

Chapter Four :

Summary Findings and Field Recommendations

This section summarises the main protection issues raised by the children and adults interviewed for this study. These findings are grouped into nine main themes and also include the interviewees' suggestions regarding ways in which these problems can be overcome.

As the study is very much a qualitative one, care has been taken, therefore, to represent the views of the children interviewed precisely as they were expressed, in order that the flood response actors can best understand the children's experiences and needs during floods. Annex 1 of this report describes the details of the findings.

4.1 Child protection issues associated with temporary flood shelters/places of shelter

- In every FGD, everyone commented on the problems related to general lack of space in the flood shelters, sharing rooms with strangers and lack of privacy, especially for girls.
- Children of all ages and many adults reported stress due to staying in flood shelters because of lack of space to play, entertainment and meeting friends.

"There was always a long queue for the bathroom, and children were often pushed out of the queue. One day, two children took a dip in the flood water for bathing, but they did not know how to swim and drowned eventually."

Comment by participant in FGD group of parents/care-givers, Balur Matth slum, Kamlapur, Dhaka

- All the interviewees mentioned repeatedly that they faced problems due to lack of toilet and bathing facilities in the shelters; the girls felt especially humiliated due to such discomforts.
- Boys and girls, especially of the age group of 10-18 years, told about their experience of verbal and physical abuse and also sexual harassment.
- Adults and many children of age groups 10-14 years and 15-18 years complained of not being

involved in making decision or even being excluded from sharing key information, lack of justice and fair dealing and nepotism.

"My mother died eight years ago. My father is a beggar. I have a brother and no sisters. My younger brother works in a rich man's house. When I think about my younger brother, I miss him badly.

During the flood we took shelter in a school. All the people who took shelter there misbehaved with my father and called him a thief and shouted at him. They called me 'son of a thief', or 'son of a beggar'. They beat me and forced me to run errands for them.

A wicked man had sex with me every night under the cover of a rug and gave me 10/15 taka in the morning in exchange. I felt severe pain in my rectum and wept. When anyone would ask me why I was crying, the 'bad guy' would say I had hurt my hand."

Rafiq (*name changed) 11 years old, Dhaka.

- Children and adults were refused refuge in shelters: especially the very poor; street children, unaccompanied children and people from ethnic or religious minorities were amongst such victims.
- In shelters, lack of security, fear of theft and abduction threats were felt strongly by majority of children and adults interviewed.
- Both in designated flood shelters and other places of refuge, hazardous environment e.g. unprotected roofs, naked electric wires hanging around people and sharp objects etc were reported by sheltering children and parents/care-giver.

'One baby of 18 months died when she fell off a bed into knee-deep water. There was no room in the shelter, so the mother and the baby had stayed back in their slum dwelling. The mother had gone into the kitchen to cook, when her baby had fallen into the water and drowned and the corpse was found floating there afterwards.'

Comment by participant in FGD group of boys aged 6-10, Korial slum, Gulshan, Dhaka.

- Majority children and adults reported lack of safe drinking water; inadequate and inappropriate food; lack of cooking facilities and medicine etc.

Recommendations by FGD participants :

- All children consulted wanted space to play, and toys, books, games or music for entertainment. Older children asked for some organised activities and games, along with some structured educational sessions.
- All mentioned that relief workers should be friendly and kind and not discriminate against children or abuse them.
- More in number and bigger shelters were a common demand, so that their whole families could stay together. It would be better if families who knew each other could share rooms.
- Sufficient number of separate toilets and bathrooms for men, women and children were a crying need. They should be kept clean and privacy should be ensured. Adults suggested introducing different bathing times for men and women for convenience and privacy.

'We found it very hard to get shelter anywhere. We were not allowed in the temporary shelters. If we took shelter on the roads, the police would chase and beat us.'

