

Training Program
on
School Safety and Security
for Block Resource Coordinators (BRCs)

Dates: 22nd Oct' 2024
Venue: Auditorium, Ground Floor, GIDM Campus

Organized by



Background

The National Education Policy, 2020 lays down the goal of every educational institution- “A good educational institution is one in which each student feels welcomed and cared for, where a safe and stimulating learning environment exists, where a wide range of learning experiences are offered, and where good physical infrastructure and appropriate resources conducive to learning are available to all students. Attaining these qualities must be the goal of every educational institution.”

‘School Safety and Security’ has been defined as the creation of safe environments for children starting from their homes to their schools and back. This includes safety from large-scale 'natural' hazards of geological/climatic origin, human-made risks, pandemics, and violence as well as more frequent and smaller-scale fires, transportation and other related emergencies, environmental threats, and violence that can adversely affect the lives of children.

Life and infrastructural loss due to devastating earthquakes, displacement of people, and damage to property by floods and cyclones have been a result of disasters in the past. Such events affect the vulnerable population the most. Children, being one of them, need to be resilient and their capacity needs to be built against the local disasters. Schools are key infrastructures for our social progress and hence need to be kept safe. For this risk-informed planning should be mainstreamed at the policy planning and project implementation level and focus should also be built toward child-centred disaster risk reduction programming.

Ministry of Education mentions that- School academic and non-academic personnel, such as principals, teachers, students, etc., spend around 1/3 part of a day, and around 220 days in a year in schools in India. Therefore, if classes are held for six hours a day, a child spends 22% of their waking time in a year in a day school. In a residential school, on the other hand, a child spends 60% of their life during schooling years in the school. Schools are thus, accountable for a substantial chunk of the child’s life, and have a huge responsibility to make the stay in schools of all children comfortable, joyful, secure, and safe. Therefore, it is important for the school that everyone concerned with school education should understand their clear roles and responsibilities towards school safety and security.

Recently, in 2020, the National Education Policy was announced and in 2021, the Ministry of Education came up with a Guidelines on School Safety and Security, which talks about School building, grounds and facilities, Psychosocial safety and support, Health and Physical safety, School Transportation, Orientation and Training of School community and authorities.

In 2021, the Ministry of Education also released Guidelines on Safety and Security which also

mentions that one of the key roles of the School Management Committee (SMC) should be ensuring the safety and security of children. It also mentions in details all the legal and constitutional provisions regarding education and the safety and security of children. It also spells out in detail, the role of the teachers, principals, parents, warden, counselor as well as students in ensuring safety in school. Accountability framework and legal provisions, whole school safety approach, and multi-sectoral approach are the three-pronged approach to the safety and security concerns of these guidelines.

In 2021, Education Department Gujarat has also mandated the establishment of a School Disaster Management Committee (SDMC) including School Safety Focal Point Teachers and Peer Educators; incorporating school safety and security one of the roles and responsibilities of the School Management Committee to lead risk reduction and response efforts during emergencies and making the school ecosystem safe and secure the for school community.

In order to strengthen DRM at school level planning, the Education Department has also issued the Govt. Resolution on School DRM Plan (SDRMP)/School Safety Plan.

The adverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on children, including disrupted access to essential services, compromised health, and increased vulnerability to natural hazards, are particularly pronounced in Gujarat, India. The state faces escalating climate-related events such as cyclones, floods, and heatwaves, exposing schools to various hazards. To address these challenges, Gujarat initiated the Saksham Shala (Resilient School) program, launched on December 21, 2023, led by the Education Department and supported by UNICEF. This pioneering initiative integrates climate resilience, aiming to mitigate vulnerabilities and enhance preparedness. The program focuses on four key areas: Clean, Green, Safe, and Sustainable Systems in Schools. With twelve specific components and a benchmarking system, the program envisions implementing resilient practices across over 53,000 schools, benefiting more than 11 million children in Gujarat in a phased approach. The program focuses to create child-friendly, gender-transformative, inclusive, and climate-resilient learning environments, addressing a spectrum of challenges for comprehensive educational development.

Legal Mandates

- Constitutional provisions for safety and security,
- Right to Education Act, 2009, and provisions under the act the for safety and security of children,
- National School Safety Policy Guideline, 2016, by the National Disaster Management Authority,
- National Education Policy, 2020, and
- Guidelines on Safety and Security, 2021, by Ministry of Education,
- Provisions for punitive and reformative actions in the Constitution of India to ensure the safety and protection of children in schools.
- Saksham Shala Guideline, 2023, Government of Gujarat, Education Department, Samagra Shiksha

Key Challenges for Safe Schools

Efforts on school safety at the National and State levels are at an evolving stage. Key challenges in the implementation of school safety measures include:

1. The disconnect between institutions:

There is a visible disconnect between the non-emergency schemes (Pertaining to Education) such as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and Disaster Response/Preparedness. Education programs are executed in most states with little synergy or policy linkages with the SDMA / DDMA.

2. Limited convergence between schemes:

Resources required for the effective implementation of a govt. The scheme cannot be leveraged in the absence of a mechanism for collaborative working with other budget holders. For instance, land development within the school campus may be funded through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). However, close coordination between micro-planning activity for MGNREGA and School Development Plan preparation would be necessary for convergence.

