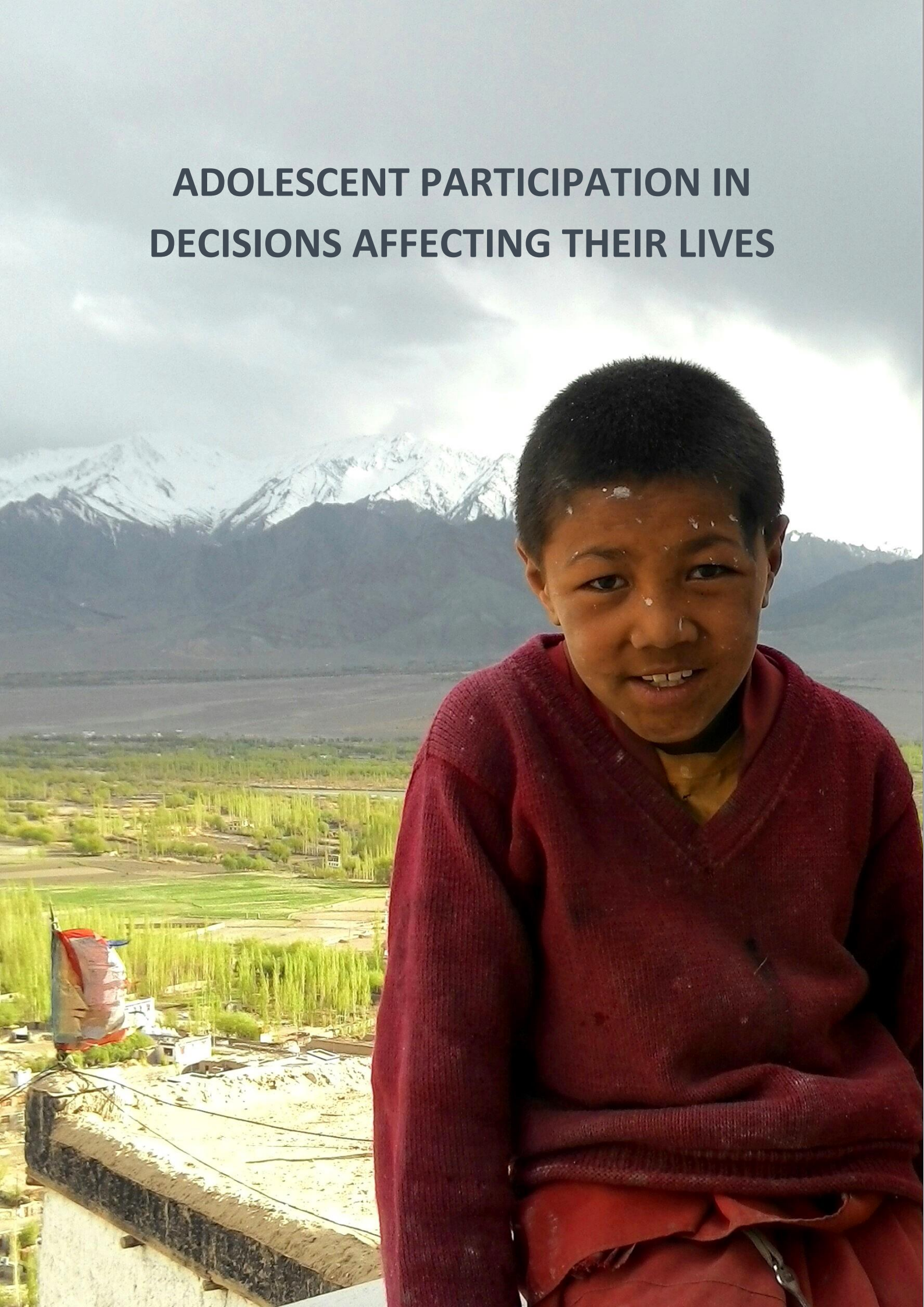
ADOLESCENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS AFFECTING THEIR LIVES



[List of Acronyms]

AABSU	All Assam Bodo Students Union
AASU	All Assam Students Union
AASSU	All Assam Santhali Students Union
AP	Andhra Pradesh
ARSH	Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health
BADP	Border Area Development Programme
BRGF	Backward Region Grant Fund
BTAD	Bodoland Territorial Area District
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
CPC	Child Protection Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDMA	District Disaster Management Authority
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
GAR	Global Assessment Report
GoI	Government of India
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
JRC	Junior Red Cross
KAAC	Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council
KSU	Karbi Students Union
KSY	Kishori Shakti Yojana
LBA	Ladakhi Buddhist Association
LWE	Left Wing Extremism
NCC	National Cadet Corps
NDMA	National Disaster Management Authority
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSS	National Service Scheme
NSSP	National School Safety Programme
NYK	Nehru Yuva Kendra
RKSK	Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram
RMNCH+A	Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child Health + Adolescent
RMSA	Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan
SMC	School Management Committee
TN	Tamil Nadu
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
YRC	Youth Red Cross

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[1] INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The past decade has seen an increased focus on the wellbeing of adolescents (10-19 years) through national policies and programmes in India. In many ways, the recently launched *Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram* (RKSK, 2014)[1] represents a significant milestone with its comprehensive and intersectoral approach. It builds on the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health or RMNCH+A (2013) strategy[2] and consolidates multiple initiatives including the landmark Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (commonly known as *Sabla,* 2010). Meanwhile, the *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan* (2009)[3] and the National Skill Development Policy (2009)[4] have also aided the prioritisation of specific concerns of this vital age group. These initiatives have focussed primarily on health and nutrition (particularly Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health, ARSH), education and skill needs. However, many of these do incorporate elements that facilitate adolescents' self-development through life-skill education and creation of peer platforms. **Two recent initiatives (policy and strategy documents) recognise and articulate the need for adolescent participation.** The National Youth Policy 2014[5] has facilitation of "participation and civic engagement at levels of governance" as one of its five objectives, with youth engagement as one of its nine priority areas. Similarly, RKSK[6] adopts participation as one of its key guiding principles wherein it envisages that "health services and programmes [are] participatory, with increasing scope for active engagement and expression by adolescents in related decision making".

Participation of children and adolescents has received increased attention since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by India in 1992. UNCRC establishes participation as a right. Over the years, **the child participation discourse has evolved notably**, with several examples[7] of good practice as well as models[8] propounded for the same. This evolution has also been marked with thinking on the participation of adolescents as a different age group. In 2001, UNICEF released a strategic approach paper[9] on the "participation rights of adolescents". Overall, there is diversity in understanding about the definition, core elements and practical manifestations of participation. Indeed, there are several[10] views on 'what real participation is?' But there is also an **emerging consensus that one moves closer to real participation when there is participation in decision making processes** and that "participation can be jeopardized if young people are asked for opinions, but then arbitrarily excluded from decision making[11]".

The value of participation in decision making during this stage of life cannot be asserted enough, and is increasingly finding resonance from multiple disciplines. There is incontrovertible evidence from neuroscience[12] that adolescence is a period of significant changes in brain structure and function. Further, research[13] has established that there is significant emotional and cognitive development at this stage. While emotional experiences

during adolescence are unique and limited to this developmental period, emotional skills and abilities developed during adolescence persist into adulthood[14]. Cognitively, it is in adolescence that most individuals develop the ability to consider multiple perspectives and competing points of view before making decisions[15]. Adolescents can make invaluable contributions to decision making processes, and some[16] would say, their participation is indispensable if we have to find "new solutions to our persistent social challenges and problems".

Disasters continue to be one such social challenge; persistent, and as evidence[17] suggests, growing.

Adolescents face a disproportionate brunt of disasters and, yet, continue to be a social group that hasn't received adequate attention for addressing their specific needs[18]. A recent survey[19] finds that response interventions are failing adolescent girls in disasters, while another[20] reports that "adolescents affected by armed conflict are largely absent from the agendas of donors and international humanitarian assistance agencies as a distinct group". The lack of disaggregated data about this age-group in disasters has also been noted, followed by efforts to bridge this gap. In 2013, Plan International's "Because I am a Girl Campaign" focused on adolescent girls in disasters, leading to global[21] as well as context-specific (including India[22]) analyses of the status of adolescent girls in emergencies. While this is a promising trend, so far, the analysis remains limited to adolescent experiences 'during' a disaster or emergency.

A comprehensive exploration of the roles and experiences of adolescents across all stages of a disaster management cycle does not emerge. Within this context, discussions about the participation of adolescents in disaster risk management (DRM)[1] tend to get subsumed within discussions about child participation. This includes child centred disaster risk reduction (DRR) programs as well as emerging analyses[23] of children's participation in humanitarian programming.

It is in this context that the following study has been conducted. While there is increasing focus on adolescents and recognition about the need for their participation in decision making processes, evidence about their situation and contexts remains scarce. The "Youth in India: Situation and Needs 2006–07" study (2010)[24] and its successor "Adolescents in Rajasthan 2012: Changing Situation and Needs" (2014)[25] are perhaps the only studies that reflect on the roles of adolescents in decision making and their participation in civic life. The participation of adolescents in decision making processes for DRM and climate change

[1] This report (in line with the GAR 2015) uses 'disaster risk reduction' to describe the policy objective of anticipating future disaster risk, reducing existing exposure, vulnerability or hazard, and strengthening resilience. Disaster risk management (DRM) is used to describe the actions that aim to achieve this objective including prospective risk management, such as better planning, designed to avoid the construction of new risks; corrective risk management, designed to address pre-existing risks; and compensatory risk management, such as insurance that shares and spreads risks. The term 'DRM Cycle' is used to describe different temporal dimensions of DRM practice i.e. response, preparedness, recovery, reconstruction; with the recognition that these phases are no longer understood as representing distinct and exclusive time periods or set of actions.

adaptation (CCA)[2] remains largely unexplored. And, it is this exploration that this study seeks to do.

Titled, **Adolescents' Participation in Decisions Affecting their Lives**, the study has the following objective:

To identify opportunities for adolescents' participation in decision making affecting their lives with a focus on risk reduction and improved resilience in the face of challenges posed by disasters and climate change impact.

