From Catastrophe to Opportunity :

Children in Asia creating positive social changes after disasters

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60 years of working with **children in Asia**

Acknowledgments

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List of Acronyms

ABS-CBN Alto Broadcasting System-Chronicle Broadcasting Network

CARE Calamity Assistance and Rehabilitation Efforts

CCCD Child Centred Community Development

CCDRR Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction

DepEd Department of Education, the Philippines

DFID United Kingdom Department for International Development

DRR Disaster Risk Reduction

FRD Fund for Relief and Development

HVCA Hazards, Vulnerabilities and Capacity Assessment

INGO International Non-Government Organisation

LAPUS Learning and Public Use School

LGU Local Government Unit

NDCC National Disaster Coordinating Council, the Philippines

NGO Non-Government Organisation

PDRA Participatory Disaster Risk Assessment

PFL Pictures for Life

SAPIME Situational Analysis, Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

SEA Social Equity Audit

SIP School Improvement Plan

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

Foreword

Within Plan's mission to advance children's rights and improve children's lives, some of our most challenging and important work lies in helping children overcome catastrophic events. While the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami was the most devastating and far-reaching natural global calamity in recent years, other less-publicised incidents have also taken devastating tolls, and the impact of these disasters, although smaller in scale, can be just as shattering to communities.

Many believe that the children within these afflicted communities are among the most vulnerable and ill-prepared to handle the overwhelming and profound difficulties associated with disasters. This can certainly hold true, as children are in a particularly susceptible developmental stage in their lives without benefiting from the life experience of adults. Others have noted, however, that children often display an impressive ability to stay resilient during such calamities, and that their high energy and participation efforts during emergencies can be of crucial value.

Since the tsunami, much of Plan Asia's focus has been on post-disaster responses in the 13 countries where we have offices, as much of Asia is topographically and geologically prone to natural disasters. This report provides a close look at three post-disaster pilot programmes that Plan country offices have recently implemented, and each programme takes a different approach to helping children. While these programmes have had positive impacts, they are not flawless, and this report also provides some insight as to how they might be improved upon replication.

Our hope is that additional Plan country offices and other development organisations and agencies will take note and consider implementing similar programmes in areas that have suffered a disaster. Or even better, they may want to set up such programmes before disasters occur, so that children are better prepared for any emergencies they may face in the future.

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Background

Over the past few years, Plan has undertaken several innovative pilot programmes that have helped improve the lives of children in communities where disasters have struck. This report describes three of these initiatives: Pictures for Life in India, Happy / Sad Boxes in Sri Lanka and Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction in the Philippines.

Background

Natural disasters are unfortunate and tragic events, but they may also present an opportunity for children to realise their inherent rights and to break the rigidity of traditional societal barriers that may be impeding their ability to realise their rights. When development organisations and agencies offer programmes to help these children display their skills and capabilities during a critical time of need, community leaders and other adults are likely to respect the children and take them more seriously, thereby improving the children's social status. At the same time, such programmes can provide children with psychological support to conquer the fear and distress they may endure in the aftermath of a disaster by helping to divert their attention away from their great losses (see Figure 1 for an overview).

Figure 1. Plan's innovative disaster-related programmes at a glance

Pictures for Life (PFL)

Pictures for Life (PFL) was introduced a little less than a year after the 2004 tsunami struck the state of Tamil Nadu on the east coast of the southern Indian Peninsula. PFL was designed as a social equity audit (SEA), in which children consulted the communities Plan had assisted after the tsunami to assess whether relief and reconstruction had been distributed efficiently and equitably. Children attended training and then conducted surveys in the Nagapattinam district; they backed up their findings by taking photos of the people they interviewed. The children gained a sense of responsibility through their meaningful endeavours, as well as the respect of their home communities.

The Happy/Sad Box

The Happy/Sad Box was a psychosocial programme introduced in southern Sri Lanka, also after the 2004 tsunami. Its aim was to help children who were shy and diffident to feel more comfortable revealing their personal difficulties from tsunami trauma or other problems. Children were encouraged to write notes or draw pictures and then place them in the secure boxes that Plan provided to the schools. Designated counsellor-teachers read the messages and subsequently offered advice and support. This helped many Sri Lankan students, who have traditionally been wary of speaking out about their troubles. After receiving advice from the counsellor-teachers, children learned to trust them; this promoted even more openness about the challenges the children faced.

Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR)

Plan introduced a Child Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme that is being mainstreamed by the Philippines Department of Education into schools across the country with the assistance of UNICEF. Plan also conducted regular sessions that taught children essential survival skills and ways to prepare themselves for the natural catastrophes that occur throughout the country. Children in the Philippines can now keep themselves safer by applying the knowledge they have acquired and can pass this knowledge on to adults, who may not be as well versed in disaster preparedness.

These programmes have been particularly effective in encouraging children to assert themselves and become more active participants. The programmes, therefore, fit within Plan's Child Centred Community Development (CCCD) approach and may also be very useful in areas where no disaster has occurred. Plan considers these programmes to be potentially replicable in other Plan countries around the world, and encourages other NGOs to consider implementing them as well.

It need not take a disaster for children to become aware of their innate human rights or to become more active community members. By participating in programmes such as these under normal circumstances, children may find themselves more confident to handle possible future disasters, with a greater capacity to express themselves clearly during extreme conditions.

The next three sections of this report provide an overview of the pilot programmes and details about their implementation. Also included are the viewpoints of children, parents and the community about their success, comments on their sustainability and recommendations for others who might wish to replicate the programmes in a different locality.

India

Pictures for Life (PFL)

"Now we have more power to rise up and be heard, and elders accept this, PFL contributed to this. Before, we were not taken seriously. Even in our homes, our opinions weren't much of a priority. After I attended the programme, it gave me courage. Now we have much more authority, but we have to fight to protect our rights."

Boy from Kallar, India

Pictures for Life (PFL)

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami slammed into the southeast coast of India, killing 10,872 people, with 5,766 missing and presumed dead. The tsunami inflicted great damage on coastal communities, which have largely relied on fishing for sustenance and as a livelihood. The state of Tamil Nadu bore the brunt of the losses, with an estimated 8,000 people killed and hundreds of thousands left homeless in the immediate aftermath.

Before the tsunami, Plan did not have a presence in this area, so we partnered with REAL, a local NGO that had served the Dindigul district in Tamil Nadu for almost 30 years. REAL was well recognised and trusted by the local communities and had previous experience in disaster-related activities. After the tsunami struck, REAL quickly became involved in relief and rehabilitation in the nearby Nagapattinam district, which had been hit hard.

These communities had tremendous physical and mental obstacles to overcome. Thousands had died and many homes had washed away. Livelihoods had also disappeared, as a large number of fishing boats and equipment had been destroyed. REAL Plan (as the partnership was now called) provided emergency relief for the community: helping relocate those who lost their homes, rebuilding vital infrastructure and offering psychosocial rehabilitation assistance.

After the tsunami, REAL Plan wanted to develop a programme that involved children meaningfully in the relief and reconstruction processes. The idea of a child-led social equity audit (SEA) was suggested several months after the tsunami as a way to examine the relief efforts REAL Plan had provided and to identify areas in which our programme could improve.

REAL Plan staff decided that building SEA capacities in children could help communities recover from the tsunami and that this skill could also be deployed in the event of future disasters. It was not meant as an instrument to denigrate REAL Plan's efforts. Instead, it was designed to make REAL Plan aware through a thorough assessment whether its relief efforts that went to communities after the tsunami had achieved social equity, and how greater social equity might be achieved in the future.

The decision to embark on many major relief projects involving housing, drinking water infrastructure, school construction and distribution of boats, nets and engines, was made after REAL Plan had conducted community meetings. These meetings involved the Panchayat (community government), community leaders, women's self-help organisations, children's club representatives and others in the village. However, as it was later discovered through the SEA, in many cases these consultations were considered informal.

Almost all the aid had been finalised by the Panchayat, and a request for an acknowledgement of the service had been obtained from both the individual beneficiary and the community leaders. While REAL Plan had taken these measures for community input, it was worth finding out how our services had been perceived through an SEA, so in the future we could improve them.

