

Children on the Frontline 2011

In 2009 the *Views from the Frontline* survey was complemented by a separate survey by Plan International and World Vision International, focusing on the needs, rights and participation of children and young people in disaster risk reduction. For 2011, the *Views from the Frontline* survey included a question for all to answer, about the specific needs of children, and children have been encouraged to take part in the survey process alongside adults.

Ensuring children's participation in the survey process is an important factor for understanding their unique needs and perspectives – just as it is important for them to take part in disaster risk reduction activities from risk mapping to preparedness, to maximise community resilience¹. In 2009 854 children and young people took part in the survey from thirteen countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and 44 per cent of these were girls.

This year saw 1,318 children and young people take part in the survey, from 49 of the 67 countries surveyed. This demonstrates progress for children's participation in disaster risk reduction.

In order to ensure robust analysis, these child-focused conclusions are drawn only from those countries where 50 or more young people took part in the survey. These were Albania, Cambodia, Cote D'Ivoire, Ecuador, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and amount to 900 of the total 1,318 responses from under-18s. All 1,318 responses are included in the main survey analysis: This section disaggregates trends in children's responses from adult responses in these six countries. Table 1 provides a breakdown of respondents in by sex and geographical location.

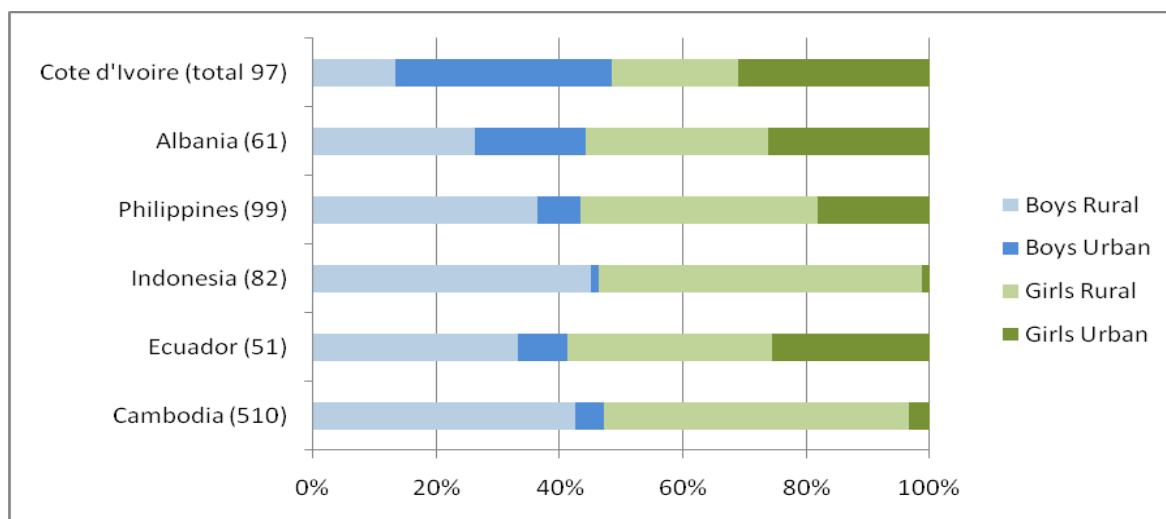


Table 1: Breakdown of child data samples by sex and location

There are two main findings from these 900 children's responses. The differences between adult and child responses uphold the argument that **children's views are crucial** for establishing an accurate picture of disaster risk reduction at the local level. Importantly, therefore, children need to

¹ See Plan (2011) 'Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction: Building resilience through participation' London: Plan

be appropriately informed about risk and risk reduction through **education** in order to meaningfully take part.

Children's responses show that in four of the six countries their views on local governance tend to be less positive than those of adults in all respects. This suggests that children have contributions for, or views about, the process of improving local governance for disaster risk reduction, which are unique to children but not yet being taken on board.

The exceptions are Philippines and Cote d'Ivoire. These are respectively high and low scoring countries overall – which may help to explain why: Philippines is ranked 11th in the overall survey in terms of average scores for local governance. This is reflected here as children's and adults views are quite closely aligned. As in 2009, this country is an anomaly. It is a high-risk country which has invested significantly in disaster risk reduction, and which has been progressive with regards to involving its children in building resilience.

Cote d'Ivoire's young people are more positive about progress than adults, but their opinions on average are nevertheless low. Their enthusiasm in comparison to adults could be due to greater engagement of children in reducing risk, or it could be a result of an especially critical or sceptical adult citizenry. The country's overall ranking is 64th out of the 67 surveyed, so perhaps it is better to ask "why are children in Cote d'Ivoire more impressed than adults?" than "what is Cote d'Ivoire doing so well with regard to its young people's views?"

The first question in the survey asks *does the local government include all people, especially vulnerable and marginalised groups in disaster prevention decision-making and implementation?* Several other questions about inclusiveness refer to children, gender, civil society partnerships, participatory monitoring and volunteering. On average (except in Cote d'Ivoire) these indicators are viewed more negatively by children compared to adults. As a vulnerable and often marginalised group, children and young people are in a better position to assess inclusiveness of participation: A possible implication of this, then, is that efforts towards inclusive or equitable participation must be increased (this is echoed to an extent by the scores of another especially vulnerable age group, the over-61s).

Across all 67 countries the survey question focusing on the needs of children and youth sees a consistently negative opinion among the under-18s compared with adults up to 61. Children know themselves and their needs best. In order to establish an accurate picture of disaster risk reduction at the community level, the argument holds: children must be involved.

In order for participation to be meaningful, participants must fully understand the subject in which they are engaging. This requires equitable access to information and education. Since 75 million children around the world do not go to school (55% of this number are girls)², education needs to be both formal and informal.

² According to the United Nations MDG Monitor www.mdgmonitor.org/goal2.cfm

An emphasis on education in 2011 comes as a result of the disproportionately large number of children and young people who answered 'don't know' to questions, and as such could not have their views on these topics included.

In five of the six countries, more children answered 'don't know' to survey questions than adults, with the exception of Ecuador, where the proportions were similar. The number of children who feel they cannot answer questions could make a significant difference to survey findings: Unexpected results could be brought inline with expectations, or mundane findings could be transformed into radical and insightful headlines in analysis such as this. The high proportion of 'don't know' answers from Cote d'Ivoire, for example, could go along way towards explaining the country's diversion from trends described above.

It is a truly great thing that so many children took part in *Views from the Frontline* in 2011. In the future, as we encourage and facilitate further participation of children and young people, both in disaster risk reduction and in the *Views from the Frontline* survey, it is crucial that we ensure they are comprehensively equipped with information and confidence to answer each and every question, for maximum benefit to everyone involved.