Reimagining Risk: Voices and agency of children on their inherited future

Reimagining Development Thinkpiece

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Acknowledgments

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> *"Naisisiwalat ang saloobin, kahit mga kabataan lang kaya natin ang ginagawa ng matatanda"*
>
> ("*Through video, we may express ourselves even if we are just children*")
>
> Child participant from Eastern Samar, Philippines

Introduction, Rationale and Field sites

2 in 5 of the world's population are under 18 years of age. 90% of these people live in the global South. They are both the inheritors of our legacy, and citizens in their own right. Despite growing research and practice around child-centred development, much of it remains focused on children's lives as children and directed at instrumental goals related to poverty reduction targets. Far less attention has been paid to realising voice and participation of children as future adults, and as new and multiple crises emerge, development practice retreats to paternalistic, adult-centric searches for ways to tackle them.

This research tackled the issue of child voice and agency in the context of disaster risks and their relationship with wider development contexts. As part of the wider research programme under the Children in a Changing Climate coalition[1], this research project trials the use of participatory video to amplify the voices of children and youth in the policy-making realm. In doing so, it seeks to understand and empower child-centred perspectives on new configurations of risk affecting development in remote rural communities.

The research was carried out in collaboration with the international non-government organization (NGO) Plan[2] with children's groups of three remote communities in the municipalities of Llorente, Oras and Salcedo within the province of Eastern Samar in the Philippines. The province is among the marginal economically and the most disaster affected areas in the country, lying in the westward cyclone track and between two major faults. The table below summarises the characteristics of the municipalities, as well as the case study communities ('barangay').

Municipality	Population	Livelihoods	Disaster burden	Case study community
Llorente	20,000	Rice planting, fishing and copra (coconut)	Flash floods, soil erosion, landslides	Barobo
Oras	30,000	Farming, fishing copra production	Riverine flooding	Cadian
Salcedo	16,000	Fishing, farming, chromite mining	Flooding, typhoons	Caga-ut

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[1] Please see the Children in a Changing Climate webpage for further details and publications
http://www.childreninachangingclimate.org.
[2] Plan UK is leading an innovative project in which children (via formal school settings and informal groups) are supported in claiming their right to safety and campaigning for disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Photo: A group of children plan their script

Methods centred on the use of visioning exercises and Participatory Video (PV) creation and screening. The children also interviewed officials and community members. Interview participants were identified through stakeholder mapping exercises. The research documented the following phases that included:

1. **Visioning** exercises with children's groups and community member on development issues and risks.

2. Planning and consultation between research partners, *Plan* Philippines and community members on use of participatory video. Children's groups completed **training** workshops on participatory video and disaster risk reduction.

3. Children's groups **research** film topics, prepare story boards and film short, 30-second, public service announcements (PSAs). Editing with assistance of expert editors.

4. **Draft screening** of the child-led documentary videos at the community level followed by an interactive workshop and participatory activities in order for the community to provide feedback on the topics.

5. **Re-filming / editing** by children's groups with support from PV experts.

6. **Screenings** of the final films and discussion workshops for the community, and with legislators at the municipal and provincial level. At each screening, discussion centred on what actions could be taken at that level to reduce risks and what issues should be taken to other stakeholders for action.

The final videos

The screen captures below link to each of the final videos produced and screened in each community and municipality. Preliminary versions of the videos were used to stimulate debate within each community, a process captured in these final videos. Following community and municipal screenings, all three videos were then screened during a meeting between the children's groups and provincial officials. Related advocacy messages gathered and agreed at community and municipal level were then communicated to provincial government officials.

Location	Film Title	YouTube link
Cadian, Oras	Flood: A Menace to Education	 www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHlRi6-nVKs
Barobo, Llorente	Barobo: The Sinking Barangay	 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdvuX9WvaYQ
Caga-ut, Salcedo	The Pock-Marked Face of Caga-ut	 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1upkBQ0tOeM

Perceptions of risks to local development

The research attempted to situate risks related to natural hazards within the wider risk environment relating to human development and wellbeing. This reflects the findings of other research into children's perceptions of disaster risks that demonstrates the inter-relationship between natural hazards and the human drivers of vulnerability (Peek, 2008; Tanner, 2010).

