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OUR VOICES MATTER

The views of children on emergency preparedness and response in Sri Lanka

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Every child has the right to a future. Save the Children works around the world to give children a healthy start in life, and the chance to learn and to be safe. We do whatever it takes to get children the things they need – every day and in times of crisis.

Acknowledgements

This report reflects the views and voices of children affected by the floods and landslides that took place in Sri Lanka in May 2016. The consultation was conducted in December 2016. Our acknowledgements go to the children who were affected by this emergency. We further recognise and extend our warm thanks to the 878 children who took part in this consultation. We also take this opportunity to thank all the parents/legal guardians, religious leaders, school principals and community members of the 16 locations studied for their cooperation and support.

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Cover: Children attempt to dry their school books in the sun during floods. (Photo: Madhubashini Rathnayaka/Save the Children)
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Foreword

In any disaster, big or small, children are frequently the most affected. Their health, education, social network of family and friends, sense of safety and security are disrupted, making them more vulnerable to the challenges and difficulties that inevitably follow an emergency. Yet despite their vulnerability children frequently display levels of resilience and ingenuity that take many by surprise. In investigations of an emergency and the response to it, however, children are often the last to be consulted, if at all, even though they can frequently offer observations and insights that may be missed when the views of adults alone are invited.

All people impacted by a disaster are victims. But that does not mean that actions by governments, aid agencies and well-wishers to improve their situation should not be informed by finding out the needs and wishes of those affected. This publication offers children who have experience of emergencies in Sri Lanka such a platform; to reflect on the problems they faced when floods and landslides affected them in 2016; to share their views on the help that was given and whether or not it was sensitive to their situation; and finally to suggest ways in which future emergency response could be more accommodating of their particular needs.

Over and above practical and insightful observations about what was positive and negative about the aid they received in 2016, the children consulted in this exercise remind us of the proactive role they played in helping their families and communities when disasters struck. Many were prime responders, the first on the

scene to help rescue family members and neighbours and to offer them support until aid eventually arrived. It is that proactivity and sense of agency that children want us to recognise and build upon. With more education in schools on disaster risk reduction, a change in attitudes towards what they can offer in such situations and provision of practical training in preparedness and response by agencies involved, many children and young people felt that their potential to contribute could be enhanced.

“I want to establish a good children’s club in our village. We could help the village during times of natural disasters and whenever problems arise. We could also help the villagers be prepared for natural disasters and also talk to them about safety precautions during a disaster.”

This consultation, carried out by Save the Children with some 880 children across a range of different geographies in the country, generously supported through funds from UNICEF, is aimed at informing the decisions and direction of agencies involved with responding to emergencies in Sri Lanka. Further, we hope that it will promote discussion as to how children’s agency can be nurtured and supported when disasters strike and contribute to a more general realisation that across all sectors of development children of all ages have a proactive, practical and unique role to play.

Chris McIvor

Save the Children Country Director for Sri Lanka

“I want to establish a good children’s club in our village. We could help the village during times of natural disasters and whenever problems arise.”

A message from UNICEF

In May 2016 Sri Lanka was hit by tropical storm Roanu. The storm caused landslides and some of Sri Lanka's worst flooding in years, destroying homes and submerging villages.

Whilst whole populations are impacted, disasters often affect women and children disproportionately, with gender inequalities and constraints affecting access to resources even in times of need. Yet many disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies and programmes in the South Asian region still overlook the special needs and requirements of women and children.

This report is different. It has gathered and documented the real experiences of 880 children who lived through the disaster in 2016, highlighting the challenges faced by young people, and it recommends how children can be better protected and cared for during future emergencies. The report brings children's views – a vital but often missing element – into post-disaster needs assessment.

We believe that the findings in this report will prove a useful guide to future child-related intervention during emergency situations.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) works closely with the Government of Sri Lanka to prepare for and respond to disasters, with a specific focus on vulnerable children, women and other marginalised groups. We are committed to promoting a child centred approach to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, and will continue to provide support to the Government in implementing the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Framework and Road Map for Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (2015).

Tim Sutton
UNICEF Representative, Sri Lanka



PHOTO: UNICEF

Abbreviations

DS	Divisional Secretariat
GN	Grama Niladhari
IASP	International Association for the Study of Pain
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
NCC	National Children's Council
NCPA	National Child Protection Authority
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SCI	Save the Children International
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water and sanitation for health
WHO	World Health Organization



Executive summary

On 15 May 2016 Cyclone Roanu struck Sri Lanka, causing severe flooding and numerous landslides, the destruction of houses and loss of productive assets. This report reflects the views and voices of children affected by the disaster, collected by means of a consultation conducted in December 2016 with 878 children in 16 divisions of the country. Six participatory tools were used, which allowed children and young people to articulate their impressions and experiences from the floods and landslides, their opinions on the emergency response and proposals and recommendations for improvement to the Government, civil society organisations and media.

The consultation process examined the impact of the disaster on children's psychosocial wellbeing, education, protection, shelter, WASH and health issues and concerns, together with how these were addressed and responded to by government and other stakeholders. The findings and children's recommendations directly point to the necessity of child-centred and child-friendly emergency preparedness mechanisms.

The findings illustrate the grave physical pain and emotional distress children endured during the immediate aftermath of the disaster due to the death of loved ones, their own injuries and injuries to friends and family, as well as the distress of losing their possessions.

A scarcity of clean water following the disaster resulted in serious health and hygiene issues: water was contaminated by deceased bodies, garbage and overflowing toilet pits. In this context, a key finding was the concern expressed by children about their own safety and the safety of others, together with their readiness to rescue and care for other people and animals.

The disaster severely disrupted children's education through the loss of infrastructure and educational materials. The emotional trauma and instability children experienced also impeded their focus on learning. Consultation findings in Colombo and Kegalle clearly indicate that education after the emergency had severe drawbacks. Most of the schools were used as temporary shelters so children had no access. The distances children had to travel



PHOTO: UNICEF

from relocated temporary settlements and the lack of alternative learning options after the emergency were also critical issues.

Many protection issues were noted by child protection agencies during the emergency and response to it. Some indicators of severe protection and safety issues were linked to the times children stayed in temporary shelters and along the routes children took when travelling to school. Among other protection concerns were incidents of neglect that were mostly reported from the Colombo District.

Children's and young people's views on the emergency response also focused on the provision of donations at temporary shelters. They expressed the importance of providing donations that are of good quality, and pointed out that donations were not distributed equally in some locations, which resulted in conflict in the camps. Some camps got a surplus of donations, while others failed to meet people's basic requirements. Children attributed this mainly to a lack of coordination, and suggested need-based distribution as a solution.

Lack of attention to hygiene and the sanitary concerns of people were also an issue in the emergency response, ranging from the unavailability of proper garbage disposal systems within the camps to unsanitary hygiene practices. At the same time unavailability of necessary medical assistance resulted in complications with wounds and injuries arising from the disaster.

The importance of humanitarianism in humanitarian aid was strongly expressed by children and young

people. They wanted to be met with friendliness and respect by aid workers; they asked for someone to talk to them and expressed the need for support to improve their mental and emotional wellbeing. Children also wanted better information about the emergency situation, and their actions and words demonstrated their ability to help and contribute to the emergency response, as well as future preparedness.

Children presented a wide spectrum of recommendations targeting key areas relating to emergency response and preparedness, including response services such as distribution of aid, education, protection, health, WASH and infrastructure development. There is significant evidence to suggest an urgent need to revisit and revise the emergency preparedness and response mechanism of Sri Lanka. Children were extremely concerned about issues of equality and access to services, transparency of response processes, responsibility and accountability of key stakeholders, and the privacy and dignity of the affected population.

Children are not usually perceived as stakeholders in an emergency yet in this case they played a vital role in many situations and expressed a strong desire when consulted to be part of any attempts to address the problems they face. The ways in which children and young people are able to be active in disaster risk reduction and preparedness within their communities and schools were strongly highlighted by them.



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

Families and children at a temporary shelter after the 2016 floods

1 Introduction

On 15 May 2016 Cyclone Roanu struck Sri Lanka, causing severe flooding and numerous landslides, as well as the destruction of houses and loss of productive assets. The cyclone affected 22 districts of the country, severely affecting 301,603 individuals. Of the affected population, 104 people were killed and 99 declared missing. An estimated 5,037 houses were damaged or destroyed and as of 26 May 2016 21,484 people remained displaced from their homes (OCHA, 2016). Nearly 100,000 children were affected by the disaster (UNICEF, 2016). In the immediate aftermath of the disaster there were severe protection, education, health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene issues that had an impact on children and communities. Despite the response of government entities, UN agencies, INGOs, civil society organisations and the private sector, it was evident that emergency preparedness, access to services and children's specific needs had not been identified or prioritised.

During the immediate response, SCI identified an absence of state officials responsible for children's services in the camps and other shelters, which were mostly managed by people not qualified to work with children. SCI also noted a severe absence of child-safeguarding procedures in camps and temporary shelters, and a range of other issues that increased the vulnerability of children living in the affected areas. Children were often marginalised and their opinions were not taken into consideration in decision-making processes.

Engagement with children's groups revealed that they were well-informed and had their own views of and solutions to their situations and the emergency response. The recognition of the importance and value of children's voices in emergency response and emergency preparedness by Save the Children, UNICEF and NCPA led to the design and implementation of this project to undertake a consultation with children, in order to contribute to a better, more child-friendly and child-centred approach to future emergency responses.

Altogether 878 children and young people from five districts and 16 DS divisions took part in this study. The districts were selected on several criteria. Kegalle and Colombo were among the most affected areas, with the highest number of deaths and greatest damage to infrastructure. The districts of Puttalam, Rathnapura and Killinochchi have suffered from seasonal floods over the decades and present a high potential for future disasters. During the district selection process, the demographics of the country, as well as an equal representation of ethnicities, were considered. Six participatory tools were used during the consultation to help children and young people express their experiences, impressions, thoughts and feelings and their solutions for meeting challenges. They were also able to assess the content and delivery of the emergency response, and offer proposals for improvement and recommendations to the government, civil society and the media.

Engagement with children's groups revealed that they were well-informed and had their own views of and solutions to their situations and the emergency response.

2 Methodology

2.1 LOCATIONS

This consultation with children and young people about the emergency situation was undertaken in December 2016. Participatory tools were used with a total of 878 children and young people from 16 divisions in five districts.

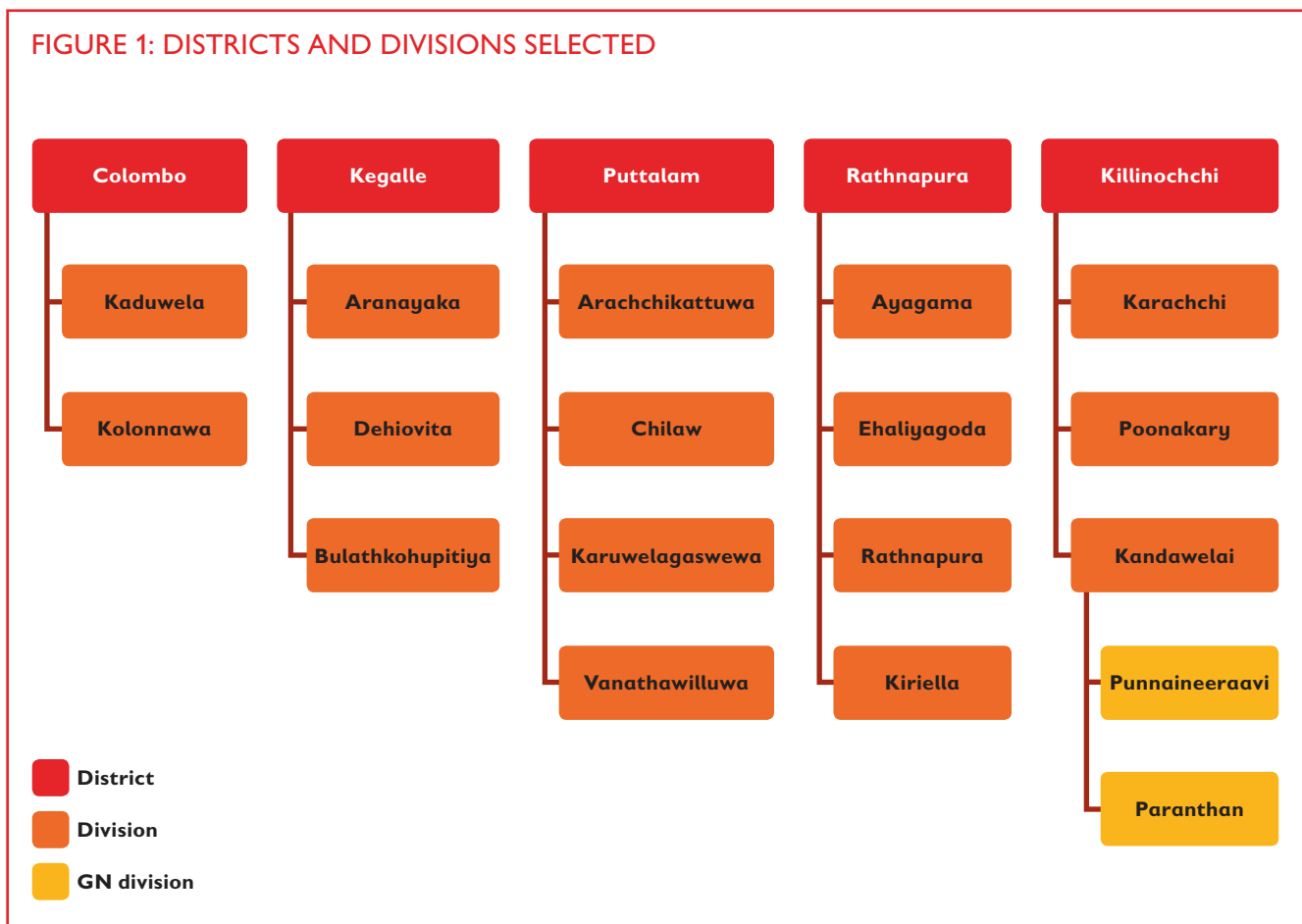
2.2 SURVEY SAMPLE AND TOOLS

In recognition of the differences in experiences and perceptions among children, the participants were divided into two age groups, 7–11 years of age and 12–18 years of age. In total, 32 groups,

comprising 478 girls and 400 boys, worked with the participatory tools. Generally girls and boys worked together in the groups, although exceptionally separate groups for girls and boys took place. Six participatory tools were used, *Village Map*, *Body Map*, *H-Assessment*, *Circle Analysis* – substituted by *Future Visioning* for the younger groups – and *Recommendations*.

