

Issue Brief

NUMBER THREE

OCTOBER 2006



Pakistan Earthquake Response: *Educating and Protecting Children in Crisis*

In October 2005, the worst earthquake in Pakistan's modern history killed an estimated 73,000 people and leveled communities across 12,000 square miles of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province and Azad, Jammu and Kashmir. The disaster struck just after the Saturday morning school session began, killing and injuring thousands of students and teachers. More than 3 million people were left homeless, putting already vulnerable children at risk as the harsh Himalayan winter approached. The disaster destroyed schools and health care facilities, along with food stocks, crops in the field, family farms, livestock and other means of livelihood.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, Save the Children mobilized to meet the most urgent needs of children. Thanks to the generous support of public and private donors including over \$7.8 million from the U.S. government; \$8.1 million from private foundations, corporations and individual donors; \$7.9 million in aid from UN agencies; and \$4.8 million from International Save the Children Alliance partners Save the Children provided education and protection programs, emergency health care, shelter and food.

One year later, Save the Children has strengthened and expanded programs to support Pakistan's recovery. The agency works in some of the most remote and badly affected areas of Pakistan, where literacy rates and other human development indicators were minimal even before the disaster. With an eye toward the long term well-being of children, the agency's recovery strategy centers on education. Save the Children is not only revitalizing schools but also improving the quality of learning environments, teaching and school management. In addition, the agency is ensuring that children and their families have the good health and sound livelihoods necessary to enable education.

While progress has been made to support the survival and development of earthquake-affected children in the past year, much work remains to ensure that they have a chance to thrive. In close collaboration with donors, local partners, community members and the government of Pakistan, Save the Children is working to help children not only recover from the disaster, but improve their opportunities and realize their potential.



One Child Remembers

On the morning of October 8, 2005, 12-year-old Ikram and his classmates finished the morning assembly and filed into their one-room village school. "As soon as we walked in, the ground began shaking," he remembers. "We ran outside as the school started falling down. Some children died and almost everyone was hurt."

Like thousands of children across Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, Ikram lost his home, school, family members and friends. His family was displaced, separating him from playmates and familiar play areas. One year after the disaster, he still worries about another earthquake and hopes that his school, home and community will be rebuilt soon.

Protecting Children in the Aftermath of Disaster

For most families in the earthquake-affected areas of northern Pakistan, living conditions had always been basic. After the disaster, which crumbled the mud homes common in this part of the country, residents of the province faced new threats from exposure to cold, rain and snow. To meet varied shelter needs across the region, Save the Children adopted a two-pronged strategy, delivering tents in the lowlands while providing families living above 5,000 feet with corrugated galvanized iron (CGI) sheets, tools, plastic sheets and technical support to construct durable one-room shelters. In addition, Save the Children provided families with blankets, small cooking stoves, utensils and household items to replace those lost or destroyed during the quake.

The International Save the Children Alliance has provided lifesaving relief to more than 300,000 people across the earthquake zone, including:

- Shelter materials to more than 45,598 families
- Food to more than 45,000 families
- Basic health care to more than 58,500 people
- Quilts, blankets and essential household goods to 18,351 households
- The opportunity for 41,258 children to attend school, some for the first time in their lives
- 175 safe play spaces to support the emotional well-being of 14,559 children



Saima, Maiday's daughter, unwraps household goods received from Save the Children

A Safe Place to Sleep

Like many fathers in the Allai Valley, Maiday struggled to keep his children safe and healthy after their home was destroyed in the earthquake. Maiday rebuilt his mud house, but his wife and eight children were afraid to sleep under the heavy timber and mud roof during the constant aftershocks. Instead, they slept in a tent, spending many nights clearing snow so the tent would not collapse, or sometimes taking shelter with other families in a neighbor's tent. The children's health suffered from the constant damp and cold. With insulated metal sheets provided by Save the Children, Maiday was able to build a semi-permanent shelter with a lightweight roof for his family. Barbar, his 8-year-old son, reported: "With these sheets, we are warm and safe so we can sleep."

Helping Children Cope with Tragedy

Because giving children an opportunity to play and be children fosters resilience and allows them to return to normalcy, Save the Children quickly set up safe play spaces throughout the earthquake zone. Each safe play space featured plastic mats for sitting and play kits containing sports equipment, arts and craft supplies, and simple toys, including dolls and play tea sets. Adult supervisors and trained youth provided structured activities and supervision. As Save the Children transitions from recovery to development programs, communities have taken on the management of safe play spaces, often moving them near schools and integrating them with education programs.

