

# Integration of DRR-Climate Change in Operationalisation of National Plan of Action for Children 2016



## NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR CHILDREN (NPAC): A COMMENTARY

India adopted its third National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC) in January 2017, pledging improvements in children's security, well-being and status for a five-year period. Drafted over nearly two years, it promises to apply commitments set out in the 2013 National Policy for Children. The NPAC envisages and calls for the states and union territories to adopt state action plans, on the basis of the national mandate.

NGOs were not invited in the formulation of the NPAC, and there was no official drafting committee or any real inter-ministerial process to develop it in a participatory manner. This was a departure from the more consultative and interactive process followed

for the 2005/2010 NPAC, and the earlier 1979 plan, inviting and engaging central ministries, subject experts and a range of NGOs.

All the same, some NGOs generated civil society discussion on priorities and concerns for national attention, and kept drafting and sending recommendations and suggestions to the focal-point Ministry of Women and Child Development.<sup>1</sup> This uninvited flow of suggested inputs to the Plan was luckily taken into consideration by the WCD Ministry official coordinating the plan formulation, and the Plan does acknowledge many risks and vulnerabilities and

<sup>1</sup> This effort was initiated and coordinated by the India Alliance for Child Rights, from mid-2015 to late 2016.

their causes, and does make several action commitments of both preventive and responsive action. The Ministry reportedly consulted the NDMA in the later stages of drafting the plan.

The NGO recommendations highlighted the importance of addressing both the vagaries of nature and the effects of civil disturbances and development faults, as well as the insecurities and displacement caused by loss of livelihood security when land and land use are lost to development projects. They called for vulnerability assessment across sectors affecting children, and proposed anticipatory and preventive measures for children's safety and for a better ranking to their needs in all development and protection planning and action.

Notable in the NGOs' list of priorities were: displacement, migration, impact of natural and civil hazards and loss of occupations – all causing disruptions of normal life and security. Trafficking and the profiteering from the buying and selling of children figured in the listing of concerns. As in advocacy of previous years, NGOs called for greater attention to prevention of neglect and harmful practices, and drew special attention to the importance of protecting children's rights across the age-span of childhood.

The NPAC has scored a 'first' by listing the risks and threats posed by both natural hazards and man-made and civil disturbances of normalcy and peace. In doing so, it has recognised the importance of risk awareness, and the existence of these risks.

This is the 'plus' aspect of the NPAC. Unfortunately, there is also a question mark, and this is the prospect of implementation and necessary investment. The NPAC has not been activated on the ground. The key coordinating mechanism has not been set up.

This is an inter-ministerial group, assigned to work with the nodal ministry, to oversee and coordinate NPAC execution. Without it, the plan stays on the 'to be done' good intentions list. States are supposed to set up similar inter-departmental groups for the plans of action (SPACs). But SPACs have not been made and adopted by state governments, except for West Bengal. And at central level, there is no fund allocation for all the stated objectives to be pursued. Business as usual cannot change the real every-day situation and condition of children.

In welcoming the risk awareness reflected in the NPAC, one must therefore also record concern at the failure to date to get the Plan moving in practice. Nearly a year

has gone by. The Plan document is not in the hands of our 713 district administrators and 'zila parishads.' Only about 400 copies have been printed. Probably state government chief secretaries have received a copy each.

*Every district is supposed to have a district development plan, and to be operating it. How many do? And does every town and city have a local area plan? Without state plans being yet in place, can these smaller-area plans be made, using the NPAC template in local reality frames? The National Disaster Management Plan has state, district and local area manifestations of the NDMA – at least envisaged on paper. They need to be there, and they need to be linked with decentralised action plans for children.*

Time is passing. There is 'life-guarding' work to be done, all over the country. Two days before our next Republic Day, we will mark a year of inaction for children.

Meanwhile, risks are very real. Climate change is affecting India. Many development decisions and civil disturbances are damaging the stability and security of large numbers of people. Rural areas and farmlands, plains and hillsides have suffered floods, landslides, droughts, fires, the perishing of abandoned or trapped livestock, the destruction of forests, many by human greed, the poisoning of water sources, the contamination of rivers, the collapse of buildings and a rising number of earthquakes. Cities have been badly hit, some of them repeatedly. Some calamities hit suddenly; others are creeping tragedies.

Children are very much at risk. Official attention to these factors remains at best responsive and palliative, in the form of 'relief.' What is needed is foresight, detection and assessment of bad times ahead, and an intelligent recognition of danger – and timely measures to either contain or tackle the risks. This is anticipatory governance. It prevents whatever harm is preventable. It is what children in hazardous situations and uncertain times need and deserve.

