CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES SUPPORT CHILDREN’S RESILIENCY
AND HELP THEM REGAIN A SENSE OF NORMALCY, STABILITY AND HOPE AFTER DISASTER

“ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CAN GO TO COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES THAT PROVIDE STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES THAT ARE CARRIED OUT IN A SAFE, CHILD-FRIENDLY, INCLUSIVE AND STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT. CHILDREN’S REGULAR AND CONSISTENT ENGAGEMENT IN GROUP ACTIVITIES CAN POSITIVELY IMPACT THEIR WELL-BEING, ENHANCE THEIR RESILIENCE AND REDUCE THEIR STRESS. GROUP ACTIVITIES PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN TO COME TOGETHER IN A PREDICTABLE AND STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT TO BE SAFE, TO LEARN, TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES, TO MAKE CONNECTIONS AND TO FEEL SUPPORTED.”
— STANDARD 15 AND 17, CHILD PROTECTION WORKING GROUP,
MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR CHILDREN PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

The Asia-Pacific is situated as “the most disaster-prone region” globally, according to the UN, as nearly 45% of natural disasters occur in this area. Therefore, it is essential to have dedicated funds in reserve as a catalyst to support rapid emergency response and the transition to recovery after a disaster—to build resilience and, at the same time, ensure that no one is left behind.

Plan International Asia-Pacific Hub launched the regional Emergency Response and Early Recovery (EREF) fund under the Inclusive Community Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (ICDRM) project funded by Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies through Plan International U.S. National Office. This funding mechanism has successfully assisted five Asia-Pacific countries in obtaining resources for immediate disaster responses, and it has reached a total of 21,009 children.

The project has helped address the specific needs of girls, boys and their families in the sectors of child protection, education, water, sanitation, hygiene, and COVID-19 prevention. It has promoted community engagement and accountability shelters and Non-Food Items as response modalities. The EREF Fund has been a significant source of support in responding to small-scale, isolated and underreported and underfunded disasters.

One of the key sectors that has been prioritized by Plan country offices under this funding mechanism is child protection in emergencies, in particular interventions around child-friendly spaces (CFS). These spaces supported the resilience and psychosocial well-being of children and young people through community organized child-friendly, structured activities conducted in safe spaces. CFSs are typically used as temporary support for...
the care and protection of children in emergencies. However, they are also used as transitional structures that serve as a bridge to early recovery and long-term support for vulnerable children.

Sinta (not her real name) is a 12-year-old girl from Indonesia who aspires to be a teacher. She was a regular visitor to CFS during Plan International Indonesia’s Lombok earthquake response in 2018. She expressed her excitement about the CFS activities, saying,

"I FEEL SO HAPPY AND CHEERFUL TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CFS ACTIVITIES; NOW I AM NOT AFRAID AND RESTLESS AGAIN AND KNOW HOW TO PREPARE IF THE EARTHQUAKE STRUCK AGAIN."

In India, during Cyclone Fani in 2019, Plan’s strategy was to provide psychosocial support activities and a quality education kit for children. The intervention was aligned with the principles of an integrated approach that includes protection, psychosocial support, health and hygiene promotion and non-formal education in CFS. This combination encouraged children to be more confident in achieving their dreams, despite traumatic experiences during disasters. "With materials provided by Plan India, I no longer have to buy new stationery and other study materials that have been damaged during the cyclone", Savitri (not her real name), a student in India, said. For her,

"IT IS LIKE A DREAM TO GET THE EDUCATION KITS, BECAUSE EVEN UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, WE COULD NOT AFFORD TO BUY THE NEW ONE. THANK YOU, PLAN, FOR FULFILLING MY DREAMS. I PROMISE TO FOCUS ON MY STUDY,"

Through the EREF funding mechanism, Plan International has supported nine CFS in Indonesia, India, the Philippines and Laos. "The EREF has been an invaluable support to emergency responses across the Asia-Pacific region. It has enabled Plan teams on the ground to start humanitarian responses much more quickly," said Andrew Baker, Plan International’s director in South Asia. CFS interventions allow affected children and young people to actively protect themselves in the face of adversity, recognizing and strengthening their resilience. It helps them to cope with the situation and maintain well-being in a safe and stimulating environment. It provides opportunities for them to play, acquire skills, access social support and build resilience to limit the negative impact of emergencies. It promotes positive interaction between children and supportive adults. CFS help children to regain a sense of normalcy, stability and hope after a disaster.