

Definition of Child Friendly Spaces

CFS can be defined as places designed and operated in a participatory manner, where children affected by natural disasters or armed conflict can be provided with a safe environment, where integrated programming including play, recreation, education, health, and psychosocial support can be delivered and/or information about services/supports are provided. The purpose of CFS is to support the resilience and well-being of children and young people through, structured activities conducted by community in a safe, child friendly, and stimulating environment.

Generally CFS refers to a relatively short to medium term programme response, and is very often operated from tents and/or temporary structures (i.e. in schools, under a tree or a vacant building). The strengths of CFS include flexibility, rapid start-up, scalability, low costs, adaptability to different contexts, and utility in mobilizing communities. If a CFS is well-designed, it has the potential of complementing other mechanisms needed to protect children in dangerous circumstances.

Need of CFS in Assam

The state of Assam is victim of recurring natural disasters such as flood & erosion, landslide, earthquake, etc. along with occasional manmade disasters such as armed conflict, communal violence, fire, etc. Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in these emergencies.

Children who have experienced armed conflict and natural disasters and their aftermath face multiple risks, such as threat to their lives, displaced from homes and communities or struggling to survive in post-disaster context. In these conditions, families are forced to cope with destroyed livelihoods, separation, security concerns. Thus the care and protection of children are crucial.

During an emergency, children's sense of well-being is jeopardized. They may be exposed to a sudden loss, to disruption in their routines, to frightening experiences. These circumstances require a significant amount of time for children to recover and for psychological wounds to heal. Often, with the ample and effective support and care, children eventually recover overtime. Many factors play into the recovery process. Personality, culture, spiritual beliefs, support systems, coping mechanisms, economic status and past experience all play a role.

Emergencies impact children physically, psychologically, and socially. In an emergency, children show many psychological symptoms, including withdrawal, anxiousness, fear, denial, anger, sadness, restlessness, and regression. They often experience sleeplessness, sadness, grief, shock, nightmares, bed wetting, and hyperactivity.

Although relief camp setups try their best to respond to needs of the affected children but it is only possible to address all the impacts of an emergency through a well-designed and participatory CFS programme.

Issues and Challenges in the state

The need of children is varied and various stakeholder meetings/workshops/field visits were conducted since 2018 to list out the child specific issues and challenges in relief camps.

Some of the issues highlighted in these multi-stakeholder discussions include:

Sector	Issues	Solution proposed
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High risk of communicable diseases by children in relief camps ▪ Major outbreaks occur due to use of raw water in emergency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standby Ambulance/Medical facility near camps ▪ Inventory of country boats with proper route mapping of waterways in vulnerable locations ▪ Proper listing of immunization for vulnerable groups ▪ Awareness generation for use of boiling water ▪ Inclusion of pre-natal care in relief camps
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deprivation of Educational facilities and recreational activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishing an education corner in the CFS to engage children in learning activities. ▪ Providing school in a box/ bag for continuity of learning during any kind of disaster. ▪ Deploy teachers and volunteers in the CFS to engage children of different age through recreational and learning activities. ▪ Teacher training on continuity of learning in emergency
Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Abuse of Children ▪ Child Trafficking ▪ Child Labour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Constitution of a child intrinsic committee to protect them from abuse ▪ DCPO unit, Labour department should engage SHGs for children needs ▪ Short term courses should be developed for livelihood ▪ Vigilance over incidents of trafficking/labour/abuse
Wash and Hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-availability of enough potable water ▪ Non-availability of separate toilet facilities or a smaller number of facilities as per inmates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Categorical survey and mapping of vulnerable groups, adults, lactating mothers and children as pre-disaster initiative and necessary supplies should be readied as per analysed data ▪ Construction of baby friendly toilet ▪ Rainwater harvesting should be made mandatory in schools and designated relief camps.
Food and Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-availability of enough food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create breastfeeding spaces as part of Child Friendly Spaces

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poor community awareness on importance of exclusive breastfeeding practices for babies <6months old ▪ Poor community awareness on importance of diet diversity and continued breastfeeding for children less than 2yrs old. ▪ Risk of promotion of breastmilk substitutes and baby foods for under 2yrs children (Violation of IMS Act) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote optimal infant feeding practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exclusive breastfeeding for first 6months of life ○ Age-appropriate complementary feeding for 6-23months children ▪ Prevent violation of IMS act
Psychological Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited number of counsellors for emotional support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Counsellors can be arranged from various sources like – NGOs, Schools Teachers, Religious Institutions, etc. ▪ Toll free numbers for telephonic support to people in extreme distress

An Overview of Disaster Damage statistics in Assam from 2014-2020 (Source: Flood Memorandum, ASDMA):

Year	Population Affected (in Lakhs)	Relief Camps	No. of Inmates in Relief Camps (in Lakhs)
2014	42.03	800	7.57
2015	36.67	984	6.76
2016	39.81	1388	6.53
2017	56.02	960	4.53
2018	13.22	366	2.49
2019	73.05	1357	5.35
2020	56.60	591	1.53

On an average approximately 4.97 Lakhs people take shelter in relief camps every year. As over 41% of the total population is under the age of 18 years, around 2.03 Lakhs children (average) live in relief camps every year. Under such grim circumstances, a well organised CFS is the need of the hour.

Overview of Assam relief Camps and existing facilities

Every year lakhs of people in the state are affected by Flood Disaster and relief camps are established to give support to affected families in the form of food and other supplies as well as giving shelter to the ones whose houses were devastated by flood. The normal life of the inmates halt for the period till flood recedes gravely affecting their economy and social development.