In mid-September 2005, Plan launched a pilot programme. The PFL model was developed, tested and fine-tuned over four phases with the help of children from 10 villages in Nagapattinam. It was also tested later in Kashmir. Each phase was designed to yield specific insights through the SEA in order to generate useful outputs. The goals of PFL are indicated in Figure 2.

Photos: Children are proud of their involvement and the skills they learned through the Pictures for Life programme

Photo: The PFL programme was able to help some children overcome their fear of the ocean after the tsunami

Figure 2. Goals of PFL

The PFL programme designers sought to accomplish the following goals:

1. **To explain to children the concept of equitable distribution of emergency relief and reconstruction aid.** Children learned that such help may not adequately reach all members of the community and that those who are most vulnerable are less likely to receive the services they need.

2. **To equip participants with the ability to collaborate effectively in the design and implementation of a social equity audit.** Children were trained to understand the concept of an SEA. Their input as to how SEAs should be carried out in their communities was considered and valued.

3. **To teach children how to carry out a survey effectively and efficiently, and to explain to them how surveys help ensure transparency and accountability.** By acquiring these skills, children gained a better appreciation and understanding of their own communities and the overall relief process, as they looked into the work and measured the services of an NGO that had given them assistance.

4. **To help children comprehend and realise their inherent rights.** According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, these include the right to express their own views freely and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. UNICEF has further interpreted this to mean the right to participate in decision-making processes and influence solutions as a partner in social change.

5. **To relieve emotionally scarred children from the trauma and struggles that persisted after the tsunami.** Through participation in the programme, children met new children and visited new villages, giving them the chance to focus on something other than the trauma from the tsunami. The programme designers believed that the psyche of the children would improve by partaking in this innovative activity, which they could feel proud of and that their communities could appreciate.

6. **To help insure a better overall assessment.** The programme designers believed that children would be less prone to bias than adults during the information gathering process. Hence, REAL Plan would benefit from a child-centred SEA that provided precise data, which could build a more accurate understanding of how to improve social equity in future relief and rehabilitation services.

At the workshop, an expert facilitator introduced the concepts and rationale behind an SEA, and discussed child rights, harmony and community development in the context of an SEA with the children.

The PFL social equity audit methodology

At the programme designers' request, REAL Plan selected children from 10 villages in Nagapattinam district who were identified as having good potential to help conduct the SEA successfully. These children, aged from 12 to 16 and on vacation from school, attended a two-day orientation workshop. At the workshop, an expert facilitator introduced the concepts and rationale behind an SEA and discussed child rights, harmony and community development in the context of an SEA with the children. He emphasised that ideally, the needs of all groups in a community should be met equitably, instead of meeting the needs of just one group or some groups.

The children themselves decided on who would conduct the surveys in the local villages, based on their participation and the abilities they displayed during the workshop. The group, which originally consisted of 38 children, was narrowed down to 25. The programme designers were aware that the children not making the cut would be disappointed, but they said that it was necessary for the children to choose among themselves who were the most capable of collecting useful data.

Once the size of the group was reduced, the programme designers (now programme facilitators) explained in more detail the concepts of harmony, development and vulnerability. The children spent the next 10 days learning how to carry out a survey, including the importance of both sampling and faithfully recording all responses as provided by the interviewees.

An additional week was spent carrying out the actual SEA. The children went in groups to different villages each day. REAL Plan arranged for travel in hired vehicles and for a staff member to accompany the children and wait with the vehicle in a central drop-off area. In the village, the children sought out people who fit the vulnerability profiles and asked them questions about the relief services REAL Plan had provided and whether they had been socially equitable. (See Figure 3.) After finishing their interviews, the children summarised the answers for each village on a data tabulation sheet.

Another highlight and positive benefit of the programme was that children learned to use digital cameras. However, despite the programme's name, "Pictures for Life," which suggests that a strong emphasis was placed on photography, photos were not the central part of the programme. Instead, the photos were simply used as proof that the children had actually conducted their surveys, helping to ensure the accuracy of the SEA. The programme designers made it clear that the photography was only a small part of PFL in comparison with the interviews children conducted in their data collecting.

