

# Child-centered disaster risk management in Sichuan, P.R. China

## Case Study

April 2015

**Sichuan Province, China** – China suffered 205 earthquakes measuring from 6.5 to 8 on the Richter scale in recent years (1964–2013) and more will likely occur in the future according to the China Earthquake Administration (CEA). Sichuan Province, specifically Southern Sichuan, located in the southwest region of the country is particularly prone to geological hazards due to rapid urbanization and overpopulation. The worst of these earthquakes occurred in 2008, when the Wenchuan earthquake measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale caused over 90,000 dead and missing people. Other major hazards that threaten Sichuan are landslides, fires and floods, which affect the livelihoods of the inhabitants within this region, especially those in rural areas.

Many of the rural parts of Southern Sichuan are home to various minority groups. The Yi group, who can also be found in other provinces of China, is the most prominent minority group in Sichuan and commonly live in rural areas. Rural residents living in hazard-prone mountain regions are susceptible to disasters and there are 161,872,000 children residing in rural areas.

To help protect these children, Save the Children China with support from Swiss Re launched the program *Disaster Risk Reduction: From Recovery to Resilience – Implementing Child-Centered Disaster Risk Reduction in Sichuan, China* on 1 July 2012 to deliver long-term improvements on children's resilience and their communities' capacity to reduce the impacts of disasters in Yanyuan County, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Southern Sichuan.

As part of this program, ADPC was invited to provide technical support in developing a three-day training course cum exercise by Save the Children China on child-centered disaster risk management. The objective of the training was to equip local government officials, non-



A school teacher, who is also a course participant, explains the group assignment during the course exercise in Xigou Village, Yanyuan County, Sichuan Province, China.



governmental organizations (NGOs), schools, and local community members with community-based disaster risk management skills and to consider children's specific needs and include them into the process, which is a new concept in the region.

"Hundreds of thousands of children are affected by disasters in China every year, and there are great needs for child-centered disaster risk reduction here, especially in poor and remote areas which are more vulnerable to disasters. That's why we initiated this child-centered disaster risk reduction program in Liangshan. ADPC is an important partner for us and has provided very good technical support in this program, without which the program couldn't have been this successful," said Ms. Fan Xiaowen, Emergency and Disaster Risk Reduction Lead, Save the Children China Programme, based in Chengdu.

China continues to focus more on preparation strategies for the post disaster process. The country is efficient at response, relief and reconstruction, but when this efficiency is utilized the disaster damage has already been made. The child-centered disaster risk reduction program focuses on reducing risks and building resilience in schools and communities before a disaster happens and with a child-centered perspective. Leading up to the course, various steps were taken to ensure implementation would be effective and these new concepts will begin to be adopted. The first step was to raise awareness within Yanyuan County to motivate them to participate in community-based disaster risk management.

### **Strategy and implementation**

On 22 April 2013 Save the Children China held a Disaster Management Workshop in Xichang City for the relevant program stakeholders. These stakeholders include local government officials at the prefecture, county and township levels, leaders of relevant villages as well as one of the leaders and teacher representatives of the Boda Township Center School. The Yanyuan County Bureau of Civil Affairs and Yanyuan County Bureau of Education are the key program partners with Save the Children China in the program.

Dr. Ling Ling Jiang, ADPC's Senior Program Manager (China Focal Point), a senior official from the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and a professor from Beijing Normal University gave presentations during the workshop to help build interest and understanding. The presentations were successful as stakeholders became more interested in disaster risk reduction work. As motivation levels began to increase, the next phase could begin.



*Photo by: ADPC*

*A local NGO member and course participant works with children during the course exercise in Xigou Village, Yanyuan County, Sichuan Province, China.*

Immediately after the workshop, a needs assessment for designing an appropriate training course was conducted in three target villages and one school in the Boda township by a team of Save the Children staff and selected members of the Ministry of Civil Affairs led by Dr. Ling Ling Jiang. During these assessments the team interviewed the village leaders and residents, Boda township government officials, the teachers and students of Boda School, and other relevant people in the area to identify what they did before, during and after disasters in order to see what was required for this project.

