

IDNDR in Latin America and the Caribbean

The First Latin American IDNDR Meeting was held in Guatemala in September 1991. High-level

functionaries from 20 countries participated. A "Declaration from Guatemala" was issued, together with a long list of recommendations for the scientific, civil defense, planning, foreign affairs and health sectors. In the Caribbean, a similar meeting was held in Jamaica, in May 1992. In the Guatemala meeting, the participating countries stressed the importance of the IDNDR Secretariat paying more direct and "aggressive" attention to the Region, to offer political support to their efforts to promote disaster prevention and mitigation, and to develop programs directed to the sectors involved in disaster reduction.

The recommendations made in this First Meeting inspired the government of Sweden to offer support to the IDNDR Secretariat, facilitating a Program Officer for the Latin American Region for a maximum period of three years. The Pan American Health Organization's Disaster Preparedness Program (PAHO-PED) offered technical and administrative collaboration. Consequently, the Regional IDNDR Office moved into the Sub-regional Office of PED in San Jose, Costa Rica, in the beginning of August 1992.

Decade Partners in the Region

Important participants in the Decade in the Region are:

The objectives of the Regional IDNDR Office are:

- To disseminate widely the existence and the goals of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, in order to create conditions that will support disaster reduction measures.
- To stimulate activities and achievements by National IDNDR Committees or similar national organizations.
- To stimulate training and formal education initiatives in disaster management in all their phases and aspects, emphasizing the ties between disaster and development.

Governments:

National Committees or IDNDR Focal Points, generally coordinated by Emergency or Civil Protection

Commissions. The impact is best in the few cases when Ministries of Planning, and Finance, NGOs and other sectors form an active part of the Committee. The Health Sector often has brought together the other sectors.

Communities: are the final beneficiaries of the disaster reduction actions. In some cases have started public works, local emergency committees, etc., on their own initiative or supported by national or International programs. Community organizations and other

NGOs are key in the promotion and execution of projects and programs to reduce disaster vulnerability, the preparation of emergency plans, local risk maps, disaster alerts and evacuation.

Regional Organizations: like PAHO (Pan American Health Organization also part of United Nations as regional office of WHO), OAS (Organization of American States), and ECLAC

(Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) play a role as a catalyst, as do CARICOM (Caribbean Community) and CDERA (Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency), and CEPREDENAC (Coordination Center for National Disaster Prevention in Central America).

Scientific and Social Organizations and Networks: like CERESIS, CUSEC, FLACSO, the Social Studies Network for Disaster Prevention in Latin America (La Red), and many universities, which are starting to integrate the topic of disasters into their curricula.

United Nations Agencies like UNDP (United Nations Development Program), OHA (Department of Humanitarian Affairs), UNCHS-Habitat, WMO (World Meteorological Organization), and UNESCO, promote or support disaster reduction programs in the region. Many bilateral agencies are as well

supporting these or other agencies (Canada, Sweden, France, USA, Japan, among others).

Non-Governmental Organizations: work in training, development programs and risk reduction projects (some examples, in Peru: PREDES and ITDG; El Salvador: CEPRODE; Venezuela: FUNDAPRIS; and Ecuador: CIUDAD. Internationally: Global Vision). Some work in emergency assistance: The Red Cross, CARITAS, etc. -Others have a scientific/technical focus.

The Private Sector: Is playing an important role. Some examples: the Petroleum Companies in Venezuela sustain seismic networks, have built protection walls and promote disaster-preparedness; local construction companies in Panamá have helped in riverbed protection projects; the tourism industry in the Caribbean is helping risk-mapping and preparedness programs.

GENERAL ACTIVITIES involving the IDNDR Regional Officer

Major Events:

The Regional IDNDR Office has presented papers and participated in round tables on IDNDR in 17 events including conferences and workshops in the Region (see attached Appendix), during which the Officer has had the opportunity to debate and meet many of the people and institutions involved in disaster work in the Region and to contribute with concepts and proposals within the frame of the IDNDR targets. This presence has been important for the dissemination of the goals and

objectives of IDNDR.

