

Internal review of a series of books on Disaster Risk Reduction produced by Library For All and ChildFund Australia under AHP funding

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Background

In 2017 ChildFund Australia joined a consortium led by Plan International Australia to become a member of the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP). ChildFund’s Education and Disaster Risk Reduction/Emergency Response (DRR/ER) and Education Advisers drew up a proposal for producing a series of age and culturally-appropriate books on natural disasters for children in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The books would also be produced with an eye to distribution in other Pacific Island states. The books would be attractive to young readers and include simple messages about disaster risk reduction. ChildFund had just begun working with Brisbane-based not for profit organization Library For All (LFA) on an education project in PNG at the same time and the two agencies agreed to collaborate on the DRR book project.¹

LFA agreed to develop a nine fiction and nine non-fiction books, in English, aimed at children in elementary/early grade primary (nine titles) and middle and upper primary grades (nine titles). Final copies were to be produced in both digital and print form. The total project budget was to cover writing and production costs and the printing of 1500 – 2500 hard copies of the 18 titles for initial distribution to Elementary and schools in PNG. The books were published under creative commons and are thus freely available to reproduce, so long as the source is acknowledged.

The books took much longer to produce than originally planned. The process of drafting and checking texts to satisfy cultural, educational and DRR requirements by authors, editors and readers in PNG and Australia was a protracted one.² Eventually, in May 2020, final copies were delivered. ChildFund and LFA estimate that, under the project budget, some 140 copies of each title can be produced in hard-copy form (a total of c. 2 500 books). Approximately 120 of each title will be distributed in sets to selected primary schools in Central Province. Digitised versions of all titles will be included on LFA’s digital library app in PNG and added to the digital libraries on tablets currently available in twelve schools in Central, Madang and Morobe Provinces with a further 45 schools to be added in 2021.

ChildFund/LFA will retain the balance of copies printed for publicity/demonstration purposes. The partners anticipate that there may be interest in the books from Ministries of Education in other Pacific countries as well as ANGOs and CSOs working in PNG and throughout the region. Although the books are currently only available in English there is also the possibility of translating them into other languages of instruction or children’s first languages.

The Books

LFA uses the metaphor of mirrors and windows to talk about the books it produces. **Mirrors** are books in which children recognise settings familiar to them such as people, families, houses, animals, villages, and physical environments. **Windows** are books which offer children insight into unfamiliar settings – in other countries or in parts of their own country which they have not visited. The DRR series was planned to include books which were both mirrors and windows or a mix of the two. LFA and ChildFund also agreed that the books would be a mix of fiction and non-fiction titles for children in early and mid-primary grades. The topics for the books would be disasters common in the Pacific – earthquakes, volcanoes, cyclones and storms, floods, drought, and fire.

¹ *Together For Education*, 2017-2020, implemented in Elementary Schools in three provinces by a consortium of NGOs under the PNG Partnership Foundation (PPF) with funding from DFAT. See Attachment 1 for details.

² See Attachment 1, Notes on DRR book project, May 2019 ...

A summary analysis of the books is attached (**Attachment 2**). Of the 18 titles, 11 were fiction and seven non-fictions. The fictional books were written in a variety of narrative styles while the non-fiction titles could be described as informative in genre. Fictions stories were primarily “mirrors” while the non-fiction titles provided “windows”. Most of the fictional books were illustrated with original drawings while the non-fiction titles included photographs as well as drawings and diagrams. The authors and illustrators were Australian or living in Australia while photographs were obtained from open sources.

LFA assigned the 18 books into reading levels under their own six-step system of classification. The levels are set out at the end of each book. Levels 1 to 4 are for early grade primary readers and are described as Beginning, Rising, Eager and Fluent, respectively. These are followed by Middle Primary and Upper Primary levels. Of the 18 titles, nine have been classified as Level 3, eight as Middle Primary and one as Upper Primary. These ratings probably reflect Australian standards and would be far too high for most Papua New Guinean primary school children, especially those in rural schools. The length of the texts and the sophistication of their sentence structure and vocabulary would be intimidating for children who speak English as a second language; some PNG teachers might also struggle.³ Very few of the books were written in the first person as might be expected of stories for early grade readers. ChildFund education team members felt that all the books were suited to middle or upper-primary readers. If further books are developed the obvious gap to fill would be stories for early grade, ESL speaking children – books with simple sentences, repetitive and/or rhyming language and written in the first person.

Content and style

The aim of the project was to produce books which would engage young readers with strong story lines or informative content and colourful illustrations or striking photographs while also putting across clear DRR messages. These messages could be about risk reduction prior to onset and protection and safety as the disaster struck and in the aftermath. In general, the books tackle these tasks successfully with some of the titles far exceeding the expectations of the original project brief and the partnership agreement.