Disaster management agencies know what to do when natural hazards turn into actual dangerous events and conditions. But they are most often called to provide rescue and relief, and first restoration of basic life-saving and life-supporting conditions. The local area government and administrative managers and providers should have the same skills and capabilities, and be capable of sensing danger, and taking timely action to contain and prevent harm; they seldom do. Is it even in their training to know about risk awareness, risk analysis, risk assessment, and risk prevention and reduction when



dangers loom and disasters strike? Do they find in their regular duty list to carry out any vulnerability mapping? The IAS training curriculum reportedly has no paper on human rights, let alone on forecasting risks to assurance of those entitlements.

Are such provisions there in the NPAC? Many of them are. The importance of their inclusion is clear. But their value for today's children depends on their application to actual governance on the ground.

After years of miserly budget allocations, the NPAC also deserves a fair share of fiscal resources, well-trained and well-equipped man-power, and first call on needed material provisions. National and state planners have had a tendency to regard children as a burdensome, dependent consumer group, demanding care and devouring scarce resources. The Government periodically refers to them as a 'national asset,' but seems actually to consider them un-productive, and a liability. It should not be only on paper and in empty words that we accord them their due as our nation's greatest human resource.

When natural hazards and man-made development ideas turn into harmful destructive events, or when civil strife halts and hurts normal every-day existence, it is necessary for India to examine whether – and how well – the main settings of life are addressed in any plan. These are the urban, rural, tribal, coastal, hill area, island, and home and institutional settings. And the shifting locational setting of migrants and people on the move, and people on the pavements. Risk lurks in each one of these. Does the NPAC address them all? It does not. This is for state plans and local area plans to do, and for focus-area plans to target. The urban, tribal, migratory scenarios are not as well-addressed as they should be; the institutional setting is largely missed.

**It is interesting that the Plan makes only one clear mention of “communal or sectarian violence and civil unrest.”** This is in a sub-section listing 'State responsibilities.' Elsewhere, through the document, 'man-made' problems and disasters are mentioned many times, but they all seem to be other than socio-cultural. In the many references to situations of insecurity or uncertainty, only 'natural or man-made' disasters are cited as the setting. Draft recommendations sent by NGOs will have to be checked to see if they contained points on civil tensions or socio-cultural causes – which were not taken into the Plan. It has to be admitted that the NGO recommendations could have failed to highlight urban or city settler needs and rights. A single mention of political divides is made in a sub-point in the Plan's action matrix,

in the entry on community-based mechanisms to address all forms of violence against children. This is a reference to '*Left-wing extremist activities*.'<sup>2</sup>

## NOTE ON THE NPAC TEXT:

The NPAC document opens with an assurance of commitment to children's rights and entitlements, and an acknowledgement of deficits in development and in the provision of basic services and protections to all children. It cites the Constitution of India, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Sustainable Development Goals. It states commitment to respect and realise the rights of children in the country. It positions the rights and obligations under the headings of survival and health, education and development, protection, and participation, echoing the 2013 National Policy for Children. It lists key concerns – acknowledging many gaps and deficits – and sets out 'emerging issues' of concern. These include India's vulnerability to climatic, natural, material and man-made hazards, dangers, and disasters.

**The NPAC takes into account the SDG targets and provides a roadmap towards achieving them. Among goals cited is one on the urban situation. Other goals listed are the ones specifically pertaining to children:**<sup>3</sup>



### **GOAL 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**

*By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations.*

<sup>2</sup> NPAC text in Italics.

<sup>3</sup> NPAC text in italics.

**The NPAC strategy sets out these aims and observations:**

- Preventing trafficking of children, take adequate measures for prevention, rescue and rehabilitation, re-integration of children and prosecution of traffickers;
- Establishing risk-alert systems to safeguard children's lives and safety in hazard-prone settings and situations, including natural and man-made disasters.
- Undertaking comprehensive fact-finding, research and analysis of data on child migration, all forms of child abuse and child trafficking, and all factors and situations of vulnerability.
- A large number of children are getting adversely affected due to natural disasters and climate change. New types of diseases, some of them showing drug-resistance are being recorded in various degrees of outbreaks.
- Moreover, a child's life and recovery potential are imperilled by the acuteness of a situation, not just the quantum scale. These are India's "silent emergencies," destroying childhoods one by one, because each individual childhood at risk is a case of 'silent urgency'.
- Agrarian distress has become a reality today, caused by multiple factors which often adversely impact children, forcing their education to come to a halt, especially if they have to work in order to provide for their needs.
- The extent of these vulnerabilities, their nature and their effect on children is not well-documented.

