

## BACKGROUND

Loss of life and destruction of property from natural and technological disasters has become regular news in the daily press. Disasters do not respect boundaries – the consequences of emergencies are increasingly being felt across national boundaries, among diverse communities, and outside the company fence. Lack of understanding of what to do during a dramatic event frequently exacerbates the losses.

While local communities are in theory able to deal better with disasters than we often believe, they generally lack the awareness and information to take effective action when something happens. If we could reach out to communities before disasters and inform them of what to do 'just in case', then the impacts could be dramatically reduced.

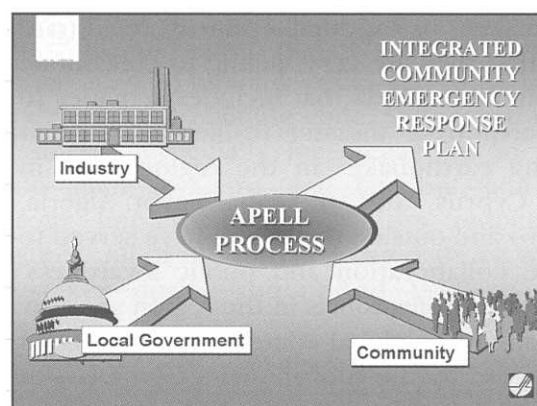
Following some very major accidents in the 1980s, UNEP worked with an international consortium to develop just such a process for local communities. "Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at Local Level", generally better known for its acronym "APELL", This has become a global methodology available to communities to minimize the occurrence and harmful effects of emergencies in all countries where natural or industrial hazards may occur. The APELL "Handbook" provides a detailed description of how to develop a coordinated, integrated, and well functioning emergency response plan for local communities.

The strategy of APELL is to identify and create awareness of risks in a community to initiate measures for risk reduction and mitigation and to foster preparedness for emergencies in industries, local governments, and the population at large. It is based on open dialogue and cooperation, not on fixed instructions in a rigid master plan.

## OBJECTIVES

The name already suggests what the program achieves - community preparedness in case of accident or disaster. These outcomes are achieved through a more structured approach to community participation in emergency planning. It is based on a meaningful two-way dialogue between representatives of the source of the hazard (e.g. a land-owner, or a company), local authorities (usually the emergency service, e.g. fire and /or police) and community leaders (who can inform their constituencies). This

dialogue is achieved through a broad-based "Coordinating Group" that first reviews the hazard situation and then proposes some the measures to address the risks. Any of the above partners could convene such a Group, however it is most common for local government or industry to start the process. The outcome of the process is an emergency plan to which the community has had full input, and which is understood by ordinary citizens. Being aware and prepared naturally also leads to action to prevent accidents from happening in the first place - i.e. risk reduction.



## ACTIVITIES

The concept of community involvement in disaster planning has been successfully used in many communities world wide, both in industrialized and in developing countries. Some countries such as France, India and the USA even have regulations to ensure that communities are consulted about disaster risks. Some major companies are also now practicing a more open approach to local communities. But such consultation is not yet universal. Further promotion and implementation is needed in many countries and activity sectors. Some of the situations where the process has been successfully employed are shown in the brochure "APELL Worldwide".

## ACHIEVEMENTS

Emergency planning is now following the trend of community involvement that we already see in other areas of governance, and indeed also in corporate affairs. The reason is simple - an informed and educated civil society is better able to deal with the many day to day complexities that modern life brings including safety. During an emergency there is no time to

educate the community - it is vital that they should already know how to react in situations where they may be at risk, and indeed how to ensure a higher level of primary safety in everyday activities

Places where communities have been involved in safety and emergency planning have lower levels of accidents and loss. Relatively modest investments in safety and preparedness by governments can avoid the massive costs incurred with disaster response and clean-up - costs for which there are no economic returns. Industry has already learned this lesson - companies with high levels of safety performance also tend to be more profitable because they avoid the high damage costs associated with possible accidents.

