

Protecting Children through Community Capacity Building and Risk Reduction

Impact Story



Photo by: Dr. Ling Ling Jiang, ADPC's Senior Program Manager

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.

Sichuan, China – China has suffered 151 earthquakes measuring from 6.5 to 7 on the Richter scale between 1964 and 2013. The China Earthquake Administration suggests that more are likely to occur in the future. Sichuan province, located in the southwest region of the country, is particularly prone to geological hazards due to rapid urbanization and overpopulation.

In 2008, the devastating Wenchuan Earthquake caused over 90,000 casualties and missing people. It measured 7.9 on the Richter scale and was the worst seismic event recorded in decades. Unfortunately, earthquakes are not the only hazard that affects Sichuan Province. Dangers such as landslides, fires and floods put those in the area at risk, especially those living in the hazard prone mountain regions. The 161,872,000 children living in rural areas are also vulnerable to these threats.

Save the Children China with support from Swiss Re launched the program entitled Disaster Risk Reduction: from Recovery to Resilience – Implementing Child-centered Disaster Risk Reduction in Sichuan, China in 2012. The program aimed to deliver long-term improvements on children's resilience and

their communities' capacity to reduce the impacts of disasters in Yanyuan County, southern Sichuan.

Asian Disaster Preparedness Center was invited to provide technical support in running a three-day training course on child-centered disaster risk management. The objective of the training was to equip key individuals from local government, NGOs, local community and schools with community-based disaster risk management skills. The program introduced a new concept to the region by focusing on reducing risks and building resilience with a child-centered perspective.

“Hundreds of thousands of children are affected by disasters in China every year, and there are great needs for child-centered disaster risk reduction – 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,” says Ms. Fan Xiaowen, emergency and disaster risk reduction Lead of Save the Children China Program



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

Training to keep children safe

Based on a comprehensive needs assessment process, ADPC and Save the Children China devised a strategy to safeguard children against the impact of disasters by training those responsible for them. Parents, community leaders, teachers, and government officials received training on disaster risk management, including the identification of hazards and vulnerabilities posing their own communities at risk. Information collected during the risk assessments was used to create customized action plans for the communities to address future hazards – especially with the safety of children in mind.

There is strong evidence suggesting that the needs assessment, capacity building and awareness raising throughout the program greatly boosted community members' motivation to participate in disaster risk management. The training events were pivotal in urging relevant government agencies, schools and villages to actively integrate the whole community into disaster risk management activities – an important step in changing the community's mindset regarding disasters.

"Before this course I never knew the impacts of a disaster could be reduced, but after the course I knew we could do something to reduce them," said Ms. Jiang Defang, course participant and officer in the training section of Liangshan Prefecture of Emergency Rescue Center.

In Xigou Village, a training workshop on disaster risk management was scheduled on a Saturday, so even children could participate.

Retaining successful impact in future planning

The program sparked an interest in disaster risk management activities that still resonates in the communities.

"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.

The program showed that an existing interest in disaster risk management yields the best results during program implementation. A key to boosting motivation is to involve key stakeholders, including the local community, government, and school representatives in the project proposal discussions. This way, the process becomes more interactive with those it is trying to help and empowers the community as a whole. This interaction boosts the motivation for people to help themselves, resulting in heightened interest and willingness to participate.

Save the Children China and ADPC plan to continue to promote community-based and child-centered disaster risk reduction in China.

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