



# CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE

Stories of hope and resilience against disaster

unicef  | for every child



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# CCDRR PROGRAMME: INTRODUCTION



*Child club members of Parsagadhi, during a regular meeting discussing seasonal risks and hazards in Parsa District in southern Nepal.*

UNICEF Nepal/2022/BWagle

UNICEF's Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme was designed in 2013, building on an existing UNICEF-supported Child Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) programme in Nepal. In late 2013, UNICEF with generous funding support of the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation successfully launched the CCDRR programme in Nepal starting with four pilot districts. Between 2013-2021, the CCDRR programme was implemented in three phases (Phase I, Phase II and Bridging Phase) covering 12 districts, reaching over 27 municipalities. It was officially concluded end of 2021 in most districts with some remaining wrap-up work until June 2022.

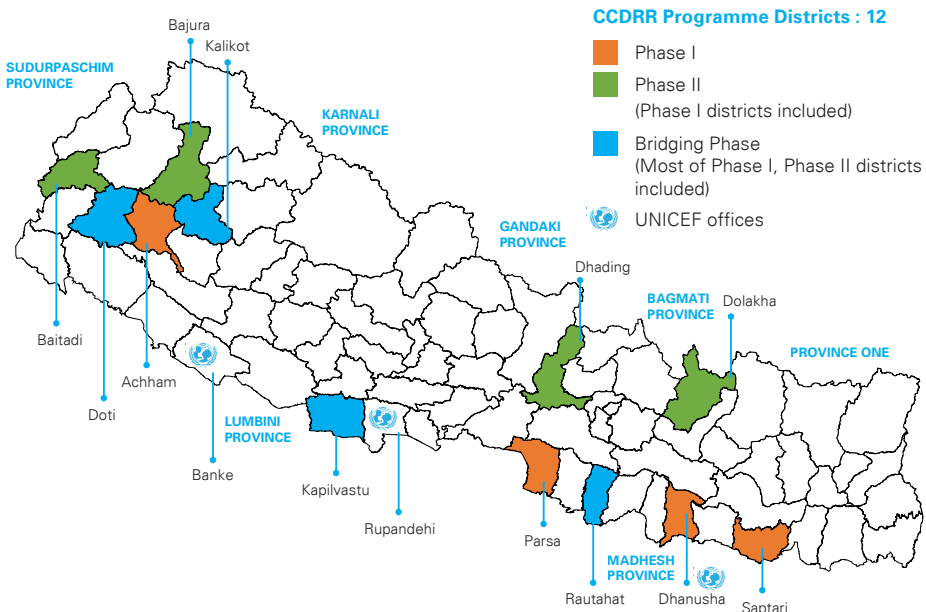
The first phase (Phase I: 2013-2016) was launched and successfully implemented in four pilot districts: Saptari, Dhanusha, Parsa and Achham. The second phase (Phase II: 2016-2019) programme expanded its original geographical coverage and was implemented in 14 municipalities by adding four new districts, namely: Baitadi, Bajura, Dolakha and Dhading, the latter two of which were heavily affected in the 2015 earthquake. The Bridging Phase (2019-2021) was implemented in 12 municipalities of eight districts, by adding four new districts, namely: Doti, Kalikot, Kapilvastu, Rautahat and their respective municipalities, Joraya, Raskot, Shivaraj and Durgabhagwati.

While each of the phases had particular programme outcomes as it evolved, the overall CCDRR programme aimed to i) strengthen knowledge, skills and capacities of children, young people and communities and systems; ii) increase child-centred DRR integration into district, provincial and sectoral policies and plans and iii) improve resilience and meaningful participation of children and young people in decision-making in DRR and climate change adaptation.

UNICEF worked with a diverse range of partners in the implementation of the CCDRR programme and collaborated at all three levels of government (federal, provincial and local). At the federal level, UNICEF coordinated closely with the Ministry of Federal Affairs

and General Administration (MoFAGA), Department of Education, as well as the Ministry of Home Affairs. At the subnational and local levels, implementation was carried out mainly by UNICEF partners which included both the local governments (municipalities) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), among others. Thus, it followed a mixed implementing partnership model, i.e. through direct implementation by the local/municipal governments and through NRCS, among other civil society organizations (CSO) and education NGOs. For example, UNICEF partnered directly with the municipal governments in five districts during the Bridging Phase, whereas NRCS was the main implementing partner in the other four districts, until December 2021.

## CCDRR PROGRAMME DISTRICTS



# THE CHILDREN ARE SAFE

*At a small school in far-western Nepal, interventions to reduce disaster risks supported by UNICEF have given children their rightful freedom to play without fear*



*Students of the Mallika Primary School in Doti District in far-western Nepal playing football on the school grounds.*

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## Doti, Nepal

Visit the Mallika Primary School, located in Joroyal Rural Municipality in Doti District in far-western Nepal, on any given day and you'll find the school grounds to be a hive of activity, with children out and about, playing football or volleyball or a simple game of tag. This, however, would not have been the case just two years ago, when teachers had to actively dissuade the students from playing on the premises, considering the various risks that existed.

With the school perched on a rise, there was a long drop to the road below from the

playground. Although a barbed wire fence had been propped up, it was neither complete nor secure to prevent a fall. The topography and the open ground also meant that the school was vulnerable to lightning strikes in an area where such incidents are common and often fatal.

Recognizing these risks to the safety of children, under the Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction Programme (CCDRR), UNICEF – with generous funding support from the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation – undertook a number of interventions at Mallika Primary, in partnership with the Joroyal Rural Municipality

and the school. This started with construction of walls and a sturdier net fence all around the grounds, to stop children from falling over, as well as the installation of an anti-lightning device atop the school structure.