The *Village Map*, *Body Map* and *H-Assessment* tools were most frequently used. For the older age groups (12–18), the *Circle Analysis* tool was also applied. Some of the older age groups used the *Recommendations* tool.

FIGURE 1: DISTRICTS AND DIVISIONS SELECTED



FUTURE VISIONING

This tool was included as an alternative to the Circle Analysis tool for children to express their views, hopes and dreams for the next one to three years.

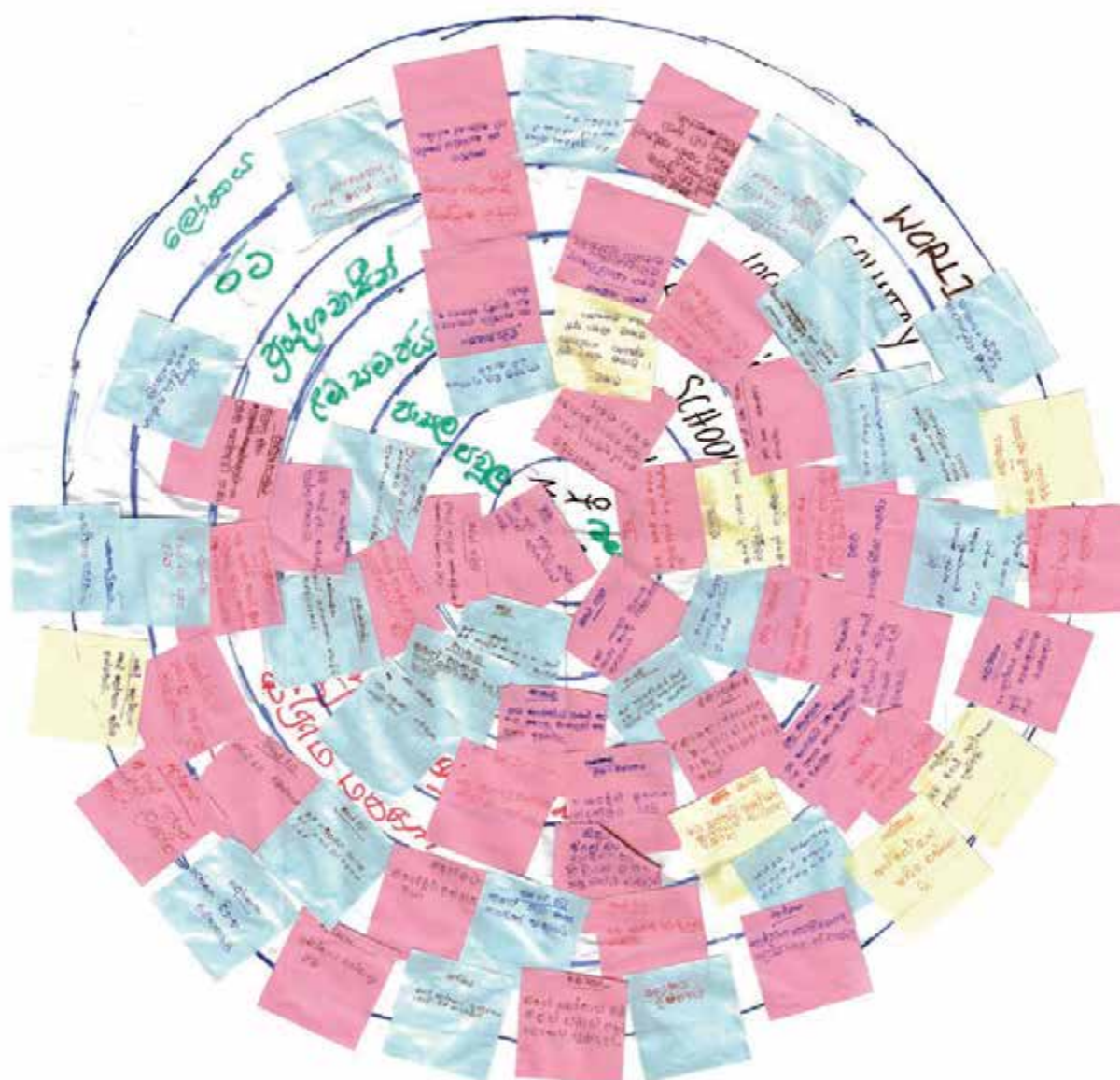
RECOMMENDATIONS

This tool was used to identify children’s recommendations to three parties: the Government, including local as well as national authorities; civil society organisations and media.

BODY MAP TOOL



CIRCLE ANALYSIS TOOL



2.3 DATA COLLECTION

The 12 facilitators (six male and six female) from SCI and former members of the National Children's Council (NCC) conducted the consultations in pairs, comprising one male and one female facilitator. They received training on the methods, tools and reporting formats, and on safeguarding the rights of the child.

Three key themes were explored. The first was an exploration of children's experiences of the floods and landslides. The second theme focused on the physical, mental and emotional impacts of this experience. The third focused on children's assessments of the responses provided during and after the emergency situation, and their proposals and recommendations.*

* Please refer to Annex 1 for further information on geographic areas, sampling, participatory tools, data collection and analysis, as well as challenges and limitations.

3 Findings

Nearly 100,000 children were affected by cyclone Roanu (UNICEF, 2016), one third of the entire affected population. Usually after a disaster children's physical survival needs, such as safe water, food, shelter, clothing, and primary health care, are highly prioritised. However, findings and observations indicate that other needs and rights essential to children, such as protection from abuse and harm; education and awareness; necessary hygiene facilities; psychological wellbeing; and the right to have a voice in matters that affect them are often overlooked or disregarded. This report provides evidence that children are not merely victims or beneficiaries during an emergency: they acknowledge the gravity of the situation and actively engage in safeguarding themselves and those around them. Children are vigilant individuals, able to perceive the relevance and appropriateness of responses to a situation, especially in relation to issues they face, and this can in turn improve the decisions made by adults and the accountability of institutions.

This section on the findings of the consultation is categorised into five broad themes:

- the experiences of children as disaster struck
- the consequential impact of the event
- the response during and after the emergency
- children's proposals and recommendations for future emergencies
- children's visions for the future.

Children are vigilant individuals, able to perceive the relevance and appropriateness of responses to a situation.

3.1 'WHEN DISASTER STRUCK' – CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS

EXPERIENCES OF LANDSLIDES

"I was watching TV with my family. My father pointed out that the water in the brook had turned muddy. He asked me, "I wonder why the water is muddy today putha [Sinhala word for son]?", after which my father went to process karunka [areca nut]. My mother said, "It sounds like helicopters are flying over us. I wonder why?". After this there was a heavy mist all over. Everything after that I can't remember. I lost consciousness, and gained it only when I felt raindrops falling on me. I have a faint memory of seeing my mother leave. I screamed loud."

Unlike the floods, most children explained that the landslides occurred suddenly, within a few minutes and when they least expected it, giving them hardly any time to think, let alone prepare for the disaster. However, they said that there were indicators that they had not been aware of, common in areas where landslides take place, such as clear water in brooks turning muddy, small streams overflowing, and animals going into hiding.

"There were fewer animals just before the disaster, people say animals are able to sense a natural disaster before it happens and they go into hiding."

If children had been given disaster awareness education prior to the incidents, it is evident that they could have identified early signs of the impending disaster. Children are highly perceptive of changes in their environment and are able to proactively engage in informing people and moving to safe places with family and loved ones.

The consultation responses show the efforts children took at the point of impact, as they were drawn to help people in need and protect themselves from harm.

Children expressed that they almost instinctively ran out to safety without really having any sense of direction. They repeatedly mentioned having their feet hurt in their flight by rocks and rubble from damaged houses and trees. Massive boulders and uprooted trees obstructed them, limiting access to clear paths, while free-falling rocks from the landslide made all paths very unsafe during the evacuation.

“Before the landslide occurred, huge rocks rolled down the mountain. We stepped outside our house and looked at what was happening. All the roads were unsafe for travel, so we went through the forest and looked for refuge in a safe area. A huge rock fell onto our house. My aunt, uncle, grandmother, grandfather, and friends passed away.”

Leaving loved ones behind, especially if they are deceased, is traumatic, and no one was prepared for such a situation. Children witnessed mourning relatives and family members retrieving the deceased from the rubble at the site of the disaster, even at risk to their own lives. Some families did not receive closure until later on, as their loved ones were declared missing and they could only hope and pray for their safety. Sometimes their prayers were not answered.

“We hadn’t heard from our father yet. My uncle (father’s older brother) asked my mother to meet him but strictly advised her not to bring us along. My father’s body was unearthed after eight days. My mother was called to identify his body. My mother couldn’t recognise my father, as his body had changed, it had bloated and started to rot. But my father’s phone was in his pocket and that was how my mother was able to identify him.”

Some children were accompanied to safety by older siblings or elders. Nevertheless, they still witnessed the magnitude of the damage the landslides caused to significant places in their villages. Children showed most concern for having lost their homes, either as a direct result of the landslide or as a result of evacuation due to high risk. Damage to their schools, demolished houses in their neighbourhoods, and gaping holes in the middle of the roads they once used to travel were all repeatedly mentioned.

“We became refugees.”

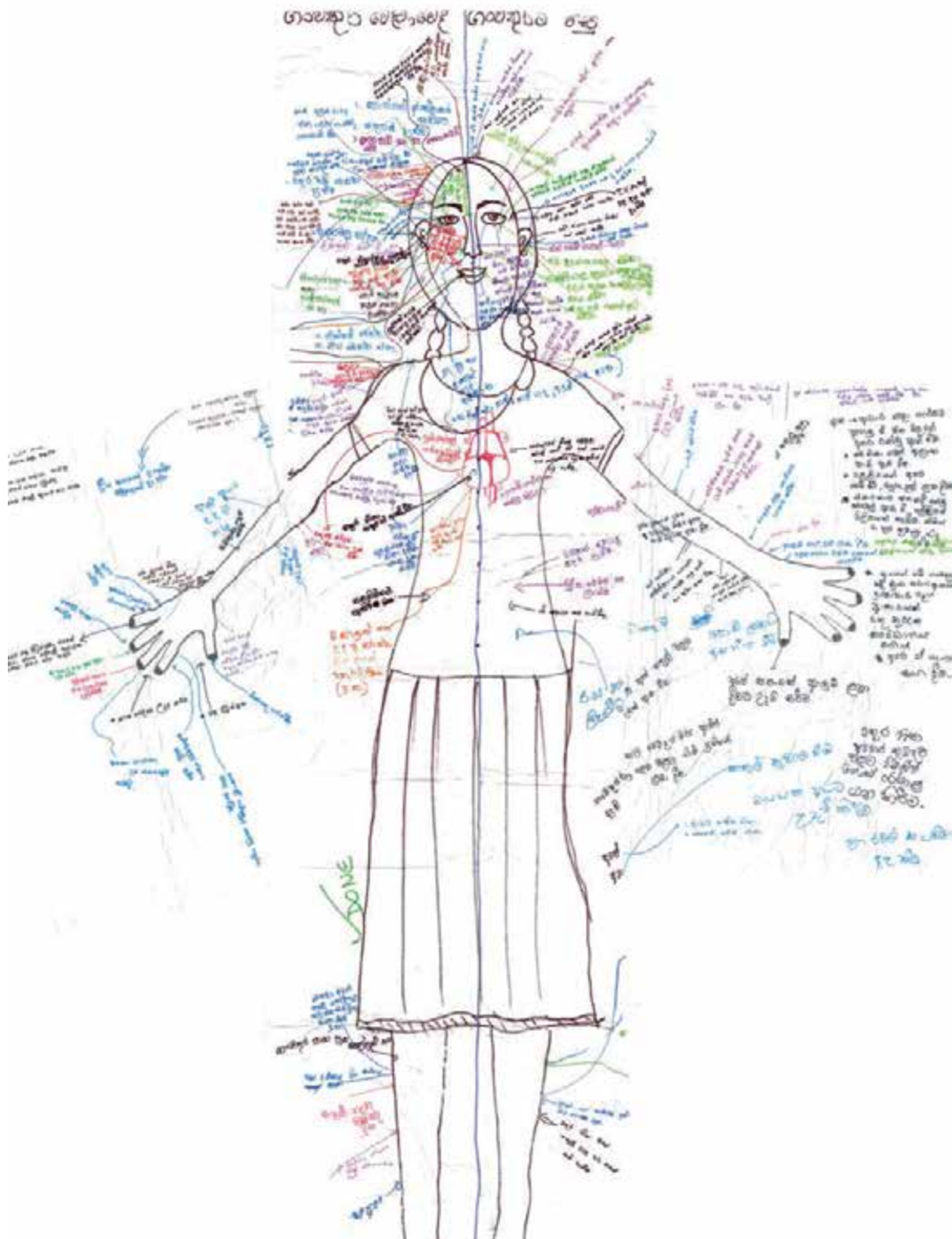
“We lost everything.”

The story was worse for children who were either unable to leave their homes in time, injured themselves on the way or had to see their loved



A Save the Children volunteer talking with a child at a child-friendly space in Colombo

BODY MAP TOOL



ones injured or dead. A few mentioned the loss of more than one loved one. There were many incidents where only one person survived, while the rest of his or her family perished.