An important regional event for IDNDR was the Inter-american Conference on Disaster Reduction, convoked by the government of Colombia in Cartagena de Indias and supported by the majority of regional or international organizations working on the theme. It was attended by almost 1000 participants from the entire Region. This Conference offered an opportunity to exchange information on a multitude of topics related to disaster mitigation, and national and local

experiences. At the same time, there were meetings and seminars organized by PAHO, OAS, the Red Cross Federation, the Network for Social Studies, and the US-Latin American Partnership. The Conference also served as a preparatory Regional Forum for the World Conference.

Other important events have been the Workshops and Seminars to prepare the outline for a Central American Disaster Reduction Plan, involving all economic and social sectors, in the frame of the Central American Integration System (SICA). Close to these attempts are the legal aspects and promotion by the Central American Parliament to prepare a Frame Law for National Disaster Management.

National Promotion:

In order to analyze how to strengthen National IDNDR Committees and similar entities, their multisectoral focus, IDNDR activities and national policies, and the participation in the World Conference, the following countries have been visited in official missions by the IDNDR Regional Officer:

• Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, Venezuela, Perú, Argentina, Cuba, Barbados, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, Jamaica.

Specific meetings to stimulate and help to organize the National IDNDR Committees or similar multisectoral organizations were held in Venezuela and in Argentina.

The Regional IDNDR Office has directed eight circulars in the form of letters or faxes to the National Committees in the Region, to promote participation in the

celebration of the International Day (including promotional material), in the World Conference, and to receive contributions to STOP Disaster magazine and "IDNDR Informs" Bulletin. There has been much correspondence through letters and telephone conversations with members of National Committees, as well as with members of the IDNDR Regional Scientific and Technical Committee, to follow up, and advise on IDNDR activities.

A day of exchange of experiences between the President of the Peruvian IDNDR Committee (Head of the National Institute of Civil Defense of Peru) and the Costa Rican National Emergency Commission was arranged and a second day of visit by the Peruvian to the Panama Civil Protection System.

The Regional Office offered support to the countries to hold national meetings or workshops to help with evaluations of achievements and future plans, in preparation for the World Conference. Only Costa Rica, St. Lucia, and Peru asked for support for their workshops. Honduras contacted the Office for help in the revision of its national report. During a meeting with the National Committee of Venezuela, that country's participation in the World Conference was analyzed.

Promotion material and its distribution in the Region:

The Newsletter "*IDNDR Informs - Latin America and the Caribbean*" has been produced on a trimesteral basis (Issue 6-7 prepared in Dec. 1994). The first Issues in Spanish and English, sent to approximately 10,000 people, were financed and distributed by PAHO/WHO; number 4 was financed by CEPREDENAC, 5, 6-7 by PAHO. The purpose of this Bulletin is to publicize local, national or regional experiences

that comply with IDNDR goals, and in this way facilitate horizontal contacts between Bulletin readers. The Office has received approximately 4,000 positive responses from Bulletin readers throughout the Region, requesting subscriptions, giving constructive criticism, or asking for more information or material on IDNDR.

- The Officer co-edited the book "A World Safe from Natural Disasters: The Journey of Latin America and the Caribbean", produced by PAHO/WHO as a contribution of the Region for the World Conference (English and Spanish). It collects the principal events and experiences that led to a higher level of preparedness and later the introduction of disaster-mitigation in the region, and proposes priorities for future action.

- The Regional IDNDR Officer produced a four-panel exhibit on IDNDR and the Regional Office in Spanish and English.

- It also produced four Fact-sheets during the period in Spanish about IDNDR, adapted from texts from the Secretariat in Geneva, with regional information.

- For the International IDNDR Day in 1992, a mural was painted for an event held in Cartago, Costa Rica.

For the International IDNDR Day, October 13 in 1993, a poster, a pamphlet, and a press-kit were produced, along with PAHO and the OAS and a massive campaign in the Health- and Educational Sectors was possible to launch. The campaign was organized after a regional meeting among 25 experts, that met in Mexico, organized by the Regional IDNDR Office, PAHO and the Mexican Government.