In Salcedo the children identified the Barangay (village) of Caga-ut as high risk and singled out chromite mining as the dominant hazard to livelihoods and wellbeing. Their second ranked hazard was flooding due to typhoons; exacerbated by a lack of early warning systems. In Llorente the children identified that the hazards of flash flooding, landslides and soil erosion were a serious risk to the Barangay of Barobo. Through research with local community members, they stated that these hazards were caused by illegal logging and sand quarrying, and that students crossing the low bridge in the Barangay were especially vulnerable. Flood was identified as the major hazard in Oras. The children drew a hazard map of Barangay of Cadi-an to demonstrate to the group the vulnerable location of the Barangay on the flood plain.

Photo: Cadi-an's riverside location makes it exposed to floods

The issues of chromite mining, sand quarrying and garbage dumping were the topics selected by the children for developing initial 30-second public service announcement videos to promote dialogue with other community members. The effects of these activities and the messages the children wished their films to communicate are displayed in the table below. These topics were then further refined into the final videos through use of these short films to stimulate discussions with community members.

Table: Film topics chosen by children in Eastern Samar

	Topic	**Effect**	**Message**
Salcedo	Chromite Mining	Water pollution Flash floods Forest clearing	Stop Chromite Mining for the betterment of the people and the children
Llorente	Sand Quarrying	Flood Soil erosion	What future waits for the children when the world around us is slowly disappearing?
Oras	Garbage Dumping	Water pollution Diseases Flood	Be disciplined to save the river

The issue of climate change became significant during the feedback and script development stages. In many cases, the children were most concerned about more tangible risks such as mining or malnutrition, which have clear and obvious implications for their everyday lives. As climate change was an important focus for Plan International, the children were encouraged to consider other risks were connected with climate change issues in their films, particularly through examining linking climate change and disaster events. Similarly, Forces of Nature encouraged the children to concentrate on physical hazards and 'natural' disasters and were critical of their choice to prioritise issues of drought, malnutrition and mining.

More than three decades of social science and development research has shown that underlying vulnerabilities and social risks are often the root cause of seemingly natural disasters (see Wisner *et al.* 2004). The fundamental role of social vulnerabilities in disaster causation is evident in the strategies and reports of the UNISDR and IPCC. It is also important to recognise that while it is now undisputed that climate change is occurring, there is currently only partial scientific evidence to link the rising incidence of meteorological disasters with climate change. The IPCC has found no long-term global trends that would suggest an increase in meteorological events due to climate change even though this is likely in the future. There is, however, clear evidence that societal changes and economic development are the main factors responsible for increasing losses from recent meteorological and other disasters (UNISDR, 2009).

The period of fieldwork in the Philippines coincided with the passage of Typhoon Ketsana over central Luzon. The typhoon caused approximately 460 deaths and the highest level of precipitation in Metro Manila since records began. The disaster was widely attributed to climate change by development workers and the Philippine government. There was minimal discussion of the issues of corruption and poverty that have led to overcrowding and very little urban planning, disaster planning or risk reduction measures. Adaptation to climate change requires recognition and eradication of the underlying socio-economic factors that make people and their communities vulnerable to disaster impacts. In contrast, the children's perceptions of climate change presented in the videos linked its impacts with local socio-economic conditions and livelihood strategies.

New actors in the development process: The use of child-led Participatory Video as a communication and advocacy tool

This site for the Reimagining Development initiative provided a testing ground for the inclusion of children as new key actors in the development process. The following discussion evaluates the use of participatory video as a communications and advocacy tool, as well as considering the co-benefits of learning new skills and changing adult perceptions of child agency through this process. Questionnaires were used before and after the screenings in order to determine the impact of the screenings on participants.