In pursuing this objective, and in recognition of the fact that participation of adolescents is deeply entrenched in the contexts they inhabit, this study takes the **perceptions** of adolescents as well as adults (both formal and informal actors) in their external environment as the basis for analysis. Perceptions were sought on the current and envisioned roles of adolescents in society, as well as in disasters; on whether adolescents should participate in decision making process and the nature and forms this participation should entail. Perceptions were also sought on the current levels of participation in DRM as well as the enablers and barriers for participation. These perceptions, coupled with an analysis of the existing and potential platforms for participation, formed the groundwork for identifying opportunities for enhancing adolescent participation in decision making in DRM.

1.2 STUDY DESIGN

The study design was primarily shaped by qualitative research. Specific sets of data were considered for additional consolidation through quantitative means. Development of tools, sampling, data collection as well as analysis were guided by a framework of analysis. This framework was designed to enable the re-assembling of data from the diverse and layered themes that emerged from the study.

1.2.1 Framework of Analysis

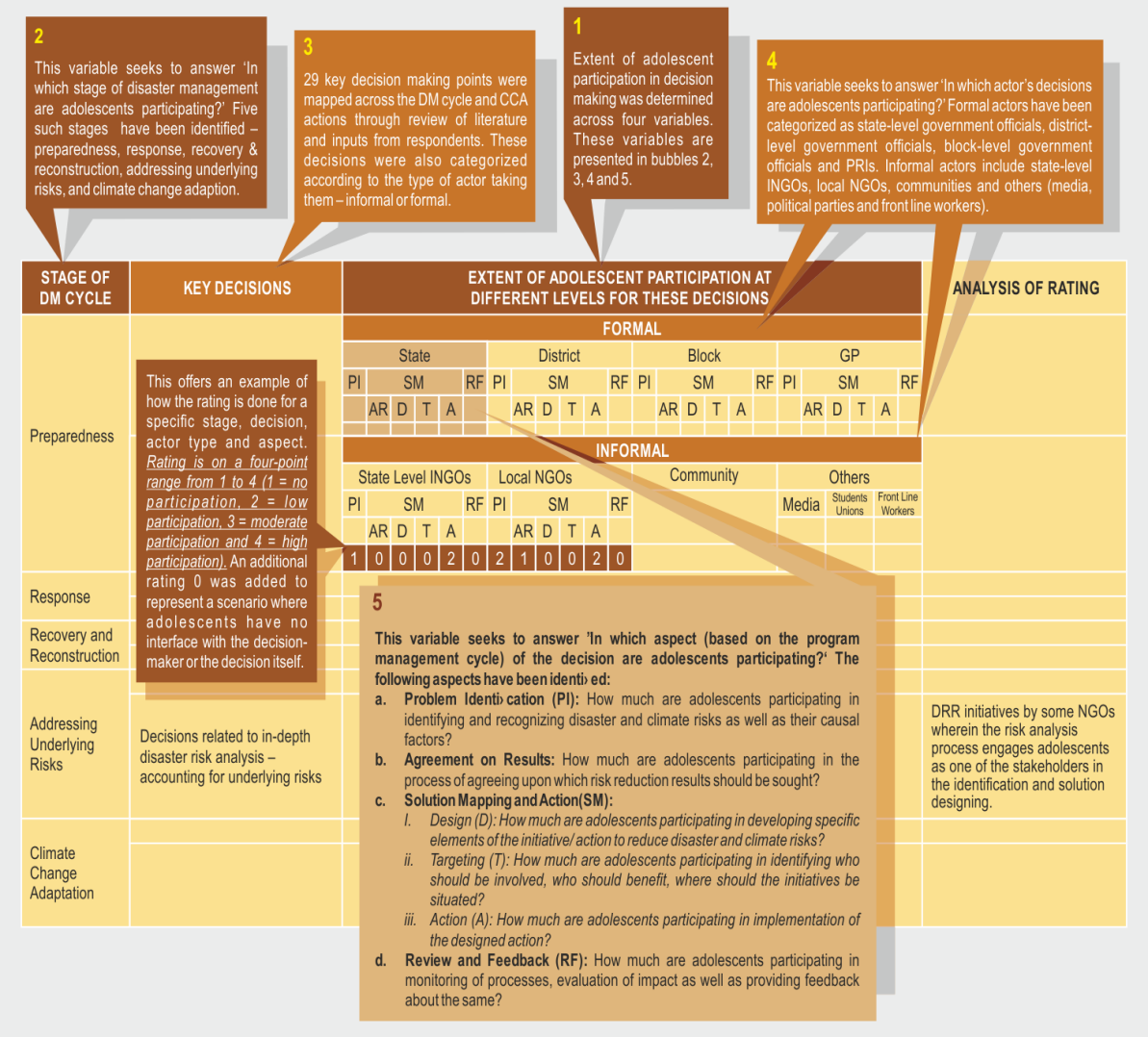
The framework[26]of analysis had two components– **the matrix and explanatory analysis**.

Outlined in figure 1, **the matrix** was developed to aid concrete and nuanced presentation of the extent of participation of adolescents within the DRM context. This matrix facilitated the summarisation and synthesis of data according to the different relevant typologies for the DRM context – stages of the DRM cycle, kinds of decisions taken within these stages, types of actors taking these decisions as well as aspects of the programme management cycle.

[2] Climate change adaptation (CCA) and DRM constitute interrelated but also substantial domains by themselves. While recognising this, for the purpose of this study, the term DRM has been used in a broader sense and incorporates CCA.

Essentially, it enabled answering meta-questions like 'In which stage of DRM were adolescents participating more?', 'How did adolescent participation vary in DRM decisions taken by the government, civil society and communities?' or 'Did adolescents get to participate in planning DRM actions or was the participation limited to implementation only?

FIGURE 1 FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS



Rating on the extent of participation was done using **the adolescent participation scale**. This scale was developed through an analysis of secondary resources as well as in consultation with selected practitioners in the pilot phase. Review of literature revealed that while many models[27] that conceptualise children and youth participation existed and child-centred organisations and their networks (like the Inter-Agency Group for Child Participation) had developed[28] practice standards for children's participation, a scale for measurement of participation had possibly not been formulated.

The adolescent participation scale was then developed by building upon UNICEF's[29] four-level continuum for measuring participation of children in emergencies. So, a four-point scale was used to rate the level of adolescent participation from 1 to 4 (1= no and 4= high participation). The rating was based on 10-point criteria. The first criterion answered the essential question 'who sets the agenda' and the other nine were derived from Article 12 of the UNCRC representing the salient features of meaningful participation. Ratings 2 to 4 were based on fulfilment of one or more of these criteria[30]. The scale is provided in the Annexure.

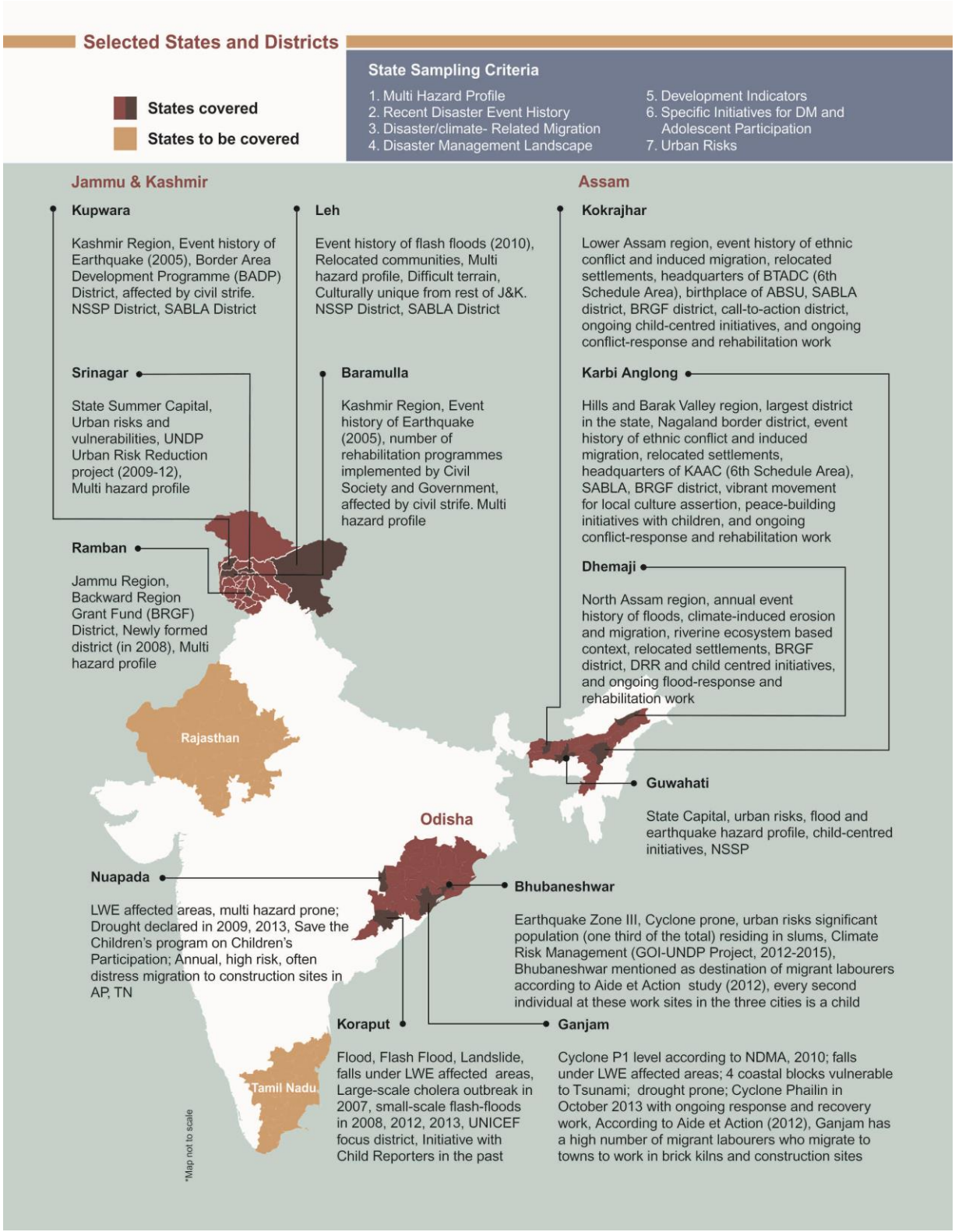
Explanatory Analysis was undertaken in order to unpack underlying reasons for the extent of participation discerned in the matrix above and to consolidate the interrelated contextual influences that shape the lives of the adolescents. **Essentially, such an analysis enabled answering meta-questions like** 'How much did adolescents participate in their own life decisions?', 'How did different actors (government, civil society, communities and adolescents) perceive adolescent participation in decision making?', or 'What were the enablers and barriers to adolescent participation in decision making?'