Save the Children also quickly established temporary, tented schools that operated throughout the winter to give children warm, safe places to gather and connect with peers and caring teachers. These schools allowed students to develop or retain basic skills such as literacy and numeracy; imparted critical knowledge about health, hygiene and safety; and helped create a daily routine and a sense of normalcy as well as hope for the future. For many children, schools and play spaces were the only safe areas to be outside of their tents or one-room shelters.

Supporting Children Far From Home

After the earthquake struck, more than 18,000 people from the Allai Valley temporarily relocated to Meira Camp, an encampment managed by the Pakistani military. Despite the hardship of relocation, life in Meira Camp offered new opportunities for women and children from some of the most remote and underdeveloped areas of Allai. Throughout the winter, Save the Children provided comprehensive support including food, education, child protection and programs to help families rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Nine safe play spaces and three temporary schools brought education, play and protection programs to children who had never before left their isolated villages. The camp has since closed, but the agency continues to assist many of the children who were in Meira Camp, reopening schools in villages where families returned after the winter and coordinating with other agencies to build transitional schools where the agency does not have a formal presence.

Going to School for the First Time

Every morning, Mohammed and his four children arrived at Save the Children's school in Meira Camp. Mohammed's family was especially enthusiastic about the school because, like more than half of the 1,573 students attending Save the Children's education programs in the camp, they had never before seen the inside of a classroom.

A farmer from the remote Gunther village, Mohammed brought his family to Meira Camp to avoid the harsh mountain winter. During their five months in the camp, when Namir, Safia, Zar and Farooq lined up for assembly in the school yard at the start of each day, Mohammed observed nearby. He made sure his sons and daughters participated and helped the teachers with students who were upset or unruly. Mohammed says he would like all of his children to become educated. His wife also was excited about the school and prepared the children early in the morning to be on time. In the evenings, the children returned to their tent and shared their books and papers, talking happily about what they learned that day.



Even before the earthquake...

- Batagram District, Save the Children's target area, was among the 10 least developed areas of Pakistan
- Allai, the northernmost sub-district of Batagram, has a literacy rate of 3.5 percent for men and less than 1 percent for women
- No secondary or high school was available to girls in Allai

Revitalizing and Improving Schools

The earthquake devastated already limited education opportunities, destroying almost all government schools in Batagram District. Save the Children has partnered with teachers, communities and the government to reopen and support over 130 government primary schools. The agency has supplied teaching and learning materials, teacher training and school tents to support the beleaguered education system, and more than 5,000 girls and 6,000 boys are able to attend school. Many of these students, especially girls, have never been in school before.



Upgrading Weather-Battered School Tents

During a winter of heavy snowfall and summer of monsoon rains, large blue tents served as temporary classrooms. Now, Save the Children is building transitional classrooms to provide weather-resistant, earthquake-resistant structures until permanent schools can be rebuilt. Each prefabricated structure accommodates 40 students and is stocked with teaching and learning materials, including a library with about 200 books in Urdu, the national language. The books include children's encyclopedias, stories, poetry and how-to guides for projects and experiments. One wall of each classroom is painted as a giant blackboard, and the area is carpeted. Upon completion, Save the Children's structural engineer, as well as district education department and national Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority officials, approve the quality of each unit.

Improving the Quality of Education

Poor school quality contributes to low enrollment and high drop-out rates. In this poverty-stricken region, children often work to help support their family. Parents must weigh the future value of sending their children to school to having them contribute the meager family income. Ineffective schools are not a viable option. Unlike local madrassas (religious schools), government schools are plagued by teacher absenteeism, corporal punishment and rote learning. To improve the quality of education in Batagram, Save the Children is training teachers and education managers in child-friendly teaching methods. So far, almost 300 teachers have received an initial training, followed by regular classroom observation and refresher training. Additionally, Save the Children is working closely with the district education department to help it better manage schools, including training its own network of teachers and developing strategies to eliminate corporal punishment and teacher absenteeism.

To encourage local participation in schools, Save the Children is reviving school management Committees, involving communities in the planning, management and evaluation of public education. Before the earthquake, most school management committees in Batagram existed only on paper. With the support of Save the Children, 62 communities have elected committee members, trained committee chairs, coordinated with the government, facilitated initial meetings and recruited women and child participants.

Children create their schools

Students in Save the Children's tented schools participated in the planning of their new transitional classrooms. Using rocks and colored blocks from Save the Children's "School-in-a-Box" kits, children suggested locations for the building, latrines, drinking water taps, boundary walls, trees, flowers and paths. In separate sessions, parents, teachers and other community leaders shared their ideas about how transitional schools should look and how the community could support them.





Restoring Livelihoods

The earthquake devastated the ability of many people and, often, entire communities, to earn a living in Batagram district. Small businesses, terraced fields and power systems were lost. Quake debris contaminated drinking water sources and rubble filled village walkways, irrigation channels and markets.

