

The Sichuan earthquake, China

May, 2008 – May, 2010



What is the situation in Sichuan?

In the worst natural disaster to strike China in over 30 years, the Sichuan earthquake has already claimed the lives of 69,016 people, left 19,851 missing, injured 368,545 adults and children, and destroyed the homes of more than 11 million people. 45.6 million people have been affected. The scale of the destruction is staggering - eighty percent of the buildings in many towns collapsed. And the crisis is not over. Continuing aftershocks, as well as damage to roads, dams and communications infrastructure, continue to threaten the people trapped in the disaster zone.

The timing of the earthquake at 2:28 p.m. on a school day had particularly devastating consequences for children. The government has already confirmed the collapse and damage of more than 7,000 schools, though the exact number of students and teachers killed is still unknown.

Within 48 hours of the earthquake Save the Children's response team was in Sichuan Province conducting an assessment and working with government partners to define our role. The assessment revealed that Save the Children could be most effective in areas where we already have a proven track record: child protection, education and health.

What is the response?

The size, speed and range of the government's response impressed the entire international community. However, while many basic needs such as food, water and shelter have been met, the scale of the disaster has forced the government to prioritize certain places and sectors over others. This has left gaps of serious need that the government is asking organisations like Save the Children to fill.

Save the Children is one of the leading emergency relief organizations in the world. We have been operational in China since 1987 and have strong working relationships with the Chinese government, mass organisations and local agencies. These relationships have enabled us to respond quickly to the disaster. We were here before the disaster struck and we will continue to be here long after, supporting the most marginalized and vulnerable children.

With 160 national staff working across seven provinces, Save the Children is one of the largest international NGOs working in China. We have dealt with 6 major disasters in the country prior to the Sichuan earthquake. In June 2008 we had more than 20 national staff in Sichuan working on our response to the earthquake, with the support of 12 international emergency experts from SC Head Offices.

A young boy plays in the newly established Save the Children child friendly space in Mainzhu stadium, Sichuan province, China. The space will serve some of the 300 children who live in the camp, with one tent for 3-6 year olds and one for 6-12 year olds.



Photo: Jon Bugge/Save the Children

What are Save the Children's primary objectives?

The overall objective is to ensure protection and respect for the rights of child victims of the Sichuan earthquake. 65,000 Children need access to education, protection and basic hygiene facilities.

Child Protection Interventions:

- Providing safe places for 2,500 children in camps for displaced people to play, learn, and develop
- Enabling 2,500 children to play an active role in their own development through Children's Activity Centres, training and the Child-to-Child approach

Education Interventions:

- Restoring access to education for 65,000 children aged 7-15
- Restoring access to pre-school care and development for 3,000 children aged 3-6
- Providing training in psycho-social support for the teachers of the same 3,000 children
- Improving the quality of care and development for the same 3,000 children

Health Interventions:

- Securing the health of 1,300 children under 5 in camps through the provision of safe bathing facilities and critical supplies
- Improving the health situation of 1,000 rural children under 5 through village health committees

What are Save the Children doing in the area?

- **Child Friendly Spaces**

Child Friendly Spaces give children in post-emergency situations a safe environment to learn, play, and develop. The Spaces themselves are in tents or safe buildings in camps for displaced people. Save the Children has years of experience using this model in post-emergency situations to protect children and provide much needed stability at a time when they are most vulnerable. The children that participate can meet other children, be stimulated, learn new things, play and at all times be safe from harm. In short, we provide spaces in which these children can rebuild a sense of normalcy.

- **Children Activity Centres for Children Affected by Migration**

Children Activity Centres are places where children can have fun, learn and interact with others. These "left behind" children are particularly vulnerable and isolated, and our Centres help them integrate with their communities and increase their level of protection. The Centres are established with local government partners and provide training to children and caregivers in health issues, how to better protect children, and life skills.



• Education

The UN has reported that 2 million children's access to education was affected by the earthquake. From the beginning of our needs assessment it was clear that restoring education services would be a major priority of our work. Education Bureaus in the worst affected counties have asked us to assist and we are already in action re-equipping primary and middle schools and restoring access to kindergarten for tens of thousands.

• Re-equipping Schools

The government has prioritised the establishment of transitional schools in the areas worst affected by the earthquake. As a result nearly all of the schools in our target counties will have their needs for temporary classrooms met. However, there is still a strong need for school equipment, furniture, and learning materials so we are focusing on supplying schools with this necessary equipment in order to fully restore access to education as soon as possible.

• Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)

ECCD facilities in China provide day care for young children, pre-schools for three and four year-olds, and kindergartens for five year-olds. In post-emergency situations restoration of access to ECCD is very important. Parents need to begin putting their lives back together, and it is a great benefit to them to have a place they can bring their young children to ensure they are being cared for. Save the Children is helping restore ECCD facilities in the worst-affected areas by providing the necessary material support including classroom equipment, play equipment, learning aids and teaching materials.

In addition to this we are going to work with our partners to improve the quality of ECCD in the area. In China there is not a major focus on early-years education, and as a result the quality of the activities and care for children in these facilities is often quite low. Save the Children will work to improve this in the target area. We will also carry out a community mobilization campaign to increase the number of parents who send their children back to school.

• Safeguarding health


Our needs assessments showed no outbreaks of infectious disease in the affected areas and confirmed that the government has provided adequate supplies for most people in camps. However, there are a number of critical supplies unavailable in the camps including baby food, mosquito nets, Ph neutral soap, and towels. In addition to this there are almost no facilities to wash young children in safe water. There is also a need for awareness-raising about health issues threatening young children in the wake of the earthquake. Save the Children has designed a set of interventions to address these problems and to build awareness and capacity to protect children's health now and in the case of potential future disasters.

• Child Health Support in Camps

Camps for displaced people can present health risks to children. We have designed an intervention to meet both of these needs. First, we are setting up child bathing stations in tents in these camps for children under five. The stations will also serve as a distribution point for jars of semi-solid baby food which is currently unavailable in the camps. From these stations, we will promote breastfeeding and

Save the Children volunteers and parents bathing children at one of our child bathing stations in a camp for people displaced by the earthquake.





we will distribute awareness raising materials about child health issues in post-emergency situations.

- **Community Based Child Health Initiative**

We have identified a need for greater awareness raising among rural populations affected by the earthquake. We will work with partners like the local Health Bureau and Women's Federation to set up 15 community health committees in rural villages. This will involve training volunteer carers and distribution of basic hygiene items to reduce the risks to children under five.

- **Disaster risk reduction- a lasting legacy**

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) involves working with communities on activities that help people prepare for and reduce the impact of natural disasters. This can include mapping the risks in a village, building evacuation routes, training caregivers about health concerns after a disaster, and much more. Our intervention is designed not only to respond to immediate needs, but also to leave a legacy of capacity within the community and within partner organisations to better cope with future emergencies and disasters.

We will implement education, protection, and health related trainings for children and carers to teach them how to respond in future disaster situations. Since the Hyogo Framework in 2005, Save the Children has incorporated DRR as a major part of its work and actively promotes Child-centred DRR which recognises that children can play an important role in helping their families, villages and communities to reduce the risks associated with natural disasters.

Case stories



Liu's story as told by his grandmother:

"After the earthquake Liu was so scared and unhappy that he stopped talking and seemed to shut down. I was very worried about him. When we came to the camp, I was told about a tent for children where they could play with toys, draw pictures, and play with other children. I brought Liu here and he found it wonderful. I bring him here first thing every morning and we spend most of the day here. He especially likes drawing pictures. Since my grandson started coming here he's come back to life and started talking again." (Picture shows from left to

right Liu's grandmother, a SC volunteer, Liu all seated at a drawing table inside a Child Friendly Space.)



Qiao Sisi's story

Qiao Sisi is a 7 year old grade-one student in Renjiaping Primary School in Beichuan County. Since it was a newly-built school, the number of casualties caused by the earthquake was relatively few. The school building is now out of service due to severe damage. Qiao Sisi is one of many left-behind children and is being taken care of by her grandma. Her grandma and her were taken to Mianyang and given temporary shelter 3 days after the quake. Perhaps she is too young to understand what the catastrophe means; she feels quite content that she can play with her new friends there.

Chen Juanquan's story

Chen Jianquan is a 12 year old grade-six student from Leigu Primary School in Beichuan County. Six days after the earthquake, his mother was still missing. On the inside, Chen Jainquan is in pain, though outwardly he is still confident that all of his family members can find each other. He went to the Mianyang relocation site with his father and younger brother, and his father participated in the rescue with other men. He is anxious for school to start again. "I needn't worry about having enough food here, but I have nothing to read. I've read my brother's Grade-One mathematics book three times. There is still no news from the school, but we can't go back for school lessons; that's for sure."

