BEST PRACTICE

Sub-Regional Government Initiatives Empower Comprehensive School Safety

Intergovernmental collaboration in ASEAN, Central America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific build momentum for country-level action.

Background

Systematic global and *regional* efforts in promoting Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) began in the 1990s around the time of the 1st World Conference on Natural Disasters (note: one would nowadays refer to natural hazards) in Yokohama in 1990, with the *School Safety Retrofitting Program* in Central America in the 1990 and 2000s. In preparation for the 2nd World Conference on DRR in 2005, where the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-15* was launched, the UNDRR sponsored *Let Our Children Teach Us! The Role of Education and Knowledge in Disaster Risk Reduction* (2006). The International Conference on School Safety (2007) yielded the *Ahmedabad Action Agenda for School Safety*.

Assessing School Safety from Disasters, A Global Baseline Report (2011) (published in 2014) provided early documentation of comprehensive school safety implementation globally. From 2012-15 the UNDRR sponsored the Worldwide Initiative for School Safety at the *First Meeting of Safe School Leaders* held in Istanbul in 2012, and a *Second Meeting of School Leaders* in Tehran in 2015 with the support of national disaster management and education authorities.

Since that time we have seen very important momentum for school safety resulting from the sub-regional initiatives of government education authorities, working together. Some important examples and lessons learned over the past 10 years come from Latin America & the Caribbean, and the Asia-Pacific regions, namely:
- The ASEAN School Safety Initiative (ASSI)
- Coordinación Educativa y Cultural Centroamericana (CECC) / Central American Integration System (SICA)
- Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI)
- Pacific Coalition for the Advancement of School Safety (PCASS)

Sub-Regional Initiatives Set Examples for All

ASEAN School Safety Initiative (ASSI)

The _ASEAN Safe Schools Initiative (ASSI)_ is a collaborative effort within the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to enhance school resilience against natural hazards and daily risks. It aims to provide a secure learning environment for children and ensure access to quality education. ASSI originated from the 21st Meeting of the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM) in 2013, endorsed under the Disaster Prevention and Mitigation element of the _ASEAN Agreement for Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme's 2010-2015_. The initiative's implementation was later sanctioned by ASEAN Member States. Supported by key partners like Plan International, Save the Children, World Vision, and Mercy Malaysia, ASSI is a flagship project in ASEAN's disaster management framework. It retains significance within the ongoing _AADMER Work Programme 2021-2025_.

Key achievements of ASSI include:
- The _ASEAN Common Framework for Comprehensive School Safety (ACFCSS) (2016) and its Manual for Operationalisation_ was co-developed and endorsed by the national disaster management agencies and national education authorities in ASEAN, to guide the implementation of safe school initiatives at the regional, national, and local levels in the region.
- Three ASEAN Regional Conferences for School Safety (2015, 2017, and 2019) were organised. to promote lessons learned and knowledge-sharing on school safety programming and the building of a school safety community of practice in the ASEAN region.
- The biennial ASEAN Safe Schools Awards was established to recognise outstanding efforts in promoting safe schools and disaster risk reduction in the region.
- The ASEAN Cross-Sectoral Coordination Committee for ASSI was established in 2019 to serve as a venue for the disaster management sector (ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management/ACDM - Prevention and Mitigation Working Group) and the education sector (ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education/SOM-ED) to discuss and recommend actions to address and coordinate school safety implementation and monitoring in the region.
- Capacity-building activities and technical assistance has been provided to ASEAN Member States to support implementation of the ACFCSS and the ASSI Program Strategies. These have included regional trainings on school disaster management and safe learning facilities, stakeholders' consultation and validations workshops, and knowledge-sharing activities, including forums, research, and cross-country field visits.
- Regional school safety guidelines and technical resources were developed to support national implementation of school safety policies. These include: ASSI Programme Strategy 2014-2016 and 2017-2019; _School Disaster Risk Management Guidelines for Education Authorities in Southeast Asia_ (2016); Regional School Safety Mapping (2017); CSS Self-Assessment Mobile Application for Schools, pilot-tested in Lao PDR (2015-2019); ASEAN Guideline for CSS Progress Monitoring and Reporting, and the Country CSS Progress Monitoring Template (2019); and _School Safety Standard Operation Procedures_ videos produced in Lao PDR and the Philippines.
- _ASEAN Safe Schools Initiative: A Compilation of Case Studies_ (2015) which document national school safety good practices and lessons learned from across the region, in relation to Pillars 1, 2, and 3.

