

The empowerment of people affected by natural and human-made disasters to reduce inequality: Addressing the differential impact on persons with disabilities, older persons and youth and children.

57th Session of the Commission for Social Development
13 February 2019
United Nations
New York, NY

Jaishree Beedasy PhD
Columbia University, New York, NY

Human and Economic Impact of Disasters

- Between 1998 and 2017 - 7255 disasters¹ climate-related and geophysical disasters
 - affected 4.4 billion people
 - caused 1.3 million deaths
 - greater than 90 % of the disasters caused by climate related events
 - poorer countries most vulnerable, and worst-hit



Human and Economic Impact of Disasters (contd.)

- reported direct losses of \$2.908 trillion
more than twice what was lost in the previous two decades
- high-income countries report higher losses in terms absolute economic losses
- high-income countries recorded losses for 53% of reported disasters, low-income countries only recorded them for 13% of disasters
- disproportionate impact of disaster events on low and middle-income countries
- only one officially high-income territory – the island of Puerto Rico featured in the top 10 economic losses as a percentage of GDP

Children and Youth More Vulnerable To Disasters

Every year millions of young people including children, are affected by disasters

- an estimated 175,000 million per year will be affected by climate-related disasters in this decade¹
- one in six children, 357 million, live in a conflict zone²
- out of a total of 303 million children and youth out of school, 104 million live in conflict or disaster affected countries³
- have different physiology and psychology compared to adults rendering them more vulnerable to disasters and adverse events⁴



1. Save the Children UK (2007) Legacy of Disasters: The impact of climate change on children

2. The War on Children: Time to End Violations Against Children in Armed Conflict (2018). Save The Children International

3. A Future Stolen: Young and out-of-school. UNICEF 2018

4. Balbus, J.M., & Malina, A.B. (2009). Identifying Vulnerable Subpopulations for Climate Change Health Effects in the United States. Journal Occupational

Children and Youth More Vulnerable To Disasters (contd.)

Children and youth often do not have the resources, independence or opportunity to prepare for disasters

- they face physical harm, disruptions in their families, schooling, housing, health, access to food, clean water, healthcare and social services, friendships and social network
- poverty level, housing stability, education, immigration status, legal status, and disability issues play a big role on the experience of and recovery from disasters
- they have different vulnerabilities and protective systems at different times in the course of their development¹
- younger children rely on adults to make evacuation decisions, secure shelter, and provide resources
- not given the opportunity to participate in disaster initiatives

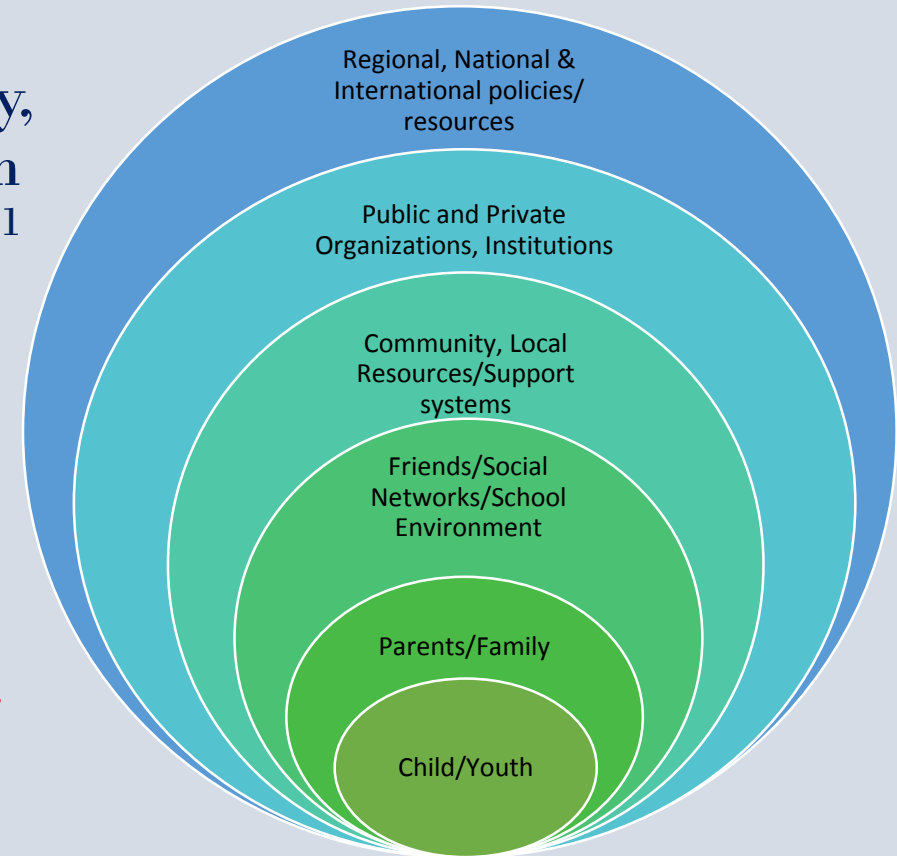
1. Wright, M. O., Masten, A. S., & Narayan, A. J. (2013). Resilience processes in development: Four waves of research on positive adaptation in the context of adversity. In S. Goldstein & R. B. Brooks (Eds.), *Handbook of resilience in children* (pp. 15-37).

