

People's Cultural Centre organises state-level consultation on child protection in emergency



Secretary of People's Cultural Centre delivers a speech at a workshop on child protection. Picture by Ashwinexi Phai

Focus on saving kids during disasters

SHILPI SAMPAD

Bhubaneswar, Feb. 23: A state-level consultation workshop on child protection in emergency was organised in the capital today by Save the Children and People's Cultural Centre (Pecu). Civil society members and media persons took part in the event. The objective of the workshop was to discuss strategies to bring about more awareness regarding protection of children's rights in emergencies and to influence policies and decisions of the government in dealing with such issues.

"In comparison with other emergencies, children are more vulnerable to danger during emergencies. The state government in collaboration with civil society organisations needs to shield children in adverse conditions to ensure their proper development," said Ranjan Mohanty, secretary of Pecu. He was referring to the flood of 2008 and a super-cyclone that wreaked havoc in the state in 1999. "Disasters pose a challenge to child protection systems and coping mechanisms. Acute shortage of ready-to-eat food, preparation of food using polluted water, lack of shelter, loss of parents, violence and abuse during and

after emergencies are areas of concern," added Mohanty. Child protection officer of Unicef-Orissa Lakshminarayan Nanda said general intervention might not address issues affecting children and the situation needs mobilisation of extra resources and training of resource personnel. "A child needs to be empowered to face challenges in post-disaster situations that includes trafficking, abuse, migration, education, child labour and arrangement for their safety and sanitation. This requires planning and programmes at the government level," said Nanda. Pecu and Save the Chil-

children are working on child centred disaster risk reduction programme, which is a community-based disaster preparedness initiative with special focus on children in Kendrapara and Balasore districts. "The project covers 30 villages, 18 of which are in Balasore. We train women and children in mechanism and materials for disaster risk reduction," said the Unicef officer. The workshop was marked by heated debates about the government's ban on punishment in schools and the promotion of fear psychosis among children in a "protective environment". "It is true

that many parents want teachers to discipline children by scolding them and through mild punishment. We are talking about a child's protection so far as exploitation, violence, discrimination, sexual abuse, engagement in hazardous activities and child labour is concerned," said Shantaram Nanda of Save the Children. "We must not prevent a child from learning life skills such as swimming in a river or climbing trees. But at the same time, it is important to ensure his or her safety. We are also training children in first-aid and rescue operations," said Mohanty.