“We have also received assistance to build child-friendly toilets and other water, sanitation and hygiene facilities,” says Bhoj Thapa, one of the teachers at the school and the assigned disaster risk reduction focal point. “In the case of girl children, sanitary pads are now provided in the school itself.” He adds that the support from UNICEF and the municipality has also extended to installing water filters for safe, drinking water in every classroom.

In addition, as part of the CCDRR programme, teachers, guardians as well as children themselves, have also been oriented in different aspects of reducing the risk of disasters as well as responding to a crisis.

*The programme has reached schools and communities, and through demonstrations, engaged people directly. This has had a very good impact.*

*- Nanda Raj Bhatta, Ward chair, Joroyal Rural Municipality*

“The programme has reached schools and communities, and through demonstrations, engaged people directly,” says Nanda Raj Bhatta, ward chair in Joroyal. “This has had a very good impact.”

For Bhoj, being able to see his students freely run and play as they should is the biggest reward. “The children are safe,” he says with a smile.



*Teacher Bhoj Thapa (center) at the Mallika Primary School in Doti District in far-western Nepal teaching his students about the anti-lightning device installed at the school with support from UNICEF in coordination with the local government.*

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# 'IT HAS GIVEN US PEACE OF MIND'

*In a village in southern Nepal, with the installation of a water pump set through a UNICEF-supported project, children and families are feeling more prepared to fight fires and save lives*

## Parsa, Nepal

On an early summer's day in February 2022, in the village of Harpur in Parsa District in Nepal's southern plains, locals are preparing to conduct a test of the ward's Fire Control House. As the pump starts to run and water flows through the pipes to the community tap, children begin to jump and splash excitedly, before the water is directed to a small canal that leads to the farms beyond.

This multi-use water pump was installed three years ago as part of the UNICEF-supported Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme to help the community

fight fires, something that was common in the windy season in the months of April and May.

"It was a constant worry," says Uttam Ram, a local currently working as a social mobilizer for the project. "Most of the 330 households in the village have thatched roofs, which can catch fire easily."

Thankfully, there have been no fires in Harpur since the pump was installed, partly due to the awareness that the local child club members have been raising in the community against fire hazards, going door to door to offer tips and advice on how to prevent fires.



A view of the Fire Control House/ emergency room in Harpur where the search and rescue equipment and water pump are installed.



“Before, if a fire broke out, we would have to rush to get buckets,” says 16-year-old Alok Kumar Ram, the president of the local child club. “But now, we would first raise the alert, unlock the pump house, get the water running, and mobilize everyone, including the child club members, to work together to douse the fire with the hose.”

In addition to fighting fires, excess and unused water from the pump can also be used for irrigation and other purposes – an idea that was brought up by the ward’s local disaster management committee (WDMC), which manages the water pump, and the child club network. The two entities have been working

*“It was a constant worry. Most of the 330 households in the village have thatched roofs, which can catch fire easily.”*

*- Uttam Ram, Social mobilizer,  
Parsagadhi Municipality*

together under the CCDRR programme to identify and mitigate disaster risks, and the child club members are consulted on any matters related to DRR.

“It’s given us peace of mind that if something happens lives won’t be lost,” says a 60-year-old.



*Locals washing clothes and children playing with water from the newly-installed pump during a mock drill.*

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# A COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER

When a landslide hit a village in Bajura District in far-western Nepal, it prompted the community to band together to contribute their labour to a UNICEF-supported project to build a gabion wall in the area



Staff from CCDRR partner organization, NRCS, supporting with project activities and awareness raising in Triveni Municipality, Bajura District.

## Bajura, Nepal

On a fateful night in July 2020, Jhirudevi Budha and her family had been sleeping in their home in Triveni Municipality in Bajura District in far-western Nepal. Jhirudevi remembers that it had been raining continuously at the time, but it wasn't until she heard a huge rumbling sound and felt the ground under her shake that she realized what was happening: a landslide. She immediately woke up her three children and ran with them out of the house.

"We saw that half of our courtyard had been swept away in the landslide," Jhirudevi says. "We rushed to our neighbour's place and asked to be let in... it was our only choice, even though all three houses in the neighbourhood were at risk."

Although their home had been spared the brunt of the destruction, Jhirudevi says she was too scared to return for a long time, fearing another landslide would do what

the last one could not. Desperate, she contacted the Nepal Red Cross Society, the implementing partner for UNICEF's Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme in the municipality.

The team carried out an assessment and soon developed a plan to build a gabion wall along the upper reaches of the hillside, right above where a number of houses – including that of Jhirudevi – were located. It soon turned into a community effort with over 130 people from Triveni providing free labour to the initiative, ensuring it could be completely quickly in a matter of days.

In addition to the gabion wall being built, a local grass plant of the *Nepius* species was also planted below the wall to help keep the soil intact and reduce risk of landslides.

“We are thankful to everyone who helped in this,” says Jhirudevi. “We had almost lost hope that day when the landslide happened and we had to run out, but we don't have that fear now.”



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*We had almost lost hope that day when the landslide happened and we had to run out, but we don't have that fear now.*

*- Jhirudevi Budha, Local, Triveni Municipality*



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# CHILDREN'S ISSUES AT THE FOREFRONT

*In Nepal's south, through his engagement in a child club under a UNICEF-supported initiative, a young boy is reminded of the crucial role he can play in serving his community, especially in the area of disaster risk reduction*

## Parsa, Nepal

On a quiet Saturday morning, a group of eight to 10 children walk through the gates of Dalit Mukti Basic School in Harpur in Parsa District in southern Nepal, a sense of purpose in their stride. Once on the school premises, they gather around in a circle and begin talking, their faces animated.

This is a weekly meeting of the local ward-level child club, where they are discussing their plans for the coming week, led by their president Alok Kumar Ram.

Alok unrolls the seasonal hazard calendar, a big chart developed by the child club that lists different disaster and climate hazards and the seasons in which they are likely to occur. With fire hazards at the top of the list for the current season, Alok initiates a discussion on what the child club members can do to help the community reduce these risks.