The most successful titles combine strong plotlines and lively artwork with DRR messaging that is clear and explicit, but which does not overwhelm the unfolding narrative. The most visually attractive examples of these are the four titles produced in graphic novel format on earthquakes, cyclone/storms, flood, and fire. The cartoon/comic strip format also allows the authors and artists to tell stories with a wealth of detail, and subtlety, as there are multiple picture frames on each page, some of which are purely graphic and others which combine narration boxes and speech bubbles. In effect, each frame is a page. So, for example, the seventeen numbered pages of DRR # 4, ***Dad! Mum! I Felt The House Shake***, contains 53 separate frames, 50 of pictures and text and 3 purely graphic.

Authors have tried various ways to introduce DRR messaging without overwhelming the flow of the narrative. School scenes, in which the teacher provides the information, is a common device. Other methods include knowledge sharing between siblings; parents or grandparents talking about their own life experiences; children hearing messages on the radio or households being visited by knowledgeable others. In some cases, these devices are rather intrusive, and the story line suffers. This is not a problem in non-fiction titles where DRR messaging can easily be integrated into the flow of information.

³ Of the nine Level 3 books, for example, three are between 300 and 500 words in length and the other six are more than 600 words.

Analysis of the books broke down the DRR messaging into three categories⁴:

- Preparation: warning signs of the disaster or what could be done before onset to lessen damage and mitigate risks
- Protection: about how to stay safe as the disaster occurred
- Response: dangers or other factors to consider after the onset of the disaster.

Of the 18 books, 16 included very thorough or thorough messaging about preparation and 15 very thorough or thorough messaging on protection. Response was the most lightly covered category with 9 books assessed as having very thorough or thorough messaging, 3 with some coverage and 6 with no coverage. This coverage, emphasising preparation and protection, was entirely consistent with the project brief and contract.

After the text in each book the authors included follow-up tasks. There were three main activities:

- A generic series of questions which asked children to think about their responses to each book (probably more useful when moderated by a teacher);⁵
- A generic activity (“Squares”) which asked children questions about the content of each book, but which was tailored to individual titles (again, probably best when facilitated by a teacher).
- A maze/matching game about the contents of an emergency kit – this was an activity which could be completed by children independently.

The identical emergency kit maze/matching activity appeared in 7 books. The generic question set appeared in all 18 titles and the “Squares” activity in nine. A quiz, which could also be completed independently by children, was included in one book and would have been a useful addition to others.

LFA aims to produce books which are culturally appropriate to readers. In the case of the DRR series the immediate target audience was children in PNG with a secondary interest in children in other pacific states. The authors and illustrators of all 18 completed books have been broadly successful in achieving this aim with the characters, settings, and events of their stories. Children and their extended families are featured as are schools and tropical environments. Some household products and furniture mentioned may not be commonly be found in village settings, but children would be familiar with them. In most books, for example, families rest, sleep and eat on mats, maintain gardens, go fishing and travel in boats, shared vehicles or on foot.⁶

The books are gender sensitive with girls often central characters in stories. All artwork is inclusive from a gender point of view. Children or adults with disabilities are not portrayed although there is explicit consideration of the elderly in a couple of titles.

Conclusions, recommendations

1. Although the series took longer to complete than expected, the authors and illustrators have produced a highly attractive set of books with clear DRR messages embedded in them.
2. Reasons for the project taking much longer than planned included: changes of key staff in Sydney (the DRR/ER Adviser) and PNG (the Education Manager) in 2018; a lack of clarity and overall coordination in Sydney about who would provide feedback to LFA on the educational and DRR/ER content of the books and how this would be done; a lack of clarity about the role DRR and education staff in CFPNG would play in providing feedback on the books and how this would be done and, finally, the unfamiliarity of some of the LFA authors with village life in PNG and the importance of clearly including DRR/ER messaging in the stories.

⁴ In the case of drought these distinctions were not clear cut with many measures taken being applicable at any stage.

⁵ The four generic questions were: What did you learn from this book? Describe the book in one word. Funny? Scary? Colourful? Interesting? How did this book make you feel when you finished reading it? What was your favourite part of the book?

⁶ Many culturally inappropriate references were removed during the editing process as some authors were not familiar with PNG village life and lifestyles. A few such references were not picked up such as what appears to be a wildebeest in a field (**Waiting For The Wet Season**, cover and p. 5) and atypical household furniture (chairs, tables, beds in several books).

3. All the books are suitable for use in PNG for readers in middle and upper Primary School grades. Some of the books would also appeal to readers of lower Secondary School age.
4. There may well be interest in the books from other schools and education systems in the region, particularly from Pacific Island States.
5. Although evidence of student interest and readership must await data collection/surveys following their distribution to schools, there is a paucity of such books currently available and it appears likely that the books will be well received and eagerly read. Follow up studies would also show which titles should be prioritised for additional print runs.
6. Because of their length, language styles and vocabularies the current series of books do not cater for children from ESL backgrounds in early primary grades (KG, Grades 1 and 2). This is a gap which it would be useful to fill.