**The following emerging issues specifically need attention and deliberation:**

- Comprehensive plan for safeguarding children in all disaster situations including psycho-social support for children affected by natural and man-made disasters.
- Providing social protection network for children affected by agrarian distress.
- By giving due recognition to these issues as emerging threats that prevent realization of rights of children and undermine their best interest; the NPAC seeks to put them on the agenda of the country so that specific strategies may be devised by stakeholders concerned to mitigate their effect on children.

**THE NPAC STATEMENT OF CONCERNS SAYS:**

**Children Affected by Natural Disasters and Climate Change**

India is among the countries which are at high risk of damage from natural disasters including climate change. Over the last decade, China, the United States, the Philippines, Indonesia and India constitute together the top five countries that are most frequently hit by natural disasters. According to estimates from the Centre for Research on Epidemiology of Disaster, between 2013 and 2015; more than 20 million people in India were affected by various natural disasters in India, such as flood, drought, cyclone and earthquake, causing a damage of approximately 25 million US dollars (approximately 1700 million Rupees). Rapid climate change has also affected the agrarian economy causing agrarian distress which affects not only nutrition but also the overall well-being of affected population, especially children. Man-made disasters also pose a serious concern in an already disaster-prone environment. It is estimated that a large proportion of the affected population would be children who are the worst-affected population in emergency situations as they face multiple protection and health risks. Therefore, they need to be given special focus in terms of securing their safety, security and well-being.

**vii) Access to Safe Water and Sanitation**

Safe and sufficient drinking-water, along with adequate sanitation and hygiene positively impacts survival, health and nutritional status of the population. A study by the World Bank (June 2010) in 70 countries shows a robust association between access to water and sanitation and child morbidity and mortality. The results show that good water and sanitation infrastructure lowers the odds of children suffering from diarrhoea by 7–17 per cent and reduces the mortality risk for children

According to Water Quality Surveillance Report (2015–16) by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation ; out of total habitations where water testing was undertaken, contamination (chemical and bacteriological) was reported from water sources of 35 per cent habitations.

### Key Concerns of Priority Area 3: Protection

The term “Child Protection” has been defined in the ICPS guidelines as protecting children from or against any perceived or real danger or risk to their life, their personhood and childhood; reducing vulnerability to any kind of harm and ensuring that no child falls out of the social safety net; and in case children fall out of safety net, then ensuring that they receive necessary care, protection, and support so as to bring them back into the safety net.

#### Child Trafficking

Trafficking in human beings, especially women and children in India, has become a matter of serious national concern. In India, over the last decade, the volume of human trafficking has increased, though the exact numbers are not known, it is one of the most lucrative criminal trades, next to arms and drug smuggling undertaken by highly organized criminals. Women and children from poor, socially disadvantaged communities and those affected by disasters are vulnerable to trafficking, as criminal syndicates exploit them and coerce them into sexual slavery and/or forced labour. Human trafficking in India can be classified into three groups:

(a) for commercial sexual exploitation, (b) for exploitative labour, and (c) for other forms of exploitation like organ sale, begging, camel jockeying, etc.

#### The NPAC Key Priorities list:

- Provide universal access to services for all children for the prevention and treatment of water and vector-borne diseases;
- Increased access to safe drinking water, including implementation of measures for ensuring water quality;
- Mobile dispensaries with age-appropriate and free medicine for hard to reach areas/areas affected by natural disaster.
- Ensure continuation of education for the children affected by natural and man-made disasters.
- Sub Objective 3.1: Create a caring, protective and safe environment for all children to reduce their vulnerability in all situations and to keep them safe at all places.

#### Priority Actions

- Support development of community-based management and prevention system to address child

labour, child migration, trafficking, child marriage, and all forms of abuse, exploitation and violence against children.

- District-wise vulnerability mapping of children to be undertaken by child protection agencies in coordination with District administration and relevant agencies such as PRIs and ULBs.
- Establish and strengthen Child Protection Committees to develop Child Protection Plans at various levels (in both rural and urban areas).
  - Create a protective environment for vulnerable children by linking them and their families with government social protection and livelihoods initiatives and proof of identity.
- Strengthen community-based rehabilitation services (including barefoot counsellors) and field functionaries of all departments and NGOs dealing with children.
- Ensure protection of children during natural and man-made disasters.
  - Orient and give training to the children and families on the immediate measures that have to be taken in case of any disaster, in accordance with NDMA guidelines.
  - Provide adequate information to parents/teachers and community members on existing reporting/referral mechanisms for cases of child abuse/violence/ trafficking/separation from family.