To help families recover from this economic disaster, Save the Children launched livelihoods programs in Meira Camp and Batagram District, with a focus on Allai.

Cash-for-work opportunities provided families with an immediate income for completing community projects such as road reconstruction and rubble removal. A voucher program allowed the most vulnerable families to select an asset, such as a small farm animal or a sewing machine, to use as a foundation to rebuild their lives.

A New Start

Fida, age 17, prepares to take the goat obtained through Save the Children's voucher program back to his village. The son of a widow, Fida struggles to help make life better for his six younger siblings. He makes sure that Samina, age 8, and Jalal, age 10, continue their education.

Caring for his family has been even more difficult since the earthquake destroyed the family's home and livestock. With no bank in all of Allai, animals are as much a food source as a way to store wealth. For many families, losing farm animals was as economically devastating as losing their homes. But now, explains Fida, "We will own this goat. It will give us milk to drink. After four or five months it will grow up and have babies. We will then own more and our lives will get better."

Providing Access to Improved Health Care

Healthy and well-nourished children are best able to learn and develop. Among school-age children in Batagram, a lack of essential vitamins and minerals combined with common ailments such as diarrhea and worms cause stunting and developmental delay. Even before the earthquake, availability of health care was scarce or of low quality, especially for women.

Just two weeks after the earthquake, Save the Children began revitalizing primary health care in Allai. The agency opened its first field hospital on an abandoned rice paddy, where its medical staff, government health care workers and volunteers saw hundreds of patients a day. The need for improved primary health care quickly became apparent: Many patients, particularly women, came seeking treatment for chronic illnesses related to poor hygiene and inadequate nutrition.

On December 6, 2005, Save the Children, opened an interim rural health center, replacing the destroyed government health facility, to provide primary and secondary health care services to a population of 150,000. From the first days of operation, the agency has worked closely with the district health department to manage the health center, building its capacity to resume and improve public health services.

Government health staff was supported by female volunteer doctors and nurses from both Pakistan and the United States, and later a full-time female doctor hired by Save the Children.

In an area where women historically received very little medical care during pregnancy and traditionally gave birth at home with only unskilled help, Save the Children took several steps to encourage women in Allai to come to the health center for delivery, including distributing antenatal cards at Meira Camp, providing cooking oil to women receiving prenatal check-ups and giving babies born in the hospital warm clothing and blankets.



Dost Malki, a Save the Children community mobilization officer originally from the Allai Valley, talks with a local girl about the importance of education.

Gaining Acceptance in the Isolated Allai Valley

Connected to the main highway by only a precarious mountain road subject to frequent landslides and heavy snows, the approximately 150,000 inhabitants of the Allai Valley live a traditional lifestyle with little contact from the outside world. Save the Children was one of the first relief agencies to reach the remote area following the earthquake and immediately began providing emergency relief to its communities.

Before the earthquake, few agencies had been able to work in Allai, where residents were wary of outsiders. In this conservative society, families observe strict purdah, a religious and cultural practice that requires women and older girls to cover themselves and remain isolated from outsiders. Women normally remain behind the walls that surround their mud houses, rarely venturing out, and then only totally covered by burkas. Families are reluctant to send their girls to far-off schools with male teachers, or take women to see male doctors.

Over the past year, Save the Children has partnered with village elders and local religious and political leaders around the valley to provide support to Allai's residents. The agency hired and trained a network of community mobilizers, many local to the area, to help explain Save the Children's mission and involve communities in designing and implementing programs.

During countless meetings with men and women from all over the valley, Save the Children listened to their concerns and worked with residents to develop innovative solutions that respect traditions while providing access to much-needed services. Taking the time to understand the local culture and gain the community's trust has led to a partnership that will continue as communities rebuild.



Committed to Helping Families Move Forward

One year after the most devastating earthquake in Pakistan's modern history, families who experienced the disaster are working together with non-governmental organizations and the government to rebuild their homes and lives. The disaster of October 8, 2005, provided a unique opportunity to create real and lasting change in the lives of children in Pakistan. Thousands of children and women who have never been to school or received medical attention of any kind are now able to access these services. Given the opportunity to raise the literacy rate and health standards in this part of the earthquake zone, Save the Children is committed to work in the coming years with communities and government to increase access to quality education, especially for girls, develop family livelihoods, and improve the health and nutritional status of children and their families.

Save the Children is the leading independent organization creating lasting change for children in need in the United States and around the world. For more information, visit www.savethechildren.org.

Save the Children USA is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance, a global network of 27 independent Save the Children organizations working to ensure the well-being and protection of children in more than 110 countries.

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