To celebrate the IDNDR Day of 1994 a joint effort among the IDNDR Regional Office, the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent and PAHO was made. Two information packages were sent out with pamphlets, posters, articles and books to the National IDNDR Committees, the Red Cross Societies and the Ministries of Health. Radio interview and participation in a press conference in Peru during a school-drill, a TV program in Costa Rica and the contribution of various articles in local press in Costa Rica formed part of the IDNDR Regional Officers activities for the 1994 IDNDR Day.

- The Officer published articles in magazines and local programs, Stop Disasters, ECODECISION (Canada) etc. The IDNDR Regional Officer together with the Regional Disaster documentation Center of PAHO coordinated the generation and reception of articles for STOP Disasters, issue no. 22, on Disaster related Information Access, especially for Developing Countries.

- The Office has actively collaborated with the Regional Disaster Documentation Center, initiated for the Region by PAHO, in the collection and dissemination of documents and audiovisuals. Since December 1994 the IDNDR Regional Officer is in charge of the supervision and promotion of the Disaster Documentations Centre's activities.

In August, 1994, a BIBLIODES (a selected bibliography of special disaster related topics) was produced and distributed on the theme of IDNDR.

Education:

The Office has facilitated and co-organized work-shops within the Disaster Management Training Program (UNDP-DHA, PAHO and OAS), talking about IDNDR and the ties between development

and disasters, in the following countries:

- Honduras, August 1992;
- Bolivia, March, 1993; Ecuador, April, 1993; Costa Rica, June, 1993. This last workshop also included national preparatory work for the World Conference.
- Cuba, Feb. 1995.

➤ Through speeches or contacts with public educational institutions, the idea has been introduced for courses or curriculum adaptations at different primary, secondary and university levels, to include natural hazards, disaster vulnerability, mitigation and prevention measures. This has helped strengthen and broaden the initiatives from other organizations such as PAHO, OAS, The Network for Social Studies etc.

➤ IDNDR organized and participated in a visit to Costa Rica by a delegation from the National Engineering University of Nicaragua. The delegation interviewed staff of university institutions international and regional entities (ICAP and CEPREDENAC, etc.), with the objective of defining a possible training and specialization program in disaster management in Central America (August, 1993). IDNDR has also been invited to present a paper at the University of the Andes in Merida, Venezuela.

➤ IDNDR supported the formulation of a formal and informal education component for the 1993 Triennial Institutional Plan of CEPREDENAC.

➤ The Officer has given talks on disaster mitigation in various classes and workshops, such as courses co-organized by PAHO for hospital maintenance personnel (Costa Rica) and in a simulation for hospital mitigation, PAHO (Trinidad).

CEPREDENAC and others.

Community training:

The Regional IDNDR Officer is co-organizer for a Forum in Costa Rica to share Latin American experiences in community training and organization for disaster prevention to be held in April, 1995.

➤ The officer has participated in Community round tables in San Martín, Perú, and in El Salvador. Interviews and field visits in Chosica, Peru, for articles to STOP Disasters and IDNDR Informs. Interviews with the Costa Rican Red Cross for the same purpose. 1994.

➤ Author of an article on IDNDR in a book on "Disaster Prevention in Vulnerable Communities" (CEPREDENAC and FLACSO- The Network), 1994.

Projects or Programs:

The Regional IDNDR Officer has formulated an SPR project for UNDP Costa Rica, together with the National Emergency Commission, for support to a diagnostic of possible areas of cooperation between UN Agencies and national sectors in disaster prevention; organization of a national program of local disaster prevention; and a better internal organization within UN what refers disaster mitigation and preparedness.

➤ The Regional IDNDR Officer has served as facilitator on behalf of the IDNDR Secretariat and PAHO towards the French IDNDR Committee to identify areas of cooperation between France and the countries of the Caribbean basin (1994-95).

➤ The Regional IDNDR Officer has initiated contacts with UCCI (Union de Ciudades Capitales Iberoamericanas) to organize a seminar on disaster mitigation

and organization at Municipality level in Central America and México (1994).