1.2.2 Sampling and Methods

The study covered 13 districts across three states in India – Assam, Jammu and Kashmir and Odisha. Figure 2 maps the states and districts along with the selection criteria for each.

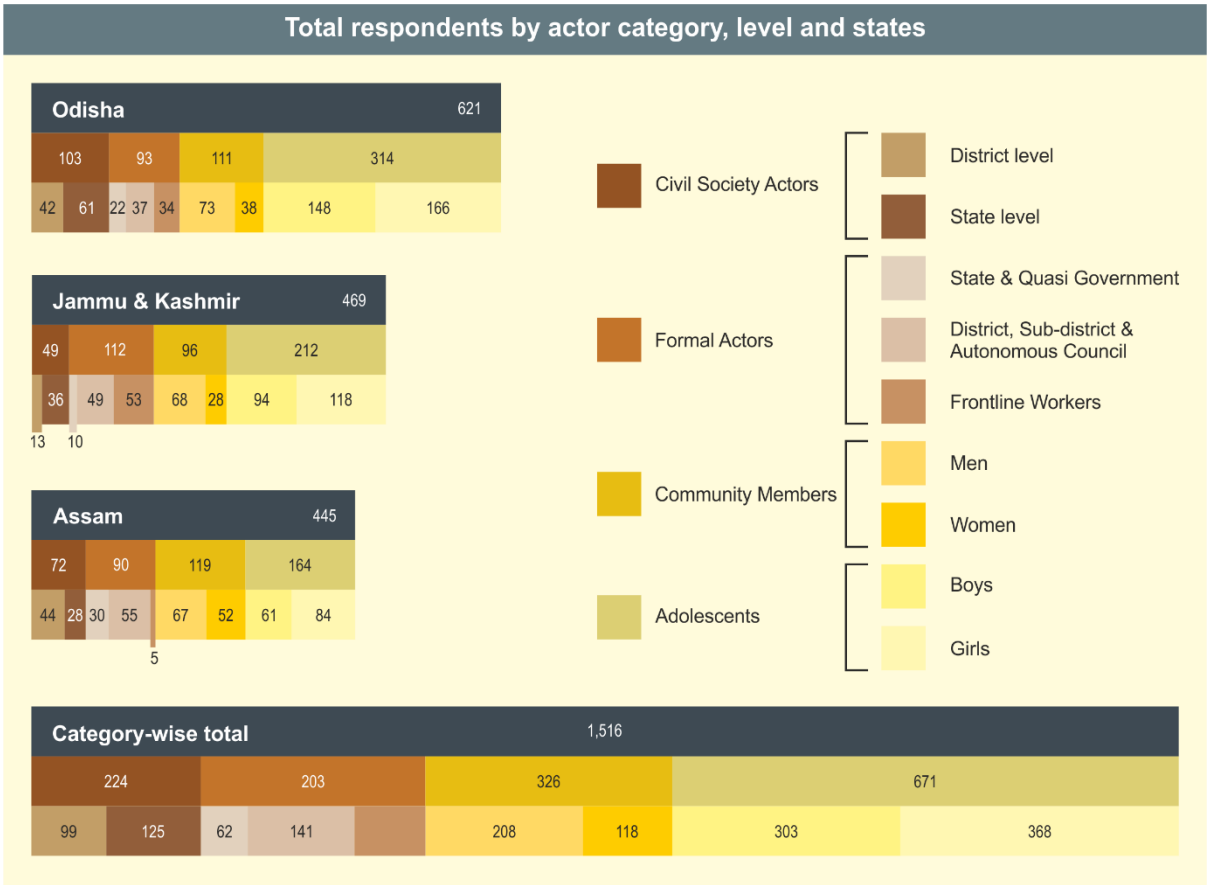
Within the 13 districts, 34 sites were visited wherein respondents were selected from rural, urban and peri-urban contexts; relief camps (both short term and long term); schools and child care institutions.

FIGURE 2 STATES AND DISTRICTS COVERED



An actor mapping was undertaken to select the typology of respondents. Purposive sampling was used to finalise this list in discussion with key respondents at the state level. Overall, the study covered **1516 respondents** (*see figure 3*) which included 671 adolescents (368 girls and 303 boys).

FIGURE 3 RESPONDENTS' PROFILE



Discussions with respondents were held between February 2014 and September 2014 using semi-structured interviews, group discussions and focus group discussions (where feasible). The entire process was guided by ethical considerations of respect for participants, informed consent and confidentiality. Adolescents were not directly asked to narrate personal experiences of disaster events. Instead, a space was provided where they could, of their own volition, share if they wanted to. Special care was also taken to ensure that the visit to the relief camps did not disrupt on-going services or inconvenience the community members.

1.3 REPORT STRUCTURE

This report presents **a summary of the consolidated findings** from three states – Assam, Jammu & Kashmir and Odisha. Eight finding statements have been collated from the detailed state reports. These have been presented along with the emerging programmatic implications from each finding. Subsequently, overall recommendations have been provided.

[2] FINDINGS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. **Most (77% government, 90% civil society, 78% adolescents, 71% communities) actors believed that adolescents should participate in decision making**

2. **70% adolescents and 71% adults felt that adolescents should participate in decision making only after completion of specific biological, familial and social milestones**

3. **Adolescent participation in life decisions was found to be minimal, with girls having even lesser say in life decisions, especially in decisions related to their marriage and health**

4. **Adolescent participation in decision making related to disaster risk management was found to be limited; wherever participation existed, it was with child-centred NGOs or communities, in the preparedness and response stages and only at action level**

5. **Understanding of adolescent participation in decision making emerged as being limited to voicing of opinions for 90% of the adolescents and adults respondents**

6. **Several platforms for adolescent participation existed in every state; however, there was limited participation of adolescents in decision making processes within these platforms**

7. **Deep-rooted power hierarchies and their manifestations in institutions, societies and individuals determined adolescents' participation in decision making**

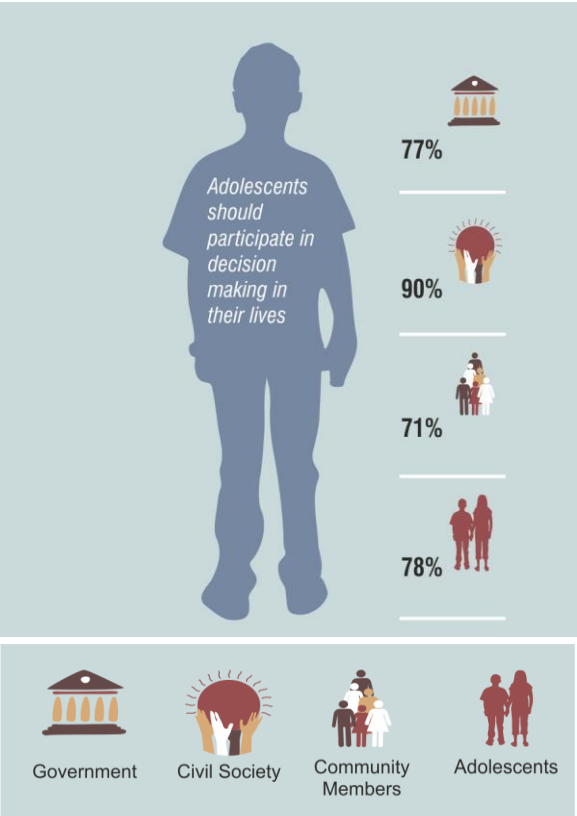
8. **While understanding of adolescence and participation remained culturally embedded, culture itself was believed to be in an age of transition. This age of transition offered opportunities for revisiting and reviving traditional practices for adolescent participation with contemporary relevance.**

This section presents eight salient findings along with their implications for those programming to enhance adolescent participation in decision making.

1. **Most actors (77% government, 90% civil society, 78% adolescents, 71% communities) believed that adolescents should participate in decision making**

Discussion: By and large, study respondents across the three states were open to engaging on the issue of adolescent participation in decision making. The possible merits of such participation, as cited, included enhanced exposure for adolescents with improvement in their communication and negotiation skills. Increased interaction with duty bearers leading to sharing of concerns and contributing to more effective service delivery was also highlighted. Further, participation (whether within schools or other spheres) was also associated with incremental learning of values of civic engagement and governance. The role of participation experiences in enabling adolescents to grow as more articulate, confident and responsible adults emerged as an underlying and recurrent motif across respondent categories. At the same time, value addition by adolescents to the decision making process did not find an equally emphatic endorsement. Many respondents agreed that adolescents could add value to decisions, especially the ones directly related to their lives. However, this confidence did not extend to decisions in their families or communities. *(See finding 3).*

Also, those with affirmative responses usually attached caveats specifying acceptable spheres of participation (most favoured: family; least expressed and favoured: public/policy), age and other criteria. Also, the overlap of age boundaries between adolescents and children and lack of distinct notion of adolescence seemed to influence perception and practice to varying degrees. In many interventions across the three states (whether government or civil society organisation-CSO initiated), adolescents remained subsumed within the category of children with varying degrees of clarity on this issue. For example, one respondent associated with the district disaster management authority (DDMA) at a study location spoke of activities with children including adolescents (quizzes, mock drills and school disaster management plans) but reiterated – "I don't know about this adolescents you are talking about." Clearly,



focus on and programming for adolescents (as a single target group or as a recognised sub-set of children) remained dependent on explicit mandates. This, in turn, influenced the engagement of the actor with adolescents and helped shape related perceptions about their participation. Thus, it was found that government and civil society respondents with a mandate for working on health, nutrition (particularly linked to ARSH), education and protection appeared more receptive.