Children and Youth In Interconnected Systems

- Children and youth develop within interconnected systems and groups, including their parents, their family, their households, their peers, the institutions with which they interact, their communities, and society as a whole¹
- These systems influence children's and youth's development in general and their ability to adapt to disasters and adverse events.

Essential to:

- empower the children and youth by promoting their adaptive capacities or resilience
- build and strengthen the supporting systems that “protect” them from the negative consequences of exposure to adverse events



Disaster Research, Education and Advocacy

Our team at NCDP

- combines research, education, practice, and advocacy work related to disasters
- provides best practices for our national disaster preparedness and recovery, and resilience
- focuses on vulnerable populations, especially children
- translates findings into actionable recommendations for policies at the federal, state and local levels that improve the lives of vulnerable populations
- Many of NCDP's recovery projects have focused on the health and mental health needs of children who have been affected by disasters
- Mixed method studies combining quantitative (e.g. surveys) and qualitative (e.g., focus groups and key informant interviews) approaches

Children and Youth Focused Work: Disproportionate Impacts

Even within countries that are more affluent, the impacts of disasters and the recovery trajectories can be strikingly unequal

- US Gulf Coast particularly vulnerable to both natural and technological disasters due to
 - its geographical location
 - the concentration of industry and infrastructure
- Region's vulnerability further compounded
 - poor health metrics such as high obesity and diabetes rates
 - socio-economic factors such as chronic poverty and a struggling economy
 - 28% of children in Louisiana and 31% of children in Mississippi live in poverty compared National average of 19% ¹

Long Term Disaster Studies in US Gulf Coast

- Large longitudinal cohort studies conducted by NCDP in the US Gulf Coast states
 - following the trajectories of children's recovery after natural and technological disasters
 - Hurricane Katrina in 2005
 - Deepwater horizon oil spill in 2010
 - After hurricane Katrina, a five-year longitudinal study of 1,079 randomly sampled households in Louisiana and Mississippi ¹
 - estimated 160,000 children had been displaced ²
 - displaced children were more than four times more likely to show symptoms of serious emotional disturbance than those who were not
- A decade after the hurricane, the effects of missed schooling and mass displacement is being felt in New Orleans' communities.
 - some youth service-providers are adjusting to serve adults in their mid-20s who, after Katrina, fell behind in school and life

.1.Abramson, D. M., et al. (2010). "Children as Bellwethers of Recovery: Dysfunctional Systems and the Effects of Parents, Households, and Neighborhoods on Serious Emotional Disturbance in Children After Hurricane Katrina." *Disaster Med Public Health Prep* 4(S17-27

2.The Lost Children of Katrina. *The Atlantic*. April 2 2015

Long Term Disaster Studies in US Gulf Coast (contd.)