- National multi-stakeholder school safety coordination platforms were established in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Thailand.
- These and ad hoc platforms supported and validated the production of national Education Sector Context Analysis for CSS and EiE or the School Safety Context Analyses: *Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Timor Leste,* and *Vietnam* which are being updated from time to time.

National achievements in ASEAN countries:

- **Cambodia:**
    - Highlighted the Education sector in Cambodia's Strategic National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction which provided a framework for school safety efforts in the country
    - Integrated DRR into the school curriculum for Grade 8's Earth Science and Geography subjects
    - MoEYS developed the *Quality Control Guidelines for School Building Construction*
    - Formulated the *Child-Friendly School Policy*
    - Developed the *School Health Policy*
    - CSS Pilot implementation in schools in Kampong Chhnang and Pursat Provinces.

- **Indonesia:**
    - Ministry of Education and Culture established the National Secretariat for Safe Schools (Sekretariat Nasional Sekolah Aman – SEKNAS)
    - MEoC Issued a Circular Letter encouraging the mainstreaming of DRR into the school curriculum
    - MEoC created a Special Allocation Fund for safe school rehabilitation
    - Issued Guidelines for the Implementation of Safe Schools and Madrasas (Islamic schools)
    - MEoC with support from different donors and development partners conducted school-level implementation of comprehensive school safety

- **Indonesia & Lao PDR**: *Comprehensive school safety (CSS) policy case study: Scaling up CSS assessment in Laos and Indonesia* (2017)

- **Lao PDR:**
    - MOES developed specific DRR curriculum for Grades 3-6 (Primary and Secondary Schools) in partnership with NDMO and the National Institute for Education Sciences
    - MOES developed DRR Manuals for teachers and education officials
    - Guidelines for School Building Construction approved by the MOES
    - Developed a Comprehensive School Safety Assessment Suite that comprises a self-assessment tool and the Visual Inspection for Safety Upgrading Strategy (VISUS) tool. The self-assessment tool was piloted in 50 schools in four districts, and the VISUS tool in nine schools in three districts of Bolikhamxay Province. Updating of the assessment tool and scaling up of the rollout in other provinces are ongoing.
    - Discussions for the establishment of a national multi-stakeholder School Safety Coordination mechanism is ongoing
    - Updated the Laos School Disaster Management Toolkit (now School Safety Management Guiding Tools) to align with the new CSS Framework 2022-2030. Rollout of the updated resource was endorsed by the MoES and is now ongoing
    - The review and updating of the Laos Education Sector Snapshot for CSS and EiE (now School Safety Context Analysis) is ongoing.

- **Myanmar:**
  - o School Safety or DRR in Education Sector was prioritized in the Myanmar Action Plan for DRR 2009-2015
  - o Government issued a Guidance on Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction in the Education Sector (Myanmar Comprehensive School Safety Programme Framework)
  - o Established multi-stakeholder working groups for school safety under the Ministry of Education
  - o Myanmar National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021
  - o School-based implementation of CSS in Yangon Township and Rakhine State

- **Philippines:**
  - o *Comprehensive school safety (CSS) policy case study: Protecting children in emergencies by law in the Philippines* (2017)
  - o The Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2015 on Comprehensive Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Programs in 2015.
  - o *School Safety First: how adapted education information systems are playing a key role towards ensuring school safety in the Philippines* (2022) is a case study of the lessons learned from implementation of the Comprehensive School Safety Assessment Suite (CSSAS) with DepEd in the Philippines where digital toolsets are used for post-disaster rapid damage and needs assessment, comprehensive school safety monitoring, and child-centred social accountability to strengthen the resilience of the education system in a system serving more than 40,000 schools.

- **Thailand:**
  - o Established the Thailand School Safety Network as a national multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism for school safety jointly led by the Ministry of Education, Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) and the Ministry of Interior, Department of Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation (DDPM)
  - o Standing Order on "Mainstreaming DRR in Education issued by MoE to promote disaster education in all schools, including development of textbooks and in teachers' guides and training on DRR
  - o The Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards developed a DRR-sensitive curriculum with the support of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
  - o Highlighted DRR in Education in the Strategic National Action Plan (SNAP) or DRR 2010-2019
  - o TSSN developed the CSS Training Guidelines for Teachers and the Disability-Inclusive School Disaster Management Handbook
  - o Development of child-friendly DRR Learning booklets and public broadcast of animation video materials (ex. Alert Little Tun) in partnership with Thailand PBS Channel
  - o Developed a School Safety Assessment web-based platform used by schools to report on school safety status and implementation progress.
  - o School-based implementation of CSS in Nonthaburi, Ayudhaya, Pathumthani and other provinces in the North and Deep Southern regions.