Still, several of the children interviewed for this report said that when they carried the cameras to conduct the SEA, their peers and community members gave them respect, since they were not used to seeing such equipment in their villages. Learning this new skill was a thrill for the children; a few of them indicated that their families have since asked them to be the photographer for special celebrations.

Photo: A youth conducts a PFL survey

Figure 3. Vulnerability profiles, services and equity questions developed and used for the SEA in Nagapattinam district

With some help from the facilitators, children categorised different demographic groups perceived to be vulnerable:

- Children aged 0-3, 4-10 and 11-18 years

- Adult widows

- Female single parents

- Elderly females

- Illiterate persons

- Physically handicapped persons

- Mentally handicapped persons

- People who are ill

- Severely impoverished persons

- People who are politically weak

- Recently bereaved persons

- Members of scheduled castes or tribes

- Members of religious minorities

The children surveyed members of these groups about the services REAL Plan provided as part of our relief efforts. These included the provision of:

- Boats, fishing nets, engines and iceboxes

- Children's health and capacity development centres

- Children's clubs

- Cultural activities

- Medical camps

- Paint therapy

- Relief materials

- Sanitation

- School kits

- Sports equipment

- Temporary shelters

- Water services

The children asked respondents whether they thought each service was equitable in the following ways:

- Accessible to all

- Relevant to their needs

- Valuable to the community

- Timely in its provision

- Reflective of consultation with the community

- Preserving of the self-esteem of those who were provided services

After a week of surveying, children elicited responses from more than 700 individuals in 10 villages, and registered a total of 4,646 answers.

Results from the data

After a week of surveying, children elicited responses from more than 700 individuals in 10 villages, and registered a total of 4,646 answers. The programme facilitators undertook a preliminary analysis of the tabulation sheets to get a feel for the results and to check the robustness of the data, and in two cases, did a follow-up survey. They then shared and analysed their broad findings collectively with the children.

Subsequently, the facilitators hired a team of data input operators who entered the data in coded format to generate a detailed analysis and wrote the final report for Plan India. According to Plan staff, the data that the children collected proved valuable for REAL Plan to keep in mind so that future relief efforts would be more equitable.

Different communities' answers yielded different findings. For example, one community identified an irregular dispersal of drinking water supplies, while another specified the need to relocate a childcare centre. Some communities suggested technical improvements, such as installing common drainage systems or including electric motors in irrigation systems.

A number of respondents felt that REAL Plan could have made stronger efforts to consult the community during the relief phase. This surprised REAL Plan staff. The executive secretary of REAL Plan, Peter Lourdu, said, "When we looked back at our strategy, we found out that most of the consultation we had done was very informal and we didn't reach enough people. In the reapplication phase, we decided to go for a regular formalised consultation, so that more people in the community would know what was going on with our projects. That is the kind of correction we learned from PFL."

The results of the survey were shared with the community via a travelling photo exhibition. The exhibition was displayed in Kallar, first for the benefit of the village council members and parents, and then for the entire village. The participating children also shared the results with district government officials and the District Collector. Plan India then organised an exhibition of the children's photos in Delhi and other locales.

Many of the photos were posted on a website about PFL (www.picturesforlife.org). The facilitators explained the purpose of the website to the children in Nagapattinam, who understood that it would feature their photographs, and later presented the final website design to them.

The facilitators also shared the PFL website with children in Kashmir during the orientation session, which was attended by school teachers, headmasters and officials from the Department of Education. The facilitators explained that the website would display the children's photos in a new section on the Kashmir phase of the project and sought the children's agreement.

The community and the Panchayat members were very happy to see their views about the relief work were being respected and that the SEA was being conducted by local children; indeed, the communities took pride in their children's involvement in this exercise. After the results of PFL were made public, some community and Panchayat members made further recommendations to improve the services rendered. According to REAL Plan, in most cases these recommendations were taken into consideration and implemented accordingly.

The communities that REAL Plan served agreed that many people benefited from the thorough work of the children in PFL. Although some thought it would not have made a difference whether children or adults had administered the SEA, the programme designers felt that children would administer the survey better. Some of the children's comments to this effect are in Figure 4.