Comment from participant in FGD group of male and female street children aged 8-11 yrs, Dhaka

- Adults and children should all be involved in the running of the shelters. Shelter committees, including children, should be established to manage different aspects of life in the shelter.
- Medicine and medical treatment should be provided for everyone, including visits by paediatricians.
- Enough food relief should be provided for everyone, including cooking equipment. Foods were to be appropriate for children of different ages. For example, infants who were no longer breastfed but not till then introduced to solids, needed special food prepared for them.
- Provision should be made for safe water for drinking, bathing and cooking, especially in

arsenic affected areas.

- Bedding and warm, dry clothes, should be provided. In addition, some mothers asked for provision of cots for babies.
- Increased security to protect children and their belongings are required, especially at night. Some children expressed a lack of confidence in the police and suggested 'community policing'.
- Strangers should be kept from entering the shelters. Wicked people and drug addicts should be kept in a separate space. There should be lights in the shelters at night.
- Shelters should be kept clean and tidy to avoid accidents.
- Children asserted the need for a better atmosphere and practicing demonstration of better attitude towards children; elders should not behave roughly with children. Parents/care-giver also talked of the need to recognise the child rights and treating children with priority. Parents/care-givers also discussed the importance of showing that they were caring about children and demanded arrangement of games for them to help them forget about the living conditions.
- There should be income-earning opportunities by organising making of handicrafts.
- There is great need for day-care services for the working mothers.
- Livestock should be kept in a separate place.

'Durga* took shelter with her family in a shelter in Rajarbagh area. Her family was living side by side with another family. There was a young boy who often harassed her. When everyone went outside to work, the boy would touch her. He threatened Durga saying that if she told anyone about that, he would throw acid in her face. When the girl informed her parents/care-giver of this, they sought justice from the committee members of the shelter. But the girl's family being a Hindu one (religious minority), and the Muslim boy bribed the committee members and got away unscathed.

Durga (*name changed), age 17, Dhaka

- Arrangements should be made for space for offering prayers.

“I took shelter in a school building during flood. There was no supply of drinking water or latrine facilities in the school building. Some people made me bring alcoholic beverage and marijuana for them. If they’d find a girl who’d be willing to do ‘things’ with them, they’d give her more food. I got only flattened rice for food. I didn’t get rice and there was no arrangement for cooking there.”

“I am the older brother; I have younger brother and sister. When the young ones are crying for food, I feel much distressed. I wanted to study during the flood but could not. People who take shelter in a flood shelter are illiterate. People should run educational sessions in the shelters and provide us with adequate food. The smell of liquors or marijuana harm us, so addicts should not be allowed in the common shelters. There should be police or RAB posted in every shelter.”

- Boats should be available to take people on trips outside the shelter—to help them with a breath of fresh air for a change.
- In slum areas, where people are unlikely to get access to proper flood shelters, NGOs should organise raising the bathrooms and latrines temporarily above the flood water level, providing separate bathrooms etc for men and women.

4.2 Protection issues associated with evacuation / rescue

- Risk and fear of drowning, separation, injury and snakebites, losing hobbies and treasured and passionate belongings.
- Tension between parents/caregivers and children; verbal and physical abuse by parents/caregivers.

"As I am too young, I cannot carry heavy loads of goods and that's why I am scolded. I have to carry much too heavier loads than I'm supposed to at my age."

Comment by participant in FGD of boys aged 6-10, Dhaka

"Children are crying and shouting from fear and parents/care-givers are treating them as a burden."

Comment by participant in FGD group of mothers, Dhaka

- Rescue workers are liable to discriminate: e.g. not allowing street children, children from minority groups, poor children etc onto boats.
- Rescue workers, or people posing as rescue workers, harass or sexually abuse children, especially teenage girls.
- Many children, especially of the age groups 10-14 yrs and 15-18 yrs complained of a lack of planning and preparedness: not knowing where to go / if a rescue boat was coming at all etc

FGD participants' recommendations

"During floods, we care for our children even more. As we are not able to give them enough food then we have to compensate by showering them with more care and affection. Once I was staying with my two children on a bed that had been elevated due to the flood water entering inside our room. Suddenly the bed collapsed and all our belongings including the television fell down. Instead of trying to save the expensive television, I tried and kept my children safe by holding them firmly with my hands."