"What can we do? What are your ideas?" the 16-year-old asks.

Club members bring up the different opportunities to raise awareness around the village, including a door-to-door campaign to reach out to locals personally with key messages on fire safety during the windy season, distributing pamphlets and organizing a rally, among other activities. Alok also suggests that they divide up into pairs of two



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– a boy and a girl each – to cover the village during these door-to-door visits, and his fellow club members nod in agreement.

Alok was elected president of this ward-level child club in Harpur, as well as being the secretary of the larger child club network that encompasses the Parsagadhi Municipality. The establishment of these clubs and networks took place under the initiative of the Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) Programme supported by UNICEF, and generously funded by the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation.

For Alok, his involvement in the child club and network has been very rewarding in terms of the skills and knowledge he has gained, especially in the area of disaster risk reduction. This includes being trained in search and rescue, first aid, learning to prepare go-bags and life jackets, among other skills, and being able to teach others what he knows. More importantly, Alok says, it's been a good



*A weekly child club meeting being held in Harpur in Parsa District.*

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reminder of the role he can play in serving his community.

“I didn’t feel as though I could do anything,” Alok says. “I would think, ‘I’m just a child.’ But now, I feel that there is a lot I can do to contribute.”

And indeed, that contribution has been immense. Thanks to continuous efforts by the child club to push fire safety messages, Harpur has not witnessed a fire in the last three years. The club also advocated with ward officials, and eventually joined hands with the local disaster management committee (LDMC) and municipality, to install a water pump set in the village – with CCDRR support – dedicated to fighting fires in the vicinity.

Under Alok’s leadership, the club had also identified a number of disaster risks at the Dalit Mukti Basic School, including the possibility of road accidents given the lack of a school gate and proper boundary wall. In 2021, following the child club’s coordination with the LDMC, CCDRR and the Nepal Red Cross Society, a wall was built around the school and metal

*“I feel like a different person now. Knowing that children can be agents of positive change has given me that confidence.”*

*– Alok Kumar Ram, Child club member, Parsagadhi Municipality*

gate put up, so that children within are secure. With these accomplishments, Alok says he has also become a much more confident speaker and leader, someone who is now able to effectively put forth children’s concerns and issues related to DRR across various public platforms.

He hopes that more children around the country can gain from the trainings and opportunities that come with being part of child clubs. “I feel like a different person now,” he says with pride. “Knowing that children can be agents of positive change has given me that confidence.”

# SAFE TO LEARN

*In far-western Nepal, through the CCDRR programme, UNICEF is working to address the risks in children's journeys to and from schools, and ensure a safer learning experience*

## **Baitadi, Nepal**

Kalpana Pandey had to rely entirely on luck when going to school. The tenth grader at the Shivasthali High School in Dashrathchand Municipality in Baitadi District in Nepal's remote far-west had to cross a small river on her way to class. Although this crossing was barely an inconvenience during the dry season, it posed a major challenge during the monsoons, with the water level often rising too high for her to walk over.

"The only way to cross was to walk through the water, so there were many times I just returned home without going to school," Kalpana says.

Of course, she wasn't alone in this; it was the same gamble for other students who live in her neighbourhood, who also had to cross the river to get to school.

Learning of the difficulties the students were facing, UNICEF – through the Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme – and in partnership with the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), initiated the construction of a bridge over the river. The reinforced cement concrete bridge would span eight metres in length and enable children and the community at large to make the crossing easily, even during the rainy season.

Kalpana says the project has been an absolute game-changer. "There used to be two months or so out of the year that we couldn't get to school so would miss classes," she says. "That's no longer an issue."

While for Kalpana, it had been reaching school that had posed a risk prior to the construction of the bridge, for students at the Kedar Basic School – also located in Dashrathchand – the risks were present on the premises of the school itself.

The school building at Kedar was extremely old and had not been well-preserved, and students, teachers and parents worried that even the smallest of earthquakes could bring the structure tumbling down. But without resources to undertake renovations, the school had no choice but to run classes in the old building.

The much-needed support arrived in 2017, when, through the CCDRR programme, UNICEF and the NRCS supported a series of improvements at the school. A child club was established at the school, and subsequently – together with its members – a local disaster and climate resilience plan was also developed. Efforts soon began to replace the existing stone and wood structure with a



*A meeting between child club members of the CCDRR programme and the adult members of the Local Disaster Management Committee in Baitadi District.*

UNICEF Nepal/2021/SShrestha

sturdier concrete building, and with additional support received from the municipality itself, another three-room structure was also built on the premises.

“The 300 or so students here, as well as the staff members, don’t have to study or teach in fear anymore,” says Bisansingh Bhandari, Principal at Kedar Basic School. “We’re very relieved.”

“There used to be two months or so out of the year that we couldn’t get to school so would miss classes ....That’s no longer an issue.

– Kalpana Pandey, Child club member, Dashrathchand Municipality

# THE RISK WAS CLEAR

*In southern Nepal, a young girl leading a child club network established as part of a UNICEF programme reflects on what she and her peers have learned and achieved through working in disaster risk reduction in their community*

## Parsa, Nepal

For much of the year, the Singyahi River, as it flows through Manawabazaar in Parsa District in Nepal's south, is a temperate, calm entity. However, come monsoon season, and it can rage wild, wreaking havoc and destruction in its wake, a constant threat to the 300 or so families living in its proximity.

That was what happened in 2019, when heavy rains caused the river to become swollen beyond its banks, entering the village, destroying crops and forcing people out of their homes. It was during that time that two students had been swept away while they had been crossing the river on their way back home from school. While one of the children made it out of the water alive, the other had not been so fortunate.

"There was no embankment," says Reetu Shrestha, one of Manawabazaar's locals and the vice president of the child club network in the area. "The risk was clear."

