A. CHILDREN IN EMERGENCIES

Children are one of the most exposed demographic groups to the adverse impacts of disasters and emergencies. ASDMA understands this and has taken up concerted efforts to protect children from the wrath of disasters and emergencies. With regards to children in emergencies, UNICEF plays an essential role in Assam too. UNICEF’S mandate is to protect children from the immediate and long-term effects of emergencies, preventing them from being harmed, monitoring the violations of their rights and developing programmes to respond in situations in which they are at risk or have been subjected to violence or abuse.

Children have inalienable rights in all circumstances, especially in disaster situations during which they are most vulnerable. They are directly and indirectly affected by the impacts of disasters and many times their rights are violated in the process. The upcoming World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) also emphasizes ‘reducing vulnerability and managing risk’ by giving the community of children a voice in the risk reduction processes.
AIDMI has worked on a number of projects for children in emergencies. Based on this work with ASDMA and UNICEF, AIDMI discusses following challenges and opportunities.

- In Assam children are exposed to multiple threats and disasters, which have both physical and psychological impacts on them. AIDMI proposes to develop proper research on the vulnerabilities that affect children in Assam, and based on this data, propose functional response measures to improve child protection and safety in the state.

- Some impacts disaster situation have on children are difficult to prevent, and even if they are they can still scar children with deep rooted emotional trauma. It is important to identify post-disaster mechanisms for children, such as psychological assistance, group activities with other disaster affected children, etc. and set up a platform to share this information with the communities.

- It is important to strengthen the protection and safety measures for children in Assam. In this sense, advanced trainings and infrastructure should be provided to the police, home guard and social welfare departments to better respond in an emergency situation.

- A clear definition of roles for the departments, agencies and authorities is crucial. In an emergency situation in which a child is at risk, the response measure will be more effective when the roles are clearly delineated.

B. SCHOOL SAFETY THROUGH SCHOOL DISASTER MANAGEMENT PLANS AND MOCK DRILLS

Schools are the nurseries which nurture the future leaders. Since children spend a great part of their day at schools, it is imperative to safeguard schools against the adverse impacts of disasters and emergencies. ASDMA responded to this challenge by undertaking school safety audits in all the districts of Assam with the objective of evaluating school safety levels and to help the schools develop safety measures and spread awareness about these matters to concerned agencies and stakeholders.

Some of the aspects that were assessed during these audits were the schools’ infrastructure, health and hygiene in the schools, the levels of awareness and training, disaster preparedness measures and hazard risks. The findings of this assessment should now be incorporated into state and district level disaster management plans.

AIDMI discusses following challenges and opportunities based on its work with ASDMA and UNICEF to make the schools in Assam safer. These are also aligned to the theme of ‘Reducing vulnerability and managing risk’ of the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit.

- Assessment of the schools in terms of safety is an important task. But, what matters the most is implementation. It is extremely
important to implement the findings of such assessments in order to make the schools and the children safe.

- A consolidated centre, especially on disaster risk reduction (DRR) is urgently needed. AIDMI proposes that the state administration should plan to establish a resource centre on DRR where all the information and material on DRR is available.

- ASDMA has already invested a lot of efforts and resources to train the school teachers on disaster preparedness. But, what is next after the trainings? There is no follow up on this. AIDMI recommends making a network of all the trained teachers in order to further use them for more trainings to other teachers those who are not trained. Also, such a group of trained teachers can also advise time to time on what is needed in the state in terms of disaster preparedness.

- Mockdrills or evacuation exercises need to be organized routinely.

- The hazard of fire and preparedness measures against it (use of fire extinguisher) needs to be further taken up.

- Carrying out the implementation of necessary preparedness measures, such as checklists on safety and security features in the schools, data collection and record-keeping systems.

C. INTEGRATION OF DISASTER RISK REDUCTION WITH CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

As the nodal state level agency working on disaster risk reduction (DRR) in Assam, ASDMA has to keep up with the changing context of vulnerability in the state. DRR includes disaster management, disaster mitigation and disaster preparedness, and it aims to reduce the damages and impacts caused by natural hazards, through systematic efforts of agencies, authorities and communities.

Since climate change is increasing the incidence and severity of disasters, ASDMA has also started working on climate change adaptation (CCA). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) helps ASDMA to achieve seamless integration between DRR and CCA by linking them together in humanitarian contexts. The consultations leading to the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) 2016 also focus on the importance of convergence of DRR and CCA. Understanding climate risk better would help in better understanding and addressing disaster risk.

The All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) highlights the following challenges and opportunities based on its work with ASDMA and
UNDP to make Assam more resilient to climate and disaster risks.

- In adopting climate change adaptation measures, it's important to prioritize them based on the needs of the district. This will help implement them correctly and avoid the dangers of wrong adaptation. ASDMA could assess the current and most urgent needs of the district in order to put into action adaptation measures. The adaptation strategies must be contextualized.

- Adaptation is the adjustment of natural or human systems in response to current or expected climate change. In this process many actors from different sectors are involved. ASDMA and UNICEF should promote the implementation of adaptation measures in the public and private sectors.

- Research and evaluations on the costs of impacts of climate change adaptation and mitigation in Assam should be carried out and shared for the preparation of climate change adaptation plans at the district level. Correspondingly, this information should be shared among the involved sectors.

- The connection of new technologies and the promotion of their use in companies should be explored.

All the above mentioned initiatives reflect ASDMA's commitment to making a safe and resilient Assam for its citizens. Agencies like UNICEF, UNDP and AIDMI also collaborate with ASDMA on such initiatives. The consultation process leading to the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) emphasizes leveraging synergies among various humanitarian actors for maximum impact and reach. The partnerships forged by ASDMA with various agencies are prime examples of such cooperation and collaboration for achieving humanitarian goals.

The contents, findings, issues, and challenges reflected in the paper proposed for presentation are of the views of AIDMI and not of ASDMA.