Comment by participant in FGD group of parents/care giver in Kamapur slum, Dhaka

Children’s recommendations for improving the evacuation process were primarily concerned with the attitude shown by relief workers and as well as the family members towards the children. It was generally felt that children should be respected most in such crises. They should be rescued first as they are the most vulnerable. Children felt that care should be taken to avoid accident/injury and to ensure that children are not lost in any case. They argued that parents/care-givers should be aware of the needs of children, take care not to beat them and to control their anger. Many children wanted parents/care-giver to recognise that relocating is upsetting for children and that they simply cannot carry as much as adults. Children of all ages and parents/care-giver asserted, however, that if rescue work is done compassionately based on co-operation, then it should be easier for all.

In addition to these needed attitudinal changes, children identified a number of practical means of improving their situation.

- There should be sufficient number of large boats to transport everyone and their belongings.

Evacuation plans should be made in advance. Information about these plans should be shared with people in the community. Everyone should know who should come to rescue them, from where, when and in which boat etc. Everyone should know the address of the shelter well and the means of reaching there safely.

- The government should form a rescue team that should be kept ready to start work as soon as the flood occurs. Local NGOs and members of the local elite should help during the rescue.
- There should be an early warning system run by the government, so that people have time to shift their belongings. Children living in rural areas where flash floods occur especially stressed the need for a warning system to alert them in advance, so that they are able to move to the flood shelter before the waters rise quickly and submerge their homes.

"In case of a fast-onset flood, it is very difficult for us to get to the shelter with our belongings in time. At times, we fall into the snares of fake rescue workers, and we have to go with unknown men. We don't want so, but we have no choice as we must try and save our lives."

Comment by participant in FGD group of girls, aged 10-14, Dhaka



Photo : Save the Children UK

- Rescue workers should have proper identification. The rescue team could be made up of local community members.

- There should be campaigns conducted to raise public awareness of how to prepare for floods which would help to foster a spirit among neighbours to help each other.
- Drains and roads should be kept clear to allow floodwaters recede.
- Everyone should be taught how to swim.

4.3 Child protection issues associated with separation from family members

- Families are split between shelters due to lack of space.
- Children go missing or are drowned in heavy floods, often when parents/caregivers are out at work.
- Children go missing in the confusion of relief distribution.
- Children go missing when they venture far out to collect things.
- Children are abducted or trafficked.
- Children having a row with their family members or in cases of being abused by the family members often run away and get lost.

- In cases of death of parents/caregivers, children become 'heads of households'.
- Parents/caregivers engage children to do household work with another family for wages.
- Mothers put children into an orphanage as they are unable to raise them.
- Parents/caregivers even 'sell' children for want of food.
- Father/head of the family leaves home in search of work, may re-marry and do not return.
- Early marriage – due to extreme poverty/ to avoid increased risk of harassment or abuse of adolescent/ or "attractive" girls being more vulnerable during disasters.

"Family members should stay together through the flood. This should reduce sense of suffering and promote mental peace."

Comment by participant in FGD group of girls aged 6-10, Dhaka

- Some children, especially teenage girls, were sent to relatives. Some children had no problems but many talked of suffering from anxiety at separation from parents/care-giver; too much of domestic chores to handle; and also physical abuse / sexual abuse / neglect.

Recommendations by FGD participants

- It was strongly felt by all children who were then living with their family members that families should stay together during floods. To try to avoid being separated, children proposed that families should store food in case of flood, so that they are not forced to take desperate decisions such as early marriage or sending children to work. Similarly, children thought that if jobs or cash-for-work schemes would be available for their parents/care-giver during floods, it would help decrease the financial pressure on their parents/care-giver.
- Children asserted that if there was enough space, security, food, water and medicine in the temporary flood shelters, then this would eliminate another reason why parents/care-giver might be inclined to split the family.
- Children felt that parents/care-givers should always keep their children near them and be aware and vigilant; they suggested that adults

"When I had to sleep on the veranda at my relative's house, I was always scared of kidnappers and ghosts (!). I felt very much unhappy to take shelter there during the flood, and thought of myself as a burden to everyone."