After the data collection the training curriculum for the three-day training course cum exercise was created at ADPC's headquarters in Bangkok from April to October 2013. The course took place from 31 October to 2 November 2013 in Yanyuan County and included local government officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), schools, and local community members. Two strategic points for effective implementation were designed to make the training course a success.

The first strategy ensured that children would be the focus of the training through building the capacity of parents, community leaders, teachers and government officials in the community. ADPC and Save the Children China understood that adults had never been trained on disaster risk management in these communities. Therefore, it would be a better use of funding, which was already limited, to train them as the key beneficiaries of the course so they could later help and train the children. By building the capacity of key actors within the government, county and the community levels with children in mind, the project implementation area would become more resilient and actions can be taken to ensure children are included in disaster risk management efforts.

The second strategy ensured that the field exercise conducted in one of the selected villages (Xigou Village) would be held on a Saturday to increase the attendance of children and parents. Since there are less commitments on the weekend compared to during the week, there is a greater chance for children and parents to attend the exercise. Overall, the exercise and participation strategy was a success with 29 children and 41 parents in attendance in addition to the 30 participants who attended the training course.

Participants that were present in the course used the Participatory Risk Assessment (PRA) tools and relevant disaster risk management approaches they learned to identify hazards, vulnerabilities and capacity in the community.

Children and parents improved their understanding by working closely with other participants and team leaders to identify risks, such as examining and drawing hazard maps. This hands-on experience was extremely attractive to participants, especially the children and their parents. The identified risks were used to create an action plan for the community that described what risks needed to be solved and how those risks can be solved in the future.

### **Program benefits**

The needs assessment, capacity building and awareness raising throughout the workshop and training course cum exercise greatly boosted the motivation of people within the project area to participate in disaster risk management. Before the course, disaster risk management was an unknown concept. Government officials and local people became interested in the course when they learned that the effects of a disaster can be mitigated to reduce its impacts.

“Before this course I never knew the impacts of a disaster risk could be reduced, but after the course I knew we could do something about them,” said Ms. Jiang Defang, course participant and officer in the Training Section of Liangshan Prefecture of Emergency Rescue Center.

The project areas had plans that articulated what to do during and after a disaster, but this is an example of preparation plans that focus on response and relief.

“Before the course, regarding a disaster, I only knew that whenever a disaster occurs different departments will take up their responsibility to respond,” said Ms. Jiang Defang.

The course was particularly important because key institutions throughout the community including relevant government agencies, schools and village leadership began spreading disaster risk management concepts, a first step in changing the mindset of the community regarding disasters.

After the course has finished there is evidence of people becoming more attentive to disaster risk management concepts and sharing them throughout the community. Teachers who took the course talk about disaster risk management to their students, local government officials are aware of what can be done to create a more resilient community, and one participant, Dr. Zhong Ping, combined part of the course material with Save the Children’s relevant disaster risk reduction training materials to work with other organizations in Xichang and elsewhere. She reported building the capacity of around 100 people.

Participants realize the importance of disaster risk management and have actively participated in raising awareness within their community and elsewhere. The training course has created consistent capacity building for this area that has lasted far longer than the initial three days of the program. Even the implementing agency learned to think differently about how to strategically approach a new region. This was the first time a program like this was launched in these areas, and many valuable lessons were learned that can be applied to future projects.



*Village community members observed the course exercise while working, and later participated in Xigou Village, Yanyuan County, Sichuan Province, China.*

### **Lessons learned**

Disaster risk management leadership is crucial in any village or community. When village focal points were being established the implementation team discovered that the village leaders in Yanyuan County often stay in the township or county, not the village. Their absence made it difficult to establish a village leadership to motivate and coordinate disaster preparation efforts. This issue is even more relevant since some villages are spread across a 50 kilometer area, making it extremely difficult to lead preparation efforts without a reliable focal point. Organizational problems such as these need to be addressed through practical and innovative ways during the project design and implementation.