Photo: Community members discussing development goals with children

Photo: PFL participant conducting an SEA survey

Figure 4. Comments from children about their effectiveness during the SEA process compared with adults

"Adults asking these questions would change answers to be more favourable to agencies who work for them. With children doing it, we would only record answers from what we heard. Children won't be biased, so we can get better answers."

"Many adults are illiterate, but we know how to read and write perfectly."

"Adults have too many things to take care of already, so giving surveys would be one of many tasks that they have to do. With children, we could focus more on the survey. It didn't matter that I was a child – I felt the people I interviewed were confident that I would do a good job."

> *"The training was remarkable and helped expose our talent. We learned how to give surveys and how to take photographs, and we got experience in village mapping. We examined whether the relief coming from REAL Plan after the tsunami went to all the people and reached them in a proper manner."*
>
> Boy from Chinnakottaimedu

Children's overall views of PFL

It is clear that PFL participants felt empowered. The surveying experience was a successful and enriching one for them, and all parties agreed that the activity succeeded in meeting its goals. According to the programme designers, some participants responded to it "astonishingly well".

"The training was remarkable and helped expose our talent," said a boy from Chinnakottaimedu. "We learned how to give surveys and how to take photographs, and we got experience in village mapping. We examined whether the relief coming from REAL Plan after the tsunami went to all the people and reached them in a proper manner."

"Now we have more power to rise up and be heard, and elders accept this," said a boy from Kallar. "PFL contributed to this. Before, we were not taken seriously. Even in our homes, our opinions weren't much of a priority. After I attended the programme, it gave me courage. Now we have much more authority, but we have to fight to protect our rights."

There is evidence that the children's success in performing their PFL duties has emboldened them and helped raise their maturity level.

"I used to have a fear of elders, but now I have become more courageous," added the boy from Chinnakottaimedu. "Before, I didn't pay much attention to village issues, but now I am very concerned. Through other children's activities and training by NGOs, I had learned that I should pay attention – but taking part in the PFL training was more important to developing real concern than any other programme I've been a part of."

Many children noted that they had enjoyed meeting new children and seeing new places.

A girl from Kallar said, "Before PFL, I was known only in my local community, but now I have made many friends with children from other places, and I led the other children when we went to my village."

A few respondents mentioned that when they went to other villages, they saw that the struggles were sometimes worse than in their own villages and felt good about their significant role in helping make improvements that make a difference.

"We should not keep quiet about problems in our villages," said the girl from Kallar. "We should work together to try to find solutions to problems."

PFL also suceeded as a psychosocial tool, because the daily activities diverted some children's minds away from the mental trauma of the tsunami. Another boy from Kallar was still very sad about the loss of his mother when he began PFL training, but he said that the PFL experiences helped him move on in profound ways.

"In the first five days of PFL I wasn't interested, and I would disturb others and run away after the lessons were done. But I grew so happy to be with other children – dancing, playing and learning about PFL," he said. "It was such a good feeling to be with many children instead of being aloof and depressed."

The boy added, "Before PFL, my mother would come and call in my dreams, but after PFL, I don't remember having those dreams again. I also dreamed about the tsunami coming and I would scream and wake up; I had many sleepless nights. But after PFL, I stopped having bad dreams like that. The 20 days was such a happy time, I forgot all about being sad."

Photo: A villager with some children who were proud of their accomplishments, which were featured in a travelling exhibition throughout India

> "It gave us elders a great feeling to see that the children's potential is so great. We have great confidence that these children can make a difference in the community."

Mother from Kallar

Parents' views of PFL

Parents agreed that their children had benefited a lot from participating in PFL.

"It gave us elders a great feeling to see that the children's potential is so great. We have great confidence that these children can make a difference in the community," said a mother from Kallar.

At first, however, some parents were reluctant, since involvement in the programme meant that their children would be gone for up to 20 days. However, the children did return home during the village mapping exercise, a trial survey and while conducting the SEA survey in their own community.