Overall, across the three states **civil society respondents appeared most open to adolescent participation in decision making**. The sharpest interstate variation was noted for community respondents. Community respondents in Assam and Odisha provided overwhelmingly affirmative responses (around 90%).[3] In Jammu and Kashmir, a high 61% felt that adolescents should not participate in decision making. The proportion of respondents who felt the same across government and civil society categories across the three states stood at 12% and 7% respectively. The reasons cited included immaturity of adolescents (one adult respondent noted – "the prefrontal lobe of their brains is not developed"), lack of experience and social precedence for such participation. These aspects are elaborated later in the report.

Interestingly, adult reservations for adolescent participation in decision making were **echoed by adolescents as well**. This was most noticeable in Jammu and Kashmir where, and largely in consonance with the position of community members, only about half of the adolescent respondents felt they should participate (boys: 47%, girls: 50%). In the other two states, figures for both boys and girls stood above the 80% mark. However, here too, doubts regarding one's capacities and apprehensions about upsetting traditions/habits/accepted social order were articulated. Participation of girls in decision making evoked mixed responses, most prominently in locations in Kashmir. This surfaced in meetings with adult community members as well as adolescent boys and girls themselves. Also, older adolescents (16-19 years) at some locations appeared sceptical about involvement of younger peers (i.e. 10-14 years) in decision making.

Moreover, an overwhelming majority of adolescent respondents across the three states were often initially perplexed by the theme itself! Some shared that they had never thought along these lines. Others at several locations gradually opened up to share frustrations at being overlooked during decision making within their families, schools and communities and of this being the norm in their lives.

Programmatic Implications

- ***Positive developments in policy and programmatic environment should be leveraged for greater effect.*** The growing emphasis on adolescents as represented in RKSK, RMSA and other flagship government initiatives needs to be utilised to greater effect. These provide an opportunity to trigger dialogue on the needs and concerns of adolescents

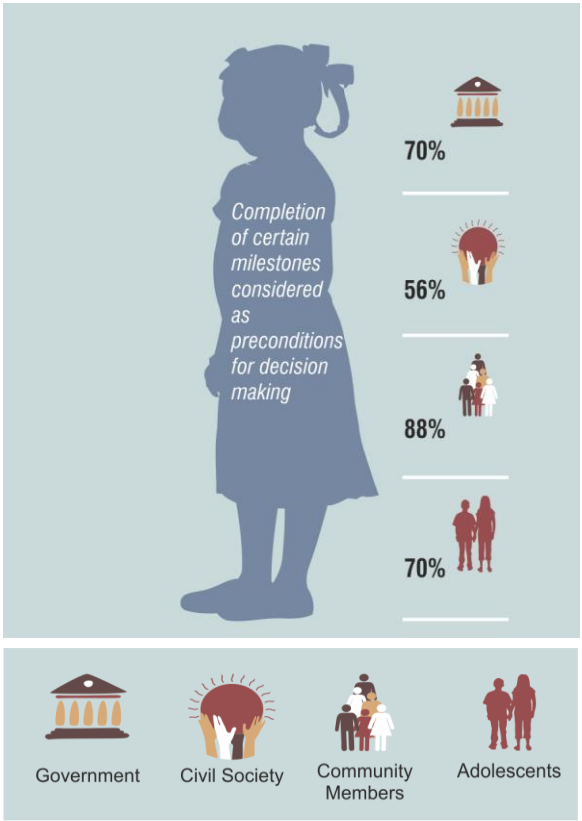
[3] The remaining were unsure. They did not reject the notion.

and involve various actors in the process. Also, many of these initiatives incorporate platforms for working with adolescents (such as SABLA with Kishori Samoohs). The scope for promoting adolescent participation in decision making through such platforms must be explored (*more on this later*).

- ***Working with all adult actors should be seen as an essential prerequisite.*** It is imperative to involve adults across stakeholder categories (communities, government, CSOs and other actors) for creating an enabling environment. There should be a special emphasis on involving gatekeepers to help shape local perceptions favourably. Further, concrete opportunities must be utilised for realising adolescent participation. Involvement of adults in such actions would serve to reinforce the need for adolescent participation in decision making and the benefits of the same.

2. 70% adolescents and 71% adults felt that adolescents should participate in decision making only after completion of specific biological, familial and social milestones

Discussion: Different cultures conceptualise the onset of adolescence and transition into adulthood through socio-cultural markers[31]. Interactions with respondents across age-groups and actor-types reaffirmed that adolescence continued to be an experience whose boundaries, structure and content were shaped primarily by cultural mores and beliefs. Such a conceptualisation of adolescence (as a stage composed of "landmarks along the path to adulthood"[32]) was also observed to extend to notions about when adolescents could participate in decision making; wherein, this privilege/ ability was believed to be **contingent upon completion of certain milestones**. For example, across all the communities visited, marriage emerged as one such milestone, after which participation in decision making as well as independent decision making were sanctioned, regardless of the age at marriage. However, the influence of gendered notions ensured that boys were usually provided more space for decision making than girls. In fact, wistful aspirations of having a greater say post marriage as articulated by unmarried adolescent girl respondents stood in sharp contrast with experiences shared by young married women who spoke of little say even in matters related to reproductive and child health.



Migration emerged as another milestone, especially for adolescent boys. Thus, boys

who migrated enjoyed more participation in decision making about their own lives than their peers who stayed back in the communities. However, in some cases, this also acted as a barrier towards participation in decision making regarding community matters whereby migrating adolescents were believed to be disassociated from contextual realities. Also, they were often physically not present during decision making and thus, not in a position to comment on community affairs. Similarly, completion of higher education, engagement in income generation activities, participation in cultural events like organising festivals, or holding positions at local units of student unions were seen to accord more freedoms in decision making. Respondents were also asked about what they thought was the 'age of maturity' after which adolescents were capable of participating in decision making. This varied across regions and cultures between 17 to 25 years, but invariably had more to do with the adolescents' experiential development through completion of milestones than with the age itself.

Adolescents also voiced similar views with many older adolescents (15-19 years), especially in urban areas, linking their age of maturity with the legally recognised age of 18 years when they are granted voting rights. Yet, as one adolescent respondent, echoing frustrations of others in the group, pointed out, "Just because we turn 18 years and have a voter id does not mean that we have any power or that adults will listen to us more."

Programmatic Implications

- ***These notions need to be unpacked and solutions sought collectively within the logic of the identified milestones***. This can be achieved by working with the custodians and interpreters of societal norms like religious leaders and community elders. For example, a civil society respondent in Jammu and Kashmir who is also a noted religious scholar shared that Islam incorporated the issue of child rights. He stated, "There are clear references to survival, protection and development. While participation is not directly mentioned, there is a potential to interpret the section where Islam says any child above 12 must be consulted if his/her marriage is being considered. If a child can be consulted then, he/she can be consulted for all other decisions also." This highlights the potential of engaging in depth with these notions for arriving at collective and workable programming inputs.
- *Reinterpreting and/or reframing relevant milestones for contemporary times is needed*. For many adolescents belonging to Kondhs, Parajas, Gadabas and other tribal communities in Odisha or Karbi communities in Assam, an extended period of stay in the adolescent dormitories (*ghotuls* or *jirsong asong*) marked the transition from adolescence to adulthood (*see finding 8 for more*). In the context of increased urbanisation, migration and cultural transitions, it is becoming a dying practice; albeit, not one without its merits towards preparing adolescents for adulthood. There is an opportunity for programmers to re-interpret this with contemporary relevance.
- *Adolescents need to be prepared for the decisions they will have to take upon completion of milestones.* While marriage or engagement in livelihood activities allows for more

decision making, often adolescents find themselves in-charge of decisions without preparation for this stage. This highlights another programming need, for working with adolescents to build their capacities for decision making.

3. Adolescent participation in life decisions was found to be minimal, with girls having even lesser say in life decisions, especially in decisions related to their marriage and health

Discussion: In the process of exploring adolescent participation in DRM, it was thought pertinent to examine how much say adolescents have in other decisions pertaining to their lives. Eleven decision making themes were explored with all adolescent and adult respondents. These were consumption, education, recreation, personal health and hygiene, sexual and reproductive health, marriage, livelihood, engagement in substance abuse, religion, politics and civic amenities. Adolescent respondents, across sites, spoke of unequal relationships with adults and this appeared to impact their scope for decision making. For most, not being heard or consulted appeared to be an intrinsic part of their lives at this stage.

Overall, boys were found to have more say in decisions, especially those related to consumption, recreation and choice of livelihood. Boys were perceived to have **considerable say** in decisions regarding their political ideologies and allegiances across all three states. Girls, on the other hand, had a lesser say in their life decisions, especially in those pertaining to their marriage, recreation and health. A striking gender divide between adolescents' agency was also found in a recent study[33] on adolescents in Rajasthan where "even the least educated boys were more likely than the most educated girls to have made money-related decisions independently". Among the states, select study locations within Assam and Jammu and Kashmir revealed that adolescent girls had an even lesser say in their life decisions, especially those about their marriage and health (including sexual and reproductive health). Moreover, girls living in childcare institutions were found to be exercising the least agency about their day-to-day decisions, where these decisions were taken by parents, relatives/guardians or the hostel wardens.

Education emerged as a life aspect where boys and girls equally had considerable say compared to other aspects. This included decisions about continuing or dropping out of education after primary/upper primary or higher levels, choosing subjects to study after Class X or in college, travelling to another location for education and occasions for returning home. However, their say in decisions within the educational institutions themselves was perceived to be limited at best or non-existent at worst.

