



(Photo: Jasmin Agovic/Save the Children)

DISASTER-RESISTANT SCHOOLS

Close to a hundred communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina were affected by the natural disaster in 2014. Around 560,000 citizens including 140,000 children were affected by floods and landslides. The unpreparedness of both the competent authorities on all levels of government and the citizens resulted in major material damage, leaving many families homeless. In order to help reduce the risk of natural and other disasters, in 2015 Save the Children implemented a program aimed at reducing the risk of natural and other disasters in the municipalities of Maglaj, Šamac, Gradačac, Srebrenica, Sanski Most and Brčko District.



Post-flood aid in Maglaj

Images of a completely flooded Maglaj from May 2014 caused widespread shock. Maglaj was one of the hardest hit communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

“We now have to try and deal with what happened. Floods leave behind landslides and you can never be sure that these have been completely repaired” – said Mehmed Mustabašić, the mayor of Maglaj, on the first anniversary of the floods.

The streets of Maglaj are no longer under water, life is back to normal and the economy is slowly recovering. Citizens, especially children, have uneasy memories of floods, flooded apartments, evacuations and all they had to survive, but it is from these memories and recollections that energy should be drawn in order to create a local community that is ready to meet such challenges.

“I was afraid. I didn’t know what was going on. Although my house wasn’t flooded, I was worried for my friends who were hit by the floods. I thought I would be happy that the holidays came sooner, but I wasn’t. I couldn’t wait to go back to school.” – A 7th grade boy.

“I cried a lot. I didn’t know what would happen to us. Our house was hit and I was afraid we wouldn’t get out alive.” – A 5th grade girl.

Immediately after the floods, Save the Children provided assistance to affected persons in Maglaj area, consisting of vouchers for purchasing products for cleaning and disinfection of their houses, and later in recovery of their homes and schools.



Photo: Amir Bašić/Save the Children

Save the Children continues its activities in Maglaj

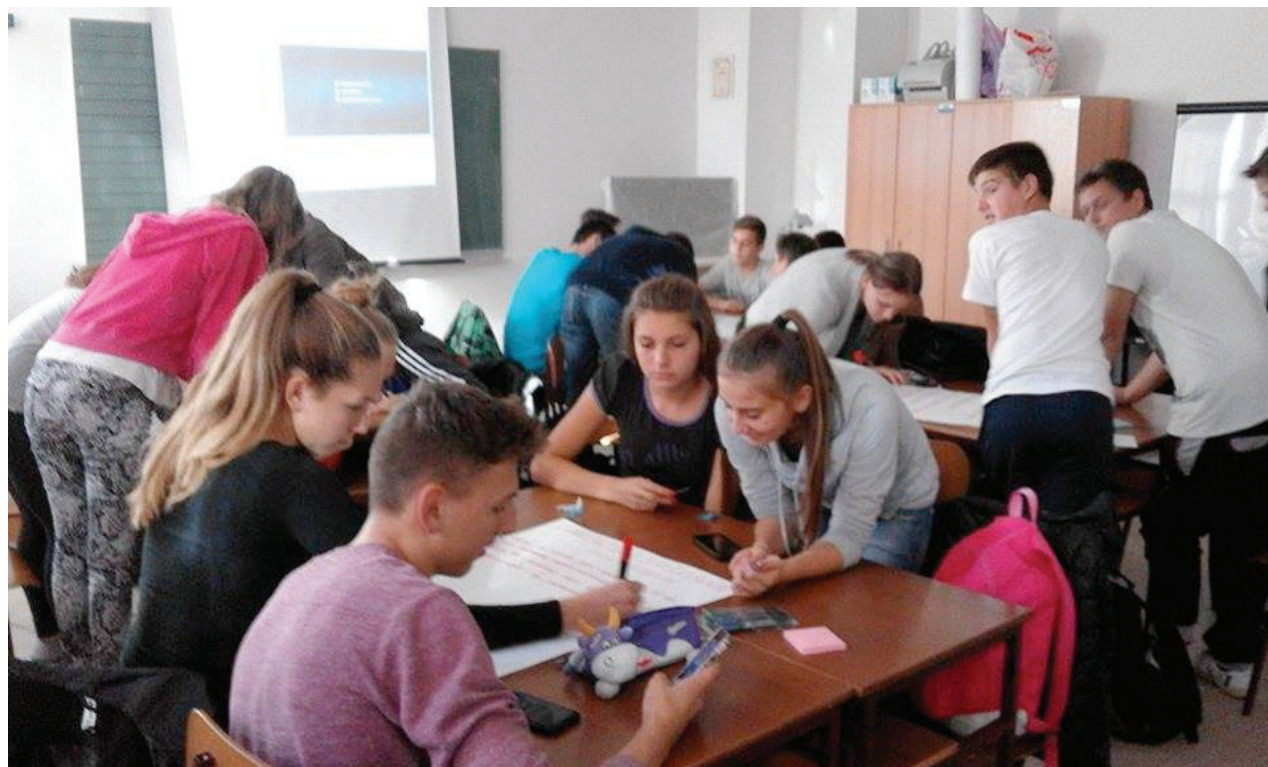
As an organization that primarily focuses on protecting children, Save the Children immediately joined the efforts to help the impacted population, especially children. Help included lifesaving equipment, equipment for clearing out and disinfecting houses, and later on it also included reconstructing homes, schools and establishing Children Corners, safe places where, at times of disaster, children could study, play and receive psycho-social assistance in dealing with their traumas.