Another challenge to promote disaster risk reduction in rural and underdeveloped areas is that the communities do not have enough money to continually invest disaster risk reduction efforts. During this project, the financial instability of some villages affected implementation efforts. Some of the rural areas of the Boda Township are very poor, with a yearly family cash income of only 1,200 RMB (roughly USD200), earned mainly from corn farming. The township government’s finances are also low with an annual budget of 50,000 RMB (about USD8,000) to support their work in six villages, one school, and other responsibilities including the salaries of government workers. Even if people in this area readily adopt disaster risk mitigation practices, the local government has insufficient funding to support the activities. Because of these financial hardships, when the needs assessments were conducted in rural villages some of the leaders felt it would only cause trouble and were reluctant to participate.

Implementing disaster risk management programs in poor areas is a challenge because it is hard to build the local peoples’ motivation to participate in disaster risk management activities. In financially unstable areas similar to these villages, livelihood development should be intertwined with disaster risk management programs to encourage participation and ensure the program will be successful.

During this project, additional funding could have been used to combine livelihood development programs with disaster risk management efforts within the poor areas of the Boda Township. This combination would have increased motivation to participate in disaster risk management activities similar to

providing hardware items to the community. Based on Save the Children's practice in this project, providing hardware items like fire extinguishers and training on their appropriate utilization has been accepted more readily than simply providing oral information. After the community received physical items participants' interest in the training rose and they were more willing to engage.

Local government officials were key actors in building motivation in both rich and poor areas that were reluctant to participate. In China, if the local government does not support a project, neither will the people in the project area. The government officials' new focus on disaster risk reduction boosted the participants' motivation to engage in disaster risk management activities.

### **The importance of government at different levels, particularly local government**

Government, particularly local government, involvement is important when implementing disaster risk management programs in China. Government assistance was invaluable leading up to the disaster risk management program implementation and training because their involvement boosted the local participants' motivation to participate in community-based disaster risk management. Even after the training, the government officials used their leadership roles to promote disaster preparedness efforts in their respective communities. This leadership role was fostered by the support provided by participating international organizations.

It's important for international organizations working in China to have a strong understanding of China's culture, government structure, and existing disaster management systems and concepts in practice both internationally and within China. This understanding is necessary because of how closely they will be required to work with the government at different levels, particularly local government officials, and community members whose collaboration is crucial for successful implementation.

When working in China, extensive coordination must be done to research the implementation area and a strong partnership between the participating international organizations, local NGOs and government should be formed long before the implementation begins. This project would not have been a success if a bond with the local governments had not been formed beforehand. They helped to get the program off the ground and the motivation they produced still exists within the implementation area.

### **Future implementation strategies**

ADPC's work continues in the program through Save the Children China's invitation to work on a field practitioner's handbook temporarily titled *Child-Centered Disaster Risk Management – An integration of community-based disaster risk management and child-centered approaches* based on the training course in Sichuan that will be released in 2015, which will be published in Mandarin in Beijing.

The program itself is scheduled to continue until May 2015, and many people are eager for more training. The program sparked an initial desire to participate in disaster risk management, which still exists, but without additional funding the efforts will begin to lose traction.

"Even though we work in the training sector we still lack the necessary skills, knowledge and concept to train other people, so we are eager to get more capacity building programs, particularly training. We are willing to train schools and other relevant people. Before, we trained just for disaster response and rescue. We didn't have knowledge on disaster risk management," said Ms. Zhao Yan, officer in the Training Section of Liangshan Prefecture of Emergency Rescue Center.

In the future, similar programs need to have the funding to identify challenges that may hinder implementation efforts before the program begins and strategize techniques to solve these problems. These challenges, if identified early enough, can be mitigated by allocating the appropriate funding to address them. Without the necessary resources these difficulties will remain unaddressed.

Furthermore, it must be understood that motivation is a key implementation factor. As this study shows there is a correlation between motivation and successful implementation. One strategy to further boost motivation is by involving key stakeholders, including the local community, government, and school representatives, in the project proposal discussions. This way, beneficiaries have a say in the project itself, becoming more active and boosting their motivation to participate because they are closely involved in the project.

After the success of this program, Save the Children China and ADPC plan to continue to cooperate in promoting community-based and child-centered disaster risk reduction in China. Future programs should have the appropriate financial capacity to address similar challenges as the ones found in this study and to overcome other obstacles during the next phase of the project to ensure a more successful implementation.



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