- **Vietnam:**
  - In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Training developed the guidelines on implementation assessment of school safety in Viet Nam
  - The Ministry of Education and Training issued the Decision 1977/QD-BGDDT in 2023 approving the project "Prevention of crime and violations for students until 2025, orientation to 2030" which aims to improve the capacity of schools in Viet Nam to prevent crime and fight against violations, contributing to building a safe and healthy educational environment.
  - Implementation of CSS in selected primary schools in different provinces (ex. Quang Ngai, and Quang Tri Provinces)

Coordinación Educativa y Cultural Centroamericana (CECC) / Central American Integration System (SICA)

In late 2021, Central American Educational and Cultural Corporation CECC-SICA with support from UNICEF-LACRO, held the **First Forum of the Global Safe Schools Initiative of the SICA region**, virtually, with Ministries of Education, CEPREDENAC, and Risk Management. In late 2022, the **Second Forum of the Safe School Global Initiative of the SICA region** was held in the Dominican Republic. UNICEF, UNESCO, and INGO partners are supporting a variety of CSS advances across the region.

Key achievements of SICA CEDD:
- A new _Declaration of the countries of the SICA region on School Safety_ (2022) endorses the Comprehensive School Safety Framework, and ratifies the commitment of the Ministries of Education to continue working on the implementation of the initiative.
- An updated _Progress of the Roadmaps by country in the SICA region_ (2022).
- Jointly addressed COVID with a _Declaration of the Council of Ministers of Education of the Central American Education and Culture Coordination of the Central American Integration System Facing the COVID-19 Pandemic_ (2020) and _Contingency Plan for the SICA Region_ / _Plan de Contingencia en Educación para la Región SICA_ (2022).

National achievements in SICA countries:
- **Costa Rica:**
  - MOE has worked together with the National Emergency Commission to develop guidelines and response plans for emergency response, delivered to teachers and other education personnel.
  - National and international organisations (firefighters, Red Cross, etc.) are collaborating to train emergency committees.

- **El Salvador:**
  - Redesign of Environmental Management course. Mobilising to include the educational community in the repair or reconstruction of educational centres by applying infrastructure, environmental, and social standards.
  - MoE established a Technical Roundtable on Risk Management for the Right to Education supporting the implementation of damage assessment tools, and evaluation of post-disaster recovery needs, guidance, and INEE minimum standards training for school personnel.

- **Guatemala:**
  - Updated educational infrastructure information system to geo-reference all the schools, incorporate a national security index for educational centres, and post-disaster rapid evaluation report card.
  - Developed the MoE response plan.
  - Risk Management Preparation Guide updated and translated into several native languages.
  - Obtains SECONRED approval for education sector response plans.

- **Honduras:** A guide with the basic contents related to disaster risk reduction and resilience that should be included in the curricula was developed and the teachers were trained on DRR and resilience.

- **Dominican Republic:** Training on DRR has been carried out at the national level. National Drill Day has been established and all schools have participated.

Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI)

The _Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI)_ and the _Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)_ School Safety Initiative (ASSI) are two sub-regional inter-governmental initiatives UN member states championing regional school safety by promoting child rights and resilience in the education sector, yielding significant advances in school safety. Cross-country and national level examples, and historic and emerging work in **Central America** and the **Pacific** provide additional inspiration for action.

The _Caribbean Safe School Initiative_ is a collaboration initiated in 2017 with the aim of strengthening the capacity of Caribbean countries to create a safe and resilient school environment through regional cooperation, knowledge-sharing, and resource mobilisation. Initially led by the _Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA)_, with support from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and other regional partners, the Safe Schools Ministerial Forum of national education authorities now leads this effort. The _Caribbean Safe School Initiative Thematic Case View_ documents this effort.

> _"It is really about stimulating change at the national level by promoting standards around school safety."_
> **Elizabeth Riley, Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency**

Key achievements of the CSSI:

- The adoption of the *Sint Maarten Declaration on School Safety in the Caribbean* (2022) (replacing the 2017 *Antigua and Barbuda Declaration on School Safety*), and the *Caribbean Roadmap for School Safety* (2022) are currently endorsed by 19 Caribbean countries that joined the initiative during the First, Second, and Third Caribbean Ministerial Forums on School Safety (2017, 2019, and 2022 respectively).
- A permanent secretariat for school safety will include the MoE Chair, the incoming Chair, UN agencies (UNDRR, UNICEF, UNESCO), CDEMA and others, as recommended by the Chair of CSSI and the Secretariat.
- The development of the Caribbean Safe School Ministerial Forum, which brings together ministers of education, disaster management, and other stakeholders to discuss school safety and disaster risk reduction strategies.
- Implementation of various capacity-building programs, such as the Caribbean Development Bank's technical assistance to the *Caribbean Safe School Program* to improve safety and resilience in educational facilities across the region.
- CSSI partners continue to provide support e.g., to ensure that, following the La Soufrière volcanic eruption in 2021, affected schools would be rebuilt with resilience in mind. This included training sessions for teachers and education officials to strengthen their knowledge of disaster risk reduction and resilience.
- The region recently examined *COVID-19, Systemic Risk and Education Sector Resilience in the Caribbean Region* (UNDRR & CDEMA Brief) (2022), understanding and coping with this in the context of the CSS Framework.

"At the regional level we are including DRR in every activity or strategy."
Sisera Simon, Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States

National achievements in the Caribbean Region:

- **Seven countries and territories:** Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, British Virgin Island, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sint Maarten, and Trinidad and Tobago have aligned the school safety plans with the National DRM plans.
- **Five countries:** UNDRR ROAC and CDEMA supported a Model Safe Schools Program aligned with the CSSF for safer and greener schools in Antigua & Barbuda, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Turks and Caicos Islands (2017). This provided templates for a model policy, school safety & greenness assessment, and school emergency/disaster plan for adaptation in
- **Six countries:** Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines implemented a standardised, CSS Assessment Suite Technical Tool, the *VISUS methodology* for assessing multi-hazards safety of school facilities.
- **Anguilla, Bahamas:** Disaster Preparedness Child Advocates training helps families become safer and better prepared through effective communication and decision-making strategies, ensures families do not lose important documents and can assist in rescue and recovery efforts.
- **Belize:** A review and evaluation of schools' infrastructure was conducted to allow the strengthening of safe school environments, more bus routes, and making the schools more accessible.
- **British Virgin Islands**: Updated the National Education Sector School Safety plans and policies (ensuring the inclusion of the budget).

- **Cuba:** Exemplary case study highlights *Students Leading Communities in Disaster Risk Reduction through Informal Education in Cuba* (2017)

- **Dominica:**
  - Made the safe school construction standards a National Policy
  - Developed Education in Emergencies (EiE) plans and integrated concise versions into the broader education sector plan, including child protection, health, and environmental footprint.
  - Approved and implemented a Safe School policy aligned with national priorities and plans.
  - Conducted training and sensitisation activities for line personnel (teachers, parents, students, officials) on how to implement the policy.

- **Haiti:** Capacity-building programmes for local child school safety practitioners, enabling them to better assess and address disaster risks in schools.

- **Saint Vincent & Grenadines:**
  - Training of trainers and capacity building activities on school safety Pillar 1 adopted tools.
  - Review and update of the disaster risk components in the curriculum.
  - Disaster Risk Management training delivered for teachers pre-service and in-service, including the use of technology for distance education.
  - Civil society groups (youth groups, faith-based, others) engaged in public disaster risk reduction education activities and expanded communication channels via social media and parent forums.

"We are hopeful that whatever is learned at school can also be transferred into the home by the students and let their parents know."
Rolston Nickeo, Education Officer*

# Pacific Coalition for the Advancement of School Safety (PCASS)

The Pacific Coalition for the Advancement of School Safety (PCASS) is a region-wide coalition of national education and disaster management authorities, established in 2016 to strengthen the commitments of governments, civil society, and other sectoral partners to protect children's rights to safety and survival, to educational continuity, to safeguard education sector investments, and build a culture of safety in the face of natural hazards and climate change in the Pacific region. Other cross-sectoral authorities, civil society groups, and development partners have been engaged in this process in several countries. Facilitated by Save the Children, initial support for collective efforts came from DipECHO (2016-2018) and support from the Government of New Zealand will anchor a renewed effort beginning in 2023. Whilst the Pacific region as a whole has active partnerships both for education: _Pacific Regional Education Framework 2018-2030_ (2018), as well as for resilience: _Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific: An Integrated Approach to Address Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management 2017-2030_ (2017), bringing these together to address comprehensive school safety with economies of scale is still to be embedded as a priority.

Key achievements of PCASS:
- Ministries of Education, National Disaster Management Organisations, and their multilateral and bilateral development partners, identified national as well as common regional priorities, and developed this initial roadmap: _PCASS: The Pacific Coalition for the Advancement of School Safety: for a Bright Future Safe from Disasters for All Children_ (2017).
- Policy guidance was co-developed on _Limiting and planning for schools as temporary evacuation centres in emergencies_ (2017).