After providing active help in the immediate aftermath of the floods, Save the Children continued working on Disaster Risk Reduction programs (DRR). In Maglaj, these activities included training the school staff and students, planning and developing Disaster Risk Reduction action plans, conducting disaster simulation exercises as well as equipping schools with fire extinguishers, first-aid cabinets, ladders and other lifesaving equipment. These activities were funded by Malteser International Europe.

“It is very important to us that action plans focus on children and that certain activities that include children, teachers and school boards are carried out on a higher, local community level. Through this project we will try and integrate our experiences and methods of working with children in emergency situations into disaster response plans” said Andrea Žeravčić, director of Save the Children in North-West Balkans.



(Photo: Šejla Dizdarević/Save the Children)



Resistant to disasters!

“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.” - Benjamin Franklin

Risk reduction appears as a logical step in planning future disaster responses. Through its DRR project, Save the Children is focused on working with key actors in local communities who are the first to react in times of natural and other disasters, so as to ensure that they are adequately educated, have the necessary capacities and outlined procedures for a quick response. The plan is to meet these goals by developing and implementing risk assessments on the level of schools and municipalities, as well as protection and rescue plans that include clear protocols and standard operating procedures for protecting children in emergency situations on the local level. These risk assessments and response plans have already been developed and adopted by “Novi Šeher” and “Maglaj” elementary schools from Maglaj.



Close to 180 students from two primary schools, „Novi Šeher“ and „Maglaj“, participated in 60 trainings and workshops aimed at improving their preparedness and strengthening their capacities for prompt and adequate response in cases of natural and other disasters.



(Photo: Jasmin Agović/Save the Children)



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“During the floods we, as a collective, reacted instinctively, as human beings. We had no strategies or plans, but we knew we had to save the most important things, so we took all the documentation and the entire archive upstairs, and luckily enough, it was night when the water started rising so the students were not there. I couldn’t even imagine what would have happened had the students been there.” – says one of the teachers from “Maglaj” elementary school.

From January 2015, when the implementation of the project began, to the present moment 25 employees and 179 students from two elementary schools “Novi Šeher” and “Maglaj” participated in 60 trainings aimed at enhancing their preparedness and strengthening their capacity for a quick and adequate response in times of

As part of the activities, Save the Children organized demonstration of tactical exercises for students of two schools in Maglaj in order to apply the acquired knowledge on acting in cases of natural and other disasters in practice.



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natural and other disasters. Workshops and exercises – simulations of natural and other disasters – ensured that the students as well as their teachers possess the relevant information and skills that will strengthen their resilience and their capacity to protect themselves and their peers in times of natural and other disasters.