“My uncle’s house got buried in the landslide; although he survived, my auntie died. Their son, who was in the army, was also buried under the landslide. He got married just one month ago!”

Some children trapped during the landslide said that they did not remember much, as they were going in and out of consciousness. Children (especially girls) had to face a lot of discomfort, even while they were being rescued. They recalled being pulled out and carried by men to be transported to hospitals, not knowing the whereabouts of their family and with their safety in the hands of strangers.

Buses were used to transport victims to hospitals and temporary shelters. Children recollected this as being a very uncomfortable journey, as most of their clothes were torn and sometimes even had to be removed completely in order to free them from under the rubble.

“...we were moved and sent to these places in a bus. We had no clothes when we were sent so I wrapped myself in a bed sheet until I was given clothes. My sister said she was ashamed because her clothes were revealing since they were torn.”

Children proved to be extremely aware, resilient and practical in their thinking and actions, and were able to help people and actively engage with the community in rescue missions. Older children seemed to have greater awareness of the impending threats and took authoritative action to save lives.

“We had to pull the three deceased people out of the muddy water with our hands. Some people refused to leave their houses. We scolded them and forced them to come to the safe area.”

EXPERIENCES OF FLOODING

The experiences children faced in the floods phase of the emergency were significantly different to those encountered during the landslides. Although the impact of the floods was less severe compared to the landslides and the loss of life was reduced, the problems children faced were nevertheless very real.

“The previous night my mother swept the house and left the rug out. The following morning we had water up to where the rug was: that was when we knew the floods were getting worse.”

The floods began gradually, and the areas affected were mostly located close to rivers or lakes. As heavy rains persisted, water began to overflow and make its way onto the roads of the villages. Most of the places that were severely or significantly affected by the floods in May 2016 have been subjected to seasonal floods over the decades. However, the degree of impact was much greater in 2016 compared to previous years.

Although flooding was expected, people were not prepared for floods of this magnitude. As water levels increased they took precautions to protect their belongings, stacking furniture or moving it to neighbouring houses on higher ground. Children, with the help of their parents, placed their books and school supplies in high places of the house,

such as in the rafters. Sometimes this did not help: children recalled seeing their furniture and other valuables being washed away. Clothes, books and electronic items were useless once they had been affected by the muddy water.

“Even if we kept books on a high place the leaks on the roof got the books wet.”

“Some of our good clothes couldn’t be used again after they touched the mud water.”

The water receded within a few days in some locations and the damage was less severe. However, in some other areas, especially in Kolonnawa and Kaduwela, water levels kept increasing, as the land is lower than the Kelanie River and is quickly inundated when it rains. While some people took refuge on higher ground and in publicly accessible places such as temples and schools, others remained in their homes. In some areas, the water rose to 2.5 metres (over 8 ft) and was deep enough to completely submerge a single-storey house.

Families were trapped as the floods got worse. Roads were inaccessible and people did not have access to shops to buy provisions, so they relied on donations distributed by the army and other civil society organisations by boat and helicopter.

“We counted the helicopters which came to help us.”

Children, especially the younger group, saw the floods as an opportunity to play. They were happy to be home, without having to go to school, and to play with their friends in the floodwaters. Often neglected by adults, children used banana trunks, polystyrene foam and similar materials to keep them afloat, but were not always aware of potential dangers.

“I sat in a big tyre and used my hands to paddle across the floodwaters.”

“A crocodile had come with the floodwaters and bitten a child.”

People trapped in their homes became restless. At this point, children mentioned that they shouted for help, and they also heard other people shout out to them for help. Although they had enjoyed the floods at the beginning, with time the stagnant water began to give off a stale muddy odour, which was unpleasant and became unbearable in areas where the water had mixed with faeces from overflowing toilet pits.

Nature was not the only threat people faced during the immediate aftermath of the floods. Thieves were breaking into unattended houses, with the result that people refused to leave their homes, even while the floods were steadily increasing.

“I stayed with my father and older brother in our three-wheeler for a few days till the water resided. Everyone was affected and out on the streets. Although we were not robbed, robbers came during the night to the house below ours (our neighbour’s house). We heard a pounding sound from the wall. When my father went to check the place there was nothing, but he stayed up the whole night keeping watch. In our aunt’s area of the village, robbers had come and robbed their belongings and their three-wheelers. No one was attentive since everyone’s focus was on the floods.”

Just as in the case of the landslides, children were able to actively engage and help people in need, but sometimes put their own lives at risk.

“Some of the people refused to leave their houses. We scolded them and forced them to come to the safe area. My younger brother went under water but my brother saved him.”

“We saved some of the animals who got caught in the floods.”

“We saved people with disabilities.”

EXPERIENCES IN TAKING RESPONSIBILITIES AND READINESS TO SUPPORT OTHERS

During times of emergency, children and young people show an instinctive desire to help and protect others. They can be remarkably resilient to situations and take up roles and responsibilities which may be seen by adults as beyond their level of maturity. This section focuses on the additional responsibilities children took on during the emergency, their willingness to help and the support they gave.

Children were proactive and were instinctively able to make informed decisions about their own safety and wellbeing.

“I ran in the rain to a safe place.”

Both age groups consulted often mentioned the added responsibilities they had to take during the immediate aftermath of the disaster for their younger siblings, grandparents and neighbours.

“I carried my little brother and kept him in a neighbouring house.”

“I helped my grandmother and grandfather who fell into the water.”

Most of the locations affected have experienced some level of flooding previously – some have seasonal floods – but not on the same scale as in 2016. People’s assumptions were based on past experiences. Thus, increased vigilance and disaster preparedness may have prevented harm and damage. Children took an active role in warning people and creating awareness about the imminent disaster. However, they recalled that people had not taken their views seriously.

“I screamed to others so they can get out of the risky place.”

Once children were away from danger after the disaster, they still took care of their younger siblings, believing that it was their responsibility to protect them and ensure they came to no harm. Boys took on adult roles of feeding and protecting their brothers and sisters, while girls looked to emotionally console their siblings.

“I had to look after my brother while my father was away looking for other families, I had to see that they were fed.”

Children of both age groups helped with carrying and moving their siblings to safe places.

“When my mother went to look for my father, I kept my sister on my shoulders because she was asleep.”

Children in the 12–18 age group supported people in their villages and contributed to saving the lives of others, including in some cases their own parents. They rescued smaller children and older people, and took care of people with disabilities. They carried babies in their arms and small children on their shoulders, and assisted elderly neighbours to reach safe places. They helped people crossing flooded areas and pulled people out of the floodwater. They sometimes did this in situations when they were tired, and at risk to their own lives.

“Though we felt pain in our legs, we still somehow carried the older people.”

“There were people who fell into potholes while walking. I helped them up.”

Both age groups showed concern for animals and helped to save some caught by the floods. They carried pets and livestock to safe places, and one child reported pulling goats and cows out of the mud.

Save the Children conducted rapid assessments with children in Kaduwela immediately after the disaster



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

“I carried the dog on my shoulders from the river bank to the safe side.”

“My hands got blistered by carrying all the heavy things.”

Children in the 7–11 age group supported their parents in taking care of the household, by carrying water, washing and cleaning the house, bringing furniture out of the flood and cleaning it, and helping to cook. Some also supported in cleaning schools.

“We cleaned the dirt that had come from the muddy water from the floods.”

Both age groups took part in repairing and putting things in order, for example setting up drainage and digging channels to divert floodwater. The young people also helped others to build houses. The older children (12–18) took initiatives to support their families and neighbours in various ways.

“We collected sticks from trees to make fires, to cook our meals. We also distributed sticks to our neighbours.”

“We made sandbags and put them at the doorway to prevent water entering into our house.”

3.2 ‘HOW IT AFFECTED US’ – THE IMPACT OF THE EMERGENCY

Disasters can cause death, physical injury, distress and the loss of homes and places of employment. They can also give rise to protection concerns, hygiene issues and disruption in the education in children and adolescents. Anyone who sees or experiences a disaster is very likely to be negatively affected in some way. The impact, particularly on children, may last for months or even years, and may influence their development and relationships with family and friends later in life.

PHYSICAL PAIN AND INJURY

Pain is defined as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage. As will be discussed later, pain can also be caused by emotional or psychological distress, but this section specifically deals with physical pain endured by children during the emergency situation. This includes pain arising from physical injury and damage such as cuts, bruises and disease. Hunger and thirst, also identified as pain, were frequently mentioned by children consulted in the different divisions.

Children affected by the floods and landslides mostly reported experiencing similar types of pain. However, there are some types specific to the context of the emergency. Figure 2 indicates that the largest proportion of sources of pain was from cuts, wounds and bruises. This was mostly recorded in areas that had suffered from landslides. In the unexpected evacuations during the landslides, children had hurt their feet on rocks, jagged tin sheets, broken furniture, trees and other objects.

The *Body Map* tool revealed that most injuries were to children’s feet. Some children who were displaced by the floods recalled slipping and falling while they were trying to get across the water. Some also hurt their legs because they were unable to see rocks and other objects below the murky floodwaters. These wounds sometimes became infected as they were not cleaned appropriately.

“I slipped and fell while being evacuated and the wound on my leg lasted for about two months.”

The landslides occurred late in the evening and, in some locations, at night, so visibility was poor. Children reported that thick clouds of dust from the landslides and falling rocks had further obscured their vision. The highly stressful atmosphere of the situation also made children very anxious and scared.

“Because it was an emergency situation, we were very scared and I was unable to think clearly. I could feel chest pains afterwards.”

Some children sustained fractures when they could not escape the landslides and were buried under rubble. They and others had painful experiences of being trapped under demolished houses and furniture, or having to be pulled from under trees.

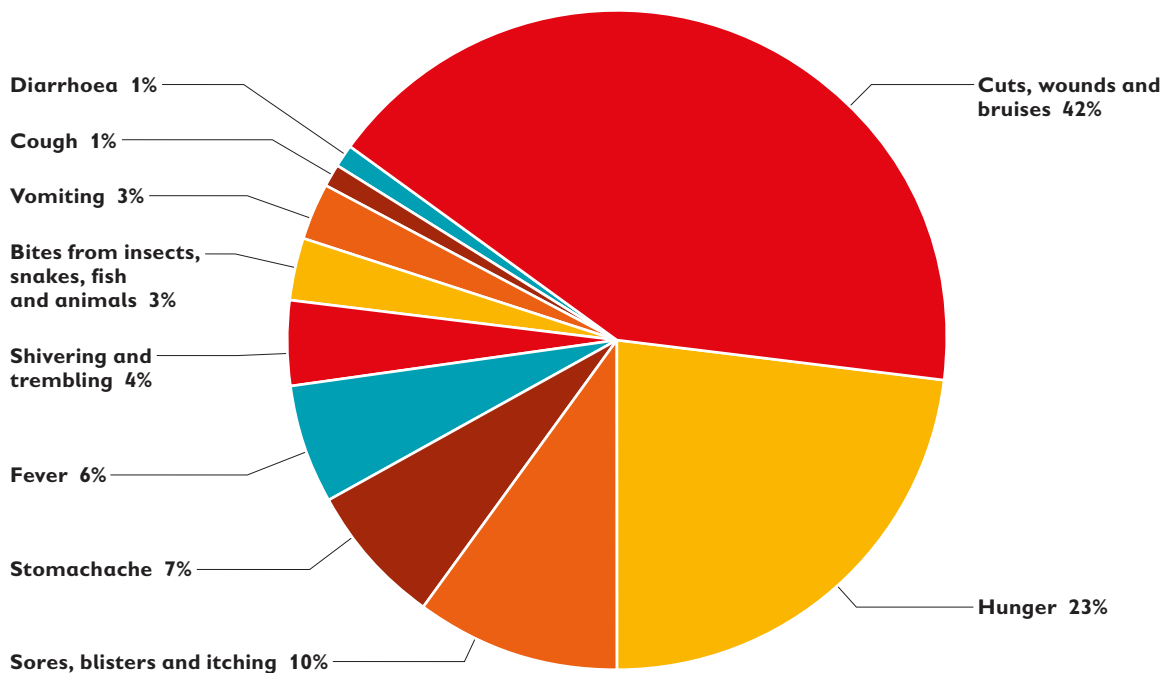
“I heard my brother and uncle come to where I was, when I shouted then they saw me buried under the rubble.”

Figure 2 indicates that a high proportion of children experienced hunger during and immediately after the emergency, because food did not reach every location as quickly as required. Many children recalled the extreme hunger and thirst they endured during this time. However, this was a longer-term pain brought up by children affected by the floods, rather than those affected by the landslides. A few children who were victims of the landslides explained that they were too shocked to feel hunger during the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

Children said their hunger increased during the rainy season and people became vulnerable and weak when they did not have any food.

“Old people and sick people were helpless because of hunger.”

FIGURE 2: FORMS OF PHYSICAL PAIN MENTIONED



In the flooded areas, although children were surrounded by water, they were not able to drink any. Clean water was a scarce resource and therefore receiving water as donations during the emergency was critical.

When children had their hands and feet submerged in water some started to feel numb, while others got cramp in their legs. They also said they felt weak and started to tremble. As a result of exposure to the stagnant, polluted water, children's feet started to itch and swell, resulting in blisters and sores.

“Our legs ached and hurt because they were always wet because of the floods. Later they swelled and turned red.”

Sometimes being in water or being in damp clothes for prolonged periods led to fever, colds, headaches and coughs. Illnesses were also contracted while children were staying in overcrowded camps with poor hygiene and sanitary facilities, or because of the increased number of mosquitoes. Snake- and insect bites were also reported, mostly in the flood areas.

“My leg was bitten by a water snake.”

Another source of pain, over-exertion, was experienced at the beginning and end of the emergency. Most children caught up in the floods had to help their parents carry belongings to safe places, sometimes through the floodwaters.

Towards the end of the emergency, when families started moving back to their homes, children again often had to assist their parents.