Overall, older adolescents above 14 years were found to be taking more decisions than younger adolescents. Also, those who were members of the student unions or residing in residential schools (as opposed to child care institutions) were perceived to be more capable of taking their own decisions. Most respondents were unanimous about

adolescents having **some say** in family level decisions and **no say** in community level decisions, across gender, age-group as well as regions; a finding also echoed in the Rajasthan study where adolescents were found to have a very limited participation in civil society.

Programmatic Implications

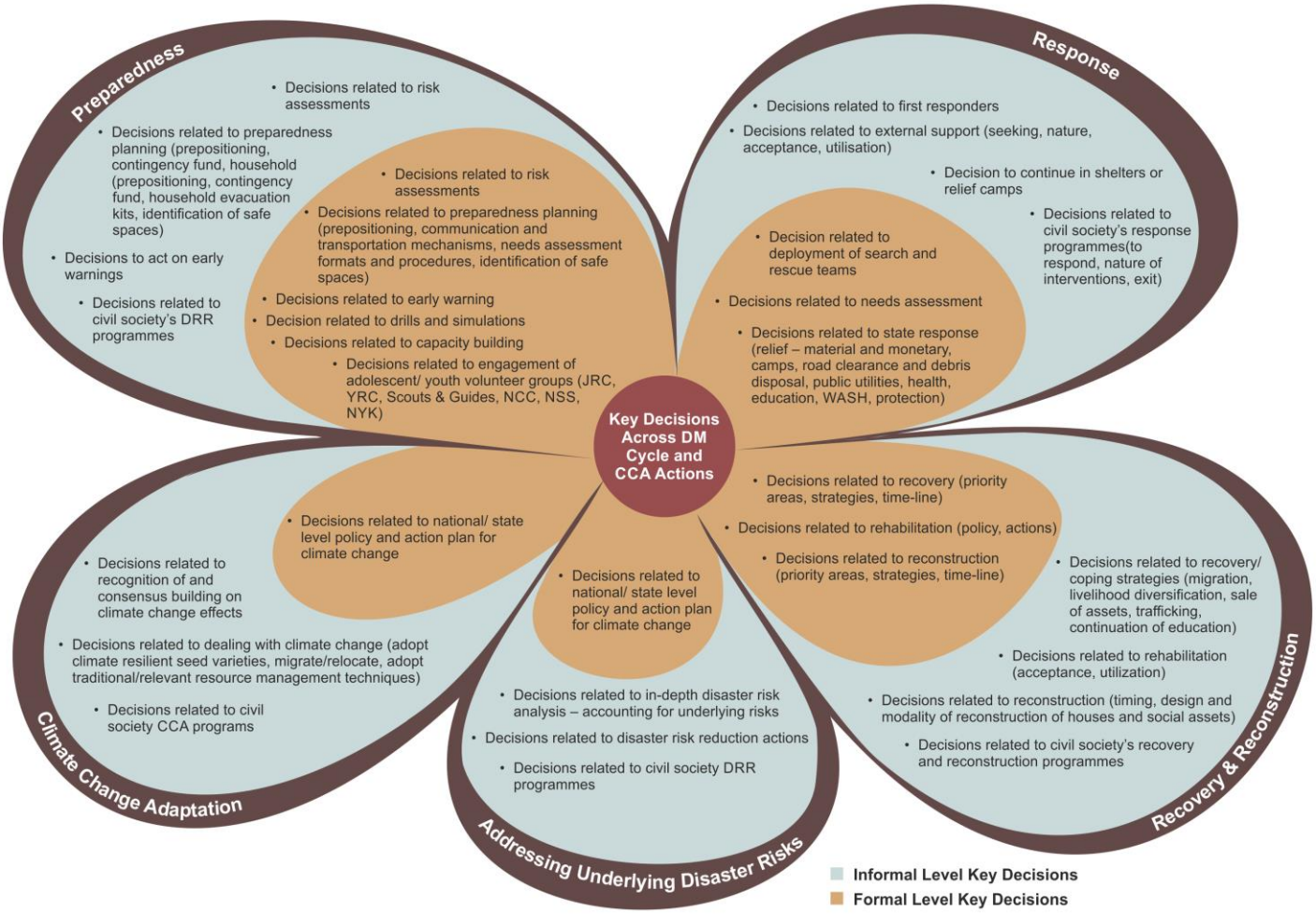
- ***Parents and caregivers must be engaged with, especially for promoting parent-child communication***. Every household context is unique, yet the role of parents and parenting practices is inarguably one of the primary influences in an adolescent's life. While many adolescent programmes work with adolescents themselves, few[34] work with parents outside the realm of information provision. Fewer still work with parents-to-be, in preparation for parenting. In a context where parents and caregivers continue to be most immediate gatekeepers to the practice of adolescent agency, it is imperative that programmes be designed towards participatory and positive parenting practices.
- *Role holders for adolescent-specific platforms should be engaged with.* This includes teachers for school based platforms, *Anganwadi* Workers for Kishori Samoohs etc. The emphasis should be on encouraging them to adopt participatory practices during their engagement with adolescents.
- ***The emphasis on decision making component in life skills based programmes should be increased.*** The inherent interlinkages of decision making as a life skill with other skills (including self-awareness and communication) are collectively expected to "enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (WHO). However, the life skills component often gets overwhelmed by the other thematic content within sectoral or multisectoral programmes. This is more challenging for initiatives that are at scale. For instance, Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) functionaries involved in operationalising SABLA in the three states conceded that other components (i.e. nutrition services, nutrition and health education) often took up a bulk of their time leaving inadequate space for life skills. Reflections on the group processes including inputs from girls at one location showed that *Kishori Samoohs*, where functional, did provide a platform for discussions on the girls' lives and the choices they could make. However, adolescent participation in decision making within the *Kishori Samooh* itself was not a frequent reality. Decision making can be promoted by strengthening these pre-existing spaces.

4. Adolescent participation in decision making related to disaster risk management was found to be limited; wherever participation existed, it was with child-centred NGOs or communities, in the preparedness and response stages and only at action level

Discussion: Of the 29 decisions mapped across stages of the DRM cycle and CCA actions (*see figure 4*), an average of 11 received a rating of '0' on the participation scale across all three states. These, mostly government-level decisions, were rated as '0' because neither did the

decisions target adolescents as a specific group nor was there any interface between the decision-maker and adolescents.

FIGURE 4 KEY DECISION POINTS ACROSS DRM CYCLE AND CCA



The other 18 decisions that received ratings between 1 and 4 were mostly dominated by ratings **1** (signifying interface or presence of adolescents but no participation as "the adults make decisions, take action and tell adolescents what to do") and **2** (where "the adults take a lead in deciding what to do but inform adolescents and involve them in action"). Decisions with rating '1' had to do with training programmes organised for this age-group through Red Cross and under the National School Safety Program (NSSP), which adolescents attended as participants, but had no say in the content, design or implementation of. The decisions taken by child-centred organisations through their programmes with disaster and conflict affected children emerged as the only decision points with rating 2.

Conscious involvement of adolescents emerged as being **highest in the preparedness, response and reconstruction phases** in the following activities:

- As participants in preparedness-related training programs and mock drills
- As respondents during needs assessments carried out by child-centred organisations
- As recipients of aid during response and reconstruction for e.g. when receiving educational supplies, when child-friendly spaces were set up or when scholarships were being provided to students
- As volunteers during responses in camps, to support with community kitchens, distribution activities, maintenance of water points, debris clearance, and such

Adolescents were present during family-level decisions across most stages. This included presence during discussions for decisions on evacuating to a camp, receiving aid or migration of family members. However, unless the adolescent was migrating by himself (rare in the case of girls), decisions were communicated to them and they had limited say during the decision making process.

Where adolescent participation existed, it was **mostly in the 'action' aspect** of decision making. That is, there was negligible participation in aspects like identification of the problem, agreement on results, design and targeting of solutions or the review and feedback of actions. Thus, it can be said that problems and their solutions were largely being defined by adults, and the adolescents were being 'utilised' for implementation. This was congruent with discussions with stakeholders across the states, many of whom stated the 'use of adolescents' as one of the merits of adolescent participation in DRM. This was further highlighted by the fact that the only decisions by formal actors where adolescents were present or had any interface with the decision makers were related to relief distribution or maintenance of community assets like water points.

Discussions[4] about the extent of adolescent participation in decisions in **conflict contexts** provided different perspectives. Adolescents were believed to be participating in guarding their villages, violent activities (for e.g. stone pelting in Kashmir or violence in Kokrajhar) as well as reconciliation efforts (for e.g. as a part of the '*samasya samadhan manch'* or solutions forum formed after ethnic violence in Kokrajhar). However, perceptions about how much say they had in the decision making processes *per se* remained varied.

Programmatic Implications

- ***Improved understanding of decision points*** *across different stages of the DRM cycle as well as CCA and especially within specific programming contexts is needed*. It emerges that the framing of DRM actions as decisions has not been done so far. A detailed analysis of the types of decisions being taken and the actors taking them will enable prioritisation and targeting while programming.
- *The debate regarding the seemingly unresolvable tussle between protection and participation needs to be taken beyond civil society strategic discussions and made more contextualised and actionable*. This should include conscious attempts to demystify

[4]Especially in Koraput, Odisha; Kokrajhar and Karbi Anglong, Assam and Jammu & Kashmir

which capacities are needed for adolescents to be able to participate in disaster risk management efforts without putting them at risk as well as inclusion of their caregivers in the discourse to address their concerns.