• The Regional IDNDR Officer has served as a facilitator for the exchange of the UNCHS (Habitat) project "Visualization of Planning for Human Settlements" (VISP) in Nairobi, with the National Emergency Commission of Costa Rica and representatives of CEPREDENAC (1993). It supports UNCHS (Habitat) management and UNDP in the creation of a "Regional Resource Center for Sustainable Human Development Support at the Local Level" for Central America, an inter-agency Center of the United Nations to offer technical assistance, monitoring and consulting to projects and communities involved in self-management and human development, that might include disaster mitigation and preparedness.

It has also facilitated contacts for the British Geological Survey in the design of a project called "Evaluation of Secondary Seismic Calamities for Urban Planning" in Costa Rica (1992-94)

Policies:

An important task of IDNDR is to offer political support for disaster reduction measures. To these ends, the Office has supported CEPREDENAC in its efforts to obtain the political mandate of the Presidents of the Isthmus to push for the Regional Disaster Reduction Plan.

• With the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC, the Office lobbied for the approval of a resolution of its General Assembly in April 1994, to obtain a mandate to work systematically in cost-benefit studies for investments in disaster mitigation and prevention.

• In visits to countries or specialized agencies, the connection between planning processes and environmental management has been emphasized (i.e., Regional IDNDR Office's participation in the follow-up committee on Agenda 21 in Costa Rica, occasional contacts with HABITAT in Nairobi, ECLAC and others).

Outside the Region:

Participation in three meetings of the IDNDR Scientific and Technical Committee (New Delhi, Feb. 1993; Geneva, Nov. 1993; Yokohama, 1994). Five visits to Washington and one to New York to coordinate with Regional organizations (PAHO and OAS), agencies involved with the UN (UNDP and DHA) and others (US National Academy of Science, FEMA, US Geological Survey, etc.).

Two visits to Geneva and the headquarters of the IDNDR Secretariat (1992 and 1993).

UNDAC:

The IDNDR Regional Officer participated in the identification of candidates from Costa Rica for a Latin American UNDAC team together with the DHA Disaster Relief Branch and UNDP. Participated in a one-week "Training for Trainers" for the UNDAC course in Latin America, in Madison, Wisconsin.

Conclusions

The existence of the Regional IDNDR Office has certainly contributed to the dissemination of IDNDR objectives. Positive examples are the dissemination campaigns mounted as interagency initiatives for the celebration of the International Days for Disaster Reduction.

Today the number of "Partners" and organizations interested in related topics is much larger than a few years ago, so are the programs and projects to achieve disaster reduction.

Mass media in many of the countries in the region is contributing in a constructive way to raise awareness on the necessity to work on prevention and mitigation public works, at the institutional as well as the educational and applicable science levels

■ The existence of the Regional Office contributes to this situation, and its work should be broadened and strengthened

■ The "IDNDR Informs-Latin America and the Caribbean" Bulletin and production of other promotional materials support national efforts in this direction and should be maintained.

A lot of studies, papers, reports, publications & training-material are produced on disaster related topics with relevance to Latin America and the Caribbean. The Regional Disaster Documentation Center, administrated by PAHO, is offering a mechanism of identification and distribution of these materials to nationals, institutions and users in the Region.

■ It should be a priority of IDNDR to strengthen the Documentation Center and to find new "partners" to this dissemination of disaster related information to the national institutions that need it.

The incorporation of the concepts of socio-economic and physical development and planning, as well as the active participation of communities, is still weak in most national organizations working with disaster prevention.

■ The IDNDR should support the attempts of creating National Disaster Reduction Systems with an interinstitutional, multi-sectorial and participatory focus .

The existence of a conceptual and promotional framework, like IDNDR, has offered opportunities for horizontal cooperation between neighboring countries, with the goal of exchanging positive experiences. The strengthening of subregional organizations like CEPREDENAC, points towards this. So does the celebration of informal meetings and coordinations that take place among international organizations working in the region in disaster related activities.

