

# Local Organization in Emergency Situations: A Manual for Municipalities

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## Background

In December 1992 the Collaboration Centre for Emergency Situations, established by the Italian General Directorate for Development Cooperation (DGCS) and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), published the manual entitled *Local Organization in Emergency Situations*. The publication is a result of studies and research conducted by Central American countries between 1991 and 1993. One-hundred and forty experts from IDNDR National Committees of Central American Countries, Red Cross, Visión Mundial, PRODERE Programme of PAHO/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Ceprode participated in the development of the manual.

Designed to be a non-sectoral tool and to be easily used by local municipalities, the manual examines the organizing roles that communities play in disaster situations and related issues including decentralization of activities, new roles of civil society, sustainability and social and environmental vulnerability, all of which are central themes in the debate on development in Latin American countries. Apart from its planned objective, the manual has proven useful in facilitating a continuous process of interchange among Decade Committees.

## Points of Interest

According to the manual, there are several factors that local populations share in common in disaster situations, namely the "territory" involved not to mention the risk and resource potential of the area. Other shared concerns of the community in disaster situations are explored including:

1. The need to utilise all institutional opportunities of decentralization to facilitate the application of a territorial plan,
2. The influence of variables such as individual, social and environmental vulnerability in determining the impact of disasters;
3. The relationship between daily emergencies and emergencies produced by disasters as well as the role of local planning in determining links between prevention, mitigation and development, and
4. The need to avoid false dilemmas such as the question of whether priority should be given to the local planning

capacity or to the emergency situation.

In the first section, "About Disasters", common myths about disasters are examined and destroyed. In other sections, such as "The Community Organizes Itself", a pedagogical practice for disaster prevention is presented. "Reacting to Emergencies" examines the role of the community and of local municipal services during the first 72 hours after a disaster. The role of the community as explored in "Participating in the Reconstruction" suggests that reconstruction in disaster situations is not as simple as rebuilding local infrastructure.

## Results

To determine the effectiveness of the manual, PAHO conducted research in six countries of Central America in 1993 in collaboration with national entities in the municipalities of San Marcos in Honduras; León and Granada in Nicaragua; and the Island of Manguera, Santiago Texacuango, Acajutla and Chalatenango in El Salvador. All initiatives were coordinated by UNDP-PRODERE, the Italian Cooperation (DGCS), PAHO, Visión Mundial, Ceprode and national universities. In Panama research was carried out in the municipality of Boca de Toro. PAHO will present the results of its research in an evaluative meeting in Central America which will probably be held in Guatemala in 1994.

Six thousand copies of the manual were published and distributed to Latin American Countries and public health



The risk and resources map prepared by the community

schools in North America, including the Milwaukee International Health Training School.

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has proposed that the manual receive consideration for the "Sasakawa Prize" as an initiative of the Collaboration Centre of WHO/PAHO/DGCS for promotion of the prevention and mitigation of emergencies. A second edition has already been planned.

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### ***Natural Hazard Management Activities: Preparedness in the Context of Development The Organization of American States***

The Department of Regional Development and Environment (DRDE) provides cooperation in natural hazard management to OAS member states through technical assistance, training and technology transfer. The DRDE, based at OAS headquarters in Washington, D.C., has been involved in natural hazards vulnerability assessment and disaster mitigation activities in Latin America and the Caribbean basin since 1983. This preparedness activity is part of the mandate of the OAS/Permanent Council to the Executive Secretariat for Social and Economic Affairs (ECOSOC) and is supported by Resolutions CP/RES.546(834/90) and CP/RES.593(922/92) in the context of the IDNDR.

The objective of DRDE's technical cooperation in this area is to avoid or reduce the impact of disasters through intervention in the development planning and project formulation processes to reduce vulnerability to natural hazards. Specifically, the activities focus on:

- a) Making information on natural hazards more accessible to emergency response and development planning entities;
- b) Training planning technicians and decision-makers in hazard assessment and disaster mitigation techniques;
- c) Assessing natural hazards as part of ongoing environmental and natural resource evaluations, and development strategy formulation; and
- d) Identifying and formulating mitigation measures for development investment projects.

Activities are generally carried out as part of ongoing technical co-operation programmes of the DRDE at a national or regional level, collaborating with national and regional institutions. The activities are supported through collaborative efforts with OAS member state national agencies and international development assistance agencies, including UNDP, DHA-Geneva, IDB, World Bank and bilateral development assistance agencies such as USAID/OFDA. With their focus on long term prevention and mitigation, DRDE activities in this area are clearly complementary to emergency relief actions.