Some parents were also apprehensive because the training would take place in Kallar, which was one of the areas most seriously affected by the tsunami. Nevertheless, a mother from Pattinacherry said that after her husband looked into the situation in Kallar, they agreed to send their son. She ended up being a respondent to the questions posed by the children, and she claimed that the PFL experience had helped her son get out of a state of trauma.

"The programme helped. Before, he was aloof and he stayed at home due to his fear of the tsunami," she said. "After the programme, he started playing more with other children and was more confident, and started recognising children's rights. His attitude had a positive effect on his younger brother, who looks up to him, and wanted to be like him. So seeing both of my sons develop like this helped me a lot."

A couple from Seruthur said that because their boy had previously enjoyed good experiences with REAL and since two other boys from the village were also participating in PFL, they were willing to send their son. Ultimately, they were quite happy with that decision.

"He became more disciplined after the programme," said the boy's mother. "He does his work on time now, and has become an obedient boy at home."

The boy's father seemed even more pleased about the effect of PFL on his son. "Before he was not of any help," he explained. "Now he helps clean the engine and boat when I come back from fishing. His language skills seem to have developed since this programme. Also, he is dressing better, which has become more important to him. Before PFL, he wore dirty clothes, but after, I noticed he became very neat and clean. He was more dependent on us as parents, but being away gave him a chance to be independent and take care of himself."

Some of the parents of PFL participants also noted that improvements had been made to their communities after the findings from PFL were revealed. This is because once REAL Plan realised how to do better in certain areas of service provision, such as making distribution of drinking water more equitable, necessary positive changes were made.

Other community perspectives of PFL

The teachers of the PFL participants also noticed that their students exhibited positive behavioural changes after their involvement in the programme.

For example, the headmaster of the North Poigai Nallur School said that at first he was very reluctant to allow his student to go, because the programme extended past the school vacation. But the boy convinced him that it was important for his future and that he would learn things he could not at school. The headmaster found that it was a good decision because the boy turned out to be one of the most successful PFL participants.

"After this programme, he underwent a sea change," the headmaster said.

"He used to cut classes, but whenever he needs to leave now, he seeks permission first. I have confidence in him now and I want to thank REAL Plan for selecting him for the programme. He's had a very good impact on other students, too."

Soon after the PFL experience, the boy was elected executive secretary of his local children's federation and he went on to meet the President of India in Delhi.

A teacher from Pattinacherry said that he noticed a difference in his student's behaviour before and after PFL.

"I was surprised at his improvement," the teacher said. "PFL seemed very useful and helpful. He probably learned many more good things from the programme than he would have in class."

A member of the Kallar Panchayat said that after REAL Plan approached them to seek permission to conduct the programme in the village, he could see that it gave awareness and skill training to children and that the children were helping contribute to the village.

REAL Plan's view of PFL

The difference between PFL and other programmes is that PFL does something with children instead of for children.

REAL Plan staff members were very pleased with the children's increased awareness of society and how it functions.

The difference between PFL and other programmes is that PFL does something with children instead of for children.

"Most other programmes only increase the capacity of the children or the community," said Peter Lourdu. "With PFL, we gave children the chance to evaluate our own programmes. Focusing on children's participation was the big difference here."

Plan staff found that the children's aptitude for these tasks was remarkable. As one Plan staff member extolled, "The capability of children to perform these tasks was more than what we anticipated. For example, we never expected them to understand technicalities in housing design."

As mentioned previously, the children, with a newfound sense of responsibility, made a tangible contribution by diligently carrying out the SEA. The findings, in turn, enabled REAL Plan to better serve the local people.

