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Developing and Implementing Comprehensive School Safety Policy

Policy is the process of defining and creating desirable community change. It lays out a specific vision of what should exist, establishes specific goals to achieve this vision, and creates programs or services. Some policy evolves out of common practices, traditions, and the 'way things are done' within communities. This is called **emergent policy**. In contrast, **top-down policy** is generally made by policymakers who define a goal of the 'way things ought to be' and then write policies that direct behavior to achieve this goal. However, many well-intentioned top-down policies have failed when they inadequately account for local culture. As a result, many policymakers have shifted toward **participatory policy development** where stakeholders work together to develop policy goals and strategies appropriate for their community. Practitioners play an influential role in top-down and participatory policy development. This can include providing information, encouraging innovation, facilitating community participation and representation at regional, national and global forums, empowering marginalised voices, and evaluating policies.

Policy implementation is the process of taking the policy vision and making it a reality. Practitioners who implement policy are advocates and mediators between policy visions and the emergent policies of communities. They serve as guides, helping the community move towards the policy's vision in ways that respect and align with their emergent policies.

Once created, policy is most often stable and has long periods with only small changes. However, this stability may be 'punctuated' by periods of rapid, large-scale changes. These periods often occur when advocates converge as broad coalitions and shift the way an issue is understood.

The Comprehensive School Safety Policy Framework

Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) has become an important policy design framework to help reduce disaster impacts in the education sector, and practitioners have a crucial role to play. The CSS Framework developed in response to two opportunities for change: (1) A global shift from disaster response to disaster risk reduction (DRR); and (2) Evidence of the devastating impacts of disasters on the education sector. Advocates and education sector leaders developed and promoted a top-down policy vision of safe schools through global-level documents, such as the Ahmedabad Action Agenda for School Safety (2007) and Disaster Prevention Guidance for Education Sector Decision-makers. Bottom-up advocacy also shaped the Framework. For example, dozens of grass roots activists from across South Asia, Southeast Asia, and North America supported one another's advocacy efforts under the independent banner of the Coalition for Global School Safety.

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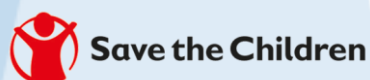
America supported one another's advocacy efforts under the independent banner of the Coalition for Global School Safety. Ongoing conversations between top-down leaders and grassroots advocates led to the first CSS Framework in 2012 being presented by the Children in a Changing Climate Coalition. In 2013, the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES), which represents a broad coalition of advocacy organisations, further developed the CSS Framework to align with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction adopted in 2015 (GADRRRES, 2017). The current framework has three intersecting pillars:

1. Safe Learning Facilities
2. School Disaster Management
3. Risk Reduction and Resilience Education

Developing a shared policy vision at a global scale is a significant achievement and has enabled such initiatives as the Worldwide Initiative for Safe Schools (WISS). Now, GADRRRES organisations are working together to develop targets and ways to monitor progress.

Important lessons for practitioners

- **Build Demand**. Build broad and deep support for policies by exposing communities and policymakers to goals.
- **Frame Issues Effectively**. When experiencing indifference, or hostility, to policy change, develop new ways to frame the goals and proposed policy in terms of the values most important to communities and policymakers.
- **Strengthen Advocacy**. Recognise the importance of working with other advocates to support policy change. Connect agencies and organisations that can work together to advocate for change.
- **Promote Participatory Processes**. In both top-down and participatory policy development, facilitate broad stakeholder involvement and empower marginalised voices, such as teachers and youth to articulate goals, identify problems and innovate strategies.
- **Encourage Compliance, then Enforcement**. Support effective policy implementation through a gradual process of community change. Where possible, encourage policy compliance by appealing to stakeholder self-interest and rewarding desired behavior. Use sanctions and fines to address actors who lag behind.
- **Mediate between Vision and Reality**. Frequently compare policy goals with education sector practices at all levels. When and where progress stalls, evaluate community practices at all levels and support policy revision to better account these practices.
  Recognise Opportunities for Change. Understand that change in policy may be incremental and slow, until opportunities for punctuated change, such as disasters, occur. When these opportunities arise, be ready with robust advocacy coalitions and policy proposals.

Readings

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