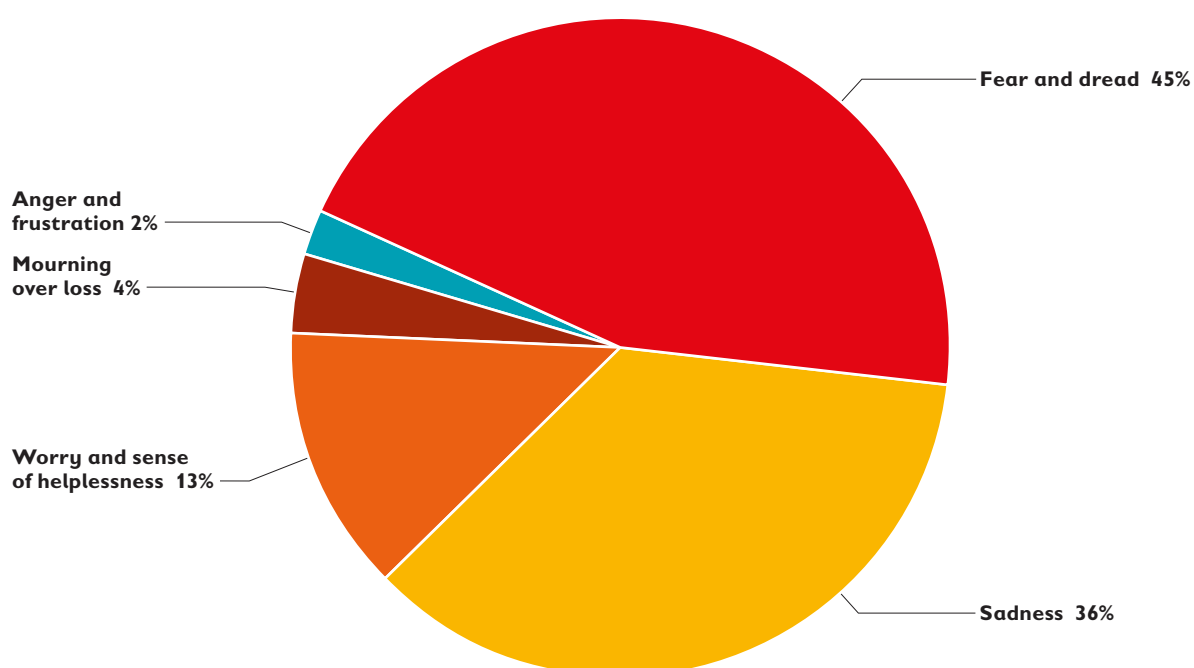
“Carried water to wash and clean the house and clean the mud that had come with the floodwaters.”

EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

Disasters are unfamiliar events that are not easily understood by children, who find them emotionally confusing and frightening. During a time of turmoil children may be left with a person or people unfamiliar to them, and may be provided with limited information. This section will discuss the worries and distress children endured during the disaster, and what they consequently feared and dreaded. Children's experiences are collectively presented for the floods and the landslides.

The landslides and floods were new experiences that children had little or no time to absorb; hence they repeatedly recalled feeling fearful of the events that occurred and dreading the possibility of it happening again. As depicted in Figure 3, the most frequently mentioned emotional impact of the disaster related to fear and dread. In addition, the loss of lives and belongings, and the experience of having to adapt to a new lifestyle, often made children feel sad and worried for their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of their loved ones.

FIGURE 3: FORMS OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS MENTIONED



In the time immediately preceding the landslides, children witnessed other people frantically running to save their lives.

“We heard the sound of the stones rolling down the mountain and the sound of people screaming and crying.”

“We were homeless, we lost everything.”

When children directly witness the impact of a disaster, the emotional consequences can be significant. The children consulted witnessed horrific incidents of death, which were especially traumatic when they involved close family members.

“I shouted and cried loudly when the landslide occurred. We constantly talk about the landslide and stammer when we speak because of the shock.”

“My aunt was carrying a small baby. An iron rod fell on the baby and killed him instantly, and my aunt was injured.”

Children were also extremely saddened at the death of their relatives, friends, neighbours, friends’ parents and pets.

“Due to the landslide we lost the friends we used to play with.”

“I am sad my dog died due to the floods.”

Children realised that a lot was changing both during the immediate aftermath of the disaster and when people started to resume a normal life. They understood the need to adapt to changes. As a result of being in high-risk areas, some children moved with their parents to new villages and had to attend new schools. Leaving their old school and friends behind and making new friends was a source of sadness and anxiety.

“After the landslide I was temporarily sent to a different school. I felt sad here since I didn’t get to meet my old friends.”

Children are sensitive and worry about how a disaster might affect their families and communities. As adults generally take responsibility for providing support and protection and creating stability, their absence, and a child’s inability to regulate their own emotions, can cause the child to feel insecurity and fear about his or her own safety and wellbeing.

“Although relatives came to see me in hospital, my parents didn’t show up.”

Children were very aware of the gravity of events and understood the impact caused to themselves and their families. They feared and perceived the possibility of drowning or being wiped away by another landslide. They were also very informed on areas that were safe and unsafe in their village. They showed concern and worry about their pregnant mothers. Problems within the camps such as the consumption of alcohol by adult men also made children feel unsafe. Children were aware of the financial burden the disaster had brought to their families after they lost their land, and worried about when they might again have a house to live in.. Some children felt angry and questioned why they had to face such a misfortune.

“I was scared, shocked and angry.”

“I am sad because all my parents’ paddy cultivations were destroyed and their efforts are now lost because of these floods.”

Children were also affected by the way people responded to their plight, and stated that they felt sad when people sympathised with them because it reminded them of everything they had lost. However, there were also other instances when they felt that there was a lack of understanding of their helplessness.

“People said we are getting free food, doing nothing and staying happily at the temple (shelter).”

WATER AND HYGIENE

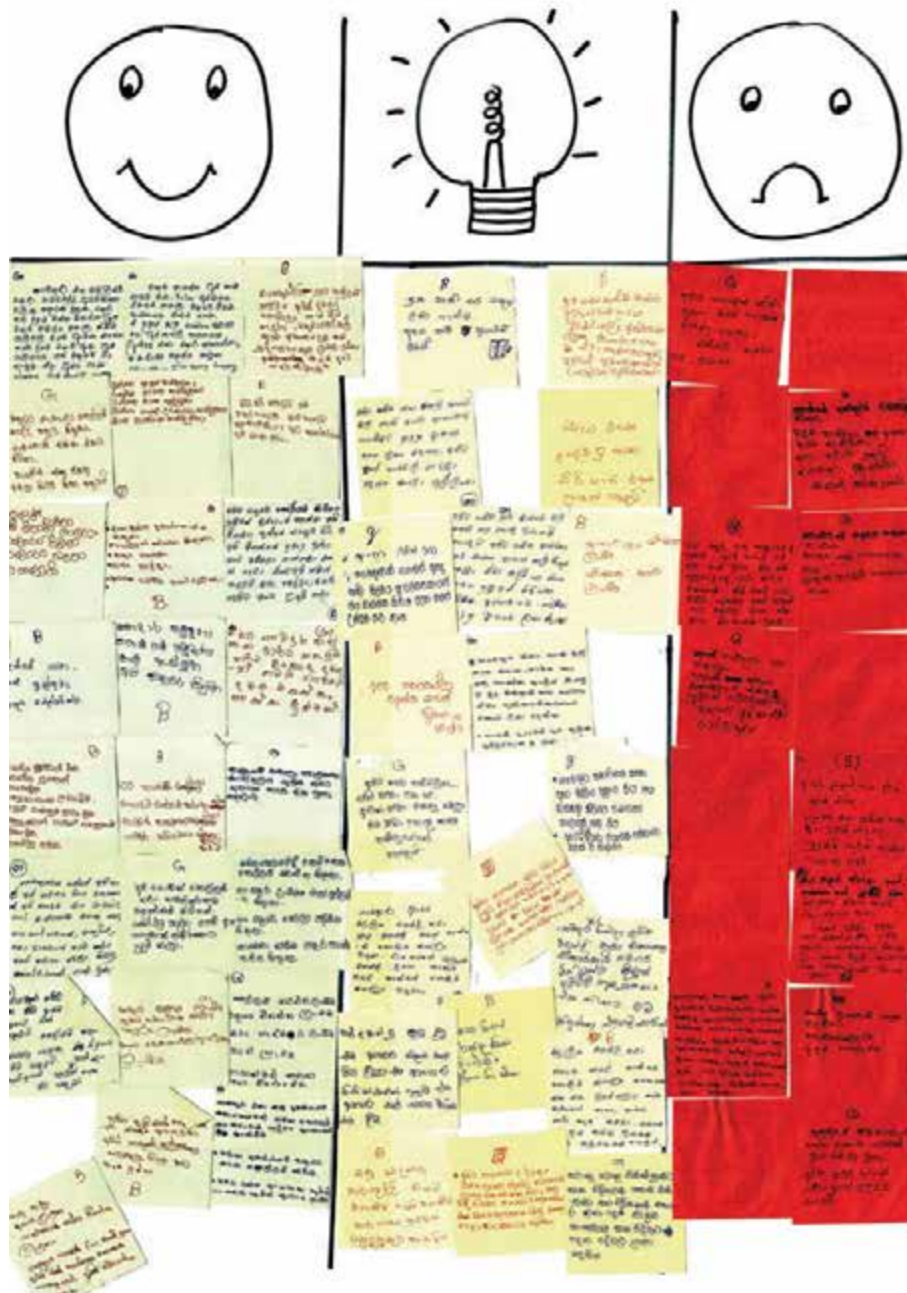
In flood and landslide situations, a basic necessity directly affected is access to safe sources of water. This section includes the impact on water supply, and resulting hygiene and sanitary concerns, related to the emergency and specific difficulties that children had to endure.

During the floods, children were exposed to long hours in contaminated floodwaters, and had to remain in damp clothes. Scratches and wounds got infected and blisters appeared on their feet. In some locations wounds were left unattended because of the scarcity of water.

One reason for the scarcity of water during the floods was contamination of well water from toilet pits that overflowed. Stagnant floodwater gave off a bad odour that made children nauseous and sick.

“Due to the contaminated water we got various skin rashes.”

H-ASSESSMENT TOOL



Sometimes the remains of dead animals and fish around the areas of the landslide produced bad odours, and children, especially the 7–11 age group in Aranayaka, recalled that deceased human bodies also emitted a bad stench around the camp areas.

“The flowing water stank of dead bodies and both the water and soil were red in colour, from the blood of the people who died.”

“PHI gave chemicals to decrease the smell.”

Before the disasters, children and people in some of the affected communities had had a steady supply of water at their disposal for personal hygiene and basic sanitation needs.

“We didn’t have a water issue before the landslide, but now water is precious to us. I wonder if we have this severe water scarcity because we wasted water so much before, without realising the value of it.”

DISRUPTION TO EDUCATION

Disruption to education was one of the biggest concerns revealed by the consultations. Children were not able to attend their schools, as some were located in high risk areas, while others were damaged due to the landslides, or were used as shelters for victims of the floods or landslides.

Damage to infrastructure often resulted in longer and less safe routes to school. Some children therefore did not attend school when their parents were unable to accompany them.

“The bridge was completely damaged so even today we had to come around another village, because of this we get late to school and for extra classes.”

Most children who were victims of the landslide lost all their school supplies. Among these were children preparing to sit Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations. Losing their notes greatly impacted on their education and ability to prepare for the exams. Some who were displaced and severely affected by the floods were unable to save their books and notes, even though they had made efforts to keep their books in safe places.

“Notes were destroyed because the pages got stuck together when water goes in.”

Although some children were affected by the floods and were unable to attend school, their schools started to function again a few weeks after the disaster. Therefore children often felt worried and concerned about the lessons they were missing.

“I was thinking of all the work I missed in school that I must catch up on.”

Children in most locations highlighted the psychological impact of the floods and landslides on their education.

“We are sad that we lost our friends, relations and homes; because of this we face difficulties when we do our studies.”

PROTECTION CONCERNS

Emergency situations can disturb a child’s sense of security and hope. Not only do such situations create space for new protection concerns, but it also exacerbates existing vulnerabilities. Therefore, child protection during emergencies are indispensable and urgent.

In Sri Lanka children, especially girls, are discouraged from openly discussing topics around sex. Although

children were aware of child protection issues and recognised the need for them to be addressed, fears about how people would react and cultural imperatives arising from honor, shame and modesty seemed to influence their responses. Children were hesitant to speak of such events, and even when they attempted to do so, they were prevented by peer pressure. For example, when a girl (12–18 age group) tried to explain an incident where her protection was threatened during the emergency, she was rebuked by her friends and asked not to discuss such matters in public.

However, children pointed out vulnerabilities and risks children faced in the issues of safety and protection.

The highest number of children who were affected by the emergency was from Kegalle District, and they also reported the most concern about protection. This suggests a potential link between the magnitude of the disaster and its impact on the protection of children.

“Someone comes to the camps every night and flashes a torchlight at the tents. We don’t know who it is. The person runs away between the tents. Therefore, to ensure our safety, a grandfather from the camp stays awake every night to keep watch, and sleeps during the day since the others have to sleep at night. They need to work during the day, or we won’t have money for expenses. He is old and therefore is unable to identify the person who is bothering us.”

3.3 ‘HOW YOU RESPONDED’ – THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Humanitarian aid is defined as a commitment to support vulnerable communities that have experienced an unexpected emergency, and efforts being made to maintain and improve their overall quality of life (Kopinak, 2013). In an emergency situation government, civil society and private sector agencies work together with the local government and local people to ensure a coordinated approach to fulfilling the needs of affected populations. However, sometimes these efforts fail to meet people’s needs. This is primarily due to lack of communication and coordination among service providers and administrative authorities, resulting in ineffective response or duplication of services. In addition, members of the public provide various goods and services in ways which are often unregulated and poorly coordinated with the formal

emergency response mechanisms. Nevertheless, the views of children in this consultation highlight that acknowledging progress and success is just as important as identifying problems with the effectiveness and sustainability of the response.