Children as risk identifiers and risk reducers

Photo: Filming the first draft videos

On the whole, workshop participants thought the children were well qualified to identify disaster risks in the community. For example, municipal decision makers rated children's capacity to identify risks more highly after watching the film than beforehand. Only one of the proposed solutions in one film was criticized, because the children had selected the incorrect breed of Mangrove tree for local conditions. In this case, however, the children pointed out that they had identified and communicated the problem and that ultimately, government is responsible for implementing the best solution.

On the whole, workshop participants stated that the children communicated practical solutions in their films. Comments from community members and decision makers demonstrated great appreciation of the active role children can take in disaster risk reduction. In particular, it is recognised that children can be instrumental in information dissemination campaigns from the community through to the international level. It was also recognised that children are capable of taking direct actions in the community such as tree planting, waste management and cooperating with other community members and sectors on DRR and CCA.

Children as community risk communicators

The majority of participants stated that the video documentaries had showed them the realities and problems confronted by the communities. Many noted that they had been unaware of the extent and social causes of these problems prior to the screenings. The majority of participants agreed with the content of the films: the problems presented; the causes identified; and the solutions proposed.

In Salcedo roughly half of the participants stated that they had learnt more about the danger of chromite mining. Importantly, the film also increased their awareness about the

existence of youth organizations advocating for DRR. When asked again after the film what the causes of disasters were in their community, four adults listed chromite mining and one listed poverty. Prior to watching the film, no adults had listed chromite mining or poverty as causes of disasters, only natural events and tree clearance. However, many noted the importance of mining to local livelihoods and that alternatives would need to be sought if mining was to stop.

In Oras, the majority of adults stated that the film had taught them about the dangers flooding posed to children's education. Post-film answers on the causes of disasters were similar to pre-film responses in that natural causes (typhoon) remained the dominant response. However, after watching the film, two of the adults also identified the geographical location of the Barangay as a cause. Adults also discussed planting trees and bamboo near the river bank as a flood control method.

In Llorente, the majority of participants stated that they had gained new information about what people can do to reduce disaster risk in the Barangay. Five of the adults also stated that they were now more aware of why disasters had been increasing. Post-film responses on the causes of disasters experienced were similar to pre-film responses, with logging and land clearance being the dominant responses. However, after watching the film, a few of the adults and decision makers also listed *kaingin* (forest burning) as a cause of disasters. There was an understanding within the community that they all contributed to flooding and that illegal activities needed to be replaced with alternative sustainable livelihoods.

Crucially, the children used the Eastern Samar dialect Waray-Waray in their film rather than the national language of Tagalog. Although the majority of Filipinos are fluent in Tagalog, many screening participants felt that the children's use of the local language made the film more 'local' and therefore relevant for the community and decision makers.

The majority of participants in Salcedo and Llorente stated that the key benefit for the children and adults who participated was in terms of raising their general knowledge and awareness. In comparison workshop participants in Oras stated that the key benefit was in terms of the ability of those who participated to help the community lobby their concerns to the Barangay council.

However, perhaps most importantly, the Llorente adults also stated in highest numbers that the benefit to those who participated was that they were able to express what they wanted to say on the issue of risks to local development. All of the groups reported that they had learnt new information from the children and the films, confirming children's capability as effective local communicators.

Children as lobbyists – communicating with local government

Photo: Community screening in Caga-ut, Salcedo

The process was extremely successful in facilitating five well-attended and fruitful government workshops where the children and relevant decision makers could share their views. It is clear that the participatory video and workshop process helped children to communicate their case to local government. They were able to lobby support for their interests and their communities' problems.

In Salcedo, the majority of participants stated that they could help and support children to raise awareness and take action by supporting their advocacy activities. Two municipal decision makers also stated they would help through trying to push through DRR sensitive legislation. The municipal decision makers claimed that children are more enthusiastic communicators than the adults. However, they added that parents, teachers and other adult community members should also be involved in the campaign alongside the children. After watching the film the decision makers stated more specifically that children have an important role in disseminating information / raising awareness on disasters, through mediums such as films and posters. The decision makers largely agreed to the proposed solutions in the film. They stated that campaigns, networking with concerned agencies, alternative livelihoods, and ordinances regulating or prohibiting chromite mining must be initiated. Some also suggested the need for a full consultation in the Barangay in order to decide how the problems will be resolved.