Following the incident, Reetu and her fellow network members had advocated with ward and municipal officials, as well as seeking support from UNICEF and Nepal Red Cross Society representatives, to urgently address the safety needs. The construction of a kilometer-long embankment along the river was proposed to keep the river's course in check.



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*We feel we made a real difference in helping people learn to keep themselves safe.*

*– Reetu Shrestha, Child club member, Parsagadhi Municipality*

Thanks to the commitment and push from the children, the embankment soon materialized. Reetu and the child club network also led a campaign for the plantation of trees along the embankment, to help prevent soil erosion and flooding, as well as reaching out to locals with tips on keeping important documents and valuables safe in case of a flood or other





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emergency, and on evacuating to higher grounds immediately. “We haven’t seen a big flood here since,” says Puja Tiwari, another of the 14 members of the network.

Supporting the establishment of child clubs and networks around the country is one of the key aspects of UNICEF’s Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme. The programme, funded generously by the Margaret A Cargill Foundation, is run in collaboration with local governments, and works with and for the children and communities in disaster-prone districts to better prepare them to prevent and respond to disaster.

Besides coordinating with local officials and organizations to identify and mitigate disaster risks such as fire, cold waves or floods - as in the case of the Singyahi – the children are also engaged in raising awareness in the community about harmful practices such

as child marriage, the dowry system and untouchability, among others.

“During COVID-19, we also campaigned to promote the preventive measures,” Reetu adds. “And we feel we made a real difference in helping people learn to keep themselves safe.”

The network holds monthly meetings to plan upcoming activities and programmes, as well as their participation in different trainings. These have included basic first-aid, search-and rescue trainings and other DRR-related sessions.

All of which, Reetu says, means that she and other child club members feel like they can fully support their communities during a crisis, advocate for children’s rights and needs to key decisionmakers, and call for urgent action where required – precisely the objective of the CCDRR programme.

# 'WE FEEL MORE PREPARED'

*For residents of a flood-prone village in Nepal's south, the installment of a raised hand pump has ensured uninterrupted access to safe water and peace of mind*

## **Rautahat, Nepal**

In the village of Bhalohiya in Durgabhagwati Rural Municipality in Rautahat District in Nepal's southern plains, floods are an annual occurrence, with water rising to hip-level on many occasions, according to locals.

One of the key challenges during the monsoon season has always been to secure access to clean water for the community, especially after a flood. As soon as floodwaters entered the village and rose above a particular height, the existing hand pumps would inevitably get submerged and the water become contaminated.

Bhalohiya residents remember how dirty and yellow the water would be in appearance, with

*"It has put our minds at ease...  
We feel more prepared in case  
there is a flood.*

*– Sumitra Devi, Local,  
Durgabhagwati Rural Municipality*

a bad smell and taste. "It stained our clothes and utensils," says Sumitra Devi, one of the local women. "And many of us would get sick, but we had no other source of water."

For the past two years, however, it's been a different story altogether. The municipality, in partnership with the UNICEF-supported Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme, has installed an elevated hand



*Locals of Bhalohiya using the raised hand pump.*

pump in Bhalohiya. A major catalyst for these efforts was Dinesh Sahani, the chairman of the local water user committee who donated his own land for the construction of the pump.

The new pump draws water from a depth of nearly 365 feet underground – compared to 180 feet for other existing pumps, and 25-30 feet for older pumps – and is placed atop a raised platform, ensuring protection from floodwaters. And not only is it flood-resilient, but the platform has also been designed with a ramp and handrail for improved accessibility for those with a physical disability, as well as being easy for children to use.

The hand-pump serves a total of around 80 households at present, although Sumitra says

you also often see people from nearby villages coming to fetch water. “Many children will fill their water bottles here on their way to school,” she adds.

Local child clubs have also been mobilized to promote the use of the hand pump, as well as raising awareness about other health and safety measures to be mindful of during flooding. These clubs are a CCDRR-supported initiative to better inform and engage children in recognizing and responding to disaster risks in their communities.

“It has put our minds at ease,” Sumitra says. “We feel more prepared in case there is a flood.”



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# REPRESENTING THE VOICES OF CHILDREN

*In Achham District in far-western Nepal, a young girl trained through a UNICEF-supported initiative gains confidence to amplify and strengthen the voices of her peers*

## Achham, Nepal

Manisha Kumari Bista feels she has come a long way, both in terms of her skills and knowledge in different areas, as well as her personal growth. The 15-year-old from Kamalbazaar Municipality in Achham District in Nepal's far west remembers being extremely timid back in 2013, unable to speak up in class, let alone in front of a larger audience.

"I could barely even introduce myself properly to people," she says now, laughing. "I was just so shy."

Despite her timidity, Manisha decided to join the local child club – a decision that, to this day, she believes was one of the best she ever made. "There were so many activities that the child club organized, from essay-writing competitions to quizzes, street plays and awareness campaigns related to disaster risk reduction," she explains. "Being part of the child club meant I was both organizing and participating in these events."

That experience and the exposure it brought to people outside of her day-to-day life, from different backgrounds across different wards in the municipality was a huge leap for Manisha, who found herself coming out of her shell bit by bit. In two years' time, she was elected vice president of the club, and four years after that, the secretary and today, she is the president.



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So what ultimately led to these changes she so clearly sees in herself? Manisha says it was the eye-opening process of learning about various facets of child rights, the impact of social practices like child marriage, about the importance of water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as about disasters and how these affect children and young people, that really propelled her. The child club, according to her, helped her understand that she was an advocate for the children in her community, and that responsibility gave her the confidence to speak out.

"I wanted to call for more attention to children's concerns and issues and demand more investment in their futures, including in helping them become disaster resilient," she says.

Indeed, disaster risk reduction formed a core part of the work of the child club, which was engaged in helping schools and local governments in identifying risks, mapping hazards and raising awareness in the community. The children were also trained in light search and rescue as well as first aid.