The DRDE has undertaken a series of sector-specific vulnerability reduction studies at a national level for agriculture, education, transportation, tourism and energy. The education sector is prominent in this priority group of sectors, recognizing the 1993 theme of the IDNDR. The objective is to prepare disaster reduction investment projects to protect the sector as well as identify vulnerable portions of the sector's infrastructure whose probable damage in case of a natural event will necessitate disaster response measures. These studies are complemented by regional courses, as well as with courses on the use of natural hazards information in the preparation of investment projects.

Recently, the General Secretariat of the OAS and the US Agency for International Development have undertaken an agreement under which the OAS will execute the Caribbean Disaster Mitigation Project (CDMP). The objective of the CDMP is to establish sustainable public/private sector mechanisms for disaster mitigation which will measurably lessen the loss of life, reduce physical and economic damage, and shorten the disaster recovery period. The project will address some of the major issues in the disaster development linkage in the Caribbean: the need to reduce natural hazard vulnerability in existing and planned development, mapping of hazard prone and environmentally fragile areas, the use of information in public awareness and development decision-making, and the capacity of the insurance industry to better manage risk and maintain adequate catastrophe protection for the region.

The five year project was designed by the USAID Offices of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and Housing and Urban Programmes (PRE/H) and will be carried out by the OAS Department of Regional Development and Environment in conjunction with Regional Housing and Urban Development Office of the Caribbean (RHUDO/CAR) and USAID missions in the region.

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# Southern Africa: Challenges for Long-Term Disaster Reduction

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Southern Africa is not normally considered "disaster prone". The region, which comprises Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, is not noted for natural disasters such as earthquakes, devastating cyclones, volcanic eruptions or other hazards of sudden onset. However, the region's population of 120 million is well acquainted with the consequences of civil conflict, population displacement, recurrent drought, the catastrophic impact of epidemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS and cholera/dysentery - risks that threaten the well-being of millions throughout the region.

Protracted conflicts in Angola and Mozambique have displaced more than two million refugees into neighbouring countries with an excess of three million internally displaced. During the 1991-92 drought, as many as twenty million residents of the 10 Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries alone were considered to be at "serious risk". Cholera, a familiar illness across Southern Africa, accounted for more than 100,000 cases and 6,000 deaths between January 1992 and March 1993. In several countries, the prevalence of HIV seropositivity in pregnant women now reaches 30%.

These figures underline the extraordinary burden Southern Africa carries both with respect to sustained disaster risk, and continuing regional vulnerability. However, unlike other parts of Africa, Southern Africa has unique capacities that permit it to cope more effectively with natural threats that have little respect for national borders.

The effective response by SADC and its member states of the "worst drought in living memory" of 1991-92 is a rare model in intercountry cooperation. Politically and operationally, SADC's 10 member states together responded in a timely way to food security alerts released from the Regional Early Warning Unit. The outcome was a joint UN-SADC donors conference which resulted in food and non-food pledges to avert famine. In an unprecedented international, regional and national relief effort, SADC's member states, together with South Africa, shipped approximately five times more food and relief goods than were shipped to the Horn of Africa in the 1984-85 famine. With the exception of deaths

attributed to the continuing deprivations in Mozambique, Angola and South Africa, no human losses can be directly attributed to malnutrition caused by food scarcity.

As the decade progresses, the need to link regions like Southern Africa more actively to IDNDR global initiatives becomes more pressing. It is a region struggling to contain environmental degradation and implement rigorous economic structural adjustment programmes concurrently with the challenge of managing the spectre of recurrent drought and the rehabilitation of war-ravaged economies. In this regard, it faces many of the scenarios confronting much of the developing world today. However, the region is notable in its past investment in a political infrastructure that enhances opportunities for cooperation across borders, in a transport infrastructure that permits the "seamless" movement of goods for export - and import - and for an institutional infrastructure that provides continued monitoring of national and regional food security. There is also ready recognition that the processes of reducing vulnerability to hazards such as drought have regional, national and community implications, and that this is a multi-sectoral, multi-agency effort. The IDNDR has as one of its objectives the transfer of skills and appropriate disaster reduction technologies from the North to the South. Southern Africa is noted for its stable political framework for regional cooperation, its willingness to collaborate with informed technical and donor partners in the North, and expertise in regional drought reduction. As the Decade progresses, closer collaboration between this region and global IDNDR initiatives can only be considered an invaluable opportunity for all.

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