Comment by participant in FGD group of boys aged -10, Korial slum, Dhaka.

could be warned against splitting their families during floods (maybe through public announcements). Children thought that parents/care-givers should either keep their children with them at work, or there should be day-care facilities in shelters with additional

security measures to house them when parents would be away at work.

- Some of the older children recognised that their parents/care-givers thought they were keeping them in the safest place by sending them to stay with relatives or neighbours. However, they requested that their opinion was to be sought



Photo : Unicef Bangladesh/2004/Torlesse

and the decision of sending them out should be made jointly. Teenage girls asserted that the best thing for them was to stay under the care of their mothers. In cases when they would not have to go to relatives' / neighbours' houses, the girls should live together in a separate room, away from the men in the house.

- It is again worth mentioning that the orphans and unaccompanied street children interviewed were aware of their greater levels of vulnerability, and they argued that someone should make it their priority to care for them during the floods.
- Parents/caregivers suggested that Imams (one who leads mosque prayer sessions) should communicate messages through the mosque loudspeakers to make people aware of the need to keep children close and protect them during flood time.

4.4 Child protection issues associated with abduction / trafficking

- Many children and adults interviewed knew of children who were abducted in flood time.
- Virtually all children and adults interviewed had the fear of abduction during disasters viz. floods.

"During the flood, we passed our time in fear."

Comment from participant in FGD group of girls aged 8-11, Dhaka

- Desperation results in putting children in difficult situations; when a stranger tempts them with promise of food or work for wages, they feel compelled to go with them.
- Parents/care-givers felt worried about leaving children unattended in shelters while they had to go to work, but they hardly had any choice left.
- Children working outside, going long distances on errands or going to the toilet outside shelters—all such incidents put children in greater risk of abduction.

“My neighbour went to the Union Parisad office with her three children to collect relief. She told the children to wait outside the office while she went for the stuff. When she came out, her children were not there. After a lot of searching and wailing about, she learned that her children had been taken away by a man in a van.”

Comment by participant in FGD group of ‘Civil Society’members, Uttar Ujirpur, Ujirpur Union

- Street children are particularly at risk; often no one is watching them and no one looks for them.
- Parents/care-givers felt that children in marooned houses were more at risk of abduction, compared with those living in the shelters.
- Virtually all parents/care-givers and children commented on the lack of security in shelters.

Recommendations by FGD participants:

- All people consulted expressed the need for increased security, through forming a local committee and establishing a form of ‘community policing’ for monitoring incidents of kidnapping and trafficking.
- Children felt that

parents/care-givers must take care not to engage them in work that increases their vulnerability, and that parents/care-givers should accompany the children on their journey to and from their workplace.

- Children felt that they could further avoid being abducted by holding group discussions so that all children would be aware of such dangers. They also recognised the benefits of moving around in groups, not staying alone and resisting the temptation of work, food or sweets offered by anyone unless it was approved by their adult guardians or some familiar and trustworthy elders.

4.5 Child protection issues associated with relief distribution

- Attitude towards children was perceived as a major problem; the overwhelming problem identified by the children were the seniors' lack of respect for the children; children getting beaten or pushed out of service queues; sexual harassment; food snatching ; and offering them only the scraps at the end.

"We have to regard children's problems as our problems, and we have to stand beside them to assist them in overcoming the same."

Comment by participant in FGD group of Civil Society members, Uttar Uipur, Chapai



Photo : Save the Children UK

- Not enough food; bad quality/rotten food; same type of food for days (no variation in food items); irregular distribution.
- Many children described water as ‘the most precious thing’, and complained of a lack of purifying tablets or non-availability of usable tube wells above floodwater.
- Food not appropriate for children of different ages – especially babies
- Lactating mothers become malnourished, rendered unable to breastfeed babies adequately
- Children and adults complained of unfair/biased systems of distribution; unaccompanied children being overlooked; majority of street children discriminated against.
- Children and adults deprived of relief if they are at work.