Attachment 1

**Notes on the project to produce 18 DRR books for elementary/primary school children in PNG under AHP funding
ChildFund Australia, May 2019**

ChildFund applied for funding under the AHP to produce “DRR” story books for primary school children in 2017 and entered into an agreement with Library For All (LFA) to produce them. ChildFund had been introduced to LFA through partnership in the DFAT-funded Together For Education (T4Ed) project in PNG. The T4Ed project, implemented by a consortium of NGOs led by World Vision, planned to provide support to some 300 Elementary schools in 3 provinces of PNG over the period 2017-2020 and children in these schools would be the initial targets for the books.¹ Other interest in the books could come from (i) state schools supported by Save the Children and CARE in other parts of PNG under similar projects (ii) better resourced state schools in other parts of PNG and (iii) private schools. During initial discussions between WV, ChildFund and LFA it was agreed that books would be produced for children of both elementary and primary age. To quote from an email of September 2017:

... we could look at a set of books, say 2-4 stories for each of the three age ranges [6-8, 9-11 and 12-15 years] ... 10-12 altogether, covering a range of different disasters common to PNG (flood, drought, wild fire, landslide, earthquake, volcano, tsunami) or threatening (sea level rise, climate change) and in a variety of settings (islands, highlands, dry scrublands, mountainous rainforest).

AHP approved activities proposed by ChildFund for PNG, including the DRR books, in March 2018. The initial AHP funding of \$25 000 was reduced to \$15 000 but ChildFund Australia agreed to contribute an additional \$30 000 from its own “GIG” funding. The main purpose of the additional \$30 000 funding was to produce books to a high standard and to produce enough copies to distribute to the T4Ed schools.

The contract signed in June 2018 specified 18 books on a range of topics (see table, below); ten to be produced by December 2018 and ten by December 2019. The books were to be in English, to be attractive to children, to cover the kind of natural disasters experienced in PNG and would, “incidentally”, provide useful information on disaster preparedness and response. Books were to be provided in both digitised and hard copy formats.

	Earthquakes	Volcanoes	Storms	Fire	Cyclone	Drought	Flood
Elementary (Gr. KG,1,2)	1 x Fiction 1 X Non-fiction	1 x Fiction 1 X Non-fiction	1 X Non-fiction	1 X Fiction	1 X Fiction	1 X Fiction	1 X Fiction
Mid Prim	1 x Fiction	1 x Fiction	1 X Non-fiction	1 X Fiction	1 X Fiction	1 X Fiction	1 X Fiction
Upper Prim	1 X Non-fiction	1 X Non-fiction					
18 books	4	4	2	2	2	2	2

Digital versions could be included amongst reading materials LFA was producing for the e-libraries for PNG Elementary Schools under the T4Ed project. Hard copies would be distributed to schools in the project and offered to other organizations who might be interested in distributing them. By mid-2018 LFA and ChildFund had also agreed that while the books should have a PNG focus they could well be of interest in other countries in the Pacific and might also lend themselves to be added to the “books that travel” collection being built up by LFA.

Responsibility for developing the DRR book series was shared between ChildFund and LFA and involved, at various times, ChildFund’s Sydney-based DRR and Education advisers, ChildFund PNG’s Education Team leader and DRR staff and LFA staff whose main role was supporting the LFA component of T4Ed. Predictably, there was a tendency for everyone to assume that someone else would be working on the books so the development process was rather tortuous. Then came two resignations, of ChildFund Australia’s DRR adviser in September 2018 and of LFA’s PNG coordinator in February 2019. LFA also was disappointed to find that the departed staff member had produced an initial set of draft DRR stories which had not been workshopped with colleagues and which LFA management judged were not meet their organizational standards. So it was, literally, a case of back to the drawing board.

As a result of an internal review, LFA identified new writers, recruited new staff and reset their approach to the task. The new coordinator for the project, Lara Cain Grey visited Sydney on 5th April, meeting with IPT members to provide an up-date on progress in the project and receive initial feedback on advanced draft versions of four books on earthquakes. Participants in the meeting also discussed again the allocation of books by topic, grade/level, and type. The project will still produce 18 titles but the way the books are now described has changed a little from 2018.

