



# CHILD PLAY-BASED ASSESSMENT TOOL

**Nepal Red Cross**

**CASE STUDY**





Photo description: Volunteer facilitating activity with children as part of pilot project  
Photo credit: Nepal Red Cross

## Background

Sesame Workshop and IFRC have formed a strategic partnership to create content and programs focused on the safety, early education, and mental health of children aged 4-8 years.

Recognizing gaps in understanding and assessing young children's mental health, they have developed a play-based assessment tool for use in humanitarian and non-humanitarian situations. Thus, Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), tested the assessment tool, between May-June 2024, with the financial and technical support from the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) in the emergency context of remote three districts which were affected by the Karnali Earthquake.

The team who conducted this play-based assessment (PBA) was comprised of public health professionals and those who had previous experience working with children in emergencies. In other words, they were well capacitated and skilled to use this tool.

## Who was Supported and How

The tool was used with 12 children in disaster affected districts of the Karnali earthquake. The participants in the assessment were a mixed group of males and females and represented diverse backgrounds. Moreover, 12 caregivers/parents were also interviewed as part of the assessment.

The following approaches were applied during the play-based assessment:

1. All the parents/caregivers were informed at least one day prior to seek their permission to have their children participate.
2. Premises for the assessment were agreed based on accessibility for children and parents / caregivers. The premises were a Nepal Red Cross District Chapter, a school and a community center.

3. Consents and assents were collected for the play-based assessment, interviews, and for taking and using photos.

## Successes

- The PBA was considered a successful, child-friendly tool to use with children ages 4-8 years in each of the three districts where piloting occurred.
- A key reason for the piloting success was the teamwork approach applied by the NRC.
- The partnership between NRC and the Canadian Red Cross in Nepal added value for its successful implementation through helping to facilitate the process, providing support, and working in a unified way.
- A key role in the PBA is the notetaker / enumerators. These volunteers need to be keen observers to provide accurate scores. In addition, the facilitator needs to have patience to help children clearly understand the instructions.
- A few songs at the start of the PBA were replaced with local songs from the region. This made children more comfortable to engage in the PBA.

## Challenges and Difficulties

- The PBA was easily understandable to the enumerators who were assessing the children and interviewing the caregivers/parents.
- Children participating in PBA enjoyed the assessment process. However, contextualization is necessary for adoption of the tool in different settings. Factors around geographic context, local culture, and socio-economic status of families should all be considered, etc. As a concrete example, NRC replaced the songs in the PBA with local songs and this made children more comfortable.
- The time given to draw puppets (15 minutes) in section two of the PBA was a challenge for children. It would be better to have at least 20 minutes.
- In section 5 of the PBA, it would help children engage more if the animals used reflect local animals rather than ones they are less familiar with.

## Lessons Learned

- The different geographical settings (urban / rural) in Nepal creates discrepancies around access to school, exposure to social awareness information, supplies and materials. Thus, the PBA needs to make space to contextualize (e.g., locally songs, naming local animals).
- The tool will benefit from considering the varying backgrounds of children who participate. For example, differences in age (e.g., 4-year olds compared to 8-year olds) and socio-economic status (e.g., children from higher income families compared to those living in poverty). By addressing these factors, the PBA tool can be better tailored to meet the unique needs of children in different environments. This customization will help to ensure that the tool is relevant and effective across diverse settings, enhancing its ability to support the safety and well-being of children.



- The tool is effective in highlighting how children's moods can change based on the scenarios they are asked to consider.
- The facilitator and enumerators must be well trained before carrying out the PBA.
- It is best when the facilitator and enumerators participate in each activity and do every activity themselves. This helps make children comfortable.
- When parents / caregivers are present, children tend to focus on them, seeking their responses and being guided on how to answer or behave. To generate genuine responses from children, it is better to conduct the assessment separately from their parents / caregivers.
- Providing children with encouragement and appreciation from time-to-time helped them open-up and more actively participate in the PBA.
- To be effective and allow careful observation, group sizes should be small (4-6 children per small group). Larger groups make it difficult to observe and enumerate responses.
- In section 7 of the PBA, when children respond differently in terms of how their puppets feel compared to how children replied about their own feelings in section 3, the reason for the difference can be explored more clearly.
- In the Parent / Caregiver's Survey:
  - Question number 8 should have the option for more than 8 family members.
  - Question number 27 should include access to television and radio.
  - Question number 19- [If yes to Q13] a question on the parent / caregiver's highest level of education could be added.
  - A question can be added on how frequently a child gets sick to describe their physical health because caregivers seem confused by the existing question asking about physical health.
  - Also, a question can be included on children's relationship with their siblings or other family members.
  - It can also help to add a question on whether the child is known to have experienced violence, abuse, or bullying.