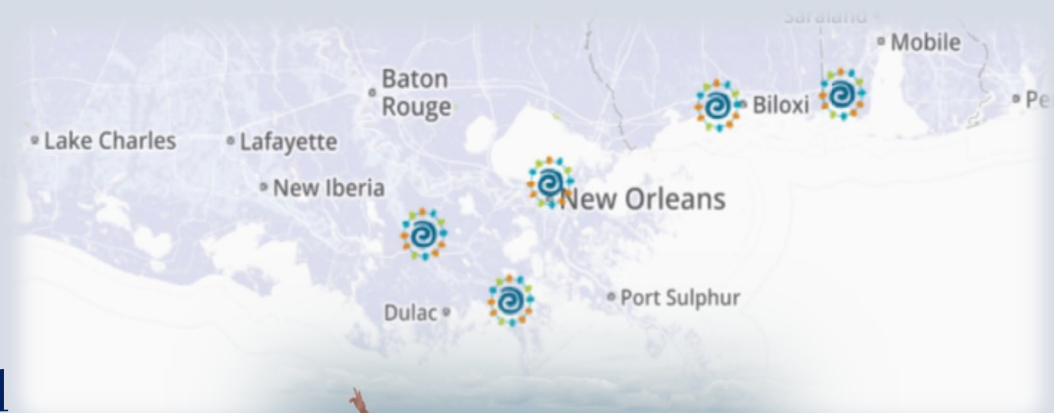
Deepwater Horizon oil spill, one of the largest spills in American history

- 1437 households randomly sampled from the hardest hit communities along the Gulf Coast in 2012
- Louisiana cohort of 720 followed for interviewing in 2014 and 2016/17
- findings suggest a relationship between exposure to the oil spill and adverse health outcomes
 - children who were directly exposed to oil, tar or dispersant were 5 times (2014) and 2.5 times (2017) more likely to have mental health issues than those who were not exposed
 - children from households reporting income loss were 3 times (2014) and 2 times (2017) more likely to have experienced mental health symptoms compared to those who did not.
 - four years after the spill children of parents who had a college degree were less likely to have mental health problems compared to the children whose parents did not have a degree
- the strength of this relationship diminishes as the time progresses, indicating a positive recovery trajectory, yet years later the health impacts of the oil spill still seem to persist

Youth Empowerment Initiative

After the initial survey, a project-based Youth empowerment program for high schools in 5 of the most affected places in the Gulf coast

- implementation of SHOREline -Skills, Hope, Opportunities, Recovery and Engagement
- a network of resilient youth who help themselves, their families, their schools, their communities, and youth in other communities recover from disaster.
- youth who build powerful connections with other disaster- affected youth and with adult leaders and innovators
- evaluation showed gains in skills such as accessing and analyzing information



Strengthening Support Systems

Children and youth serving institutions, schools, and other programs properly equipped and prepared to address specific needs

- In the US 69 million children are separated from their parents each work day as they go to school or child care
 - over half of Americans believe they will be reunited with their children within several hours of a disaster
 - took almost 6 months to reunite the last child with her family after Katrina¹
- The Resilient Children/Resilient Communities initiative led by NCDP in partnership with Save the Children, funded by GSK
 - brings together local stakeholders and coalitions in pilot communities
 - created emergency plans and toolbox that can meet the substantial needs of children in disasters
 - established a national panel of experts to link the community work with preparedness priorities of communities throughout the United States.
 - impact evaluated using the Community Preparedness Index, an evidence-based measure of community preparedness

Findings: Children as Indicators of Recovery

Overarching findings

- recovery is a complex long term trajectory with the layering of acute stressors such as hurricanes, oil spills and chronic stressors such as poverty, unstable housing, food insecurity, and health issues
- disasters exert enduring impacts on children and youth
 - may extend effects in to adult years, leading to complex co-morbidities and adverse effects
- children's health and well-being is highly contingent upon functioning support systems in their lives: their parents, their networks, their schools and other community institutions
- children and youth want to be actively engaged in their recovery
- youth leadership and empowerment programs influence the ability to achieve goals to increase self-efficacy, build skills and foster resilience
- children are the bellwethers of recovery
 - *their recovery is an indicator of a community's recovery. If children have recovered, it is likely that the community and many of their supportive systems have recovered.*

SDGs, Programs and Progress

- The 2030 Agenda for SD – 17 Goals, 169 concrete targets measured by 232 specific indicators
 - 35 of these indicators are directly related to children and youth – at center to achieve the SDGs by 2030.
 - 25 targets related to disaster risk reduction in 10 of the 17 SDGs, establishing the role of disaster risk reduction as a core development strategy
 - disability and persons with disability included 11 times in SDGs, implicitly, all SDGs relevant to ensure the inclusion and development of persons with disabilities
- UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction - UNISDR
 - enabling all communities to become resilient to the effects of natural, technological and environmental hazards
 - supporting countries to develop disaster loss databases
 - From Hyogo to Sendai: Disaster Risk Reduction to Building and enhancing Resilience
 - Children in a Changing Climate Coalition* has developed a child-friendly guide which aims to make the Sendai Framework more accessible