Recommendations by FGD participants:

- Relief workers should be honest and responsible. Relief should be given according to need--poor people should not be marginalised. Guards should be present during distribution to prevent the snatching of food.
- A separate list should be made for children, including orphans and street children. Feeding these children should be a priority.
- Relief should be distributed in a more orderly and participatory manner, with a system of registers and tokens, that is inclusive of all children, and this system should be adhered to.
- Many children felt that it would be better to avoid a single-point large-scale food distribution and instead preferred having food distributed house by house; or in shelters, room by room.
- Queuing doesn't work; when there must be queuing, then there should be separate queues for men and women, and another for children. This would decrease the chances of harassment and stop children having to compete with adults for their share of food.
- Several working children suggested that food should be kept for the people who are working outside the centre at the time of distribution.
- There should be more food of better quality,



Photo : Save the Children UK

more regularly. In addition, more child-appropriate food is needed, including special food for very young children.

- Distribution of children's clothes is also badly needed.
- Teenagers and also parents/caregivers suggested that relief should continue for about one to three month after floodwaters have receded.
- Teenagers and also parents/caregivers suggested that money could be given instead of food relief, where quality food should be available for buying at fair prices.

4.6 Child protection issues associated with access to education

- Children described being unable to attend school because : school was flooded; teachers could not get to school; school used as a flood shelter; children unable to travel to school; parents/caregivers need children to help them at

work or earn wages; children needed to run errands/take care of siblings etc.

- Educational materials ruined by flood cannot be replaced
- Wet clothes a problem, especially for teenage girls.
- Lack of access to school also means lack of safe spaces for children to play
- If not in school, children may have to be left unattended and are thus at greater risk of

The relationship between education and child protection:

It may at first appear strange to consider ‘education’ as an important child protection concern, but access to education is extremely important both for the children’s short-term well-being and longer-term opportunities. Floods are often profoundly distressing for children. Flood response actors need to seek to address children’s mental and emotional well-being as well as their physical survival. One way to do this is to ensure children’s continued access to education, where they have the comfort of a routine service and the chance to make sense of their experiences through discussions with peers, while also furthering their long-term opportunities.

abduction/accidents

- Children who do return to schools described not doing well in exams because they were unable to revise the lessons they had learnt
- Many street children / full-time working children did not have the opportunity to go to school at all.

Recommendations by FGD participants

"We have the will to study, but there is no such scope in flood time."

Comment from participant in FGD group of girls aged 6-10, Dhaka

- Most children said that they wanted to go to school during floods. In order to do this, alternative buildings should be found for people to shelter in. Schools should also be built up on higher grounds so that they are less likely to be affected by flood water. Playgrounds should also be built up on high grounds to allow children

valuable space to play during floods. Children felt that adults should make efforts to keep schools open during floods, and provide free boats to take them to and from school.

- Children also suggested that food aid for children could be combined with education. They could attend classes and receive a meal and some food to take back to their family. Their families may then be more inclined to send them to school than to work during the flood.
- Children also raised the idea of accessing extended supervision in the school grounds to allow them to play there, while their parents/care-givers are working. Schools should also be guarded to protect children from potential abductors or other people who may harm them.
- Children preparing to sit for their public examinations strongly felt that the exams should be postponed for the flood-affected children who could not go to school or study. Teachers should also be aware of the difficulties that the flood affected children face and make allowances.
- Parents/care-givers and civil society members argued that there should be some form of education in the temporary flood shelters. Virtually, all interviewees stressed the need for educational and play items to be distributed in flood shelters.

"Nabil* was forced to work to support his family after his father remarried. One day when he was sifting through waste materials, unfortunately he picked up a small bomb that exploded. Nabil was badly injured. Another rag-picker boy Zahid* died being electrocuted."

