



Summary: Research-into- Action Brief

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Research-into-Action Brief series

The series provides concise summaries of academic and grey literature on a range of topics for practitioners working in the fields of child-centred risk reduction (CCRR), climate change adaptation (CCA), and school safety. This summary highlights the main messages in the full Research-into-Action Brief on community-based school construction.

Find the full Research-into-Action Brief series at:

www.gadrrres.net/resources

Best practices in community-based school construction

Community-based school construction occurs when community stakeholders are involved in selecting the site for the school, finding funding, providing labour and/or overseeing construction. In some countries, this approach has been used for school retrofit projects. Community-based school construction can help increase access to education in low and moderate-income countries. It can also increase community awareness of hazards and knowledge of safer construction practices. However, many development partners and government bodies do not ensure that community-based school construction results in safer schools. Unsafe community-based school construction can have wide-ranging impacts, from educational disruption to injury and even death.

Program managers can support *safer* school construction by working with communities, including children, throughout the construction process. Program managers can help community members to learn about hazards, and provide technical guidance and community training. Through this process, communities learn that safety is achievable, not only at school but beyond.

Community-based approaches can achieve safer school construction most effectively where there is a high level of community involvement and interest, and in communities that are familiar with the construction materials and techniques. Even then, program managers should integrate education and training into the project. How much the community engages in safer school construction projects depends on many factors, including the community's understanding of hazards, their traditional involvement in community projects, and the skills the program manager has in partnering with communities.

Practical Applications

There are five stages to ensuring that community-based school construction results in *safer* schools. Program managers should fully integrate hazard awareness, collaboration with technical experts, and community training into each stage.

1. Prepare and Mobilise Community Support: Before school construction begins, program managers need to mobilise stakeholders to support safe school construction by helping them understand hazards and the value of risk reduction strategies.

2. Plan for Community Engagement and a Select Safer School Site: School buildings should be constructed on land that is not normally exposed to hazards, such as flood plains, tsunami inundation zones, wildfire zones and land located below unstable slopes. If possible, areas at risk of earthquakes and high winds should also be avoided.

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Community stakeholders and technical experts should check all sites for hazards together. Community stakeholders understand frequent, local hazards; technical experts may have more knowledge in infrequent, high impact, hazards, as well as climatic shifts. Where it is impossible to avoid all hazards, the school design should address the risks that remain.

3. Design Safer School with Community Involvement: Program managers must ensure that a structural engineer or an architect who knows how to use hazard-resistant and child-friendly design techniques designs schools. The design process should allow for conversations between the designers and the community, so the community understands the school's hazard-resistant elements and the school's design uses local knowledge and follows local practice. Ideally, the community should be allowed to select from multiple design options to increase community ownership. The program manager should ensure that the community has enough resources for ongoing maintenance of the design selected.

4. Construct and Monitor Safer School with Community Engagement

Where hazards are infrequent, or where informal sector construction has changed rapidly, local construction workers and unskilled labor may be unfamiliar with hazard resistant construction. In this case, technical experts should provide training to local workers, or community involvement in construction should be restricted to non-structural components. Program managers must hire a trained professional to conduct construction oversight. However, community stakeholders should also be part of the oversight process. Construction checklists, compliance mechanisms, and inspections of the project can enhance accountability and increase community confidence in the safety of the school.

5. Safely Maintain and Operate the Safer School

Following construction, the project manager should ensure communities can maintain the safer school. Community members should be trained to safely operate and maintain the school. Operations manuals can explain how to safely use the school and when to contact an engineer.

Maintenance schedules can help ensure the building does not become unsafe. Once the school is open, the school management committee should develop a disaster management plan and ensure that all occupants participate in regular emergency drills and commemorative activities. Such activities strengthen the culture of safety that started with the commitment to building a safer school.

Schools provide an entry point for community-wide learning about hazards and risk reduction. Where community-based approaches are used, those funding and managing school construction should ensure:

- All school construction projects build safer schools or make existing schools safer;
- Community stakeholders are partners in decision making;
- Construction is supported with technical oversight;
- That projects use local knowledge, materials and techniques; and
- That projects develop capacity and improve livelihoods through training and participation in the construction process (Paci-Green and Pandey, 2015).

More information

All the references in this Research into Practice Brief, and many more, can be found in the Child-centred Risk Reduction and Comprehensive School Safety Bibliography at:

https://www.zotero.org/groups/1857446/ccrr_css

Find all the references on this topic by searching for "School Construction."

Readings

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