This role that children and young people like Manisha can play in becoming change agents in their communities is precisely why UNICEF's Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme supports the mobilization of children through child clubs, to capacitate them to identify, prioritize and take action against multi-hazard risks in their communities, as well as other social causes.

*I wanted to call for more attention to children's concerns and issues and demand more investment in their futures, including in helping them become disaster resilient.*

*- Manisha Kumari Bista, Child club member, Kamalbazaar Municipality*

When asked of her plans for the future, Manisha says: "I will continue to use all the platforms available to me, at the ward level at the municipal level, and beyond, to amplify and strengthen the voices of children and young people."



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# LIMITING LIGHTNING LOSS

*In Tilathi Koiladi in southern Nepal, where lightning strikes are a common threat to communities, the rural municipality – in partnership with UNICEF – is in the process of installing anti-lightning devices in high-traffic areas, including schools*



*A view of one of the anti-lightning devices installed in Tilathi Koiladi Rural Municipality in Saptari District.*

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## **Saptari, Nepal**

On a single day in 2019 in the Tilathi Koiladi Rural Municipality in Saptari District in Nepal's south, lightning strikes killed a 15-year-old girl, as well as injuring two other women. These incidents, unfortunately, were not isolated

or rare. In this part of the country, lightning comprises a major threat to communities, especially during the annual monsoon season.

To reduce this risk to the lives of children and families, the municipality – with support

from UNICEF's Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme – initiated a campaign to install anti-lightning devices in high-priority areas, starting with community schools, in 2021.

Community schools were chosen for installation in the first phase given the large number of students that study in these institutions, often over 15,000. Through a cost-sharing modality with the municipality, UNICEF – thanks to funding from the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation – was able to support the setting up of devices in seven schools in Tilathi Koiladi, with 10 more schools set to receive devices in the current fiscal year.

Anti-lightning devices comprise a mechanism that includes a rod placed on the top of a given structure, which channels the electricity to the ground rather than letting it pass through the structure itself, which could lead to a fire or electrocution.

Pravash Jha, principal at the Public High School, which has over 1,000 students, says

*“Anytime there was a lightning storm, we used to be afraid that something would happen. That’s not the case anymore.”*

*– Pravash Jha, Educator, Public High School, Tilathi Koiladi Rural Municipality*

that having the device in place has offered both students and faculty a feeling of safety. “Anytime there was a lightning storm, we used to be afraid that something would happen,” Pravash says. “That’s not the case anymore.”

In the next phase of the campaign, after completing installation at the 10 remaining community schools, devices will be put up at health facilities and ward offices. “Basically, we are trying to target places where there is a high flow of people, and these offices see a large number of service-seekers,” says Keshav Kumar Jha, chief administrative officer at the municipality office.

# BROADENING PERSPECTIVES, ENHANCING SKILLS

*A young girl from Bajura District in Nepal's far-west reflects on how the skills she gained during her years as a child club member have stayed with her*

## **Bajura, Nepal**

In October 2020, when a fire broke out in her neighbour's house in Triveni Municipality in Bajura District in far-western Nepal, Terisa Kumari Saud remembers springing into action. She had been trained to respond to incidents exactly like this one as part of her engagement with the local child club, and the 19-year-old says she felt "prepared".

"I worked with other community members to bring the fire under control," she explains, talking about how they had made sure the family was safe, as well as rescuing materials from the top floor of the house. "Although some of their possessions could not be saved, no one was injured, and the fire was doused in time."

In addition to the role she played in helping to put out the fire, Terisa also informed the police and municipal authorities about the incident, so that a report could be made. "We also advocated with the ward office to provide support and relief materials to the affected family," she adds.

More recently, while in Kailali District – where Terisa is currently studying to be a junior technical assistant – she had been witness to a car accident. Once again, she had acted without hesitation, proceeding to carry out basic first aid treatment on the injured, and helping to send them off to the hospital with help from her teachers.



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"My teachers were surprised and asked me where I'd learned to do what I'd just done, and I told them I had taken a first aid course while I'd been a child club member," Terisa shares.

In this way, Terisa says that the skills she acquired during her years with the child club have stayed with her, enabling her to respond quickly and effectively in times of need.

UNICEF has supported the establishment of such child clubs and networks around the country as part of its Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme together with local implementing partner Nepal Red Cross Society, to capacitate and empower children to better prepare and respond to disasters.



“We did so many things – there were trainings and orientations on hazard mapping, identifying safe places and evacuation routes, as well as basic first aid, and we had also worked with the local government on a ward-level vulnerability and risk assessment exercise,” Terisa says.

“At school, we were just focused on our books, but the child club and the different activities helped to broaden my perspectives and enhanced my skills.”

**We did so many things – there were trainings and orientations on hazard mapping, identifying safe places and evacuation routes, as well as basic first aid.**

**– Terisa Kumari Saud, Child club member, Triveni Municipality**



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# WARNING BELLS

*An early-warning system installed in the River Khando in Nepal's south is helping communities on both sides of the Nepal-India border better prepare and respond to disaster*

## Saptari, Nepal

Business owners in the Belhi Bazaar are usually keen on the location they've secured for their shops, in the heart of a busy market accessible to customers from either side of Nepal-India border. However, come monsoon season, shopkeepers can face a bit of dilemma as to whether that location is truly all it's cracked up to be.

This is because Belhi Bazaar sits in one of the lower-lying corners of the Tilathi Koiladi Rural Municipality in Saptari District in Nepal's southern plains, making it very vulnerable to yearly flooding. This vulnerability was never more apparent than in 2020, when the nearby Khando River overflowed and its waters overtook the area, inundating businesses and causing considerable damage to property.

"I still get chills when I remember how bad it was," says grocery shop owner Ramesh Yadav. "Not only were we already struggling to keep our businesses afloat after the massive hit we took because of the COVID-19 pandemic... the damage from the floods just added to our misery."