## LESSONS

Involving the community in emergency prevention, preparedness and response is the central feature of the APELL process. But community involvement can only take place if the right framework is in place

An important lesson learned from past experience is the need for a neutral facilitator to bring the various social partners together in the Coordinating Group that oversees the preparation of the emergency plan. And it is important that the various partners work in a cooperative and transparent fashion to contribute to such a plan. Since APELL is a voluntary initiative, it will only work if all partners are willing to participate and are eager to see the results

Transparency in hazard information is another prerequisite, since the emergency plan must be created around the actual risks in a prioritized manner. Every contingency plan must be regularly rehearsed. An important part of the process is therefore community involvement in rescue drills and testing the plan. The experience of such drills is then used to continually improve and evolve the plan as the community grows.

Community participation is difficult in the absence of an appropriate governmental framework. Right to know of risk information, regional mapping of major natural hazards, coordination of civil defense and environmental services, and a legal structure for community participation are among the ingredients that governments can contribute to make the process more successful, and more widespread. For the APELL process to take root at local level on a broad scale there must be an APELL program to provide the support that local communities and municipalities need. Creating this 'program' is still often a big challenge for the authorities, requiring a high-level endorsement and effective coordination of agencies

## FUTURE

From its genesis in the chemicals industry the APELL process has seen wider application in other technical risk areas such as hazardous materials transport and storage, mining, port areas. Nevertheless the principles are universal and are equally valid when applied to natural disasters, health risks, and even gradual environmental change such as climate variations.

While the principles are well established, much needs to be done still for the various component parts to function better. Various methods of hazard identification and evaluation need to be better adapted at local level. A legislative base for right-to-know of risk information also clears away the ambiguities over information access in public meetings. A formal government structure for coordination of agencies and services concerned with safety and emergency management will ensure higher levels of cooperation on the Coordinating Group. A 'champion' in the government for the APELL process ensures pro-active application in new localities where emergency planning needs to be enhanced

The capacity of governments and communities for effective emergency planning and preparedness still needs to be enhanced in many places around the world. An effective information and training program - both national and international - will be needed in the years ahead. Information on successful case studies and examples can give confidence to communities and agencies that the APELL process does indeed work, and can deliver the result of an informed and aware community that is less vulnerable to disasters.



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# Global Open Learning Forum On Risk Education (GOLFRE): A Grass Root Capacity Building Initiative

## BACKGROUND

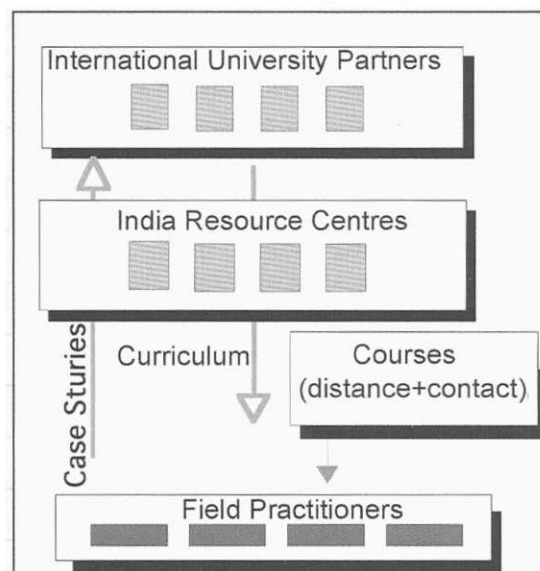
For education on risk reduction to have its desired impact on communities, it needs to reach out to the remotest development worker in the field. Such education needs to be made accessible and affordable for frontline practitioners who operate at community level and are often far removed from conventional knowledge centers such as universities. An open learning model, with distance learning options and contact programs wherever possible, is the most viable means for creating this link between centers of learning and the field worker.

Another advantage that the model offers, when used with a case teaching methodology, is that it constantly renews the knowledge base of universities through addition of analyzed information on field practice. The interaction with field practitioners makes university knowledge more relevant.

The flexible and adaptable nature of the model makes it suitable for the 'new age' student who may be on the job in the field, and not having prior formal training. The Conference is an opportunity to raise awareness of the urgency to focus on the vulnerable, taking into account community level knowledge needs to address disaster risk.