DONATIONS

When a disaster strikes, people are keen to help. It is evident from the recent emergency that food and drinking water are donated to affected people. However, in most emergencies food scarcity is only one of the immediate needs. While food sustenance is an essential and crucial part of the immediate response, disruption to distribution networks and donations that do not meet the specific needs of a community can reduce the intended benefit. This is demonstrated by the children's responses discussed below.

Children gave priority to food and clothing over other donations. Clothes and school supplies were also perceived as important. Figure 4 describes the overall positivity and negativity expressed by children towards the donations they received from the initial phase to latter stages of the response.

During the initial response most people received cooked food. Dry rations were distributed towards the latter part of the response. Children were very thankful for the food they received as it satisfied

their hunger and they appreciated food that had a nutritional value and tasted good.

“They gave us nutritious food items, we were very happy.”

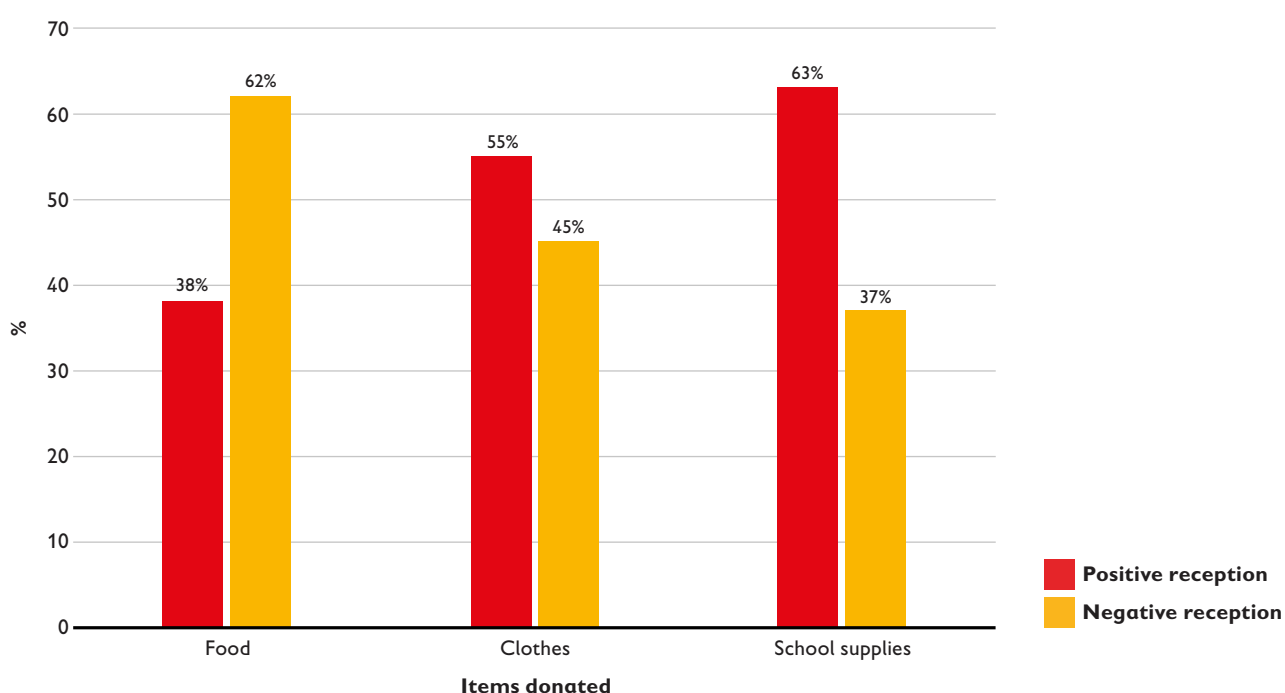
They valued food that was parcelled and packaged hygienically. However, sometimes food was not packed hygienically for consumption, especially when it was donated via boats and helicopters.

Children stated that when donating food products it is important to ensure that they are non-perishable and are appropriate for the affected communities. Consuming unhygienic food resulted in several unintended consequences, such as stomachaches and diarrhoea. Children said that even though they were hungry, they could not consume food that was not prepared hygienically.

“Rice was not properly distributed. So when the rice was left to be distributed amongst the community, fights broke out between the people; the rice had weevils in it, so it had to be washed numerous times so that it could be used for cooking since there was no other option.”

“In emergency situations like these, where different organisations provide food to these victimised poor people, food should be hygienically packaged for consumption.”

FIGURE 4: CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON KEY DONATIONS



Since food was insufficient or not distributed equally in some locations, children were left hungry. Our findings also revealed that most donations in the initial phase of the response did not meet specific needs in the affected community and was not of an appropriate quality. In some locations, children were given the same type of food every day, which had little nutritional value.

“Giving biscuits is wrong. It won’t satisfy our hunger.”

“The food they donated did not taste well at all. They gave dhal, soya and rice every day and we never got anything else. The food was stale and had sand. It would have been better if they did not donate anything at all.”

Receiving meals on time and having access to drinking water when needed was also important for children.

“Since we received a lot of food during the floods, we donated the extra food to other camps.”

It is estimated that in an emergency each person needs 15 litres of water per day for drinking, cooking, and washing. There were significant risks to children’s and people’s health during the landslides and floods due to inadequate water supplies and poor sanitation. Most of the sanitary issues in camps and personal hygiene issues stemmed from lack of

access to adequate clean water. Therefore, bottled water had to be used for these purposes too.

“Water was mostly distributed in bottles in areas where there were floods; this was the only source of clean water we had. Otherwise we have to carry water from long distances to camp since there is no drinking water.”

Children and adults of all DS divisions received donations of clothes. This was very useful and made some of them very happy. Children felt elated when they received clothes that were of their favourite colour and fitted them well. But other children felt aggrieved when donations were distributed as they were given used clothes that were not in good condition.

“When we received old and used clothes, we felt sad.”

In the chaos of an emergency situation, people may not pay attention to gender-specific clothing. Although this may not be a major concern, children can feel embarrassment and experience harassment by their friends when they wear inappropriate clothing.

Similarly, children felt that when handing out donations and distributing items such as clothing and food, people should be more culturally sensitive.



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

Consultation with children, Kaduwela DS division

“Don’t give us boys clothes, give us girls’ clothes.”

“We got dresses, but the sizes were not suitable; we didn’t like the dresses and the clothes weren’t appropriate.”

“Men distributed women’s clothing and we were uncomfortable about this.”

THE DISTRIBUTION OF DONATIONS

It is important to keep in mind that the people who were affected were mostly only victims of a natural disaster. Therefore being dependent on charity, queuing up to receive donations, appreciating donors for providing basic needs and relying on camps for food and shelter were all new and uncomfortable experiences for most children, particularly adolescents.

“Legs started hurting after standing in line to get donations.”

“Even though we sometimes got what we needed they hurt our feelings by the way they responded to us.”

Most children of the younger (7–11) age group referred to material donations as ‘gifts’. Children often wondered why their friends got ‘gifts’ when they did not, and this distressed them. Similarly, household items, kitchen utensils, infant kits, books, stationery and occasionally money were frequently mentioned as items that were donated, but with discrepancies and inadequacy in their distribution. On a positive note, children expressed how affected communities worked together to help the most critically impacted people, although they also noted that some who were not affected also claimed aid.

“My friend received clothes, that makes me happy, but I got a pair of slippers, I am sad about it. I would also have been happy if I received clothes.”

“There were fights over the distributions of donations which lead to a fight where two were injured and a statue was broken.”

“In the camps we were given a token which we had to show to receive the goods. Yet there was a lot of bias in this process because the distributors favoured people who they knew. I felt this is unfair as everyone was equally affected by floods.”

Children from both the older and younger age groups recalled incidents where distribution of donations hurt their feelings.

“No matter how many things we needed were provided they failed to give it to us in a good way.

They hurt our feelings in the way they spoke to us when they distributed the donations.”

“A lot of people who were not affected in our area helped us a lot but, some people that weren’t affected took aid that was meant to be given to the people affected by the floods.”

During the immediate aftermath of the disaster children recalled being given more donations of food and essential items than they required, but over time donations of even the most basic items, such as food and soap, were not given. This led to great difficulty for those who were affected, as many of these families had lost their means of cultivation and source of income. Those who were tertiary workers lost their jobs because they were unable to go to work regularly. Therefore, providing for their families’ needs became difficult.

“We don’t get donations any more (and it’s been six months since we moved to the camps).”

HOUSING AND SHELTER

As an immediate response to the disaster, people who lost their homes were sent to temporary living spaces in common places within the community such as temples, churches, schools, and community halls. After the immediate response, people were relocated to tents and longer-term camps. Those who lived in these shelters spent most of their time inside the camps, except during work and/or school hours.

The children spoke at length about the shortage of basic facilities such as water and electricity in the temporary shelters.

“We were living in the tents in darkness for quite a while. The chief monk of the temple had given us candles and oil lamps. We lit those, but since we were limited on supplies, we would only use one or two of these candles and oil lamps at a time.”

“We see that due to the hot and cold weather, families who are living in the tents face difficult living conditions. In addition, the others living in the camp have two toilets for usage, which causes conflict among them.”

“In the camps, there are two places for bathing. However, the water supply is limited. Therefore, whenever the taps are open on one side, the water supply is cut off to the other side of the camp. As a result, even while taking a bath (irrespective of whether it is a girl or boy), there is a need to go to

the other location to request the water to be turned off, in order to complete the bath. Otherwise, they have to go to the brook to bathe.”

Most families affected by the floods were able to move from the shelters back to their homes after a few weeks. However, the destruction and damage caused by the disaster then had to be repaired before normal life could resume.

“After the floods, members of our family got together and cleaned our house. We worked cooperatively and happily. Some siblings who were angry with us became friendly.”

While some children felt uneasy living in temporary camps others found reasons to enjoy living in the same space.

“When we were at our home we were happy. But now we live sadly in the camp.”

“I am happy that I get to be with my friends in the temporary housing even though I’ve lost my house.”

“Temporary housing was given, but the metal roofing sheets were not safely in place. Therefore, due to strong winds, these sheets flew off, and the children had to assist the adults with the roofing.”

“Sweeping the house once used to be sufficient before. However, now with all the children and combined families living in the temporary housing, we have to sweep the shelter more than once to keep it clean.”

In most instances government officers engaged very closely with the affected people and most villagers were pleased that the police provided assistance to the camps and shelters during the emergency response. However, this engagement did not continue beyond the immediate response and children stated that as a result there were security issues.

“During the first few days, the Grama Niladhari would visit the camps very frequently at any given time of the day (even at night).”

“We got water cans given to us by an NGO. At that time, some of the cans were stolen. Even now, we get water cans, but the person who lives in the tent right at the front of the camp steals them. Recently mattresses were stolen by someone who came to set up the tents. We let the person stay in one of our tents overnight. The next morning, we found only the pillow and sheets in the tent.”

“We still haven’t received houses after nine months.”

HEALTH AND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster medical clinics were set up in camps and shelters. Their services were provided free of charge and this was seen as one of the most useful aspects of the response.

Figure 5 illustrates the various types of medical assistance provided to children. The largest proportion of children spoke about receiving medication, and smaller numbers had received first aid and wound dressing. However, it is significant that 25% of children’s responses noted a lack of medical assistance. Most children recalled the provision of medical assistance only during the initial stages of the response, and there were children in camps and temporary shelters who even at the time of consultation had not received any medical assistance.

During the initial phase of the emergency, mobile clinics were held mostly by doctors who volunteered from hospitals close to the locations of the disasters.

Mild drugs, such as Panadol and ‘Siddhalepa’, were administered by civil society organisations, government bodies, and in the clinics. Many victims of landslides, including very small children and pregnant mothers, were also sent directly to hospitals.

“There was pus oozing out of my younger brother’s ear. We got medicine for that from a free medical clinic.”

People from remote areas who did not have easy access to state medical and health facilities such as hospitals and clinics were the most affected by the discontinuation of medical services.

“They had a onetime clinic at the army camp, and after that they had to go to the hospital for medication.”

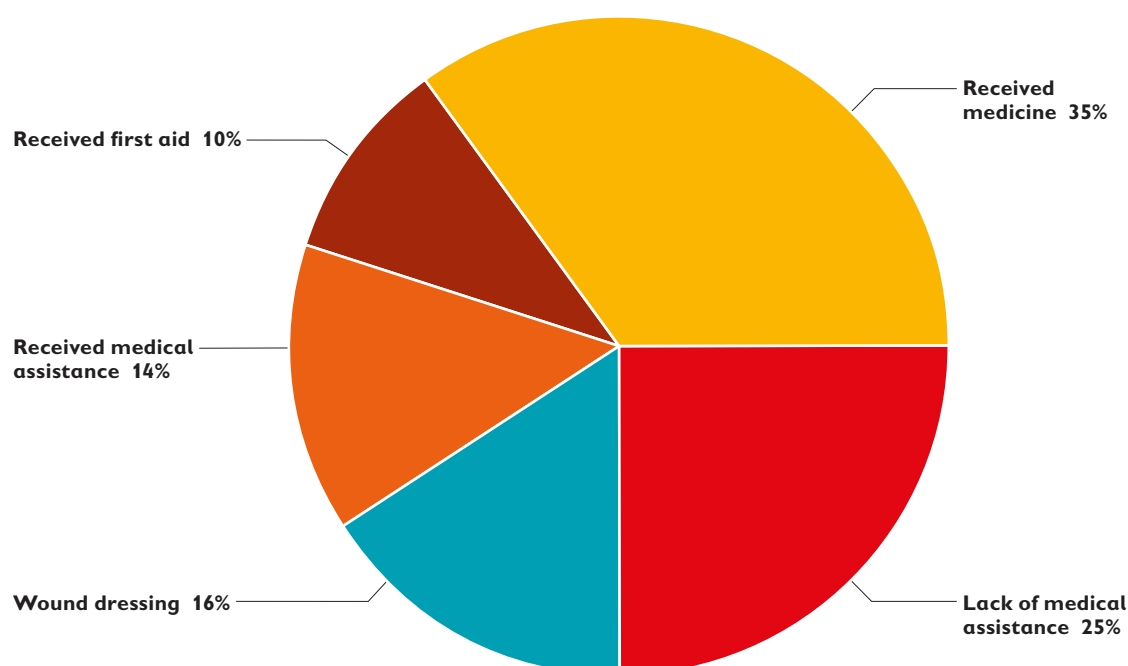
“No more medical services or facilities any more; so people have to find their own means.”