Since then, however, several key steps have been taken to avoid a similar situation in the future. Recognizing the importance of being forewarned, the municipality – as part of its existing partnership with UNICEF via the Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme, and with technical support from ICIMOD and CSO partner Sabal Nepal – has now put in place a community-based flood early-warning system or EWS.



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Upstream from Belhi Bazaar, in the neighbouring Rupani Rural Municipality, a machine was installed under a bridge on the River Khando that provides readings on the water level at five-minute intervals. These readings allow time for communities downstream, including Tilathi, to evacuate people and goods in case there is an indication of a possible flood.

"If a flood were to occur, it would take two-and-a-half hours for the water to reach Tilathi Koiladi from Rupani," says Satish Kumar Singh, the municipal chair at Tilathi. "That is enough time for people to move to safer areas, and for businessowners to pack up and secure their properties."

As part of the initiative, a communication tree has also been established, so that when the EWS warns of an imminent flood, the information is relayed to all the persons in



*UNICEF staff discussing disaster risk reduction and preparedness, including the early warning system, with local women and children in Tilathi Koiladi.*

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the communication tree, to be passed on to others in the community so that everyone is aware. From the ward chair, ward members, local security agencies to local businessmen – they are all part of this information relay mechanism.

Besides alerting the community in Nepal, the EWS is also proving useful to those across the border in Kunauli Bazaar, a number of whom are included in the communication tree and tasked with warning others around them. Much like Belhi, Kunauli used to suffer the same fate during the monsoons. Indeed, the EWS is key to communities and businesses on either side of the border, enabling better preparedness and response should disaster strike.

*If a flood were to occur, it would take two-and-a-half hours for the water to reach Tilathi Koiladi from Rupani... That is enough time for people to move to safer areas, and for businessowners to pack up and secure their properties.”*

*– Satish Kumar Singh, Chairperson, Tilathi Koiladi Rural Municipality*

# A PLACE OF LIGHT AND LEARNING

*Improvements made to the structure and premises of a school in far-western Nepal through a UNICEF-supported intervention has helped students and faculty leave safety concerns behind*

## **Kalikot, Nepal**

Students at the Shree Panchakot Basic School, located in Raskot Municipality in Kalikot District in far-western Nepal, had come to expect some inconvenience or the other when attending classes.

The school had initially comprised a two-room structure, and had been in an extremely dilapidated condition for over a decade. Not only was the roof leaking, the windows and doors were broken, there were no proper seating arrangements in the classrooms and the grounds were overrun with weeds.

“We didn’t have access to water, no carpets and the roof was leaking,” says Rashmi Bam, a student at the school, explaining that this made it very difficult for students like her to focus on their studies.

Parents too were understandably concerned about sending their children in, but also keen to take action. “Many parents feel that school is a second home for children,” says Dhan Bahadur Bam, principal of Panchakot. “They felt a collective responsibility to protect an institution that was so important in our children’s lives.”

It was thanks, in large part, to the push from the students and parents, that a school-level vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA) was carried out, under the UNICEF-supported Child-Centred Disaster Risk

*“Many parents feel that school is a second home for children. They felt a collective responsibility to protect an institution that was so important in our children’s lives.*

*– Dhan Bahadur Bam, educator,  
Shree Panchakot Basic School, Raskot  
Municipality*

Reduction (CCDRR) programme. Various risks were identified that needed to be addressed immediately to make the school safe for students and staff.

Based on these findings, UNICEF through the CCDRR programme, and in partnership with the municipality, swiftly undertook several school-improvement activities at Shree Panchakot. Keen to help, the school management committee and caregivers also offered their support to the project.

The school building was renovated thoroughly to accommodate three rooms compared to the previous two. The walls were plastered and painted, the roof repaired, doors and windows secured, and classes laid with carpets and tables. In addition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities were upgraded

as well: child- and disabled-friendly toilets constructed, together with handwashing stations.

The premises were also cleaned up, with a net fence erected around the compound and a gate put in place to prevent outsiders and grazing cattle from entering.

These efforts meant that this school, where

students and faculty were once afraid the roof and walls would cave in over their heads, has now been transformed into a place of light and learning. Dhan Bahadur says that it has become much more of a conducive environment for children to study and enjoy their time in class – and his students echo his sentiments.

“Everything is better now,” Rashmi says.



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# WALLING OFF DISASTER

*At a school in Parsa District in southern Nepal, students are playing freely and without fear thanks to a newly-constructed boundary wall around the premises – built with the advocacy of child club members*



*Child club members engaging in a plantation activity at the Ram Sworup School in Parsa District.*

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## Parsa, Nepal

“We had to be constantly on alert to make sure that the students didn’t go in the direction of the pond and have an accident of some kind ... it was nerve-wracking.”

Rishi Kumari, a 10th grader, is talking about the anxiety she and her other schoolmates, faculty and parents used to feel in the past, in the absence of a boundary wall around the Ram Sworup Rampriti Chaurasiya High School in Bindabasini Rural Municipality in Parsa District. Not only did this mean that the school’s compound was open to outsiders, including grazing cattle that often came in and damaged the plants, but with the pond close by, there was also a very real danger that children – especially the youngest – would venture out too far and fall into the water.

*“The child club has done a great job of leading the way and showing us all the importance of identifying risks, and preparing for and preventing disasters.”*

*– Sanjay Kumar Gupta, Educator,  
Ram Sworup Rampriti Chaurasiya  
High School, Bindabasini Rural  
Municipality*

And such incidents had taken place in the past. “Two students had fallen into the pond two or three years ago and drowned,” Rishi Kumari shares. “It was scary.”



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*A young boy indicates the brick wall constructed around the school premises following the advocacy and demand of the school's child club.*

It was only when the school's child club, of which Rishi Kumari is a member, made the push for change that these risks were finally alleviated with the construction of a strong brick wall hemming in the school's premises.

