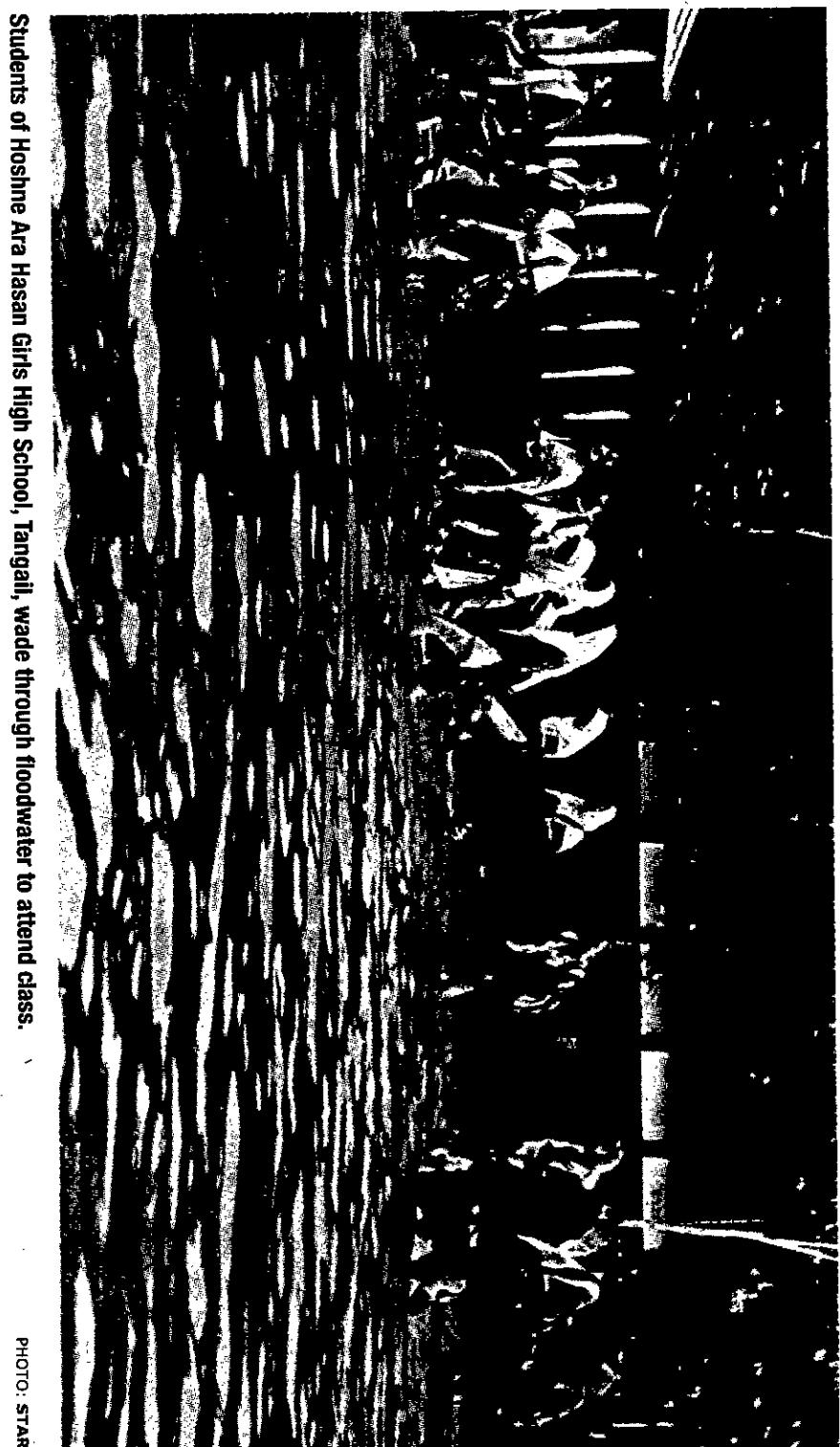


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**M**ANY readers are likely to have come across the powerful photo and news published on schools affected by flood in northern and central regions of Bangladesh in *The Daily Star* on August 4, 2016. The photo of schoolgirls, wading through knee-deep floodwater at the premises of a school in Tangail Sadar upazila to attend classes, spoke more than a thousand words. Education in emergency deserves more attention in Bangladesh, one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change, and children have to bear a disproportionate brunt of its effects.

In Bangladesh, children comprise 39.7 percent of the population. A prosperous future is contingent upon the opportunity for these children to grow as able and competent citizens with equality and without discrimination. It is, therefore, obligatory for the country to provide a congenial environment for children to reach their maximum potential. Government's efforts for children's wellbeing have been sincere and sustained. Bangladesh is among the first few countries to ratify the two most significant global treaties that protect the rights of children namely, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Formulation of the National Children Policy 2011, National Children Act 2013, and National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010 are significant steps in ensuring a better life for each and every child across the country. Bangladesh enters the era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a solid development base arising from progress on several Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets. Adequate education will drive productivity of young adults and



**Students of Hoshne Ara Hasan Girls High School, Tangail, wade through floodwater to attend class.**

PHOTO: STAR

ultimately economic growth in the coming decades. Despite all this significant progress, poverty coupled with natural disasters prevent many children from enjoying their right to education, which is embodied in the UNCRC. Bangladesh is also committed to ensure primary education for all children. Article 17 of the Bangladesh Constitution specifies that the State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children.

Compulsory Primary Education Act, 1990 and Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) also show the importance of basic education for all children.

However, all these policies and programmes are often defeated by the ever changing climate of Bangladesh that often leads to natural disasters. Impacts of disasters such as cyclones, floods, flash floods, riverbank erosion on children's education are severe and harmful. It damages school

infrastructure, disrupts educational activities and displaces children and their families. Children also lose their learning materials.

The UNICEF report states that on average, 900 schools suffer severe damage from floods, cyclones and river erosion every year in Bangladesh. More than 4,665 schools are affected by disasters per year. In the past three years, natural disasters – particularly cyclones – have disrupted the education of more than 1.5 million children.

If we want to achieve the SDG's, there is no alternative but to ensure education of the children before, during and after any

emergency. Preparedness, quality, participation and coordination are key principles while delivering education during any emergency situation. Preparedness for disaster allows time to think through the impact on schools, effect on the education system, ways to support the most vulnerable groups and how to gauge the response of other actors in advance.

In Bangladesh, there is no common guideline for school emergency response and it is not addressed significantly in the country disaster management plan and policy. Different development agencies like Save the Children are working with the government for the development and standardisation of these safety guidelines under the comprehensive school safety theme through DIPEDCHO-8, an action plan supported by the European Commission. NGOs have been providing non-formal primary education (NFPE) to out-of-school children principally in remote disaster-prone locations, including coast, chars, haors, and hill tracts since 2007. Education was suspended after Cyclone Roanu hit the coastal areas, but with support from international donors like IKEA Foundation, non-formal primary education was resumed quickly in Cox's Bazar through Save the Children's operated SHIKHON programme.

Bangladesh sits on a three-way junction of major tectonic plates, and dangerous pressure is building along a fault line, according to research published earlier this year. The situation could unleash a massive earthquake, putting children's lives and education at high risk. We need to get our act together right now to protect the future of Bangladesh by redefining the role of institutions in both education and disaster management.