“There are many hospitals in the country. But there is not a single one here.”

SCHOOL AND EDUCATION

Children have a fundamental right to education. During an emergency, while government agencies and civil societies combine efforts to protect the rights of affected people and children, education is not always prioritised as part of the humanitarian

FIGURE 5: HEALTH AND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE



response. As a result, children's education may be disrupted for weeks or even months.

Children who stay in school or common spaces for children are less likely to be at risk of exploitation or abuse. An appropriate learning environment can also reduce the effects of trauma and bring about a sense of normality and structure in a child's life. This should be a key focus in a child-centred response. In emergency situations where provision of formal education is a challenge, it is important to ensure that children have access to temporary learning spaces until access to formal education is restored.

A large number of schools were used as temporary shelters for the displaced during the emergency. Using schools as temporary shelters can hinder the studies of **all** children who attend those schools, regardless of whether they have been directly affected or not.

On some occasions, the camps and temporary shelters provided for displaced communities were a long distance away from their original villages and schools and in these instances the distance to school was another factor that impacted on education. Sometimes children had to walk long distances or leave very early to reach school, usually because there was no public transport from the camp location. Some children were leaving the camps as early as

5:45 a.m. and returning after 6.00 p.m. This is physically arduous, and brings up safety concerns as children often travelled unaccompanied by an adult.

"My school is really far away from the camp. So on most days, I am unable to make it for my classes on time."

"For me, school is further away now. I have to leave the camp at 5:45 a.m. I can't go alone since the road is lonely. If I miss the 6:20 a.m. bus, I have no way to go to school. Also, I have no time to study at night since I return to the camp late."

However, the situation was not the same for all children. While it took some longer to get to school, others had their camps and temporary shelters located close to their schools and a few attended the school in which they had taken refuge from the disaster.

Some schools accommodated children from other schools that were damaged by landslides. However, in instances when the school had to accommodate children who were learning in a different language to the main language of instruction used, an additional set of classes was necessary. Schools timetabled two sessions of classes, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Because of the limited time in school and fewer class periods, children who attended the



Consultation with children, Kolonnawa DS division

afternoon sessions, generally the children displaced from other schools, missed learning certain subjects.

“Due to the landslide, my school (Tamil School) was badly damaged. Our school starting time was changed from morning to afternoon due to lack of space at the Sinhala School.”

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Experiences of a disaster can have a significant impact on a child’s psychological and social wellbeing and can hinder their development process. Exposure to violence, separation from family and loss of loved ones can have lasting effects on children, their families and communities. It is imperative that psychosocial responses should be provided immediately and effectively during an emergency.

Various government agencies and civil society organisations provided psychosocial support for children and adults in the most affected DS Divisions of the country. Psychological first aid and counselling were provided and child-friendly spaces were set up in some locations, giving children an opportunity to engage in stimulating recreational and educational activities.

“Different organisations came and listened to us and our grief. They conducted various programmes and gave us peace of mind. We are very grateful

for this. Some organisations provided us with knowledge about child protection and education.”

Some children who participated in psychosocial programmes described how they engaged in activities that helped them develop life skills and coping mechanisms.

“Some civil societies taught a lot besides our daily studies; we believe that it is very important, please continue this further.”

The interventions needed for children of different ages and developmental stages may vary. Therefore, it is important to have trained professionals and/or volunteers with the necessary skills, understanding and contextual sensitivity to provide appropriate psychosocial support.

WATER HYGIENE AND SANITATION

Insufficient sanitation facilities were a common concern brought up by children. The absence of adequate facilities gave rise to hygiene problems, with some men and boys defecating outside the washrooms with no access to water, and created protection issues for girls as on some occasions they were also compelled to ‘go outside’.

“Sanitation facilities were not enough. The only toilet they had in the community centre was used

by women. Men had to go outside for sanitation facilities. We did not have water in the washroom. So they had to use floodwater for sanitation. Some girls had to go out for sanitation when the washroom was occupied.”

When toilets were located close to living tents the smell was intolerable for families living in the tents.

“There is an unbearable stench coming from the toilets that we are currently using, as well as the toilets near the tents.”

The camps were not maintained well, and since some accommodated too many people, life became very uncomfortable for some children. The absence of a proper system to manage garbage increased sanitary concerns within the camp and some became infested by vermin.

When people took refuge in the schools, there were also many sanitary issues.

Another serious hygiene concern affecting females, especially girl children, was insufficient water or sanitary towels during the period of menstruation. The severe scarcity of water during the floods forced some young girls to use floodwater to clean themselves during this time.

“We didn’t have water in the washrooms so we had to use floodwater for sanitation. Some girls had to go out for sanitation when all the washrooms were occupied.”

PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

For several reasons, according to the observations of SCI, children’s vulnerability increased during the emergency response. There was an absence of a proper registration system in the camps to identify which children had parents, which were in the care of extended family or guardians and which were unaccompanied. There was no adequate regulation of visitors to the camps and at times volunteers who were allowed to engage with children in child-friendly spaces and provide other forms of psychosocial support were not trained on child safeguarding measures. In addition, camp managements were not sensitive to the specific privacy, safety and protection needs of children. Hence their needs were overlooked in the administration and provision of services.

During the emergency children engaged with various people and organisations, from government

officials to civil societies and media. Among these were volunteers who assisted civil societies with the emergency response programmes, and some children displayed unease with some individuals.

“Some volunteers in the civil societies who came to give donations to victims of the floods were dirty people who came and kept staring at women’s body parts.”

Inappropriate behaviour, together with a general lack of attention to children’s safety in the camps, led to a risk of violence from offensive adults and strangers.

“There is a man in our campsite. He gets drunk every evening, and scolds everyone in filth and then proceeds to remove the water lines that supply the camp.”

However, children did speak of instances where, while some adults resorted to over-consumption of alcohol during the emergency, others acted with greater responsibility in their new circumstances.

“People who used to drink on the other side (high risk area) now take on more responsibility and avoid drinking at most times.”

In some camp settings all men, women and children occupied the same space, and limited facilities and resources led to overcrowding. Girls from the older age group explained how they found it uncomfortable to spend all day around men – they felt unable to rest and were always on their guard. Parents took turns staying awake while girls slept at night.

“We ate and slept in the same area, and while the children slept the parents kept awake.”

INFRASTRUCTURE

Both age groups articulated their experience that the floods and landslides had caused severe damage to vital infrastructure. Some children spoke about external support and assistance given to restore damaged infrastructure such as bridges, roads and dams. This was important to them as it helped them to resume their day-to-day activities, such as going to school and visiting relatives.

“The government helped by providing equipment to rebuild the damaged bund.”

“The school is currently being rebuilt from scratch.”

MEDIA

Media is one of the most important sources of information before and after a disaster. Some children recognised and appreciated how the media provided timely information, but they also pointed out that sometimes the information was misleading and inaccurate. They also questioned the ethics of some of the reporting by media networks relating to the emergency.

“I thank the media for telecasting information about the devastation we faced. Because of that information, we got a lot of help.”

“A lot of media providers visited us and they only came to take information for their news, but they filmed us and broadcast it on TV. This was good because relatives saw us and knew we are in trouble.”

Even though most reports were accurate, some were false. Inaccurate reports had misled people in the affected areas and therefore prevented them from effectively responding to the disaster.

“Misinformation regarding the rising water levels spread fear among the people and this was during the time the water levels were actually subsiding.”

“The media did not provide us with correct information. They did not inform us until the situation got worse.”

Issues of media ethics and ethical reporting were discussed by children, echoing observations of state and non-state child protection service providers. Some of the key areas that children felt were not considered or prioritised by media organisations in reporting the emergency were the manner in which media personnel conducted themselves; how they interviewed children, requested informed consent and respected children’s privacy; and reporting with the intention to support and help affected people.

“We do not like others to take our photographs.”

“I do not like media people coming and asking me questions.”

“A lot of bad things happened. They took pictures of the affected and showed it on TV and this created huge discomfort among the people. This is one of the biggest failures I saw.”

“They spread misinformation. They focused more on certain people, which was uncomfortable.”

“The media only broadcast the overall picture of the disaster and they did not focus on the sufferings of the people or the damages that happened to our possessions.”



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

A Save the Children staff member reads stories to children at a child-friendly space

4 ‘What we really want’ – children’s proposals and recommendations

4.1 SYSTEMATISATION OF PROCESSES FOR EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF DONATIONS

- Instead of handing donations to a village representative for distribution, the government should distribute donations according to people’s needs and priorities; in many cases people who do not need donations are also given government support. Next time officials should be more aware about the distribution management process.
- The responsibility of distributing goods should be given to a person with integrity to ensure a fair distribution.
- It would be great if distribution of materials could have been organised properly and goods distributed systematically among all who were affected by the disaster.
- When donations are made, they need to be properly checked for quality before distributing to people, especially children.
- Systematic distribution methods should be in place to avoid conflicts among people over donations.
- It is important to maintain records of people who have received different types of support and donations.
- Ensure that there is a record of people who are affected that can be used to better provide necessary services.
- It is important to distribute donations in such a way that those who are more in need receive adequate items.
- In order to provide effective support different organisations must coordinate their services and efforts.
- Sometimes people who distributed goods only gave to those who they knew. Please avoid such practices in the future.
- In the camps we received a token which we had to show to receive goods. But there was a lot of bias in this process because the people who were distributing goods favoured those whom they knew. This was unfair, as everyone was equally affected by the floods.
- Some people committed fraud over the donations intended to be given to the victims of the flood, therefore voices should be raised against this.
- People who gave donations gave different goods to different people because there were not enough items. It is important to have equality in providing goods and services to affected communities.
- Everyone in our village should be brought together in one place when relief supplies are being distributed.
- When people are too sick to come to collect their donations their share should be kept for them.
- In a situation of resettlement, lands should be distributed equally among villages.

“The responsibility of distributing goods should be given to a person with integrity to ensure a fair distribution.”

“When donations are made, they need to be properly checked for quality before distributing to people, especially children.”

4.2 DONATION OF FOOD ITEMS

- Food donations should be provided in a timely manner.
- We wanted cooked food, but it would have been better if food was cooked more tastily, hygienically prepared and packaged and distributed before it was spoiled.
- Instead of cooked food, it would have been better if donations were dry rations and household items such as kitchen utensils.
- When donating dry rations or cooked food, they should be suitable for children.
- The government did donate us food, but some of the vegetables, like potatoes and tomatoes, were rotten. Regardless of the bad condition people ate it as they were so hungry at the time; please check the condition of the food aid that is provided.
- It would be better if we could get vegetables for cooking. We only got dhal and canned fish which were not always edible.

4.3 DONATION OF CLOTHES AND OTHER MATERIALS

- Affected people should be provided with vouchers to buy clothes instead of getting ready made clothes.
- It would be better if we were given clothes, pillows, mattresses, bed sheets and blankets based on our needs.
- Children should be provided with clothes appropriate to their age.
- It is important for people to come and ask the children what their requirements are before they donate clothes and other materials. This would avoid unnecessary items being donated.
- We should have a water line that provides drinking water to the tents.
- The number of water bottles we got was not enough; it would be better if we got more water bottles.

4.4 IMPORTANCE OF CASH ALLOWANCES

- There are many families who need money to build their houses; it would be good to get some money before New Year so that we can make our house beautiful.
- Instead of things, especially non-essential items it would have been better if we were given cash.
- Although the government donated a lot, some people did not receive the donations. For example, cash donations (Rs. 10,000) were not given to some of the most affected families.

4.5 EDUCATION SUPPORT

- Government needs to provide some alternative methods for us to catch up on the education we missed during the emergency and to re-establish our damaged schools.
- When donating books, please first ask us what we need.
- When providing school supplies please pre-plan them according to the needs of children.
- We have received lots of school materials and we do not need any more; these should be given to other children who have not received enough support.
- It would be better to organise activities, like reading story books, for children during a disaster.
- Give us a tutor/teacher for our camps.

4.6 SAFETY AND PROTECTION

- A security checkpoint should be placed outside the camp.
- The help of the police should be provided to ensure the safety of children within the camp.
- Prevent the abuse and harassment of children.
- Give more attention to the safety of girls.
- Make the community aware of the dangers that children face.
- Consumption of alcohol is a serious problem. It is a psychological problem among students and villagers. We need a solution as soon as possible.

“It would be better to organise activities, like reading story books, for children during a disaster.”

4.7 PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

- I would like to have someone to talk to.
- Children's organisations have different programmes that take steps to support children. I suggest it would be good to have more programmes.
- The Government should plan for children's spiritual and social wellbeing.

4.8 PREVENTATIVE HEALTH CARE AND MEDICAL SUPPORT

- Ensure there is enough medical support during an emergency, especially when children are unwell.
- At least during the next emergency situation, ensure suitable temporary shelters and health facilities.
- Help us to clean and sterilise our wells.
- They should be vigilant about the camp's health concerns and the discomfort and unease in the camps. Awareness-creation about the spreading of disease, especially in temporary shelters, is very important.