The child club in the past had conducted a risk-mapping exercise at the school. This was part of the training they received from the UNICEF-supported Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme, whose efforts encompass the establishment and capacity building of similar child clubs and networks around the country.

Through the exercise, the children worked diligently to identify the different hazards and risks they were exposed to at the school, and not surprisingly, the absence of a boundary wall topped the list. With this, the child club then worked on a proposal for the construction of a wall. The proposal recommended a cost-sharing modality, and club members approached the deputy mayor, ward chief, UNICEF and its partner organization the Nepal Red Cross Society, to join hands in the project.

In time, even province-level parliamentarians became engaged.

"With everyone's joint contribution, the full wall was completed in 2021," Mustaq Raut, the president of the child club, says. "The school feels much safer now."

Faculty members too echo that sense of security. "It's given us peace of mind," expresses teacher Sanjay Kumar Gupta. He says that since the wall has been built, the number of students at the school has risen from around 900 to approximately 1,200 now, indicating that parents are feeling more confident in enrolling their children as well.

What's more, with intruders and cattle now effectively blocked from entering the school, the premises are now greener than ever before.

"The child club has done a great job of leading the way and showing us all the importance of identifying risks, and preparing for and preventing disasters," says Sanjay.

# STEPPING UP DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN SCHOOLS

In Bajura District in Nepal's far west, several schools in hard-to-reach areas have been provided support through UNICEF's CCDRR programme to identify and address disaster risks

## Bajura, Nepal

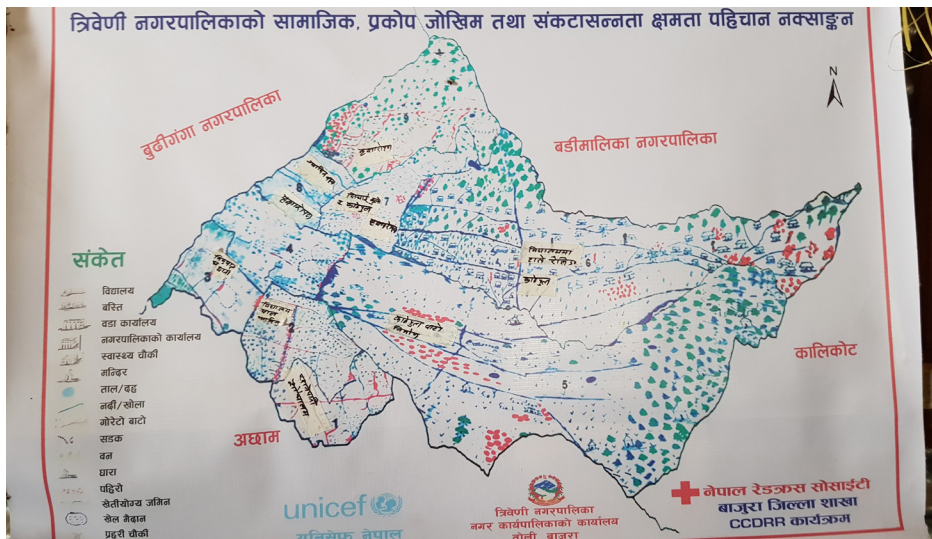
Gayatri Basic School and Niteshwari Primary School both comprise crucial institutions for the community in the Triveni Municipality in Bajura District in Nepal's far west. Both schools primarily serve children from vulnerable and marginalized communities in hard-to-reach areas, and both have a long history in these parts.

Until recently, the similarities between the two also extended, unfortunately, to the dismal state of the schools' premises. At Gayatri, the roof – damaged during a hurricane – leaked when it rained, and water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for the students and

*We used to feel very vulnerable to the elements. But under these stable conditions, we can focus on our teaching learning activities now.*

*- Tula Bahadur Budha, educator, Gayatri Basic School, Triveni Municipality*

faculties were in poor condition. Leaks were also common in Niteshwari's classrooms, a situation that was exacerbated in August 2020 when heavy rains caused the back wall of the school building to collapse, rendering it impossible to continue holding classes.







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Both schools had approached the Nepal Red Cross Society’s Bajura chapter – UNICEF’s implementing partner on the ground for the Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme – with their respective issues at different times. Once the key challenges were assessed in either case, NRCS staff, through CCDRR, coordinated with local governments to extend the necessary support to the schools.

For Gayatri School, this resulted in support to repair and reconstruct the main building as well as to establish a proper toilet. The funding for these activities was a combined effort of CCDRR, the municipality and the provincial government – and the labour was generously donated by community members. “We used to feel very vulnerable to the elements,” says

headmaster Tula Bahadur Budha. “But under these stable conditions, we can focus on our teaching-learning activities now.”

In the case of Niteshwari School, given the critical condition of the building, urgent action had to be taken to help over 100 students resume their learning. Funds were provided jointly by CCDRR, the school management committee and the ward office to build a concrete slab on the first floor where the original wall had collapsed and a gabion wall for further protection.

“We are running classes again, and the students and community members could not be happier about it,” says chair of the School Management Committee Parbat Bahadur Shahi.



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# EMPOWERED TO ACT DURING A CRISIS

*Following training sessions in disaster risk reduction supported by UNICEF, a woman in Nepal's southern plains is now more certain of her role and actions should a crisis strike her community*



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## **Parsa, Nepal**

Pana Devi's face lights up in a smile as she talks about how her perception of herself has taken a turn these past few months. Clad in a colourful saree, the 47-year-old local of Harpur in Parsa District in Nepal's southern plains is describing the different trainings related to disaster risk reduction that she has taken part in and how these have helped her feel more confident and empowered to help her community in times of crisis.