SDGs, Programs and Progress (contd)

UN system and networks supporting and empowering children and youth include

- UNICEF - changes the way children are viewed and treated – i.e., as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of as passive objects of care and charity
- UNESCO - supports and strengthens education systems worldwide from early childhood to the adult years and responds to contemporary global challenges through education.
- ILO - focuses on abolishing child labor
- **Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD)**
 - network consisting of UN entities with the aim to increase the effectiveness of UN work in youth development by strengthening collaboration and exchange among all relevant UN entities
 - UN youth agenda guided by the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY).
- **UN Major Group for Children and Youth (UN MGCY)**
 - UN General Assembly-mandated, official, formal, self-organised space for children and youth (under 30) to meaningfully engage at the United Nations
- **UN Sustainable Development Network (UNSDN youth)**
 - SDSN launched its official youth initiative to empower youth globally to create sustainable development solutions

Much has been done, and much more remains to be done to promote the well-being of children and youth in disasters and conflicts

Needs and Challenges

- Higher risk of being left behind
 - within countries, particular groups of children and youth from poorer households, those living in rural areas, those with disabilities, and those in conflict zones have increased risk of being left behind
- Lack of funding
 - investment deficiency in education, empowerment and health programs for youth and children specially in middle and low income countries
- Insufficient data
 - to assess whether countries are on track to achieve the SDGs' targets for children and youth
 - available data show an alarming number of countries needing to speed up progress to reach global targets
- Crisis of compliance in countries affected by conflict and disasters,
 - failure to properly monitor the harm caused to children, failure to hold warring parties to account for violations of the laws and norms created to protect civilians including children
 - insufficient action to protect the children of Syria, Yemen, South Sudan and elsewhere – at times prioritizing geopolitical point-scoring over children's lives

Recommendations

The following recommendations require strong political will at the national and local levels and goodwill on the part of private and public organizations

- Raise awareness and develop strategies at national and local levels of the critical needs of children and youth in disasters
 - Improve the capacity of adult caretakers, local leaders, systems and institutions to understand and meet the needs of children and youth in disaster situations
 - identify and conduct outreach to key community stakeholders – including children and youth as equal partners
 - engage the community in a program that includes training and preparedness activities to enhance resilience elements at children and youth and their families
 - perform a baseline assessment of capabilities and resources at the local level
 - develop and implement strategies to address the identified needs
 - form the basis of a practical, scalable model for a sustainable, child-focused action plan to build community resilience
 - adapt or build and use toolkits and resources for the benefit of local communities, families, child-serving institutions, community emergency managers, policymakers
 - build a robust communications strategy to reach out to and inform specific target audiences
 - evaluate whether the program produces measurable positive change
 - develop best practices that prevent power asymmetries

Recommendations (contd)

The following recommendations require strong political will at the national and local levels and goodwill on the part of private and public organizations

- Empower children and youth: they have already demonstrated how powerful they can be in so many ways (e.g. see Youth Solution Report 2018 – UNSDN Youth) – given the opportunity they will thrive more and make the world a better place
 - national plans for the education to all children (SDG 4) –one of the few routes that can address inequality
 - Without increase in investment in education for children and youth, the situation of those without access to education will only deteriorate, with an increase in unskilled and unprepared youth unable to embrace new technology and tackle the challenges of a rapidly changing global economy¹
 - invest in youth empowerment and leadership programs to build and enhance their self-efficacy
 - engage youth in disaster preparedness and recovery training through hands-on, experiential learning
 - develop strong networks and communications through technological and non technological channels
 - collect data and evaluate formal and informal initiatives

Recommendations (contd)

The following recommendations require strong political will at the national and local levels and goodwill on the part of private and public organizations and individuals

- Reduce conflicts and their impacts

invest in peacekeeping and underlying causes of conflicts - more diplomacy and negotiations in an era of retreat from cooperation into isolationism

- investment in youth conflict prevention initiatives
- countries' and their armies' commitment to abide by their obligations under the international Humanitarian law
- implement the Safe Schools declaration
- avoid the use of certain weapons
- invest in rebuilding the lives of affected civilians including children and youth

- Funding

- from government sources, international/regional aid organizations
- from private for profit organizations - Corporate social Responsibility (CSR)
- by building coalitions of youth and community leaders, health and social service organizations, for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, public officials and researchers who may work together or independently to collect data and to raise funds