4.9 DEVELOPMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE

- Build a stone barrier around the river to prevent it overflowing and flooding.
- Whatever is being distributed to us should be given happily and heartily.
- If we were given what we want in a polite way, we would be happy.
- We expect loving kind words from you.
- Even though you can't give us any donations, we urge you to speak to us respectfully and kindly.
- No matter how much you fulfil our material needs, if you speak to us in a way that makes us sad, we will be unhappy.
- People of our village were shouting at each other during the flood. It would be better if they could be informed on how to behave in such situations.
- As a Tamil person, I expect unity within our community and country.
- If you scold someone, apologise to them and maintain solidarity, especially during disaster situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TOOL



4.10 RESPONDING WITH HUMAN DIGNITY AND SOCIAL VALUES

- It would have been better if the roads leading to our houses were reconstructed after they were damaged by the disaster.
- Support to build houses that will withstand the effects of a flood.
- Our area gets flooded very quickly, even after a small rain. The government did not reconstruct the roads and, due to that, our area was flooded again. They are wasting a lot of our money. Therefore, I suggest that the government should construct the roads in a way that it is higher from the ground level to avoid the next flood.
- It is better to repair the damaged roads completely, rather than doing the job half way.
- It would be good if we could get a safe and appropriate place to stay right after flooding.

4.11 SUITABLE SHELTERS AND PERMANENT HOUSING

- We need homes to do everything we usually do. It would be good if we were promptly given housing.
- We slept in the playground. We had to run to the classrooms whenever there was rain. It would be better if we were given shelter at temples, schools or community halls.
- We need shelter, a peaceful environment, freedom and independence soon after the disaster and in the long term.
- It would be better if the government could provide us with housing loans.
- Community programmes are needed for the restoration of damaged houses.
- Construction of new houses in safe areas is needed.
- Provide adequate shelter facilities for displaced people.
- I would like to stay in a house, rather than staying in a tent, as soon as possible.
- We got a lot of books. But what we really need is a home where we can live in freedom.
- We ask the government to give us permanent houses; we can't keep getting roasted under the sun when living in tents.

4.12 RESPECT FOR PRIVACY AND DIGNITY

- Civil society organisations distributed goods and they took pictures which were then published. This was unnecessary. It would be better if this was avoided.

4.13 PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND IN ASSESSING NEEDS

- Some civil society organisations made it easier for us to voice our opinion to the government and other stakeholders; we would like that to continue all the time.
- Support and aid should be given after different stakeholders have come to us and consulted us on what we want.

4.14 ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

- Civil society organisations helped children affected by the emergency. I believe more programmes like this would be very helpful for us.
- Civil society organisations helped people in various emergency situations. I hope they will look into other issues in society as well.
- I request civil society organisations to go from village to village and conduct children's programmes.
- Civil society organisations are able to show the government the things to which the government may not have paid enough attention. Therefore, their role is very important, especially in an emergency.
- Civil society organisations supported us in many ways and provided services to victims of the landslide; please continue this further.
- Civil society organisations, like rural societies, helped affected people within their capacity. But if they came together, they could do a better job and it would have improved their efficiency.
- Civil society organisations have to inquire into our needs and should plan before making decisions to support affected children and communities. But when private institutions provide donations they do not consider any of the above.



Children participating in a body mapping exercise during a children's consultation session

4.15 RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- Some people dispose of their left over food in floodwaters and it leads to the spoiling of water and disease.
- Implement a waste disposal management system.

4.16 EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS WITH MOBILISATION OF CHILDREN AND COMMUNITIES

- The government should have a well-organised system to handle an emergency situation and must pay more attention to those who were severely affected by the disaster.
- In a flood situation it is important to deploy more members of naval forces for rescue operations and to increase the number of boats for these missions. This would provide more protection for the people.
- Evacuation may occur during night time. In such instances there is a serious concern regarding

safe means of transport. The government should be prepared for this.

- In an emergency situation, the government should act immediately and show more attention to people affected by the disaster.
- For camps that accommodate children, there should be compulsory support and materials that meet key needs of children immediately.
- Civil society organisations should do awareness programmes that increase the understanding of children and people about disasters and risk reduction.
- Create awareness on how to be safe and how to find safe places in times of a natural disaster.
- The government should use new technology to warn people about the risk of disasters, which will minimise destruction to people and their belongings.
- If a natural disaster occurs, there should be a society within the village, which includes children, to create awareness and to ensure swift emergency response.
- In urban areas there should be a proper drainage system which would minimise the threat of floods.

- Go to affected areas and get data from people regarding the emergencies to understand the situation better.
- Children should further improve their knowledge about emergencies and disaster preparedness.

4.17 ROLE OF MEDIA AND ETHICAL REPORTING

- It would be better if the media had programmes educating us on how to take precautions when disasters like this are going to happen.
- It would be good if we were warned of the floods over the television or radio before they happen and we are asked to move to safer places.
- When getting the opinions of children it is better to record only their voices without showing their images.
- Media should protect the privacy and identity of people.
- During an emergency situation the TV, newspapers and radio stations should make people aware of situations like this that have occurred previously.
- Media should publicise emergency-related information to both local and international people.
- Media should come and share people's grievances and help to provide them with what is lacking.
- If they come and interview us it can bring a lot of help for us.
- I suggest that media explores further the difficulties we have and use programmes to show how they can be resolved, and thereby make the government more aware.
- When journalists provide information to the media someone should be there to monitor such information.
- When media publishes information they need to consider the truth of the information.
- Do not ask us about our neighbours and relatives.
- When people are in difficult situations media should not interview them. But they should help them as humans.
- When media takes information from us in an emergency situation they should not reveal our names or show images of people and their houses.

4.18 'THE WORLD WE WISH FOR' – VISIONING THE FUTURE

This consultation was conducted with children seven months after cyclone Roanu struck their villages. Having experienced physical and emotional pain, trauma, loss and instability through this disaster, the children formed their own opinions, hopes and wishes on how such terrible impacts on their lives from natural disasters could be prevented in the future. They made specific suggestions and offered ideas on preparing for emergencies as individuals, as families, as students in schools and as communities, and articulated their expectations of their country and of the world.

AS A CHILD I HOPE TO ...

- Teach small children how to protect our environment.
- Listen to small children's views and opinions.
- Be a person with good values.
- Refrain from unethical activities.
- Be happy.

AS A FAMILY I HOPE WE ...

- Are united again. My family was very happy before the landslide. But after the landslide we got scattered everywhere. I want that scattered family to be united again.
- Live in a separate house.
- Will be accepted by society without discrimination.

AS A CHILDREN'S CLUB WE HOPE TO ...

- Teach children what is right and wrong.
- Help the village during times of natural disaster and whenever problems arise. We currently have no children's club. Establishing a children's club would help us achieve this. We could help the villagers be prepared for natural disasters and also talk to them about safety precautions during a disaster.

AS A SCHOOL WE HOPE TO ...

- Involve ourselves in Sharamadana and planting trees to prevent soil erosion.
- Protect our school from floods.
- Get assistance for all the affected students.

WITH OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY WE HOPE TO ...

- Educate people on the negative effects of drugs and alcohol consumption and try to put a stop to such practices.
- Increase unity among our villagers.
- Be in harmony and work together in harmony.
- Work happily and peacefully with neighbours.
- Work together as a community, without being ethnically separated.
- Have new houses to live in.
- Help to construct bunds, drainage and dams for our village. The villagers will then be safe in the future.
- Help those who are affected by natural disasters in the future.
- Unite with people in the Region/district to collect rainwater in tanks by constructing drains/canals.
- Protect the farming lands in our village.
- Help farmers with precautions to avoid destruction.
- Have the roads in our village built properly and hope that transport facilities are provided for the villagers.
- See our village develop well with the support of officials and higher authorities.
- Return to normality soon. Our village is very beautiful. During the last few days, a mountain in our village eroded so we had to stay at the school. The village was completely empty and looked deserted. I hope our village returns to normal soon.

WE HOPE THAT IN OUR COUNTRY ...

- People will be made more aware of climate change.
- We will have protection during floods.
- Methods of being safe from natural disasters can be implemented by using more advanced technology.

WE HOPE OUR WORLD WILL ...

- Protect the environment.
- Help people who get victimised by natural disasters.
- Not pollute its environment, and create an environment where all people live freely.

4.19 HOW WE PLAN TO PREPARE FOR A FUTURE EMERGENCY

Children identified specific areas that need to be considered in emergency preparedness, ranging from micro-level factors such as carrying emergency services contact details, to macro-level factors such as constructing better infrastructure to protect villages from disasters. This highlights the value they place on emergency preparedness and their wish to help communities to plan for future emergencies.

- In case your life is in danger it is good to keep the number to inform the police close to you.
- Children should further improve their self-defence abilities.
- Once you have been warned about the possibility of a flood, it is good to put belongings and valuables in a safe place in your house.
- There are limited facilities in the village. After a natural disaster I will get assistance from organisations by contacting them.
- I want to establish a good children's club in our village. We could help the village during times of natural disaster and whenever problems arise. We could also help the villagers be prepared for natural disasters and talk to them about safety precautions during a disaster.
- I will help to construct bunds and drainage to protect my village from floods.
- Prepare food items before the floods hit.
- If you fall ill during a flood it is good to keep your medicines near you.
- I will take action by preparing a first aid box to prevent diseases in my family during floods.
- Be alert and aware at all times.
- When we are warned though the TV that a flood is coming we should move to safe places.

“With our local community we hope to help those who are affected by natural disasters in the future.”

5 Conclusion

It is clear from the views of the children consulted, as well as Save the Children's own observations, that more could have been done to ensure that the response to the floods and landslides of 2016 was sensitive to the needs and situations of children. Further to the children's and young people's recommendations, Save the Children proposes:

5.1 EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Decision makers need to ensure that systems and services are in place to avert risks of disasters and to systematically respond to emergencies. Emergency preparedness also needs to focus on educating and empowering the public, including children, on measures to be taken in communities and in their immediate environments. Processes of preparedness for emergencies should:

1. Be inclusive and participatory. As the primary responsible stakeholder for emergency preparedness, the Government of Sri Lanka should work together with all other key stakeholders, such as civil society, the private sector, at-risk communities and children, in planning for future emergency situations. The views, concerns and recommendations of all stakeholders should be given due recognition and incorporated into preparedness plans, which should then be shared and implemented communally.
2. Have a strong focus on prior identification of needs. It is imperative that the potential needs of affected populations during an emergency are understood in order to plan for effective responses. Needs assessments should be conducted with the participation of stakeholders but, more importantly, with at-risk communities, as they are most aware of their own needs, based on their past and sometimes frequent experiences of emergencies.
3. Develop child sensitive systems for responding. Children are one of the most vulnerable and at-risk groups during an emergency. The risks to their safety and wellbeing that result from an emergency situation are often heightened by child-insensitive and unsafe response measures. Child-sensitive response mechanisms would require planners and implementers to follow the principle of the 'Best Interests of the Child' as presented in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
4. Conventionally, emergency response has predominantly focused on provision of goods to meet the basic needs of affected populations, such as food, water, shelter and clothing. However, it has become increasingly clear that response services should concurrently focus on the systematic provision of health, education, protection, psychosocial support and livelihoods support. Such service-oriented needs are often overlooked and may be overshadowed by the drive for donations of goods by various entities during emergencies. As the principle coordinating body the government needs to recognise the importance of providing a range of assistance, and to ensure that what is provided is appropriate, timely and relevant.
5. Consider and apply relevant international standards and guidelines in planning for emergencies, adapting these standards and guidelines to suit the country context. Such sector-specific standards include the INEE *Minimum Standards and Toolkit for Education in Emergencies*, Child Protection Working Group's *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* and IASC's *Guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*.

5.2 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

It is important that emergency response is conducted according to plans developed prior to an emergency, adapting plans to the actual situation where relevant, in a timely and consistent manner. Save the Children recommends the following measures to ensure an effective, child-sensitive emergency response:

1. Immediate identification of children who are most vulnerable and at risk, through systematic registration processes that identify children who are unaccompanied and children without parents or legal guardians.
2. In order to ensure a child-sensitive response, service providers should follow the UNCRC principle of the 'Best Interests of the Child' in the delivery of all response services. This should not be limited to child-focused services, as the manner and processes through which all assistance is delivered to affected populations will have a direct or indirect impact on children.
3. Involve and encourage the participation of affected children and communities in planning distribution of goods and delivery of services, so that the real needs of affected populations are met in an effective and efficient manner.
4. Ensure effective coordination and monitoring of the relief and response efforts of all service providers. During an emergency, as well as the government, various entities engage in the response, such as civil society organisations, religious organisations, the private sector, media and the general public. It is imperative that efforts are coordinated effectively, to ensure equity, consistency, quality and responsiveness to need, and that they conform to key standards including those that best protect children. Where gaps are identified in humanitarian response, such as appropriate child safeguarding measures in the floods and landslides response of 2016, training and capacity-building to all providers should complement appropriate supervision and monitoring.



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

Children in a reading corner at a child-friendly space

Annexes

Annex 1: Data collection details

A1.1 GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

The information was collected among children and young people in five districts, Colombo, Kegalle, Killinochchi, Puttalam and Rathnapura, and in 16 DS divisions (see Annex 2). The districts of Colombo, Killinochchi and Puttalam were affected by heavy rains which resulted in severe floods. In Killinochchi and Puttalam, heavy rains and subsequent floods are seasonal. Rathnapura also faces seasonal rains, but in 2016 the rains resulted in floods and minor landslides. Compared to other districts, this area suffered less damage.

Kegalle district experienced the most profound impact of all. Two divisions, Bulathkohupitiya and Dehiowita, experienced floods and landslides of considerable magnitude. The landslide that caused the most destruction and severe loss of lives, property, and infrastructure took place in Aranayaka, another division of Kegalle (see Annex 2).