National achievements in Pacific countries:
- _Comprehensive School Safety Policy: trends in the Pacific Region_ (Jiwanji, Paci-Green & McFarlane) (2020) identifies trends and explores facilitating or blocking factors for development and implementation of successful policies

- **Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu:**
    - National multi-stakeholder school safety coordination groups have sponsored and validated production of School Safety Context Analyses for _Fiji_, _Solomon Islands_, and _Vanuatu,_ which are being updated from time to time.
    - With leadership from national disaster management authorities, support from national education authorities, and facilitation by Save the Children and the national Red Cross, subject-matter experts in-country have adapted and adopted the global template _Public Awareness and Public Education: Action-Oriented Key Messages for Households & Schools_ (2018) for each country _Fiji_, _Solomon Islands_, & _Vanuatu_.
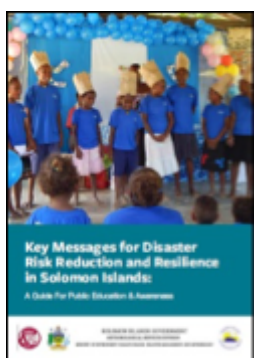
Lessons Learned from Sub-regional Initiatives

Sub-regional initiatives serve as vital platforms for collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and resource mobilisation; have a tangible impact on the ground; and, ultimately, support children to survive, thrive, and benefit from a quality basic education. Through a combination of policy development, priority-setting, capacity-building programs, and practical implementation of safe school initiatives at scale, these efforts are paving the way for countries to reduce risks, ensure the well-being of children, and the continuation of quality education in the face of hazard impacts of all kinds. While these efforts come from vastly different regions, they share some common lessons learned from their work on comprehensive school safety.

✔ **Collaboration and partnership**
These initiatives highlight the need for and impact of effective collaboration. To develop and implement CSS strategies, national government education and disaster management authorities need to be in the leadership role, with support from international governmental, and non-governmental organisations, donors, and cross-sectoral stakeholders, and local communities.

✔ **Integration of *all-hazard* risk reduction (including climate change adaptation and child protection) into the education system**
All of these initiatives take an integrated *all-hazards* approach to risk assessment, risk reduction and resilience-building, in order to embed these in education system policies, strategies, plans, and programmes - addressing safer school facilities, school safety and educational continuity management, and risk reduction and resilience education.

✔ **Adoption of regional frameworks and roadmaps**
The adoption and implementation of regional frameworks, such as the _Sint Maarten Declaration on School Safety in the Caribbean_ (2022), _Declaration of the countries of the SICA region on School Safety_ (2022), and the _ASEAN Common Framework for Comprehensive School Safety (ACF-CSS)_ (2016) are a critical first step. The next step for countries to work towards common goals in comprehensive school safety is a shared vision and roadmap such as the _Caribbean roadmap for School Safety_ (2022), _Progress of the Roadmaps by country in the SICA region_ (2022), and _PCASS: The Pacific Coalition for the Advancement of School Safety: for a Bright Future Safe from Disasters for All Children_ (2017).

✔ **Cross-country learning and development of guidance materials for implementation at scale**
The initiatives support cross-country synergies in the development of guidance materials to support the implementation of advances in Safer School Facilities, School Safety and Educational Continuity Management, and Risk Reduction and Resilience Education.

✔ **Capacity building and training**
The initiatives emphasise the importance of building the capacity of local stakeholders, including education sector leaders, educators, administrators, and community members, through training programmes, workshops, and knowledge-sharing activities. This helps to ensure the effective implementation of school safety measures and disaster risk reduction strategies.

✔ **Community engagement and local ownership**

The initiatives highlight the importance of engaging local communities in the design, implementation, and monitoring of school safety initiatives, ensuring that the needs and priorities of the communities are considered and fostering a sense of local ownership.

✔ **Monitoring and evaluation**

The development of shared targets and indicators, and systems for regular monitoring and evaluation of school safety initiatives are intended to strengthen both evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence and to support a data-driven approach to planning and decision-making. These will enable the initiatives to identify gaps, challenges, and areas for improvement and to adapt and strengthen their approaches over time.

✔ **Awareness and advocacy**

The initiatives underscore the importance of raising awareness about school safety and disaster risk reduction and advocating for the prioritisation of these issues in national and regional agendas.

As the world continues to face increasing disaster risks due to climate change and other factors, the work of sub-regional initiatives becomes ever more crucial. By learning from their best practices, child school safety practitioners can be better equipped to address the challenges and build more resilient communities, ultimately contributing to a safer and more sustainable future for all.

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