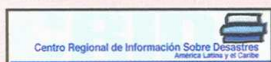


Disseminating Information is as Important as Generating it



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ONE OF THE GOALS OF THE IDNDR IS TO "...SPREAD EXISTING AND FUTURE INFORMATION ON DISASTER REDUCTION.." IN FACT, THERE IS A WHOLE LOT OF INFORMATION BEING PREPARED AND ORGANIZED ON NATURAL HAZARDS, POLICIES, TRAINING, COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES, ETC. DISASTER COORDINATORS, UNIVERSITIES, RESEARCHERS, SCIENTISTS AND PROFESSIONALS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS HAVE ALL AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN GENERATING INFORMATION THROUGH PROMOTION, DISASTER IMPACT ANALYSIS, THESIS, STUDIES, WORKSHOPS AND RESEARCH PROGRAMS.

But does all this information reach the ones that need it to take accurate decisions? Or the ones that work in the field with community organizations and development work to reduce vulnerability and respond adequately to reduce disasters?

One of "the missing links" is frequently the lack of access, processing and dissemination of the information available to achieve disaster reduction. In this sense the IDNDR should make a difference. There are many ways of improving the access to useful information. A "modern" way is to make the information available on the World Wide Web and Internet. However, still remains the need to manage printed and audiovisual documents.

This article describes how a couple of organizations – most with international or regional outreach – is developing a system to collect, process and disseminate existing written documentation and audiovisuals produced locally or internationally. The first step was the conformation of a multi-organizational Regional Disaster Information Center for Latin America and the Caribbean (CRID) based on the experiences of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) / IDNDR Regional Disaster Documentation Center in San José, Costa Rica. The overall umbrella for CRID is provided by the IDNDR Secretariat through the regional representative in San José. Member organizations are: PAHO/WHO, CEPREDENAC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Regional Emergency Office of Médecins Sans Frontières and the National Emergency Commission of Costa Rica, who hosts the Center. Another important partner is LA RED, the Network for Social Studies in Disaster Prevention for Latin America.

A second step is to create a Regional Disaster Information Network, where universities, research centers, NGOs and national organizations form part of an interactive information exchange, through bibliographic and Internet services.

Partnerships and Networking

Sharing information and spreading it is a task for many. It requires resources and is therefore best accomplished by building on partnerships among a wide range of interested organizations, that will benefit by the availability of their own and others documents.

The CRID was born as a multi-organizational project after a Regional Meeting on Disaster Information Strategy and Dissemination, held in San José, February 1997. The conclusions issued by the meeting, convened by IDNDR-DHA, were twofold:

a) To strengthen the Regional Disaster Documentation Center (PAHO-IDNDR) in San José and to widen it into a multi-organizational Regional Disaster Reduction Information Clearing House. Interested organizations then further developed the idea and finally signed, in May 1997, a Letter of Understanding to create the Regional Disaster Information Center.

b) To create a Regional Disaster Reduction Information Network (Sistema Regional de Información sobre Reducción de Desastres) where all existing Documentation



Centers or Information Servers in the region may form part an organized and interlinked way. The project has been developed among CRID members and LA RED. Other interested partners – as for instance the Unit for Environment and Sustainable Development of the Organization of American States – have expressed their possible involvement. This system will be based on linking databases and full-text documents via Internet and a joint Homepage (mega-page) and on collecting, processing and disseminating hard copies, according to the capacity of each partner, under a common methodology.

The Regional Disaster Information Center, CRID

The Regional Disaster Information Center, CRID, is based on the experiences and infrastructure of the Regional Disaster Documentation Center founded and administered since 1990 by the Pan American Health Organization, Regional Office of the World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) in accordance with the goals of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

Since 1994, the Regional IDNDR Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, also was a partner of the Center, ensuring its supervision

and guidance. CRID is housed in the facilities of the National Emergency Commission in San José, Costa Rica. It collects published and unpublished information about disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, rehabilitation and reconstruction, and all

other issues related to disaster management and disaster reduction planning. The partner organizations will develop a common policy for processing and disseminating relevant information to their local partner organizations and to all interested partners.

Promotion will also be an important role of CRID. CRID's mission is to serve as a platform for inter-organizational and interdisciplinary coordination in order to increase the production and dissemination of information on disaster and risk reduction, and to provide quality services to a wide spectrum of users in the region.

Specific Goals are:

A. To improve and widen the scope of disaster reduction information gathering, processing and dissemination.

- B. To strengthen national and local capacity to establish and maintain information centers.
- C. To promote communication through the Internet.
- D. To contribute to the establishment of the Regional Disaster Reduction Information System.

What does CRID do so far?

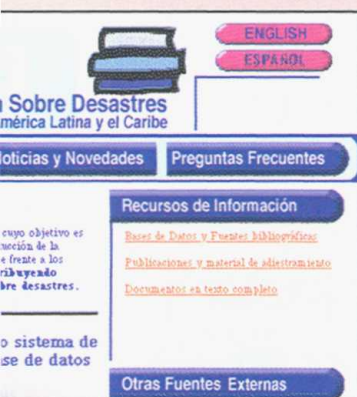
Administered by PAHO on behalf of the member organizations, the Center counts on a five person staff at the moment. Main tasks are to index and process existing documents, reports and audio-visuals produced in the region or about the region into a common database called DESASTRES; to disseminate information of the existence of its services, and to distribute copies of documents on request. Over 300 requests comes by mail, e-mail, phone or fax each month, and a great number of additional users visit the Center directly.

The service has been free so far, funded by the PAHO Disaster Preparedness Program as part of its technical support to the countries in the Region.

The future policy will be to find a proper charging policy and ask for voluntary contributions to cover mailing and, whenever possible, for the cost of the photocopy service. Basic national and local counterparts should continue to receive free service. Some partner organizations donated considerable quantities of their publications, which are distributed in their original format, as are PAHO/WHO and IDNDR publications. The DESASTRES database lists more than 10,000 titles (June 1997), as well as over 150 magazine titles and 250 audiovisual materials.

The Center is also promoting the creation of National Networks for information dissemination on disasters, built mainly upon the structure of health information documentation networks so far. A Manual for organizing a Disaster Documentation Center has recently been prepared to support national and local initiatives to create and maintain their own Documentation Centers.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CRID:	Centro Regional de Información sobre Desastres
CEPRENAC:	Centro de Coordinación en Prevención de Desastres Naturales de América Central
CNE:	Comisión Nacional de Emergencia de Costa Rica
MSF:	Médecins Sans Frontières
PAHO:	Pan American Health Organization (OPS: Organización Panamericana de la Salud)
IFRC:	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
LA RED:	La Red de Estudios Sociales en Prevención de Desastres en América Latina
OAS:	Organization of American States