	Elementary picture book	Mid-Upper Primary graphic novel	Elementary Non-fiction	Mid-Upper Primary Non-fiction
Earthquake	X	X	X	X
Cyclone	X	X	N.A.	N.A.
Flood	X	X	N.A.	N.A.
Drought	X	X	N.A.	N.A.
Storms	N.A.	N.A.	X	X
Volcano	X	X	X	X
Fire	X	X	N.A.	N.A.
18 books in total	6	6	3	3

Attachment 2: Analysis of 18 DRR Books – summary tally sheet

Feature/Criterion	Breakdown of results for 18 books							
Year of publication	2019 12 books				2020 6 books			
Primary disaster covered	Earthquakes 4 books	Volcanoes 4 books	Fire 2 books	Drought 2 books	Floods 2 books	Cyclones 2 books	Storms ⁱ 2 books	Others (see below)
Other disasters covered ⁱⁱ (Secondary coverage/mentioned)	Tsunamis 3 books			Landslides 2 books		Climate change 1 book		
LFA ascribed Reading Level	Level 3 ⁱⁱⁱ 9 books			Middle Primary 8 books		Upper Primary 1 book		
Reading level in PNG context (our estimate ^{iv})	Level 3 0 books	Middle Primary 3 books		Middle/Upper Primary 12 books			Upper Primary + higher 3 books	
Genre	Narrative 11 books				Informative 7 books			
Fiction/non-fiction (Mirrors/Windows/Mixed) ^v	Fiction 11 books		Non-fiction 7 books		Mirror 12	Window 3	Mixed 3	Other 0
Length (pages) of text	17-19 pages 3 books	21 pages 8 books			22-24 pages 2 books	27-28 pages 3 books	35 pages 1 book	41 pages 1 book
Illustrations	Original artwork 8 books		Original art - Graphic Novels 5 books		Mainly photos 2 books		Mixed 3 books	
Follow up tasks	YES in all 18 books	Generic question set ^{vi} 18 books		Q's + Squares activity ^{vii} 9 books	Q's + Maze- match activity ^{viii} 7 books	Q's + 2 other activities 2 books	Quiz ^{ix} 2 books	Other 1 book
Cultural appropriateness (in Pacific setting)	YES 15 books				Global context ^x 3 books			
Coverage of gender (characters, depiction, roles etc.)	YES 18 books				NO 0 books			
Coverage of disability	YES 0 books				NO 18 books			

(characters, depiction, roles etc.)		
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Analysis of 18 DRR Books – summary tally sheet (continued 2/2)

DRR messaging (general) Clarity, explicitness	YES 18 books		NO 0 books	
DRR messaging – preparation (prior to onset)	Very thorough coverage 8 books	Thorough coverage 8 books	Some coverage 2 books	No coverage 0 books
DRR messaging – protection (during onset)	Very thorough coverage 5 books	Thorough coverage 10 books	Some coverage 3 books	No coverage 0 books
DRR messaging – preparation (after immediate crisis)	Very thorough coverage 1 book	Thorough coverage 8 books	Some coverage 3 books	No coverage 6 books
Typos/editorial issues	Grammar 2 issues/2 books	Spelling 1 issue (US spelling)/ 1 book	Layout^{xi} 1 issue/4 books	

ⁱ Storms and cyclones are obviously related topics and associated with flooding. These links are made in the books.

ⁱⁱ There is substantial content on Tsunamis in **Earthquakes** (DRR # 4). In most other cases tsunamis, landslides and climate change are mentioned in passing as related to, contributors to or results of other disasters.

ⁱⁱⁱ All the books have a diagram which explains LFA’s system of levels. There are five levels of early books: the Learner Level “Beginner readers”); Level 1 (“Rising readers”); Level 2 (“Eager readers”); Level 3 (“Progressing readers”) and level 4 (“Fluent readers”). These are followed by categories of Middle Primary (“Curious readers”) and Upper Primary (“Adventurous readers”). Levels 1-4 might roughly correlate to Kindergarten-Grade 2, Middle Primary as Grades 3-4, and Upper Primary as Grades 5-6 in an Australian setting. Children in other countries/education systems, especially if from an ESL or EFL background, would move through the levels more slowly.

^{iv} “Our” assignments of book levels are the subjective assessments of three ChildFund Australia education advisers based on their experience of English language reading levels of primary age children in rural Papua New Guinean schools. Nearly all children in these schools are ESL/EFL learners. Situations in other Pacific countries may differ.

^v LFA distinguishes between books which reflect children’s own experiences (*mirrors*) and books which open up a wider world (*windows*).

^{vi} The same set of questions is used in all 18 books.

^{vii} The same format for the Squares Activity is used in all books but the questions differ from book to book.

^{viii} The same maze-match activity is used in 7 books.

^{ix} The Quiz questions relate to the content of each individual book.

^x These are non-fiction books covering topics in a global context. While some of the content and illustrations have Pacific references, these are primarily “window” books.

^{xi} A red outlined box appears over the text in a small number of speech bubbles.

