- Florida Department of Education (2016) "School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting (SESIR) System," Appendix P: Definitions for Incident Reporting. Retrieved 29 March 2016 from <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/safe-healthy-schools/safe-schools/sesir-discipline-data/disciplineincident-data/sesir-discipline-data-collection-syste.stml>.
- Freeman, J. (February 2015) "North Penn School District Gears-Up To Make Schools Safer." The Reporter. <http://www.thereporteronline.com/social-affairs/20150216/north-penn-school-districtgears-up-to-make-schools-safer>.
- Brunner, J. M., and Lewis, D. K. (2008) Safe & Secure Schools: 27 Strategies for Prevention and Intervention. Corwin Press.
- M. Benadusi Pedagogies of the unknown: unpacking 'culture' in disaster risk reduction education J. Contingencies Crisis Manag., 22 (3) (2014) J. Victoria, B. Towers, M. Petal School emergency drills. Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Education Sector (GADRRRES) child-centred risk reduction research into action brief series.
- Bhutan Ministry of Education Teachers Handbook for Disaster Risk Reduction towards Safer Schools. Document Submitted as Part of the CSS Baseline Survey.

- Save the Children Limiting and planning for schools as temporary evacuation centres in emergencies Retrieved from <https://www.preventionweb.net/publications/view/55716> (2017).
- IFC Disaster and Emergency Preparedness: Guidance for Schools World Bank, Washington, D.C (2010) Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/17669>