#### Ensure child protection in all humanitarian action.

- Safeguard children from exploitative situations, displacement, separation from family, deprivation of basic services, and disruption of education
- Ensure safety and dignity of children are preserved while providing aid/support
- Create a system of disaggregated data collection on the total number of children affected by natural disasters
- Train officials to respond to child protection needs during natural and man-made disasters as a priority to prevent abuse and exploitation
- Ensure all Humanitarian Aid agencies have a child protection policy and aid workers are aware of it and adhere to it
- Create stringent systems of monitoring and reporting of any case of child abuse/exploitation/

*discrimination informed by POCSO Act/ JJ Act 2015*

- Create child-friendly spaces for children at disaster rescue sites and ensure children are protected from violence and abuse
- Provide psycho-social support services for children affected by disaster and victims of child sexual abuse

- Develop appropriate public advocacy tools and materials to generate awareness among parents and children regarding enhanced threats of trafficking/ child abuse/ violence and other risks during natural and man-made disasters
- Provide information to community and children on existing response and referral mechanisms (whom to contact/ where to go to seek help)

## ANNEXURE: SPECIFIC ACTIONS

### Key Priority 1: Survival, Health and Nutrition

STRATEGIES	ACTION
Health care and nutrition services for women and children during natural and man-made disasters	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify high risk districts and develop preparedness and response plans for ensuring delivery of health and nutrition services to pregnant women , mothers and children during disasters</li> <li>3. Develop regulations for climate-smart infrastructure.</li> <li>4. Inclusion in the Community-Based Disaster Management (CBDM) Plan and training in climate hotspots with adequate provisions for water supply, sanitation, and drainage in coordination with NDMA.</li> </ol>

### Key Priority 2: Education and Development

STRATEGIES	ACTION
2.2.6. Ensure continuation of education for the children affected by natural and man-made disasters	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mapping of schools and localities liable to be affected by natural or man-made disasters. Prepare mitigation plans as per NDMA School Safety Policy 2016</li> <li>2. Carry out safety audits annually as per NDMA School Safety Policy 2016</li> <li>3. Mapping of proximity of emergency and crisis service agencies , their capabilities and consequently their expected response time</li> <li>4. Orient teachers and SMC members on disaster risk reduction and preparedness</li> <li>5. Include disaster risk reduction and preparedness as a part of regular curriculum including risk assessment, mock-drills and information on emergency services</li> <li>6. Interactive and child-friendly educational materials on the DOs and DON'Ts in disasters, environmental hazards and climate change related hazards to build the knowledge, aptitude and skills of disaster prevention.</li> <li>7. Ensure continuation of education of children by developing safe child-friendly spaces as a necessary part of all response plans and providing age-specific education kits and materials</li> <li>8. Train teachers and children regarding key steps to be taken during disasters or any disturbance of a regular service.</li> <li>9. Identify alternative spaces for setting up rescue camps and not use schools for the same as far as possible</li> <li>10. Psycho-social support and counselling, undertaking activities on trauma management, through writing or art projects as well as making appropriate changes in the curriculum, for healing and learning coping skills.</li> </ol>

### Key Priority 3: Protection and Participation

STRATEGIES	ACTION
3.1.1. Development of community based prevention, rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration mechanisms for addressing child labour, child migration, trafficking, child marriage , and all forms of violence against children	3. Orient PRIs and ULB members to undertake village /urban ward-wise mapping of vulnerable children, including child labour, migrant children, children affected by agrarian distress, children of nomadic, semi-nomadic and de-notified tribes, those at risk of getting involved in crime and left-wing extremist activities, by type of vulnerability and their social background and develop integrated child protection plans with VCPCs/Urban ward-level Child Protection Committees