Described by participant in FGD group of boys, aged 6-10 years, Balur Math slum, Kamlapur, Dhaka.

*names changed.

- Many children felt that a change in attitude towards education was also needed. They thought that parents/care-givers and employers should value education more and encourage them to go to school.
- In addition, informal educational sessions on preparing for floods, health and safety issues were suggested for all adults and children in the centres.

- Roads should be built high on higher grounds so that when there is a flood, the children can still travel by roads to schools.

4.7 Child protection issues associated with hazardous work

- Examples of the types of hazardous work that children described they were doing during floods included: making brick chips, collecting waste, working as porters, plying heavy boats in dirty water and pulling rickshaws.
- Some teenage girls resorted to sex-work as a means of livelihood.
- Risks/hazards associated with these types of work that children identified: drowning; falling down drains sustaining bone fractures; snake bites; wounds from broken glass, sharp/jagged edged objects/rubbish in water; electrocution from contacting live wires in water or getting ill from spending time in water .
- Children, especially of the age group 6-14 years described being forced to run errands either for parents/care-givers or adults in shelters.
- Children and adults mentioned that wages decreased during flood period, despite work being riskier. Similarly, money-lenders too demanded higher interests during this time.
- Children who normally work are often unable to get to their workplace during floods and so lose their livelihood means.
- Some employers allow children to sleep in their places of work; such children stay in poor conditions and are vulnerable to abuse.
- Some desperate mothers start begging along with their children.
- Street children and children from minority backgrounds found it very hard to find work because of the stigma they faced; many people are looking for work in flood time without much hope though.
- NGOs reported that in some areas of Kurigram near the Indian border, children became involved in smuggling activities.

Recommendations by FGD participants:

- Children felt that they should do light work for

short periods of time, if necessary. They should not be sent outside to run errands in the face of so many kinds of dangers. Many children thought it would be better if there was scope for 'handicraft work' or any other work that can be done in the relative safety of shelters or homes. Introduction of some kind of day-care system for children in shelters was also suggested, to enable parents/care-givers work outside without worrying about the safety of their children. Children thought that there were enough 'light work' that they could do indoors to help their parents/care-givers, such as taking care of their younger siblings etc.

- Some children pointed out that if there were better income opportunities for parents/care-givers, or adequate relief was provided, then their parents/care-givers would not be compelled to send the children out for doing hazardous work. Children commented that it would be better if parents/care-givers were able to save a little money considering the hard times viz. the floods.
- As with other thematic protection areas identified, many children felt that a change in attitude was needed regarding children doing hazardous work. Some children spoke of the need to 'protect their rights', the need for the employers to be more patient and understanding, and to make parents/care-givers more aware of the risks their children faced in some occupations. One child described an incident when he had been beaten by passengers who fell off his rickshaw into the water as he had been struggling to pull it through the flood waters; he said, "Rich men should treat us as human beings."⁷⁹

"While pulling a rickshaw through the flood water, if I asked passengers to get down so as to enable me pull the rickshaw through deeper water, they would protest saying 'why they should be alighting when they were paying him'. When I said that there was a big ditch there under the water and that I would not be able to pull the rickshaw through with the passengers, . they swore and hit me. Liberating children from such predicaments is child protection to me."

Comment by participant in FGD group of boys aged 15-18 years, Dhaka

4.8 Child protection issues associated with health and hygiene

- Almost all children and adults identified a general lack of adequate medical care as a major child protection issue: few or no visits at all by doctors; lack of female medical staff; lack of adequate help with regard to administering the medicine (if provided at all); lack of money to buy medicine; and at times, medicine being supplied to everyone with other relief materials.
- At the medical centres, children reported that they'd be pushed out of queues; unaccompanied children were often just returned without any help.
- Pregnant women faced lack of privacy: childbirths were handled with very little or no privacy under desperate circumstances; lack of relevant care.
- Unhygienic environment; lack of clean water and nutritious foods.
- Floods can interrupt vaccination programmes.
- Difficulty of burying or cremation of dead bodies when graveyards/ crematoriums were under water. Often corpses were floated which was very distressing for family members, exacerbating the otherwise unhygienic environment.