“Through the workshops we tried to inform children about the hazards but also help them develop certain skills that would make them more prepared to meet challenges of this kind.” – says one of the teachers who conducted workshops with his students.

“I didn’t know much about floods and similar dangers, but I’ve learned a lot in these workshops. The most important thing I learned is that I have to stay calm and that I shouldn’t panic.” – A 5th grade girl.

“Now we also know how to behave if flooding happens while we’re at school. We should calmly leave the classroom and move to a higher floor, and if we’re already there, then we should stay put and wait for help.” – says a 7th grade boy.

The simulation exercise done in “Maglaj” elementary school brought a lot of excitement for the kids and reminded the adults of some very uneasy memories from the recent past. The simulation scenario depicted a situation in which Maglaj was about to get hit by a flood wave caused by heavy rainfall that could damage buildings and endanger the citizens. In accordance with the outlined plan, the students and their teachers moved to a higher floor of the building after the assistant director notified



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them of the forthcoming danger via the school’s PA system. The students vacated the classrooms as planned and followed through the evacuation in good spirits, fully aware that the knowledge they were gaining would serve them for the rest of their lives and could possibly be of vital importance.

“We were fooling around during the exercise because we knew there was no danger, but if flooding happens again we now know what to do. I’m really interested in learning about other disasters such as fires and earthquakes. The teachers explain it very well and it’s not boring.” – A 6th grade boy.

Novi Šeher

“Novi Šeher” is located in the community of the same name which is part of the Maglaj municipality. Due to its geographical position, this community did not suffer flooding but one part of it was affected by landslides caused by heavy rainfall. Several students and teachers of “Novi Šeher” elementary school were indirectly affected by the landslides.

“The house was damaged and we couldn’t stay there. It was raining a lot and I was afraid our house would collapse” – A 4th grade boy.

“Novi Šeher’ elementary school had no equipment for preventing natural and other disasters. We had no hydrants, fire extinguishers, absolutely nothing! Today we are much better prepared due to our hard work and the help of Save the Children” – said Zijad Meškić, the school principle.

This elementary school is facing many challenges such as drastic reduction in the number of students, national divisions and discrimination, poor infrastructure etc. However, in times of natural disaster, ensuring the safety of the children becomes the main priority while everything else takes a back seat.

“We’ve really learned a lot in these trainings, especially since people have very superficial knowledge of earthquakes, fires, floods etc. For me it was very important that we had a good time together, that we learned a lot but also had a chance to grow closer” – said one of the teachers.

Working together for the children’s well-being!

By enhancing the capacities of all actors, including municipal authorities, local population protection services, educational institutions, civil protection services and the civil society (such as the Red Cross), Save the Children strives to improve the position of children and ensure that in situations of natural or other disasters, their needs have been taken into account and adequately addressed in the immediate response as well as in later stages of responding to an emergency situation at the local level.

“Novi Šeher” elementary school also organized a fire drill for its students as part of the activities implemented with Save the Children. This exercise was the crowning achievement of all the work done with children, in which educated teachers passed on what they learned about natural and other disasters to their students.

“Workshops with our teachers were interesting, we learned how to behave in a dangerous situation.” – A 5th grade girl.

A fire was noticed in one of the rooms and the head student notified the principle who then activated the school’s Protection and Rescue Plan by sounding the school bell. Then, without panicking, the teachers and the children vacated the premises in accordance with the outlined routes. A smoke machine was there to create a fire effect and all the participants were given an idea as to what a real fire looks like. The children calmly left the building and were in for a surprise when they saw two controlled fires set up by members of the “Mali vatrogasci” (Little Fire Fighters) Association who were in charge of educating teachers and conducting exercises. The students were thrilled when two teachers, upon noticing the fire outside, used a fire extinguisher to put it out.

“During the training, the teachers were given lectures on crisis situations such as fires, earthquakes, floods etc. I can say that teachers showed great interest in these topics and I’m very pleased with our cooperation.” – said Adem Hrković on behalf of the Association for Fire Prevention and Environment Protection “Mali vatrogasci”.



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