Photo: Oras municipal government workshop

In Oras, participants said that they could help the children with these activities by advocating on their behalf and supporting their activities to make school equipment safer from the impacts of flood waters.

After watching the films the provincial decision makers of Easter Samar listed their second highest cause of disasters in their community as due to mining and the illegal extraction of gravel and sand (a change from initial attribution of improper garbage disposal). The provincial decision makers said they could help the children with their goals by supporting their plans but also through assisting with information dissemination to other schools within the province and to get their message to the Governor.

Both the Filipino children and municipal decision-makers rated the communication success of children to municipal and provincial level decision makers to be higher after watching the film (statistically significant difference).

Subsequent outcomes of the screenings and dialogues included:
- o The video from Cagaut, entitled "The Pock-Marked Face of Caga-ut" influenced members of the village council to compel miners to fill in old mining pits and to re-plant trees in areas where chromite has been extracted.
- o In Cadian, the film "Flood: A Menace to Education" motivated residents to agree to plant trees and bamboo near the river bank as a flood control method. The village leaders also stated that they would support the schools to install elevated cabinets to keep books and other learning materials above potential flood waters.

However, the PV process must be recognized as a long-term effort, with more positive outcomes in the future. All the films initiated a starting point for dialogue between the children, their community and decision makers. Engagement must therefore continue after the initial screening process in order that follow-up meetings with decision makers or additional screenings can be organized. Plan's long term presence is therefore crucial in supporting follow-on activities, including:

- Plan Philippines has supported the children's group "Young Hearts Media Correspondents" to produce a new health/epidemic prevention video.

- The films have since been screened at a number of DRR meetings in the Philippines and have been well-received by DRR actors and government officials.

Conclusions

This research reveals the unique perception and conceptualisation of development risks by children and young people. They situate risks within their own lived experience, frequently focusing on the everyday social root causes of vulnerability to external shocks and stresses. The results of this research also support the active role that children can take in managing risks to development futures, from communication and awareness raising at a range of levels to direct actions, such as tree-planting and cooperating with other community members.

The majority of participants agreed with the content of the films: the problems presented; the causes identified; and the solutions proposed. The project reinforced an understanding among workshop participants that their exposure to hazards is in part due to their own behaviours / practices in regards to their socio-economic as well as natural environment. This also helped participants realise that responsibility for managing risks rests with everybody and not just government officials.

Overall the participants said that the largest benefit to the children and adults who participated in the film making was in terms of raising their general knowledge and awareness about risks. However, other benefits included the children's ability to help the community lobby their concerns to the Barangay council. The majority of Philippine participants stated that the film could help raise awareness at the community, municipal

and provincial level, although a few of the adults were doubtful of children's effectiveness to communicate at higher levels.

The films and workshop process also initiated a number of actual positive outcomes, including compelling miners to fill in old mining pits and to re-plant trees in Cagaut; supporting schools to keep learning materials above potential flood waters in Cadian; and tree and bamboo planting in order to reduce the risks from flooding and landslides in and Cadian, Oras. Provincial decision makers in Eastern Samar stated they would assist with information dissemination to other schools within the province and pass the children's messages on to the Governor.

The videos represent only one element in a broader process that enables children to investigate and connect with their own communities and officials. One important aim for this project was the community workshop process which enabled children and the wider community to discuss their problems and come to a shared understanding of locally based solutions. This provided vulnerable communities the opportunity to learn, share and take part in decision making. The children then carried the voices of their whole communities forward to local government officials. This process has opened a door for dialogue and engagement by NGO partners will need to monitor and support this engagement in the future, particularly to follow up on the actions promised by officials. It is crucial that this broader process of risk analysis, communication, dialogue, lobbying and empowerment needs to be stressed when the videos are screened in isolation elsewhere.

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