Some of the major medical conditions that children suffer from during floods:

- Diarrhoea, dysentery and dehydration
- Fever, headaches and coughs
- Pneumonia
- Skin diseases, sores and ulcers, ring worm
- Cholera
- Hepatitis
- Reproductive health problems, including sexually transmitted diseases
- Eye problems such as conjunctivitis and night blindness
- Mosquito bites; malaria and dengue
- Snake bites, dog bites, cockroach and ant bites

Recommendations by FGD participants:

- There should be frequent visits by doctors or nurses who could provide sufficient medication

and issue clear instructions about administering medication.

- Committees including child members should be formed in shelters to address different issues such as keeping the shelter clean, distributing healthy food, securing medical treatment, etc.
- Some national NGOs suggested that there should be greater use of child-to-child methods for dissemination of important health and safety information.
- Adequate number of separate toilets and bathrooms for men and women that are kept clean and hygienic should be provided.
- A separate room for pregnant women, wherein doctors/ nurses can administer treatment, should be provided.
- Provision of adequate quantities of good food, cooking equipment for preparing food and clean water supply should be made.
- General health advice should be given, with specific information about key dangers such as proper treatment for snake bites, and provisions in place to get people to treatment sources as quickly as possible.
- Some key items such as soap, warm clothes, and sanitary pads or clean cloth pieces are a special need for the girls.

"I took shelter on the roof of our house. All my things got wet in the rain, and I got scabies from wearing wet and dirty clothes for days together. I was attacked by leeches. When I was struggling hard to get rid of the leeches, wicked boys were mocking at me. Somebody touched me with bad intention during nighttime, offering me food. Someone wanted to take me away and tempted me offering money and relief. I was forced to defecate and pass urine standing up in the floodwater and I wanted to commit suicide out of shame. I could not share all these with my parents as they were also stressed and intimidating instead of being sympathetic. During menstruation, I failed to maintain hygiene and stayed wet and dirty. . Please untie me from the sufferings of the flood; please untie all the girls of the char from the sufferings of the flood."

'Shiuly' (name changed), age 16, Dhaka

- Mothers should be able to eat well and take care of themselves in order to feed and take care of their babies properly.
- Local government bodies and rich men should come forward to assist with the health care of children.
- Teenagers, parents/care-givers and NGOs suggested that there should be programmes to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS and other STDs.
- Drug addicts should be provided with separate space in shelters.
- Provision should be made for people to enable them wash their hands before eating.
- There should be some arrangement for people living outside the flood shelters, e.g. on embankments or roofs or any makeshift structures to access health care services; information about such arrangements, if made, should be publicized using public address systems.
- Long-term vaccination programmes should be designed considering the flood season with possible alternatives.

4.9 Child protection problems associated with psycho-social issues

- Some children had pleasant things to share as regards the flood time experiences: e.g. they enjoyed more time spent with family; felt like an adventure, etc.

When asked what she remembered most about the 2004 floods, Ayesha* described witnessing the death of a baby. She was staying with other people on the roof of a neighbour's house. One single working mother was also there; she would appeal to other people to watch her 18 month-old baby while she went to work during the day. One day the baby had crawled up to the edge of the roof, while others were busy doing chores. The bare roof had no railing around, and the baby fell off and died. Ayesha cannot forget this sad event even today. .

'Ayesha' (name changed) 13 years, Dhaka

- Most children remembered bad experiences of the flood-stricken days, e.g. miserable daily living

conditions (wet clothes/ little food). Many children suffered specific traumatic events (e.g. sibling died).

- Increased stress of flood time have negatively impacted the relationships between children and parents/care giver; increased verbal and physical abuse.
- Many children suffered from anxiety at being separated from family members.
- Many children talked of a constant fear of drowning / abduction / theft / sexual harassment.
- Many children were upset about losing treasured belongings, including pet animals.
- Street children find survival to be more difficult; they face more abuses.