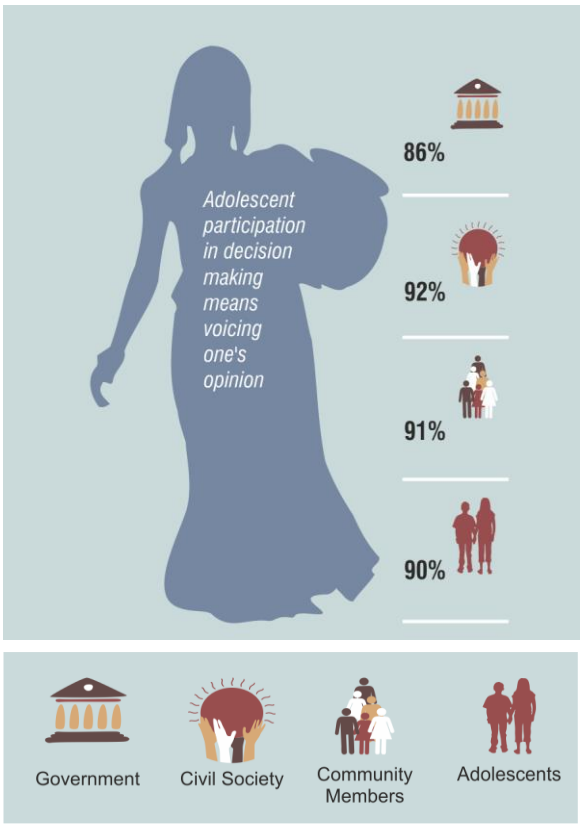
- *The participation discourse as well as practice for adolescents in DRM needs to be expanded beyond child-centred NGOs only*. This has implications on how this issue is framed, and how different actors are able to see value in the participation of adolescents. Experiential insights and research have shown that demonstrated benefits of children (including adolescent) participation across various stages of the DRM cycle leads to greater community acceptance. This, in turn, paves the way for further and deeper engagement in DRM for them, at least at the community level.[35] Programmes must be designed that allow for such participation.
- *Given that most decision points for DRM currently do not have any interface between the decision makers and adolescents, this emerges as a starting point before the participation of adolescents can be advocated for*. Adolescents have to first be 'present' as a social group with specific needs and capacities, before their voice is heard. This presence can be built by both advocacy on their behalf as well as creating mechanisms whereby they are able to know of and meet with key decision makers in the disaster management sector.
- *DRM decision makers should be engaged further on the efficacy argument* (wherein the efficiency of quick decision making and effectiveness of competent decisions is pitched as a priority over adolescent participation). The benefits of adolescent participation need to be highlighted. Moreover, establishing and demonstrating spaces where adolescents can participate (particularly in stages other than implementation) is also essential.

5. Understanding of adolescent participation in decision making emerged as being limited to voicing of opinions for 90% of the adolescents and adults respondents

Discussion: Respondents were asked to reflect on what constituted participation of adolescents in decision making. Six different themes emerged – voicing their opinions, discussions amongst peers, identifying and prioritising their own issues, planning and designing solutions, implementing solutions and reciprocal relationships with adults (wherein decisions evolve through dialogue between adolescents and adults).

'Voicing of opinions' drew overwhelming endorsement as the core element of participation across actor categories of government, CSOs, communities as well as adolescents. As a civil society respondent at a study location asserted, "The beginning of participation would be encouraging adolescents to speak up while adults listen." Identifying and prioritising their own issues and implementing solutions also found some degree of acceptance amongst adult respondents. However, the involvement in implementing solutions appeared to be understood and favoured more in terms of

adolescents implementing adult-framed instructions (for e.g. adults instructing adolescents on debris clearance).



While the above-mentioned emerged from the respondents themselves, the potential elements of participation that did not emerge and upon inquiry were not endorsed, provide a complete picture of perceptions about what participation should entail. Barring a segment of civil society actors, who linked this with ongoing organisational experiences of children's clubs, *bal panchayats* and other such entities, most respondents did not envisage planning and designing solutions as an element of adolescent participation. Only 32% of the government officials across all three states felt that adolescent participation involves planning and designing solutions as well. Government functionaries linked to education at various levels stated that children in School Management Committees (SMCs) could share their opinions but were not expected to play a major role in the discussions or decisions. Comparatively, 68% of civil society respondents upheld this aspect of adolescent participation. **Dialogue-based and process-oriented elements of adolescent participation, especially with adults, were also found to be lacking widespread social validation.** A civil society respondent in Assam opined that dialoguing was a learnt skill, and one that isn't necessarily nurtured through intergenerational conversations in our society. Indeed, such socio-cultural realities, coupled with adult notions of adolescent capacity, influenced notions about what adolescent participation **should not** be. These factors are discussed in more detail in finding 7.

Interestingly, perceptions of adolescent boys and girls also appeared to converge with those of adults. Here, too, voicing of opinions and identifying and prioritising issues found resonance (receiving affirmation from 90% and 75% of the adolescent respondents respectively). As a group of adolescent boys and girls at a study location shared, "They can, at the least, ask us. If our opinions and suggestions are useful, they can use them." Meanwhile, planning and implementing solutions drew fewer responses (54%) among the adolescents. Comparatively, lower percentage of adolescent girls (48%) endorsed their participation in planning and designing solutions than adolescent boys (60%).

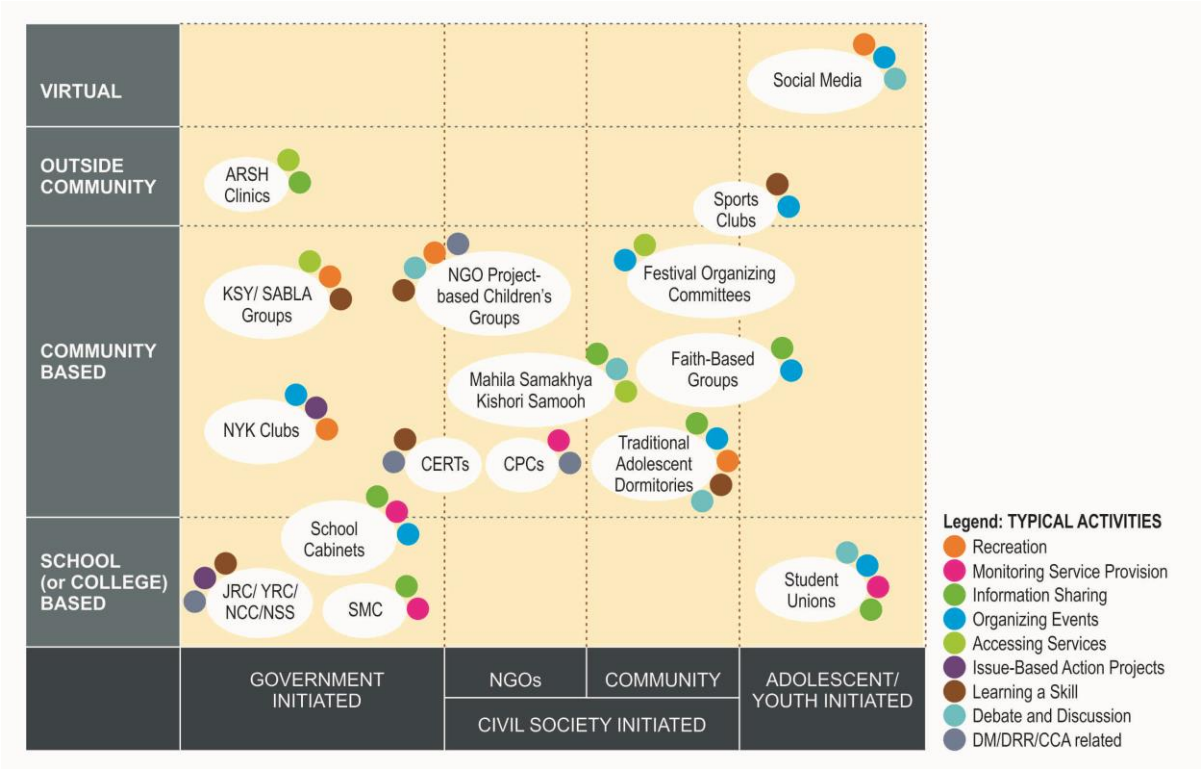
Programmatic Implications

- *There emerges a clear need for constituency building around the participation agenda, supported by debate and discussion towards demystifying what participation for adolescents entails*. While not a new agenda, different actors continue to have diverse opinions about the meaning and manifestations of participation. Programming for enhancing participation needs to engage with, challenge and build consensus upon these diverse opinions at different scales - through conversations, discussions at platforms and mass media campaigns.

6. Several platforms for adolescent participation existed in every state; however, there was limited participation of adolescents in decision making processes within these platforms

Discussion: Existing platforms and spaces for adolescents were analysed with respect to their mandate, design, structure, activities and nature of adolescent participation. Overall, **12-15 platforms were identified in every state**, including those based out of educational institutions (mainly schools), within communities, outside communities as well as those in the virtual world. Of these, only 2-3 platforms were found to be engaging in DRM activities. The types of activities in the other platforms varied between recreation, organising events, information sharing, learning a skill, service provision, monitoring of services, debate and discussion and carrying out issue-based action projects. These have been represented in the visual below.

FIGURE 4 PLATFORMS FOR ADOLESCENTS



Acronyms in the Figure - **ARSH**: Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health; **KSY**: Kishori Shakti Yojana; **NYK**: Nehru Yuva Kendra; **CERT**: Community Emergency Response Team; **CPC**: Child Protection Committee; **JRC**: Junior Red Cross; **YRC**: Youth Red Cross; **NCC**: National Cadet Corps; **NSS**: National Service Scheme; **SMC**: School Management Committee.