Catalysts for this purpose in the Region have been the Regional Office of IDNDR-DHA (multi-sectorial), the Pan-American Health Organization (health, foreign relations, civil defense and protection, parliamentarians and university sectors), the Organization of American States (regional planning, energy, and education, environmental sectors), the disaster mitigation projects of DHA, the Network for Social Studies on Disaster Prevention (La Red) and recently the International Federation of Red Cross Societies. ECLAC (and in some extent Habitat) are beginning to play a more important role in producing studies on socio-economic impact of disasters, human settlement planning, and community self-management, among other topics.

■ These efforts ought to be followed up and promoted by a "Regional Disaster Reduction Center" in concordancy with the recommendations of Yokohama. IDNDR/DHA and PAHO (and ECLAC) would be the Agencies most appropriate to run such a Center.

The Regional IDNDR Office is currently fundraising. The PAHO support will continue, but other sources must be found as well, in order to offer possibilities of horizontal exchange between countries and institutions, and promote new programs and projects in disaster mitigation as a "Regional Disaster Reduction Center".

APPENDIX

Principal events in which the Regional IDNDR Office has participated, giving talks, papers, or in round tables:

- First Meeting of IDNDR in the Caribbean (PAHO, IDNDR Secretariat, OAS and others). Jamaica. Facilitator. May, 1992.
- Meeting and Constitutional Seminar of "The Network of Social Studies on Disaster Prevention in Latin America". San Jose, Costa Rica. Roundtable. August, 1992
- "Third International Congress on Disasters". Cuba. Speaker. October, 1992
- Co-organization of a meeting of experts to plan the dissemination campaign for World IDNDR Day, October 13, 1993, "STOP Disasters in Schools and Hospitals" (SINAPROC, PAHO, IDNDR and OAS) Organizer, facilitator in Workshops, Final report. Mexico. February, 1993
- Andean Meeting on Disasters and Humanitarian Assistance (PAHO, Convenio Hipolito Unanue, IDNDR, etc.). Speaker and facilitator in Workshop. Cartagena, Colombia. September, 1993.
- "Caribbean Conference on Natural Hazards: Volcanos, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods" (University of the West Indies). Included parallel sessions on disaster mitigation for the health sector (PAHO) and the education sector (OAS). One day session on Caribbean Preparation for the World IDNDR Conference. Roundtable and facilitator in Workshop. Trinidad. October, 1993.
- "First Scientific Congress on Crisis Prevention, Mitigation and Management during Disasters" in the Technological University of Panama. Panama. Roundtable and speaker. October, 1993
- Two meetings-seminars promoted by CEPREDENAC designed to outline a Regional Plan for Natural Disaster Reduction in Central America. Costa Rica. Speaker and facilitator in Workshop. August and September, 1993.
- Workshop: "Local Communities: Disaster Prevention and Mitigation", The Network and CEPREDENAC. Facilitator and roundtable. Honduras. September, 1993.
- Workshop on Research and Application in Disaster Management. Boulder, USA. July, 1993.
- Inter-American Conference on Disaster Reduction- National Experiences. Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. Speaker and exhibit. March, 1994.
- Forum: One Hundred Years after the Great Andean Earthquake". Mérida, Venezuela. Speaker. April, 1994.
- World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction "A Safer World for the 21st Century", Yokohama, Japan, 23-27 of May, 1994, United Nations. Facilitator and exhibit.
- Seminar to outline the Central American Disaster Reduction Plan. CEPREDENAC (DIRDN, PAHO, OAS, OFDA). Co-organizer and facilitator in Workshop. Costa Rica, Nov. 1994.
- 5th Meeting of the NETWORK for Social Studies on Disaster Prevention in Latin America in Tarapoto, Perú, and a Workshop on the Use of Geographic Information Systems in Lima. The Network (LA RED), Sept, 1994 Speaker, roundtable and facilitator.
- Workshop on National System for Disaster Prevention and Management in Nicaragua". UNDP and GTZ. Facilitator in Workshop. Managua, Oct. 1994.