

From rehabilitation to safety

School students working on search and rescue techniques.
Photo: SEEDS, Saraswati High School, Ahmedabad, 2005.

Gujarat school safety initiative, India

Introduction

A devastating earthquake hit Gujarat in western India in 2001. The tragedy was marked with a very high number of casualties among school children. Many school buildings collapsed, trapping children and teachers under their rubble. The loss of 400 school children in the city of Anjar is one of the many school-based incidents that are etched in the memories of those who lived through the disaster. Extensive rehabilitation programmes followed the earthquake, into which were woven elements of disaster mitigation and preparedness. The Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA) and national NGO SEEDS took up the Gujarat School Safety Initiative, a first of its kind in the region.

The project addresses two issues:

1. Understanding and preparedness amongst school children, teachers and parents to reduce disaster risk in schools and to be prepared to act appropriately in an emergency
2. Disaster management appreciation amongst teachers so that they are able to impart disaster education to children more effectively

Direct implementation of school based preparedness activities is being carried out in 175 schools and teachers' training is being conducted across 25 Districts.

Project brief

The project aims to:

- promote a culture of disaster safety in schools
- reduce disaster risk in schools through structural and non-structural corrections
- prepare School Disaster Management Plans (SDMP)
- establish school safety clubs and task forces in schools and to provide training to them
- prepare tools like manuals, games and activity kits for training school teachers and students in disaster management
- train teachers for creating a culture of safety in schools, and institutionalize the programme through training of trainers

The project follows a process wherein individual schools are targeted by the project team to sensitize the school administrators and seek their participation. This is followed by a series of activities to orient the students, teachers, administrators and parents on disaster management issues relevant to school communities. The learning takes place in a very participatory and fun based environment with the use of interactive games, demonstrations and practical activities. Students play an active role in assessing the risks and preparing their School Disaster Management Plan (SDMP). There are mock drills to rehearse the plan, and systems are put in place for its periodic rehearsal and updating. A school safety club is then formed and it is linked to the statewide school safety network and to other networks outside the state. This keeps the momentum alive and the exchange programmes are very high-energy events for the school clubs.

The project activities are carried out using a variety of child friendly educational tools. These include working models, board games, flash card games, activity books, and demonstration kits. Formal and non-formal tools are being used in parallel, and text

books for formal education within the school curricula have also been prepared to go hand in hand with the informal activities promoting school safety planning. In addition, teacher training curriculum has been developed, and training workshops are being conducted for teacher trainers and teachers across the state.

The school based activities are being carried out in 150 schools in the cities of Ahmedabad, Vadodra and Jamnagar and one model school in each of the 25 Districts of Gujarat. The teacher training activities cover teachers from all 25 Districts of Gujarat. The teacher training programme is seen as a tool for upscaling and institutionalizing the activities that have been piloted in the project schools.

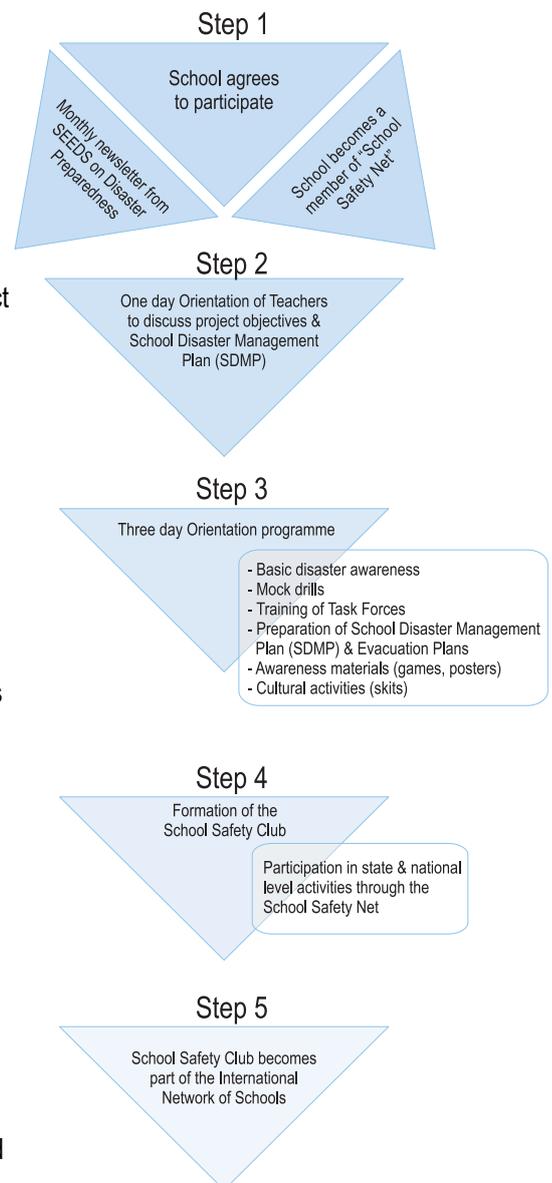
SEEDS India and Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority are implementing the project. Its duration is three years, from January 2004 to December 2006, and it is directly benefiting over 100,000 students and 9,000 teachers across the state.

Lessons learned

Schools are the future of a society. School safety is the most efficient starting point for inculcating a culture of safety. The Gujarat School Safety Initiative has piloted a methodology of school safety, and has demonstrated how it can be upscaled and mainstreamed into the education sector. The interest and involvement of the state government has ensured that this pilot project turns into state practice.

The project has directly benefited about 105,000 students across 175 schools. Of these 150 schools were in the three project cities, and one pilot school in each of the 25 districts of Gujarat. The teacher training component of the project has raised 100 teacher trainers and has directly trained over 9,000 teachers. It has created model content that can now be easily replicated in other schools. In other areas where the project is not yet being implemented, only a formal intervention in the form of text books for senior students is being introduced. This does not have a desirable level of impact on the students, and the teachers find it difficult to teach the new curriculum in the absence of any orientation or training.

The project methodology



"My school has taken many initiatives for safety. We have an Emergency Evacuation Plan, and have identified and trained task forces for search and rescue, first aid, fire safety, evacuation, and awareness. The activities are done in such a way that children enjoy them and also learn very useful lessons in the process."

Ms. Nita Joshi, Principal, Kumkum Vidhyalaya, Ahmedabad, one of the project schools.

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