3. Limited understanding of school safety concepts:

It is evident that the existing education machinery in the country is keen to promote a safe learning environment for children and teachers but the actual implementation of programs on the ground points to a limited understanding of the concept of safety. At best, new school designs incorporate earthquake safety features in many areas; however, floods, cyclones, and landslides have been given little attention in the design and cost of schools. In addition, non-structural elements are often not understood as threats to safety. At the level of teachers and students, safety issues are discussed and pursued as one-off activities. School timetables and curriculum need suitable modifications to make safety understanding a routine activity.

4. Lack of Understanding of Existing Hazards and Child Protection related issues:

Preparedness is the key to minimize any hazard impact and for adequate preparedness, one is able to identify the hazards which may be enabled through a basic understanding of Disaster Risk Management. The past incidents from Tamil Nadu in 2004 and Surat in 2019 highlighted the negligence of management in providing safer places. The management had failed to identify the fire hazards and subsequently could not prepare for a better response. It eventually resulted in putting a dark spot in the history of Indian School Safety. With respect to this, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has also come out with its judgment in support of school safety and insisted on adherence to NBC standards in school building specifications and construction. The following cases in points show how those mishaps could have been avoided if the management had been well-versed in aspects of DRM.

5. Focus of school safety and security monitoring indicators in monitoring and evaluation:

It has been observed that there is a need to mainstream monitoring indicators of school safety and security in department-level planning (including School Development Planning, Quality Indicators, and Monthly agenda at authority level).

Case Studies

1. **2004 Kumbhakonam School Fire:** The 2004 Kumbhakonam school fire incident happened in a school in Kumbhakonam in the Thanjavur district of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. A total of 94 students of the primary section of the Krishna English Medium School were burnt to death in their classroom as the thatched roof caught fire on 16 July 2004. The accident was one of the four largest fire accidents and the largest school accident in Tamil Nadu's history, as well as the second-largest school fire in India in terms of casualties.

The buildings in the nursery and primary schools had no ventilation. Near the eastern entrance, there was a narrow staircase 4.5 ft (1.4 m) wide leading to the first floor of the building. The layout of the first floor was similar to the ground floor where classes had no separation and exit was through a narrow collapsible door. The lower end of the class on the western side was connected to the noon meal kitchen thatched roof and the cycle stand roof, where the accident occurred. The Sri Krishna Girls High School had 179, Sri Krishna Aided Primary School had 477 and Saraswathy Nursery and Primary School had 126 students in its roles, totaling to 782 students. The second floor measured 62.5 ft (19.1m) * 13 ft (4.0 m) and had classes for standards VI, VII, VIII and IX of the high school. The third floor had an open terrace having a water tank.

2. **2019 Surat Fire:** On 24th May 2019, a fire occurred at a commercial complex in Sarthana Jagatnaka area of Surat in the Gujarat state of India. Twenty-two students died and others were injured in an academic coaching center located on the building's terrace. The fire was started by a short circuit on the ground floor; the students in the coaching center were trapped by the destruction of a wooden staircase. Three people have been arrested for their alleged involvement or their alleged negligence leading to the fire and the deaths.

The fire occurred at a commercial complex called Takshashila Arcade, located in the Sarthana area of Surat. Smart Design Studio, a coaching center, was operating in a makeshift dome built on the terrace of the building. The fire broke out between 3:45 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. (IST). An electrical short circuit in the air-conditioner started a fire on the ground floor near a staircase on the rear side of the building. The fire quickly spread, engulfing the third floor and the makeshift dome on the terrace of the building. There were about 50 to 70 students in the coaching center at the time. Two shops and several vehicles parked near the building were also destroyed in another fire ignited by the blaze.

A total of 22 students died: 18 girls and 4 boys, aged between 15 and 22. Of these, 16 students died due to fire or asphyxiation, 3 died as they jumped off the terrace of the building, and 3

succumbed to the fire-burns they sustained. Three of the students who died had appeared for the Class XII exams of the Gujarat education board, the results of which were declared on 25 May 2019, a day after their deaths. A further 16 students were admitted to hospital; a child aged three or four years old was also hospitalized with burn injuries.

Aim & Objectives

The aim of the training program is to build the capacity of Block Resource Coordinators (BRCs) and Samagra Shiksha Engineers (SSA Engineers) on School Safety and Security in order to bridge the gap between policy decisions and implementation of the same at schools' level.

The training is designed with the following objectives: -

1. To orient the participants to the various concepts of school safety and security in context with the risks pose by local hazards, WASH services, psycho-social safety physical health, and undesirable intentional human behaviours or actions.
2. To develop an understanding among the participants on how to conduct a school safety and security assessment.
3. To orient the participants on the legal and institutional provisions as mentioned and provisioned in the Right to Education Act and policy guidelines developed by National Disaster Management Authority and Ministry of Education.
4. To develop an understanding among the participants about the components and planning process of a School Disaster Risk Management Plan.
5. To establish the importance of learning continuity during emergency situations through alternate mechanisms and activity-based pedagogy.
6. To capacitate School Safety Focal Point Teachers and Peer Educators through Master Trainers.