"In the flood time parents become strangers, I am worried and cannot sleep, and nothing looks good."

Comment from participant in FGD group of girls aged 7-12 years, Dhaka

Recommendations by FGD participants:

- Most children expressed a desire that the adult's attitude towards them should change, and asserted that this would have a huge impact on their emotional wellbeing during floods. "Nobody showed interest to listen to children's words. It should not be so."⁸⁰ It was stressed that families should stay together and that parents/care-givers should try to make a good atmosphere and give time and affection to children and try to entertain them. Some older children also suggested that some counselling or rehabilitation could be offered for family members who had experienced something particularly traumatic.

"Our mental condition was always very bad during the flood. We had to stay like a bunch of tied-up goats, kept by herdsmen. During that period, we had to stay very quiet and still. We could not sleep soundly due to shortage of space and bedding. We fought a lot amongst our brothers and sisters."

Comment by participant in FGD group of boys aged 10-14, Sirajgonj

- Having the opportunity to play was extremely important to all children. They spoke of the need to talk to friends, to play with toys/books/music, to be taken on an excursion somewhere, and to be able to study.

"Everyone bears the grievous memory of the flood period, the memory is always painful. We fear that floods will occur again and disturb our mental peace. One of my neighbours died from diarrhoea, it is a painful memory. That we couldn't play and that we couldn't use the latrine is in my memory."

Comment by participant in FGD group of boys aged 15-18, Lalbagh, Dhaka

- Children described many things that they do to try to feel better during the flood time. These included playing outside where it was possible, such as making a raft, swimming, travelling by boat, fishing from a rooftop or boat, or visiting relatives' houses which freshened up their minds. Other activities they tried to do indoors included talking to friends, sewing, entertaining younger siblings, singing, reading the holy Qu'ran, playing games such as four balls or ludo, or playing cards with their parents. Children also enjoyed taking care of surviving animals who had not perished in the floodwaters.

"During the flood we street children were very upset. We feel that there's no one to support us. Sometimes we think it is better to die drowning in flood water."

Comment by participant in FGD group of girl & boy street children aged 6-14, Chandpur

- The need for many changes to the physical environment of children during floods was identified. The need for enough clean food and water was stressed, and a more dignified 'house by house' distribution of relief was prioritised. Many children felt that they should not be sent to queue for relief. More clean bathrooms, with

"I think they should build a child friendly shelter based on children's opinions. There should be no mental or emotional sufferings there, only respect, affection and love."

Comment by participant in FGD group of boys aged 15-18 years, Lalbagh, Dhaka

separate facilities for boys and girls would improve their wellbeing to a large extent. The need for better health care was noted, and for boats to be provided to take people to doctors.

- Most street children asserted that they would feel better if they had the opportunity to work during flood time. Whereas other children said they'd better not be forced to go to work.
- Many children argued that better security is needed in shelter; ⁸¹ "Don't allow wicked people into the flood shelter." It was also asserted that relief workers, organisers of shelters and other adults should not be allowed to talk to children alone, as this puts them in a situation where they are vulnerable to abuse.

"Tears welled up in their eyes as they remembered the sufferings of the flood."

FGD facilitator after interviewing girls aged 15-18, Dhaka

- Some younger boys also commented on how they should try to behave in floods to improve the situation for their families; "it is needed for us to behave well with our family, we have to stay with our parents/care-givers and control our temper, and we should understand our parent's sorrows." ⁸²

"The mental condition was very much worse for all of us during the flood. In my mind I felt like I became a dry leaf that drops from the tree. I felt that I had lost all my good memories and just felt speechless. I lost interest to work or eat. I did not sleep because of fear of thieves. I became very angry over little things, and I felt like my parents/care giver were not my own folks."

Comment by participant in FGD group of girls aged 10-14 years, Sirajgonj