"What has been delivered has been useful for the community. The objective auditing by the children helped us, but it also helped the children to gain respect and project a better image of themselves," said another REAL Plan staff member.
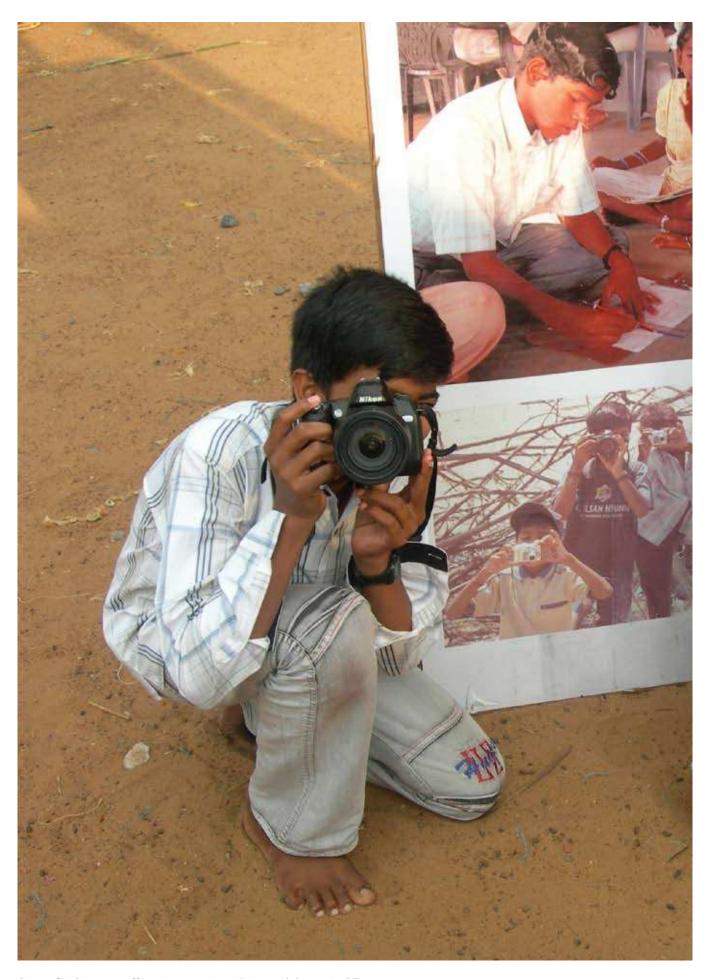
Photo: Child showing off his photographic skills learned during the PFL training

"Our confidence from PFL carried over to our children's club activities, where we had a big accomplishment. We had so many dropouts from school, but soon after PFL, our children's club took up this issue. Through interventions, we got children to go back to school."

Boy from Pandagasalai

PFL's sustainable effect on children and communities

A development organisation or agency may tell children about their rights, but this is not the same as getting people to respect those rights. Because the children demonstrated to their communities that they had the power to bring tangible benefits, they earned the respect of those around them. This awareness and confidence carried over into other activities, most prominently to the local children's clubs.

There were some instances where PFL appeared to have had a dramatic effect on the participants. This was evident in the response from a boy from Pandagasalai: "Our confidence from PFL carried over to our children's club activities, where we had a big accomplishment," he explained. "We had so many dropouts from school, but soon after PFL, our children's club took up this issue. Through interventions, we got children to go back to school."

All parents agreed that PFL had a positive effect on their children. They noticed their children had gained confidence and had earned more respect from their communities. One mother said that this was evident in the actions taken by the children's clubs soon after the PFL training. The improved confidence of the PFL participants spurred them on to insist on hygiene and sanitation improvements in schools.

One mother of a PFL participant mentioned how she was personally touched by what she witnessed. "Seeing PFL motivated me and I came to realise the importance of teamwork. Soon after, I increased my participation in the women's federation and joined a self-help group, and I'm still part of it," she said.

Photos: Youths conducting surveys for the social equity audit

The PFL facilitators came back a year later to Nagapattinam to implement the second phase of PFL and worked with 29 children who surveyed 430 respondents. The programme designers validated the PFL model by replicating a smaller scale version of the SEA in Kashmir, after earthquakes wreaked havoc in that area in October 2005. That experience was also deemed successful in achieving its goals.

"Any development relief agency can adapt this strategy," said Lourdu. "We've made the great realisation that children from communities are just as capable of doing assessments and surveys as university students from outside. Any NGO can share our experience; it's very easy."

Those intrigued with PFL's accomplishments and who wish to replicate the PFL SEA model in a different region of the world may want to consider the following:

- The programme designers say that PFL can be used in just about any situation where a service has been rendered and there is a desire to evaluate it.