"I've never been to school, and so never had a chance to learn in depth about hazards

*We were given so much life-saving information. It made me feel like if something were to happen – like a fire, say – we would automatically know the next steps to take, and not have to give in to panic.*

*– Pana Devi, Local, Parsagadhi Municipality*



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*The excess and unused water from the multi-purpose water pump in Harpur, Parsagadhi is directed to a small canal that leads to the farms beyond and is being used for irrigation.*

or emergencies or anything like that,” Pana says. “Of course, we had faced fire and other disasters many times over in our village, but I had never properly learned what caused these, how to prevent them, how to respond.”

That was when Pana, as a member of the local ward-level disaster management committee (LDMC), had been selected to be part of a series of training sessions under UNICEF’s Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme, generously funded by the Margaret A Cargill Foundation. Conducted by UNICEF’s partner Nepal Red Cross Society, the training included basic first-aid, search and rescue, and sessions in general disaster risk reduction.

Pana says it was all very eye-opening. “We were given so much life-saving information,” she says. “It made me feel like if something were to happen – like a fire, say – we would

automatically know the next steps to take, and not have to give in to panic.” Just recently, she shares about an incident at a marriage ceremony where one of her relatives had fainted, and she had applied the mouth-to-mouth resuscitation process she had learned during the basic first-aid course to revive the person.

Pana feels that such skills should not be limited to a few but rather spread far and wide so that everyone knows how to keep themselves and others safe in case of a disaster.

On her part, she has been sharing what she knows with neighbours and friends where possible.

“More women especially should be taught about preparing and responding to disaster as we are often the first ones to be affected,” she says.

# KEEPING THE RIVER ON COURSE

*In a village in southern Nepal, newly-built gabion walls and culverts along rivers are inspiring more confidence in locals in terms of reduced risk of flooding during the monsoon*

## Dhanusha, Nepal

Indicating a point along the walls of her home, Suvdi Devi Mahara is explaining how high waters can rise during a flood. “Just a few years ago, it reached my waist. I’ve also seen the water submerge half of the house on other occasions,” she says.

Suvdi Devi is a resident of the village of Naktajhij in Mithila Municipality, in Dhanusha District in Nepal’s southern plains, and knows all too well what it is like to live at the constant mercy of nature. The low-lying village is among those most vulnerable to monsoon flooding in the area, where the nearby rivers swell in size and intensity, wreaking yearly havoc on people’s lives.

To support Naktajhij locals – most of whom hail from one of the most historically marginalized communities in the country – UNICEF, following a vulnerability assessment and through the Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme, undertook a number of interventions in partnership with the ward and municipal offices and the Nepal Red Cross Society.

Chief among these was the construction of gabion walls on either side of the river to help control the erosion and land sliding on the banks. This would prevent the water from cutting a path through the soil into the village, and lower the risk of flooding. In addition,

*“We used to have to walk a long way to make the crossing, even for the rivulets, but it’s a much shorter and simpler journey now.”*

*Suvdi Devi Mahara, Local, Mithila Municipality*

a culvert was also built downstream to the one that had been previously set up by the municipality, allowing people to cross the river safely.

Similarly, another elderly women and Naktajhij local, recalls how, some years ago, she had had to abandon her house. “The water was everywhere and we thought the house would be swept away, so we left,” she says. “For months, we did not have anywhere to live.”

For Suvdi and other Naktajhij locals, the recent efforts have come as a great relief. “We used to have to walk a long way to make the crossing, even for the rivulets, but it’s a much shorter and simpler journey now,” Suvdi Devi says.

These disaster mitigation efforts were undertaken through joint funding by CCDRR and the ward office, and are helping to ensure the safety of over 60 households in Naktajhij.



*A Naktajhij resident showing how high the water level had risen during the last flood in the village.*

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# LETTING CHILDREN IN

*In far-western Nepal, a school-based DRR programme lays bare the true impact of climate change and disasters on children, and the role they can play in minimizing, adapting to and responding to these risks*

## Bajura, Nepal

For Tulasi Budthapa, teaching and learning used to be very much about what was contained in textbooks, and not beyond – and this included learning about disasters and climate change. “A teacher at the Nawadurga Bhawani Basic School in Triveni Municipality in far-western Nepal, she says that even though there were tangible disaster risks all around them, it wasn’t something that was considered necessary for children in the community to be aware of, let alone engaged in combatting.

Children, however, continued to be affected by disasters. “In 2019, there were two landslides just in front of and behind our school,” Tulasi offers as an example. “The school had not been able to afford to build a protective gabion wall back then.... Many children fell and were injured in those incidents.”

It was only in 2017 after a school-based disaster risk reduction (DRR) programme was introduced that the true impact of climate change and disasters on children, and the role they can play in minimizing, responding and adapting to these risks became truly apparent. Supported by UNICEF through the Nepal Red Cross Society and implemented by local partner organization MISS Bajura, the programme provided a number of trainings and orientations for the school’s child club members, taking them through various exercises to identify disaster risks and solutions. Tulasi, as the DRR focal point, was at the helm of it all.



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*“The risks faced by children used to be taken very lightly in the past and no one really tried to see the issue from children’s perspectives. Now that’s changed.”*

*– Tulasi Budthapa, Educator,  
Triveni Municipality*

“One of the first mitigation needs we identified at the school was the gabion wall, as well as a handrail in front of the primary classroom,” says Tulasi. “We put forth the request to the organization and the school soon received funds amounting to over NRs. 150,000, which were then matched by the Municipality.” The wall and the handrail were both swiftly installed, according to Tulasi.

Tulasi says it has been “very exciting” to be part of these DRR trainings, learnings which the child club members have been cascading to other children in the school through regular sessions. As happy as she is to be playing such a key role in ensuring that children in her school know how to protect themselves in case of a disaster, Tulasi is foremost relieved that the connection between children and the climate crisis has been rendered clear to all.

“The risks faced by children used to be taken very lightly in the past and no one really tried to see the issue from children’s perspectives,” Tulasi says. “Now that’s changed.”



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