Community Methodologies on Education and Risk Identification
"An opportunity for risk management and local development"

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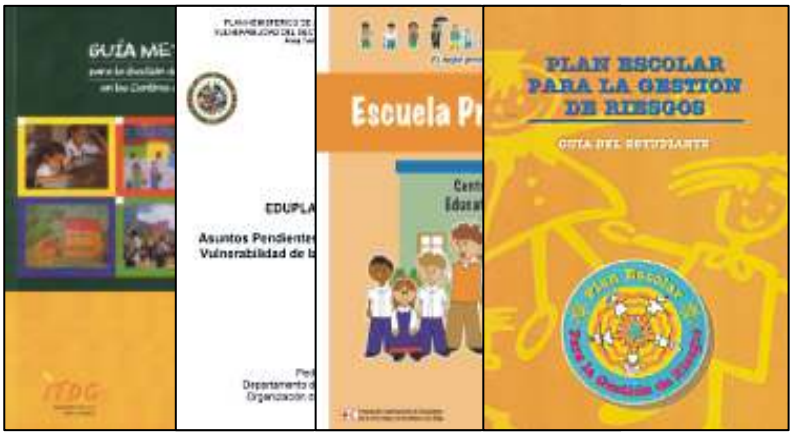
August 2008

The impact of natural disasters on economic and social infrastructure has been well demonstrated and recorded. However, smaller-scale events in isolated communities are frequently not taken into account in these records or in risk-reduction activities, and at times the local authorities are not even aware that they have occurred. Consequently, promotion of participatory technical, economic, and administrative action related to risk management at community level could become a tool that would enable these communities to take the lead in risk reduction activities in their local areas and in coordination with local authorities. The 2005-2015 Hyogo Framework for Action, which establishes guidelines for reducing the impact of natural disasters in an effort to enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities to natural hazards, contemplates and advocates decentralization of natural disaster risk management: "*Many activities in disaster risk management should be implemented at provincial, municipal, and local levels, since the risks facing people are specific to each particular geographic area*."



Examples of methodologies developed in the region: Methodological Guide for Risk Management in Primary Schools, Ministry of Education, Regional Office of San Martín, Peru; Hemispheric Plan of Action for Reducing the Vulnerability of the Education Sector to Disasters, OAS; Protected School - Tool Box "Better be Ready", IFRC; School Plan for Risk Management, Alcaldía Mayor, Bogota, Colombia.

For this reason, various regional cooperation organizations and government institutions have been working on a series of community-level activities. Important among these activities are methodologies that seek to advance education on risk identification and management in the communities, especially in the health and education sectors. This is based on the premise that education is one of the most effective ways to reduce risk on a regional scale, since the hope is that what children and youngsters learn in school will be replicated in their homes and neighboring communities, thereby confirming that *a prepared school means a prepared community.* It is in this context that UN/ISDR, UNICEF, IFRC, the International Plan, and ECHO developed an educational tool kit to provide communities in Latin America and the Caribbean with support material that can be used by teachers and community leaders, among others, primarily for the purpose of disseminating the important message that risk management needs to be part of each of the daily activities performed in a community, either by including the subject in the school curricula, strengthening capacities, or increasing the physical resilience of housing and social infrastructure.

Some examples of tools developed in this process, and perhaps the most representative ones are found in the Tool Box "Better be Ready" and the "Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA)" developed from 2005 to 2007 by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), with the support of ECHO, OAS/DSD, and the ProVention Consortium. These are very valuable community tools for risk management, since they support communities in identifying and preparing activities designed to reduce

vulnerability and increase their capacity, and they generate an added value in comparison with other activities carried out, since because of their methodological (participatory-consultative) approach, a space is created for trust and commitment building within the communities involved and among other stakeholders.

Implementation process

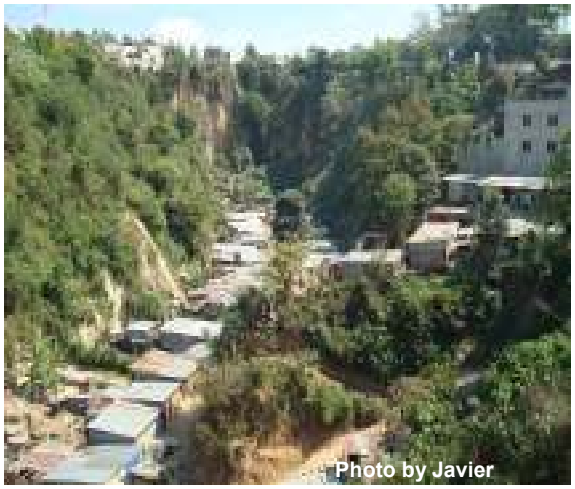
The process of formulating and applying these methodologies goes back to 2004 and 2005, when the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS), through its Department of Sustainable Development (OAS/DSD), and with the financing of the ProVention Consortium, developed the AVC as a community education tool for natural disaster risk reduction, and carried out participatory assessments in selected communities in Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras. The OAS/DSD, IFRC, and the ProVention Consortium took up this work again in 2008; this time, they embarked on a second phase, to give continuity to the assessments or analyses performed, and to strengthen the capacity of the National Red Cross Societies and the local communities and authorities. They also gradually brought in two new communities located in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Based on the participatory assessments, they selected 16 communities where they had been working in four (4) Central American countries, and, in coordination with the relevant National Red Cross Societies, they designed one (1) micro-project per community.