A1.2 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

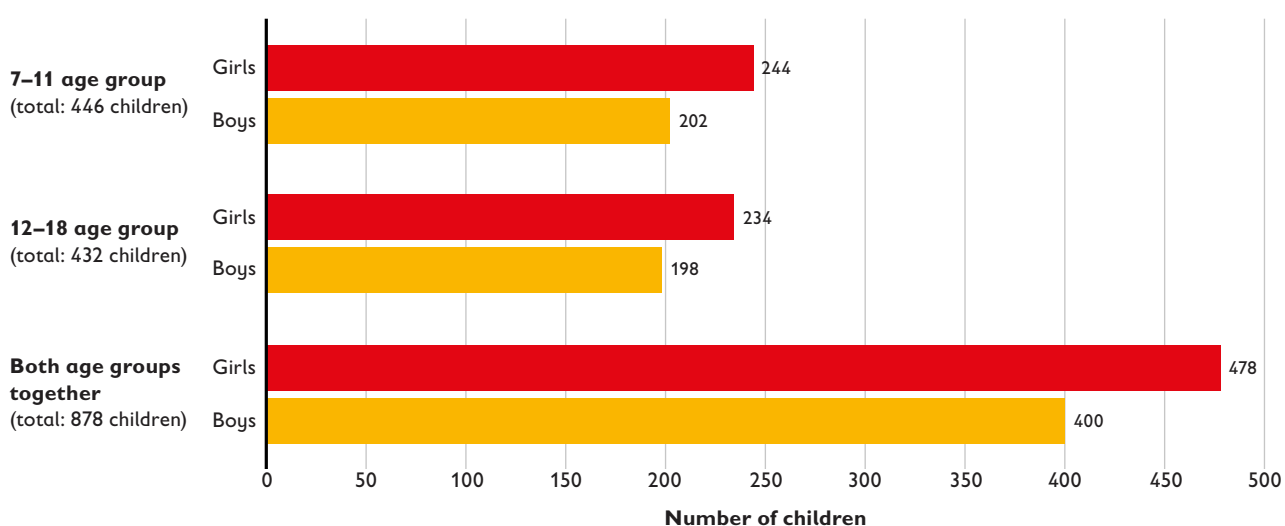
The Child Rights Promotion Officer (CRPO) of each division asked children's clubs in communities to propose children and young people who would be willing to take part in the consultation. It was intended that the diversity in each community should be reflected. The majority of children who took part were members of children's clubs in their communities.

A1.3 PARTICIPATORY TOOLS

The *Village Map*, *Body Map* and *H-Assessment* tools were the most frequently used. For the young people in the 12–18 age group, the *Circle Analysis* tool was also used, while the children in the 7–11 age group used the *Future Visioning* tool. Some of the young people's groups used the *Recommendations* tool.

By means of these tools, children were able to explore and describe their impressions and

FIGURE 6: NUMBERS OF GIRLS AND BOYS TAKING PART IN CONSULTATIONS, BY AGE GROUP



experiences of the floods and landslides, and to identify priorities and develop proposals based on their experiences of the emergency response.

VILLAGE MAP

Using the *Village Map* tool children and young people documented their experiences of how the floods and landslides had affected their villages. This tool is a visionary exercise that encourages children to identify places and areas in their village affected by floods or landslides, to discuss how these places were affected and to identify the three affected places that were of most importance to them. The questions to be considered were: Which areas were affected by the floods and landslides? How were the areas affected? Which of the affected areas received support from the government and what was the response? Which areas received response from civil society, and what sort of response? Which affected areas did not receive any response?

BODY MAP

The *Body Map* tool enabled children and young people to document their experiences of the emergency situations, by identifying how various parts of their bodies had been affected. In groups, children and young people made a life-size drawing of a body and then discussed how the floods and

landslides had affected parts of their bodies: head, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, shoulders, arms and hands, heart, stomach, legs and feet.

They also discussed the impact of responses to the emergency situation. For each part of the body, they discussed the following question: How were children affected by the response, in positive and negative ways, or by the lack of response?

H-ASSESSMENT

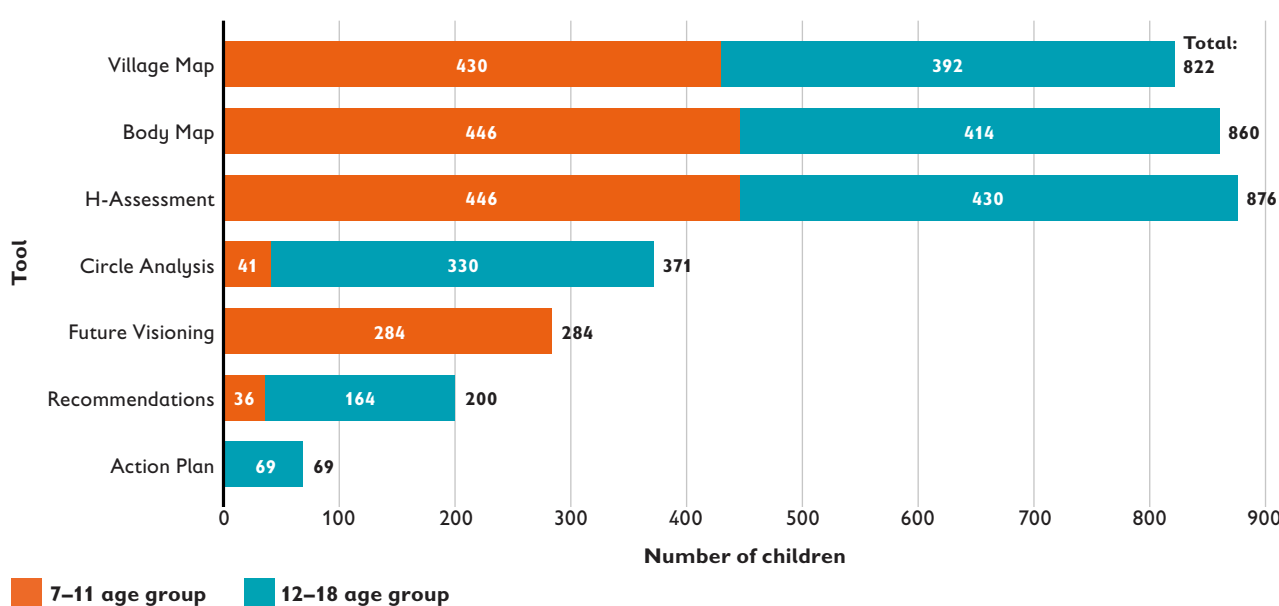
This tool enabled children and young people to make a more thorough assessment of the emergency response. In groups, they identified and discussed positive and negative experiences of the responses and developed concrete proposals for improvements. The questions for discussion were: What worked well during and after the emergency response, and why? What did not work well, and why? What would be your proposals for improvement and recommendations to government and local authorities, civil society and media?

CIRCLE ANALYSIS

This tool was used to document the perceptions of children and young people of their future in one to three years. It encouraged them to visualise the future and to share their views, hopes and dreams in various contexts, such as their family, school,

FIGURE 7: FREQUENCY OF CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH TOOLS

On average each participant took part in four tools. The tools were used 3,482 times altogether by 878 children and young people. The 7–11 age group used the tools 1,683 times in total and the 12–18 age group used them 1,799 times.



children’s club, local community and country. In the exercise, these contexts were represented by circles placed in a systematic way. This exercise has a dual purpose: to highlight information about the children’s own views and perspectives, and to give them an opportunity to look forward, identify and express their hopes and dreams. The questions presented in this tool were: What will the situation be like in one to three years for me, my family, my school/education, my children’s club, my local community and my country?

FUTURE VISIONING

This tool was included as an alternative to the *Circle Analysis* tool for children to express their views, hopes and dreams as they see them within one to three years. No specific questions were given.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This tool was used to develop children’s recommendations to government (local and national authorities), civil society and media.

A1.4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The consultations with children and young people were scheduled to take place over one month. Due to limitations of time it was not possible to accommodate a two-day consultation for every group. Only the groups in the two most affected districts (Kegalle and Colombo) received this opportunity. In the districts where impacts had been comparatively less severe, the agenda was adapted to include the key tools in a one-day programme.

Consultations with children and young people took place in schools and preschools, temples, premises in local communities and other places familiar to the participants. During the consultations, several groups of adults were also present, and some of them were familiar with the children and young people. For most sessions these adults, in addition to facilitators, government officials, interpreters, counsellors, parents, children’s club advisors and/or teachers, were present.

The children and young people were given the choice of not engaging in any particular tool which they

felt could potentially make them uncomfortable. In addition, participants were encouraged to inform the facilitators or counsellors present if they felt any discomfort and needed support.

During the consultations children and young people wrote or drew their messages on the tools. The information from the tools was then translated from Sinhala and Tamil into English and transcribed by the facilitators, who also made notes about priorities and recorded additional comments and quotes. This material was then sent for data analysis, where key issues were identified, according to frequency and relevance. Because of the volume of the material from the Body Map tool, qualitative data analysis software (QRS International, NVivo) was used.

A1.5 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The groups had one or two days to work on the tools. This meant that for some of them there was little room for follow-up questions or elaboration on issues.

The fact that boys and girls were working together in the same groups may have influenced the results in relation to certain sensitive issues. In most situations, issues related to protection, such as exploitation and abuse, will rarely be expressed when boys and girls are working together. In this study, a few suggestions regarding issues such as protection have been mentioned by girls. However, it should be noted that boys also described situations where there was a lack of safety for girls, such as times when girls who were in a camp felt unsafe when they had to walk long distances to reach a toilet. The boys noted that girls found little or no private space in the crowded camps; and that travelling to attend classes in the evening was unsafe. It is likely that more information is available on these issues than has been expressed here.

“Since it is currently unsafe for girls to travel in the evening, classes have been cancelled.”

Boy in 12–18 age group

“When ladies stayed in the school (camp), there was no safety. There were [only] basic toilet facilities.”

Participant in 12–18 age group

Annex 2: Districts and divisions affected by floods and landslides

District	Division	Effects of heavy rains
Kegalle	Dehiowita	Landslides and floods
	Aranayaka	Landslide (most destructive)
	Bulathkohupitiya	Landslides (minor) and floods
Rathnapura	Ehaliyagoda	Landslides (minor) and floods
	Rathnapura	Landslides (minor) and floods
	Ayagama	Landslides (minor) and floods
	Kiriella	Landslides (minor) and floods
Puttalam	Chilaw	Floods (seasonal, severe)
	Arachchikattuwa	Floods (seasonal, severe)
	Karuwelagaswewa	Floods (seasonal, severe)
	Vanathavilluwa	Floods (seasonal, severe)
Killinochchi	Poonakary	Floods (seasonal, severe)
	Kandawelle	Floods (seasonal, severe)
	Karachchi	Floods (seasonal, severe)
Colombo	Kaduwela	Floods (severe)
	Kolonnawa	Floods (severe)

Annex 3: Number of children and young people consulted in each district and division

District	Division		Age group	Estimated number of children	Actual number of children consulted		Total
					Girls	Boys	
Kegalle	Dehiovita		7-11	20	13	7	20
			12-18	20	11	14	25
	Aranayaka		7-11	40	25	16	41
			12-18	40	20	20	40
	Bulathkohupitiya		7-11	20	16	7	23
			12-18	20	6	16	22
Rathnapura	Ehaliyagoda		7-11	20	15	9	24
			12-18	20	7	10	17
	Rathnapura		7-11	20	19	25	44
			12-18	20	8	9	17
	Ayagama		7-11	20	5	13	18
			12-18	20	8	7	15
	Kiriella		7-11	20	6	8	14
			12-18	20	26	11	37
Puttalam	Chilaw		7-11	20	11	10	21
			12-18	20	14	10	24
	Arachchikattuwa		7-11	20	14	3	17
			12-18	20	7	8	15
	Karuwelagaswewa		7-11	20	10	16	26
			12-18	20	11	13	24
	Vanathawilluwa		7-11	20	14	12	26
			12-18	20	9	6	15
Killinochchi	Poonakary		7-11	20	7	12	19
			12-18	20	11	10	21
	Kandawelai	Punnaineeraavi GN division	7-11	20	9	14	23
			12-18	20	19	3	22
		Paranthan GN division	7-11	20	13	9	22
			12-18	20	15	9	24
	Karachchi		7-11	20	14	6	20
			12-18	20	12	9	21
Colombo	Kaduwela		7-11	40	20	16	36
			12-18	40	22	10	32
	Kolonnawa		7-11	40	33	19	52
			12-18	40	28	33	61
Total					478	400	878

Annex 4: Affected places in villages of most importance to children and young people

Areas	7–11 age group	12–18 age group	Total
Houses	18	13	31
School/preschool/playground	12	3	15
Roads	18	6	24
Cultivated areas	7	8	15
Areas of religious significance	8	10	18
Buildings	1	–	1
Public places	2	1	3
Nature	4	2	6
Other	2	2	4
Total	72	45	117

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OUR VOICES MATTER

The views of children on emergency preparedness and response in Sri Lanka

On 15 May 2016 Cyclone Roanu struck Sri Lanka, causing severe flooding and numerous landslides, the destruction of houses and loss of productive assets. This report reflects the views and voices of children affected by the disaster, collected by means of a consultation conducted with 878 children in 16 divisions of the country. Six participatory tools were used, which allowed children and young people to articulate their impressions and experiences from the floods and landslides, their opinions on the emergency response and proposals and recommendations for improvement to the Government, civil society organisations and media.

The consultation process examined the impact of the disaster on children's psychosocial wellbeing, education, protection, shelter and health issues and concerns, together with how these were addressed and responded to by government and other stakeholders. The findings and children's recommendations directly point to the necessity of child-centred and child-friendly emergency preparedness mechanisms.

Children presented a wide spectrum of recommendations focusing on key areas relating to emergency response and preparedness, aid distribution and infrastructure development.

This report should be read by all government and non-state stakeholders working with and for children, especially those engaged in planning and implementing emergency responses for children.

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A child looking at his flooded house in Kaduwela during the 2016 emergency.