Overall, the following salient points emerged from this analysis of platforms:

- Only civil-society and/ or adolescent-initiated platforms provided opportunities for debate and discussion and for doing issue-based projects; government-initiated platforms were found to be more focussed on one-way engagements where adolescents were mere recipients of either services, information or skills.
- All but one type of platform (social media groups) were conceived and designed by adults, wherein the design of the platforms did not envisage or proactively promote the participation of adolescents in decision making about the platforms – be it their goals, nature of activities or the roles of adolescents. This had resulted in most of these platforms being considered by the formal and informal actors as useful only for capacity building of adolescents and not for engagement with DRM related decision making.
- Some platforms provided spaces for decision making by the adolescents regarding membership of the platform i.e. who should be a part of the group or who should be the position-holders in a group. However, this was limited to the selection of members as the structure of the platform was often pre-decided by adults.
- Adolescents were rarely a part of the agenda-setting process. Mechanisms available for their participation in the problem identification stage or the design of activities were found to be minimal. Civil society-initiated and adolescent-initiated social media groups emerged as exceptions to this wherein the groups had varying degrees of say in deciding which issues were taken up by the groups.
- All these varied platforms contributed in identity and agency creation amongst the participant adolescents but this did not necessarily translate into creating a voice for the adolescents as a social group amidst their communities or government officials. This further translated into adolescents having lesser say in decision making before these actors.
- Many of these platforms were children or adolescent-only collectives (with the School Management Committees, Child Protection Committees and disaster preparedness task forces and student unions, as exceptions), without opportunities for interaction with adult collectives.
- The recognition of group facilitators as vital to the success of these platforms did not emerge strongly in program design. Training for facilitators was found to be limited to the content delivery, with lesser focus on the skills needed to engage with this age-group and considering further sub divisions (variations in terms of sex, age, urban/peri urban/ rural location and other background characteristics).

Programmatic Implications

- ***Greater investment on platform facilitators is needed***. The government-initiated adolescent platforms are currently facilitated by service providers who carry out other activities as their primary responsibilities for example, *anganwadi* workers; while others like student clubs often have a teacher in-charge. Building their capacities for meaningful engagement emerges as a key area for enhancing adolescent participation in decision making. Given that they are as much immersed in the contexts that hinder participation as other adults, this capacity building needs to be process-oriented, rather than a one-time activity.
- ***Context-specific platform mapping*** *exercises are needed for working on enriching them towards desired outcomes*. There already exist many platforms which can be built upon for introduction of DRM related themes.
- *Design of new platforms should consider adolescent participation in the designing stage, consciously create interfaces for adolescent-adult interaction, and have more than information-provision as their desired outcomes*.
- ***Existing adolescent-initiated platforms should be supported***. Since currently, these only exist on social media, innovative means of engagement will be needed to ensure that DRM emerges as an issue that appeals to young people and they are willing to debate, discuss and act in that direction. In contexts of conflict, these already exist as vibrant and sometimes volatile spaces; this is both a challenge and an opportunity requiring creative means of engagement.
- ***Adult decision makers*** *amongst formal and informal actors need to be engaged in order to change their perception about the platforms* from merely being means for capacity building of adolescents to becoming constructive spaces for engagement with adolescents for DRM related decision making.
- *Leaders and facilitators of these platforms should be engaged with* to ensure that they can support agency and voice creation amongst adolescents and also promote greater recognition of adolescents as an actor in DRM related decision making.
- *Collaborations with hitherto unengaged with platforms* can be promoted. This includes student unions, youth wings of political parties and socio-religious groups. Such collaborations would provide the opportunity to learn from the experiences of agency and voice creation for adolescents by these platforms. Moreover, it would also facilitate collective efforts for ensuring recognition of adolescents as a vital social group to be engaged with by formal and informal actors during decision making.

7. Deep-rooted power hierarchies and their manifestations in institutions, societies and individuals determined adolescents' participation in decision making

Discussion: Adolescent participation in decision making, realised to varying extents, occurred within a complex environment shaped by intrinsic, socio-cultural and institutional determinants. **Intrinsic determinants** included the adolescents' own notions about the right age for participation, perceptions regarding their abilities to participate and confidence for the same. In fact, adolescent notions of their abilities and related confidence often appeared to be closely linked with adult mind-sets and prevalent norms. Thus, adolescents at multiple locations did not consider themselves to be ready for such participation or that expectations of 'respectful' behaviour towards elders limited their scope of expressing themselves whether within families or communities and other spaces. Meanwhile, a group of men and youth in a rural community at a study location asserted, "They (i.e. adolescents) are not capable and there is no custom here of involving them in community level discussions."

Besides adult notions of adolescent capacity, **socio-cultural determinants** for adolescent participation included the expected role of adolescents in a society, lack of exposure to the value of adolescent participation, existing social hierarchies, and lack of supportive adults and role models. Overall, societal expectations seemed to largely converge on the need for adolescents' preparing for future adulthood rather than proactive participation in decision making in the current stage in their lives. One respondent (a government functionary at the block level at a study location) even stated that too much consultation could disturb the balance of society!

Further, existing social hierarchies also combined with each other to cast a more pervasive and often restricting influence on adolescent participation. Sometimes, a maze of **clan and age hierarchies** contrived to restrict adolescent participation in tribal societies such as the Karbis in Assam. Moreover, **gendered distinctions** could rarely be discounted completely. A group of women community members at a study location reiterated, "Elders are more likely to be receptive to an 18-19 year old boy than a 14-15 year old girl." At select study locations across Jammu and Kashmir and Assam, adolescents and community representatives (particularly boys and men) appeared unsure of the value of participation of girls in decision making. This included one short term and one long term relief camp visited in Assam wherein the related management committees did not have any women. It was interesting to note that even in Ladakh where gender-based discrimination was rarely framed as an issue, the Leh Autonomous Hill Development Council did not have any adult female representation.

Even in the context of student bodies in Assam[5] which have enjoyed considerable influence and even shaped the state's evolution, participation experiences remain mixed. Typically, adolescents would start by becoming a member in their school in class VIII, and then progress to the college, circle and district level units. However, as adolescents, they were rarely considered eligible to be office bearers. An adult respondent (a key office bearer at a district unit in a study location) clearly stated that generally, adolescents did not have the maturity to consider consequences. Meanwhile, a respondent from a political party in Jammu and Kashmir pointed out that 55 year olds continued to head youth wings! Adults appeared to play a key role in adolescent/youth related platforms within the religious domain as well. In the case of the Young Students Movement promoted by the Salesian Brothers in Karbi Anglong (Assam), the local parish priest played an important guiding role. An adult Apex Body took all decisions including those for the youth wing (covering adolescents above 15 years) at the Ladakhi Buddhist Association (LBA) working primarily for preserving their unique cultural and religious identity.

Several respondents across stakeholder categories in the three states also spoke of the rural/urban/peri-urban contexts. It was commonly held that urban adolescents remained more privileged with access to greater opportunities for self-development. In mixed groups, they were more likely to express themselves compared to peers from rural and peri-urban locations more so if the latter belonged to disadvantaged groups.[6] In a general environment where adolescent participation did not appear to be prioritised, those with special needs remained at an even greater disadvantage. Clearly then, **unless the adolescent engagements were planned and facilitated carefully, existing hierarchies of the adult world found their way here as well.**

Directions from policy measures, wherever present, appeared diffused, accounting for **institutional determinants** that were then unable to facilitate adolescent participation. The Odisha State Youth Policy 2013 (which includes adolescents as a sub group)[7], for instance, did highlight the need for engaging youth in decision making processes for local development. However, it did not elaborate on the same. The Odisha State Plan of Action for Children 2009-2012, meanwhile, also identified child participation as a thrust area. This held positive implications for adolescents as well. However, it was not explicitly related to decision making. In a way, socio-cultural determinants also shaped the institutional space wherein barriers at one level became embedded in another. Thus, even platforms for adolescents created through policy and programmatic measures rarely prioritised space for adolescent participation in decision making in their design as highlighted in finding 6 above. Limited opportunities necessarily meant less exposure and scope for growing in confidence

[5] Including All Assam Students Union (AASU), All Assam Bodo Students Union (AABSU), All Assam Santhali Students Union (AASSU), Karbi Students Union (KSU)

[6] Among others, a civil society respondent in Odisha spoke from experiences of consultations involving urban and rural (including tribal and Dalit) adolescents.

[7] Adolescents defined as 13-19 year old within the youth age group of 13-35 years.

to articulate and to negotiate. It created fewer adolescent role models. The cumulative effect of these aspects was a self-perpetuating cycle which constrained adolescent participation in decision making.

Programmatic Implications

- *Intrinsic determinants need to be addressed* by designing platforms and spaces that enable adolescents to nurture self-awareness, navigate the stage of identity formation, question hierarchies, acquire and practice critical thinking skills, and enhance their abilities as well as confidence for participation in decision making.

THE 5TH SPACE FOR ADOLESCENTS

The 5th Space (www.5thspace.in) as a concept finds its origins in the work of the NGO, Pravah, which has been working with young people in India since the early 90s. It is envisioned as a space that allows young people to understand and define their connection to the world as it is.

Traditionally, adolescents spend most of their time in four spaces - at home with family, hanging out with friends, in leisure or at school/ college / workplace. In all these spaces their world view derives from an already given legacy, through a lens which society has donned for millennia. Beyond this received wisdom, they need another space which allows them to create their own understanding of the world.

The 5th space makes the relationships in the other four spaces count by nourishing and enriching the capacities of young people to take effective and responsible action. Based on the belief that self-transformation is the first step towards creating change in our relationships and in society; this space goes beyond the commonly used terms of 'volunteerism' and 'active citizenship' and focuses on three critical aspects of youth development: Understanding the Self, Building meaningful relationships, and Impacting Society.

Those seeking to programme for enhanced adolescent participation in decision making can draw from Pravah's experience in its programme designs.

- *Initiatives that enable agency-creation amongst adolescents need to be designed and promoted*. This can be done by creating mechanisms within existing institutions. For example, competitions or groups along the lines of the Model UN can be created. There already exist *Bal Panchayats* across many states of the country, but few offer opportunities for adolescents to engage with adults in administrative or political roles.
- *Communications strategy for addressing obstructive socio-cultural norms* should be designed. Utilising behaviour change communication, relevant messages and media should be selected for promoting a dialogue with adults at different scales.
- *Existing policies should be reviewed and advocacy measures adopted to incorporate explicit mention of participation in decision making.* Further, the child rights discourse can be used more effectively to push the agenda for adolescent participation.
- *Responsibilities for working with adolescents including promoting convergent actions should be clearly identified*. Government initiatives on adolescents are anchored by various departments depending on its specific nature (women and child development,

social welfare, health, education etc). It is important that an overall sense of inputs being provided and resulting changes are tracked holistically and in terms of the integrated development of adolescents including their life skills. This may also call for identifying a nodal position/agency for this purpose.