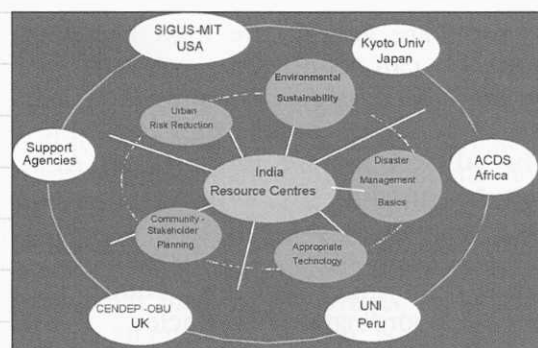
The GOLFRE concept was developed at a meeting of partners organised at Delhi in March 2004 by SEEDS with support from Christian Aid. Participants included the African Centre for Disaster Studies (South Africa), CARE (South Africa), CENDEP-Oxford Brookes University (UK), SIGUS-MIT (USA), School of Planning and Architecture (India), UNCRD (Japan), UNDP (India) and UNI-University of Engineering (Peru). The forum now proposes a formal launch of activities at the WCDR.

Learning Forum on Risk Education (GOLFRE) to bridge the existing gap between knowledge and practice - knowledge as it exists in universities and research centers, and practices as is carried out in the field by NGO workers, community volunteers and government field staff. The forum recognizes the strength of knowledge that exists with practitioners, and the value that academicians can add to it with their interpretations and analysis. Its mandate is to tap the tacit knowledge, practical wisdom and human capital latent in the minds and practices of field workers as the principal resource for training and education. The process will be one of analyzing field practices, and feeding the lessons back to field in a reflective manner. Along with this, it also strives to learn from practice and influence strategic and policy levels towards being more ground-reality oriented. As such it addresses the roles of a range of stakeholders including researchers, teachers, practitioners and policy planners.



## OBJECTIVES

A group of internationally based universities and NGOs have come together as the Global Open



## ACTIVITIES

In the initial phase GOLFRE activities will focus on India and the Asian region. The first curriculum set will be developed based on a researched repository of case studies. The respective thematic expertise of the partners will be put to use for developing the curriculum. The five university based centers linked to the initiative will contribute course curricula, which will be tested and delivered through five field resource centers in India. The resource centers will leverage on Parvat Yatra (Journey to Mountain for risk reduction initiatives in the mountain region) and Tar Yatra (Journey to Coastal areas for risk reduction initiatives in the coastal areas), the ongoing campaigns on risk reduction in India, to gather field information and to deliver courses.

The primary target group for the courses is field practitioners, i.e. field staff of NGOs, local governments and community organizations. Aspiring practitioners such as students of development studies will also form an important segment of the target group.

The activities to be undertaken to implement the program are

- Research on field practices and documentation of case studies towards creation of a knowledge bank
- Development of teaching curriculum on community based disaster management, using the case studies and special inputs from partner universities.
- Testing of curriculum through pilot training programs in the field and a pilot distance-learning program through the Internet
- Advocacy and dissemination to propagate the program and expand the group of academic and NGO partners

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The initiative

- Considers disaster risk reduction as a developmental issue
- Links universities and NGOs for creating a bridge between theoretical knowledge and field practice
- Utilizes local knowledge as the core to its educational programs
- Integrates traditional wisdom and the arts into promoting risk reduction
- Offers an online menu of best practice principles and case studies for training and education

- Targets field workers and development practitioners through affordable and accessible education media

## FUTURE

Starting from Indian case study research and delivery of the educational programs to Indian target audiences, the initiative will gradually build up to cover South Asia, Asia and finally will have a global outreach in five years time. The current efforts to attract funding support are to cover the initial four years of activities. These will include tasks of researching appropriate case studies, developing course curriculum, and delivery of courses through the distance learning model as well as pilot contact programs. It is aimed to achieve a considerable amount of self-reliance through fee based revenue streams by the end of the four years period. By that point the initiative will expand its outreach area to African and Latin American regions through nodal partners there.



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