Public and private participation: moving towards public-private partnerships

The IFRC and the OAS Department of Sustainable Development carried out a process of socialization and exchange of experiences through national forums in each one of the four Central American countries. Although in some cases important stakeholders were not present, the forums had a balanced representation of all the sectors, including government institutions, chambers of commerce and private businesses, cooperation agencies, and the communities themselves.

One of the primary results of this process was a clear need to achieve a better, more effective, and more committed involvement on the part of government institutions from the early stages of application of this type of methodology. Particularly evident was the need to ensure the active participation of municipalities or town councils, in order to provide advisory services and technical support for the communities. The participation of competent national institutions, such as National Emergency Systems, and technical institutions responsible for hydro-meteorological and seismological monitoring, for example, also proved to be a determining factor in the success achieved with these tools. The participation of these local and central government entities is essential to ensure the technical, financial, and institutional feasibility of the projects and mitigation measures identified by using these tools.

For instance, in the case of micro-projects in the communities of Puerta del Jardín and Nuestra Señora del Carmen Sector Tres, both in Guatemala, the critical role played by local and national governments was apparent, as was the need to bring them into these processes. In the case of the community of Puerta del Jardín, the participation and technical support of the municipality of Guatemala City led to a technical report issued by the municipality designating the place where the community is located as an uninhabitable area. Moreover, a recommendation was issued to suspend any infrastructure projects, so as not to encourage human settlements in that high-risk area and not to generate greater secondary risks. In the case of the community of Nuestra Señora del Carmen, the micro-project proposed by the communities was technically reviewed, and a technical document listing the projects to be carried out, the costs of materials, and labor needs was prepared, with the participation of the members of that community. In this way, a technically and financially feasible project is developed, with the required municipal permits and endorsement that will make it possible to proceed with greater diligence.



Settlement of Puerta El Jardín.
Consultant – Technical Evaluation Report of seven micro-projects in Central America, OAS, 2008.

On the other hand, the lack of institutional capacity in risk management, coordination among the different levels of government, continuity in inter-institutional agreements, and ignorance of the law were identified as factors that hamper implementation of coordinated action and the continuity of the initiatives. Likewise, it was observed that local governments have a great determination and interest—frequently with personal efforts by their officials that go well beyond their own duties, sacrificing family and personal spare time. However, urgent social situations do not allow them to move beyond the state of "emergency" to devote themselves to strategic planning that could include risk management.

The participation of the private sector is also needed to ensure the financial and economic feasibility of the mitigation measures proposed. In some cases, businesses have a great deal of information and technical capacity to support the studies and designs of these projects. A keen interest was noted on the part of the private sector to participate in developing risk management initiatives. Many businesses and labor unions are even working on establishing specialized units within their organizational structure and on implementing training and monitoring activities. However, these measures initially involve response to and preparation for disasters. There is still certain reluctance on the part of some chambers of commerce and private businesses to participate in these projects, due to the fact that risk management is not yet one of their main priorities.

To a great extent, the differences between the participation of the private sector and of the government have to do with differences in the relative development of each of the participating countries. In the case of the Costa Rican communities, for instance, greater integration of the private sector and local governments is observed in risk mitigation and evaluation processes, compared with the case of Guatemala, where the participation of the private sector is still in a very incipient stage.

We have also identified the need to move forward in public-private partnerships, both to ensure transparency in the public administration and consequently generate greater confidence in the private sector, as well as to make more rational use of existing resources, and thereby achieve greater participation and investment in reducing vulnerability and mitigating disasters. While Corporate Social Responsibility is identified as an important motivator of the private sector, a public policy that includes economic incentives, such as tax deductions and protection of the integrity of workers and their families, to ensure the continuity of business activities, is clearly another requisite for the applicability of these tools and the financial and economic feasibility of mitigation projects, and for devising local cooperation strategies, with the real participation of different sectors in decision-making processes led by the relevant institutions.

A process of harmonization and institutionalization

Finally, at regional level, the main obstacle to the application of these initiatives lies in the lack of regulations and their official recognition by the states, which are responsible for guaranteeing the security and well-being of the communities. Moreover, the lack of indicators prevents monitoring and evaluation of the measures developed by states to reduce vulnerability, and thus hinders their implementation.

It is on the basis of experience in using different types of methodologies, whether developed by cooperation agencies or by states, that the need to begin a process of harmonization and institutionalization of their structures and contents is demonstrated. This process would help in formulating indicators and would guarantee equitable benefits based on the characteristics of each one of the communities where the methodologies are applied.

This can only be achieved through a dialogue on risk management with the decision- and policy-makers, where technical, political, economic, and social aspects are discussed, good practices are identified, and short- and medium-term work plans are prepared, in coordination and with the leadership of countries, together with cooperation agencies such as UNICEF, UN/ISDR, IFRC, OFDA and OAS/DSD.

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The Department of Sustainable Development of the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development of SG/OAS received financial support for the publication of this article from the ProVention Consortium and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, IFRC