- In keeping with the theme of the SEA, facilitators should encourage transparency amongst all relevant stakeholders during the PFL training period. In Nagapattinam, teachers from the area were aware of the daily sessions and served as the "eyes and ears" for the community.

- Development organisations or agencies should make sure that they truly have enough trust from the community, or they should partner with a group that has earned such trust. REAL Plan staff, parents, teachers and members of the Panchayat all said that it was helpful that REAL was already well-established in the area and trusted, so parents and teachers felt more comfortable involving the children from their communities.

- During the participant selection process, when children are asked to determine the best individuals from the group to become data collectors for the SEA, those wishing to replicate PFL may want to prepare themselves to handle potentially bruised feelings from children who have not been selected so they do not lose self-esteem. It is recommended that these children are offered a mitigating alternative so they do not feel rejected and unworthy.

- Although the villages in India where the children went to collect the data were considered safe enough to allow them to go off on their own, this may not be true for other areas in the world where PFL may be considered for replication. In this case, a chaperone may be required to stay in close range or to accompany the children at all times.

- The programme facilitators in India did not seek specific written permission from the children or their parents with respect to publishing the photographs of the children or displaying them online. Neither did the children seek permission from the interviewees for their photographs to be available online.

  As a general rule of law, the person who is the subject of a photograph should provide written consent before their image can be published or used online. If others wish to replicate this programme, they need to ensure that children, their parents, and any interviewees give their informed consent for their photographs to be used. They must also have a means of storing and accessing these consent forms if required.

- The times during which children can take part in these activities are limited to school holidays. In Nagapattinam district, the vacation schedules differed among schools. Therefore, some children missed several school days as a result of their participation in PFL. Those wishing to replicate PFL should make sure that schools are informed and that school administrators know how long students will be away. In a few cases, children said that their teachers were not aware they would be gone for such a long time.

- Making a programme like PFL work requires good facilitators to explain the difficult concepts in a simple way so that a range of children can understand them. However, some children may not be able to grasp the concepts nor be good candidates for the programme.

- Groups looking to replicate PFL should make sure that children going into villages to conduct an SEA are accompanied by at least one child from the village they are visiting. This lets the children know where they are going and will prevent local villagers from mistaking them for strangers who are sneaking around and asking suspicious personal questions.

- While this may seem an obvious point, it should be noted that children who have been through a serious catastrophe may be in a fragile state and should be dealt with carefully during the training process.
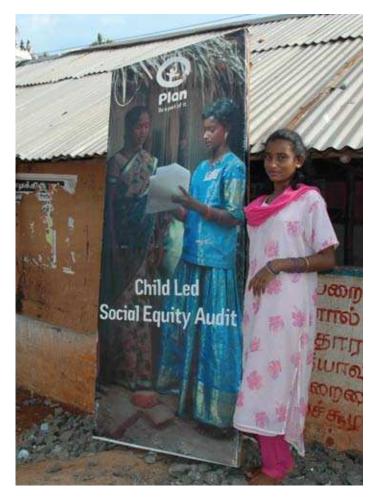
Photo: There was great pride among the PFL participants

Plan has published several documents about our PFL experiences in Nagapattinam and Kashmir, and these are available online (see Figure 5). Those interested in replicating PFL may also wish to contact the programme designers to get a clearer conceptual understanding of the entire programme.

Figure 5. More information on Pictures for Life

For an overview of the Pictures for Life programme,
see the website at www.picturesforlife.org or the Plan India website at www.planindia.org.

Reports on the four stages of the programme can be downloaded:

Pictures for Life Phase 1
Report of Social Equity Audit Workshop, Nagapattinam,
23 September 2005 – 20 October 2006 (28 pages)
www.picturesforlife.org/pdf/PFL1Report.pdf

Pictures for Life Phase 2
23 September – 1 October 2006 (27 pages)
www.picturesforlife.org/pdf/PFL2Report.pdf

Pictures for Life, Kashmir Draft Report
16 May – 3 June 2007 (14 pages)
www.picturesforlife.org/pdf/PFL3Report.pdf

Pictures for Life, Phase 4
21 – 30 May 2007 (5 pages)
www.picturesforlife.org/pdf/PFL4Report.pdf

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