- *Potential spaces for adolescents should be identified and adolescent-adult dialogue and action promoted*. This could include *muhalla* committees, other local groups for community development, faith based groups/organisations etc. The need for working with non-conventional actors such as political bodies, students unions etc has been mentioned earlier.

8. **While understanding of adolescence and participation remained culturally embedded, culture itself was believed to be in an age of transition. This age of transition offered opportunities for revisiting and reviving traditional practices for adolescent participation with contemporary relevance.**

Discussion: It is believed[36] that the 20th century marked a shift in societal perceptions about adolescents with an increased public concern about child health and safety and focus on their protection from moral and physical hazards, leading to restrictions on their engagements. This was echoed by a Karbi scholar in Assam, who said "adolescents are no longer viewed from an egalitarian lens even in tribal cultures because of the perceived increase in potential negative influences in the society".

Meanwhile, out-migration increased with growing numbers of adolescents moving away with or without families. Notions of community in urban and rural areas began to be affected with certain traditions and mores gradually losing their relevance. The inter-dependent collective that formed the basis of the social fabric also appeared to be adversely impacted. However, this transitional period also provides scope for refining and creating certain practices so as to bring in the recognition of adolescents as a social group and enhance their participation in decision making.

Programmatic Implications

- ***Traditional practices for adolescent participation with contemporary relevance need to be revived.*** Discussions with a few elderly respondents in Odisha and Assam highlighted traditional cultural practices that fostered participation of adolescents by design. Older adolescents (15 years and above) were included within traditional tribal youth platforms such as *Jirsong* for the Karbis in Assam and *Dhangda/dhandighar/Ghotul* in Odisha. These platforms represented socially validated and prioritised spaces that were implicitly linked to the passage of generations into adulthood. Thus, there was an emphasis on grooming as well as perpetuation of tribal cultural practices (including music, dance and storytelling). They also offered specific avenues for participation in community life. Both Jirsongs and Dhangdas were dormitories for unmarried boys and

girls. Specifically, Dhangdas promoted collective cultural and recreational activities and selection of partners. The Jirsongs focused on designated tasks such as clearing land in the local jhum (slash and burn) cultivation and cooking food for others engaged in this work. Headed by their own leader (called Kleng Sar Po), they would also help families during marriages, death ceremonies and other key events in the community. Their contribution was valued. The Kleng Sar Po, just like the village head (Sarte), would be offered a bottle of wine or beetle nut as an offering from these families. Significantly, both Jirsongs and Dhangdas also promoted participation in decision making and its consequences as these were self-governed with their own sets of leaders and sub groups as needed.

However, respondents from local communities and civil society at locations in both states spoke about the changing social fabric wherein these platforms appeared to be losing their importance. However, as a civil society respondent in Karbi Anglong pointed out, one could build on traditional foundations for adolescent/youth organisations and enhance their relevance by infusing these with contemporary purpose. Even with its ups and downs, the four decade old annual Karbi Youth Festival offered a telling example. Held in Karbi Anglong (Assam), the festival essentially showcases music and also serves to reiterate the Karbi identity. Organised by the Karbi Cultural Society, it remains a key cultural event which draws the younger generation. There are implications here for embedding the positives from traditional platforms including reasserting cultural ties and continuity as well as democratic group processes including participation in decision making.

- *Collective practices in urban areas wherein adolescents can participate in decision making need to be evolved and fostered*. Urban communities are often characterised by nuclear families and less stringent adherence to social norms that, comparatively, are said to hold greater power in the rural settings. This offers an opportunity for promoting adolescent participation in decision making within families as well as collective spaces linked to community development. Such spaces/platforms can be promoted in a manner that also encourages adolescent-adult dialogue, decision making and collective actions.

[3] RECOMMENDATIONS

This section consolidates the findings and their respective programmatic implications to present **recommendations for enhancing adolescent participation in decision making related to disaster risk management.** These findings have been presented from UNICEF's perspective, and can be adapted by UNICEF's government counterparts as well as non-government partners.

1) ***Ensure key policy and other instruments provide scope for adolescent participation in decision making.*** It is important to locate adolescent participation across the DRM cycle within key documents such as the State Disaster Management Policy as well as the State and District Disaster Management Plans. These instruments can then pave the way for promoting such engagement in specific initiatives.

2) ***Create spaces within formal decision making institutions for enhancing participation of adolescents that is not limited by current and more common notion of merely acting on adult instructions.*** Adolescent participation must be incorporated across all stages of DRM cycle and CCA actions. Thus, it should be concretised within problem identification, solution mapping, review-learning and contribution in policy formulation as well. The 'low-hanging fruits' in this would include creating a role for adolescent groups in effective targeting in select existing programmes, supporting service delivery, monitoring of service provision, and support in reporting as well as during preparedness, response and rehabilitation stage initiatives. The following specific aspects can be considered.

   (a)Work with the *Disaster Management Departments and Authorities* in states towards
   - recognition of adolescents as a social group with differential needs in disasters
   - creating opportunities for interface between adolescents and DRM officials at different levels
   - demonstrating the value of adolescent participation in effective decision making and action for DRM

   (b)Work with the *Departments of Education* towards using existing platforms for ensuring adolescent participation in school safety processes

   (c)Create opportunities for adolescents to engage, interact and work with *people's representatives* (urban and rural) in identifying disaster risks and designing and implementing DRM actions

   (d) Create interfaces for adolescents with the *district administration and the autonomous councils* in Sixth schedule areas[37] to constructively engage adolescents in DRM decisions

3) ***Engage with corporates and CSOs including non-conventional agencies*** like student unions, youth wings of political parties and socio-religious groups. Learnings from their experiences of engaging with adolescents can be considered and adapted in evolving more inclusive, democratic and adolescent-controlled platforms. Ultimately, the emphasis should be on promoting adolescent participation in decision making in both formal and informal mechanisms and spaces.

4) ***Engage with media for adolescent-oriented constructive programming and content creation.*** The content should question barriers in recognition of adolescents as a social group and their participation in decision making. Success stories that showcase adolescent capabilities, including participation in decision making, should be promoted.

5) ***Adolescent programming needs to be contextual and differential.*** It should focus on:
(a) constituency building for recognition of adolescents as a social group and their enhanced participation in decision making
(b) recognise that adolescents are not a homogeneous group and wherein their evolving capacities and needs must be factored
(c) promote identity, agency and voice creation amongst adolescents through strengthened platforms and inclusive institutions
(d) life skills strengthening including emphasising decision making and engagement with adults components
(e) working with adults to encourage them to move beyond the narrow "utilitarian" lens through which adolescents are often perceived
(f) creating means for engaging with adolescents in institutions as well as those affected by and/or involved in civil strife / violence
(g) ensure short term programming is guided by a long term societal change framework

6) ***Ensure that adolescent programme designs include working extensively with the key people who inhabit an adolescent's universe.*** Besides focusing on the adolescents themselves, programmes should also prioritise engaging with parents, other caregivers, teachers and platform facilitators.

ANNEXURE 1: THE ADOLESCENT PARTICIPATION SCALE

The Adolescent Participation Scale				
Criteria	**1- No**	**2-Low**	**3-Moderate**	**4-High**
Who sets the agenda?	Adults make decisions and take action and tell adolescents what to do.	Adults take the lead in deciding what to do but inform adolescents and involve them in action.	Adolescents contribute to or lead in setting the agenda and are involved in action.	Adolescents take the lead in deciding what is to be done, what roles they will take and what others need to do.
• Is participation transparent and informative? • Is participation voluntary? • Is participation respectful? • Is participation relevant to the lives of adolescents? • Do the ways of working enable adolescents to participate? • Is there equality of opportunity? Inclusive? • Are the facilitator's trained/ skilled? • Is it safe for adolescents? • Are the adults accountable?	Not applicable	Any 3 of the 9 criteria are satisfied.	Any 6 of the 9 criteria are satisfied.	More than 6 of the 9 criteria are satisfied.

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[27] A recent review by Karsten (2012) highlights 36 such models from 1969 to 2012, of which 11 focus on the participation of children and young people, including Hart's ladder of children participation (1992), UNICEF's

strategic approach to participation (2001) and Wong et al.'s typology of youth participation (2011). See, Karsten (2012) "Participation Models: Citizens, Youth, Online", 2nd edition, November 2012

[28] See for e.g. Practice Standards in Children's Participation (2005); Minimum Standards for Consulting with Children (2007)

[29] UNICEF (2007) The Participation of Children and Young People in Emergencies. A guide for relief agencies, based largely on experiences in the Asian tsunami response

[30] See also, Save the Children (2013) Guidelines for Children's Participation in Humanitarian Programming

[31] Crockett, Lisa J., "Cultural, Historical, and Subcultural Contexts of Adolescence: Implications for Health and Development" (1997). Faculty Publications, Department of Psychology. Paper 244. http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/psychfacpub/244

[32] Ibid.

[33] Jejeebhoy. S. J. and R. Acharya (2014) Adolescents in Rajasthan 2012: Changing Situation and Needs. New Delhi: Population Council

[34] Ibid.

[35] UNICEF and Children in a Changing Climate (2009). Research Report Children and Disaster Risk Reduction: Taking stock and moving forward. Brighton: IDS

[36] Crockett, Lisa J., "Cultural, Historical, and Subcultural Contexts of Adolescence: Implications for Health and Development" (1997). Faculty Publications, Department of Psychology. Paper 244.

[37] These are specific areas which have been granted autonomy as administrative units under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. These areas are usually inhabited by tribal communities and this categorisation represents an effort aimed at preserving tribal autonomy and cultural practices while focusing attention on their development as well.

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Cover Photo: Gauri Rishi/ An adolescent monk in Leh, Jammu and Kashmir.