3.1.3 Ensure protection of children during natural and man-made disasters.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Orient parents, teachers, PRI members, SHGs, VCPC and SMC members and children on various protection risks faced by children during disaster (like separation from family, sexual abuse, violence, child labour, trafficking) in villages and districts liable to be hit by disasters.</li> <li>2. Provide adequate information to parents/teachers and community members on existing reporting/referral mechanisms for cases of child abuse/ violence/trafficking/separation from family.</li> <li>3. Orient and give training to the families including children on the immediate measures that has to be taken in case of any disaster in accordance with NDMA guidelines</li> <li>4. Undertake child-centred risk assessment at block and district level in co-ordination with District Disaster Management Authorities, District Child Protections Units, PRIs and NGOs.</li> <li>5. Map existing services for children in the affected locality and analyse the capacity of existing service providers to prevent and address child protection</li> <li>6. Adequate interim care for children separated from families until they are united and ensure their care and protection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Register all displaced/separated children</li> <li>- Locate family/relatives on a priority basis</li> <li>- Place children at temporary institutional care with caregivers who are trained in child-friendly methods</li> </ul> </li> <li>7. Availability of Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) at all rescue sites</li> <li>8. Conduct Child Protection Rapid Assessments Pre, during and Post emergency in co-ordination with community members, teachers, ASHA, AWW, PRIs and NGOs</li> </ol>
Ensure child protection in all humanitarian action	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop SOPs laying down relief, rescue, post-rescue and rehabilitation procedures for children in all age groups.</li> <li>2. Safeguard children from exploitative situations; displacement, separation from family, deprivation of basic services, and disruption of education;</li> <li>3. Establish risk-alert systems to safeguard children's lives and safety in hazard-prone settings and situations, including natural and man-made emergencies as per NDMA guidelines;</li> <li>4. Map the specific vulnerabilities of children living in hazard prone regions of the country and develop age and gender disaggregated data of their needs at Panchayat and district levels for hazard mitigation and preparedness programmes;</li> <li>5. Capacity building and mock drills at the village levels by forming cadres of children and youth volunteers, with special focus on young people from the socially excluded communities and those inhabiting the most hazard prone locations;</li> <li>6. Create a system of disaggregated data collection on the total number of children affected by natural disasters;</li> <li>7. Ensure safety and dignity of children are preserved while providing aid/support;</li> <li>8. Train officials to respond to child protection needs during natural and man-made disasters as a priority to prevent abuse and exploitation;</li> <li>9. Ensure all Humanitarian Aid agencies have a child protection policy and aid workers are aware of it and adhere to it;</li> <li>10. Create stringent systems of monitoring and reporting of any case of child abuse/exploitation/discrimination;</li> <li>11. Create child-friendly spaces for children at rescue sites and ensure children are protected from violence and abuse;</li> <li>12. Psycho-social support services for children with adoption of child friendly techniques like Arts Based Therapy and others;</li> <li>13. Make separate and safe facilities for bathing/toilet for children and maintain proper hygiene, ensure necessary measures to prevent spread of contagious and communicable diseases;</li> <li>14. Hire child specialist doctors and other experts to treat the children during and post emergency situations;</li> <li>15. Develop appropriate public advocacy tools and materials to generate awareness among parents and children regarding enhanced threats of trafficking/child abuse/violence during disasters;</li> <li>16. Provide information to community and children on existing response and referral mechanisms (whom to contact/ where to go to seek help).</li> </ol>



## **The NPAC sets out the following Institutional Mechanisms for Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation:**

*Effective engagement with media is required to disseminate key messages for children's outcomes envisaged in the NPAC and create a greater awareness on child rights. Appropriate communication materials for public advocacy on key issues like child sexual abuse, street children, child trafficking, children affected by natural and man-made disasters, child nutrition and health and others identified in the NPAC will be developed and disseminated in a time-bound manner.*

**Developing new Strategies and Programmes:** *The NCAG will identify key areas of concern for children for which there is a need to develop new strategies and programmes such as addressing the health and nutritional needs of boys above the age of 6 years, special programmes for protection of migrant/ trafficked boys aged 15 years and above, providing psycho-social support to children affected by disasters; counselling and career guidance for all children aged 15 years and above, etc.*

### **The NPAC listing of State responsibilities:**

*4.11 The State commits to taking special protection measures to secure the rights and entitlements of children in need of special protection, characterised by their specific social, economic and geo-political situations, including their need for rehabilitation and reintegration, in particular but not limited to, children affected by migration, displacement, communal or sectarian violence, civil unrest, disasters and calamities, street children, children*

*of sex workers, children forced into commercial sexual exploitation, abused and exploited children, children forced into begging, children in conflict and contact with the law, children in situations of labour, children of prisoners, children infected/affected by HIV/AIDS, children with disabilities, children affected by alcohol and substance abuse, children of manual scavengers.*

## **CONCLUSION:**

It is time to study the NPAC, the West Bengal plan, and the few state government drafts, and to make both concerns and possibilities visible to decision-makers and influencers, and various levels of implementers. It is time to get more copies printed, and to engage in reaching them to those who should have them. Is this for only the government to do? Actually, it is. But given the reality, NGOs can play a part.

And it is time to set tracking, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place, and time to investigate realities and develop a detailed and up-to-date knowledge base, with truthful data search and recording. The NPAC has attempted to provide recent data, but

updating must become an essential feature of planning, programming and assessment.

**NGOs cannot be satisfied with having got some right words into the NPAC text. The children of India deserve practical attention.**

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