

The objectives of the seminar were to promote the dissemination of preventive messages, encourage the exchange of experiences, and define which tools can help journalists and other social communicators understand and convey the importance of disaster reduction.

Subjects on the agenda included:

- duty of experts, authorities and others in ensuring that information about risks is passed on to the general public,
- role of a “communicator” as a bridge, able to synthesise information and present it to the public so it is easily understood, without distortion of its technological contents,
- population must be made aware of the risks threatening them, particularly in the area where they live,
- need to establish communication strategies, from the top to bottom and vice versa, but also horizontally, in case of disaster, including warnings and urgent communication.

Conclusions:

- agree to determine strategies that will incorporate the theme of prevention within the contents of the media.
- agree to determine communication strategies to prevent disasters.
- agree to establish permanent relationships between all concerned parties engaged in collective communication.

A major newspaper, El Comercio, published a series of preventive articles after the seminar.

“Prevention starts with information, and communication for prevention is a complex process that requires united action from many professionals from many disciplines, where the media professionals are the axis of union. A regional workshop was held in Quito Social Communication in Disaster Prevention from 29 September to 1 October 1998, with the aim to promote regional and national actions to improve the information flow to the population...”


Extracts from a note of the Civil Defence in Ecuador

La Planificación de la Información Pública
Fenómeno El Niño

(Trabajo de grupos Taller Regional sobre Comunicación Social y Prevención de Desastres)

El Niño, es un fenómeno natural con características recurrentes, los mayores daños han sido consecuencia de su presencia en los años 1982-83 y 1997-98; su ciclo de ocurrencia no es preciso, ni su magnitud ni tamaño. La mayoría de los daños que ocasiona, son en zonas costeras, aunque también en sitios interiores se sienten sus efectos. Considerando que los gobiernos tanto nacionales como locales, son responsables de establecer y ejecutar acciones de protección, que involucren a organizaciones públicas, privadas y sociales para la salvaguarda de la población, expuestas a riesgos naturales, es recomendable lo siguiente:

1. Elaborar un diagnóstico que permita evaluar el nivel de conocimientos y percepción que la población expuesta tiene, sobre el riesgo que la amenaza, su vulnerabilidad y características específicas (tamaño de la población, condiciones socio- políticas- culturales- económicas, costumbres, idiosincrasias; así como la capacidad físico- mental, entre otras).
2. Planear y ejecutar una estrategia de comunicación que involucre a especialistas, técnicos, académicos o sea, la población meta y sobre todo a los medios de comunicación con cobertura en las zonas en estudio, que promueva la suficiente divulgación de los riesgos, así como las medidas de mitigación, prevención y preparación, promoviendo la creación de fuentes confiables de información.
3. Promover la elaboración e implantación de programas específicos de prevención y atención de emergencias locales, los cuales incluyan en su estructura un área de comunicación social, que asegure la permanencia y evaluación de las estrategias y medidas preventivas de mitigación y respuesta.
4. La información a propagar debe asegurar la efectiva divulgación de la organización local de prevención, mitigación y respuesta, así como promover el desarrollo de habilidades y conductas más adecuadas en la población, propiciando el establecimiento de una cultura local de prevención y preparación, contando para ello con la participación de dependencias y organismos, con responsabilidad en ello, como son: escuelas, universidades, desarrollo urbano y comunitario, salud, entre otras instituciones con injerencia en la materia.
5. Considerar a los medios de comunicación, como uno de los ejes centrales para ejecutar estrategias de comunicación colectiva y establecer medios alternativos que permitan cumplir con los objetivos trazados (formación y capacitación de líderes comunitarios, aprovechamiento de organizaciones existentes en cada comunidad, realización de seminarios-talleres, difusión de folletería, manuscritos, entre otros).



EL SALVADOR

A week long programme of events were organised to mark the week of 12-16 October 1998.

These included:

- A first response course in case of incidents with dangerous substances (technological disasters).
- Press Conference on IDNDR.
- Panel Forum on Communication and Disaster Reduction.
- A training session for superior officers of the Armed Forces of El Salvador on disaster reduction.
- Panel Forum on “Disaster preparedness begins with communication”.

- Cinema Forum on "TWISTE" early warning systems.
- The delivery of medal of honour of Civil Protection to outstanding Salvadorians within the National Emergency System.

HONDURAS

The city of Choluteca was selected as the 1997 Campaign headquarters in order to promote greater awareness of disaster prevention outside the capital city. The Inter-Institutional Technical Group for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction affiliated with the Permanent Emergency Committee (COPECO), organised activities including a parade, lectures, demonstrations of rescue equipment and techniques, cultural activities and a press conference.

JAMAICA

In 1997, a one week awareness programme was held, with training sessions and presentations in different locations around the country. A radio interview with Helena Molin Valdes, IDNDR's Regional Officer, was heard on one of the most popular morning talk shows. Flyers emphasising the problem of drought were distributed through a daily newspaper.

MEXICO

In celebration of the International Day in 1997, the National Civil Protection issued a special set of lottery tickets which included important information on disaster preparedness.

Mexico broadcast a national message throughout the country in order to explain and emphasize the importance of disaster prevention. The Mexican Red Cross produced an emergency information wall chart.

NICARAGUA

The Nicaragua Civil Defence Directorate appointed a special committee to plan and carry out activities related to World Disaster Reduction Day. Among those involved in the activities were the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, NGOs; the Nicaraguan Institute for Territorial Studies (INETER) and the Ministry of Education.

There were demonstrations and discussions with the National Red Cross, and the fire brigade gave fire fighting demonstrations. Moreover, there were earthquake simulation exercises in schools. The 1997 World Disaster Reduction Day on 8 October marked the 25th anniversary of the 1972 earthquake.

PANAMA

In 1997, a series of lectures and seminars were organised by government and the private sector; students competed in a public speaking contest on disaster reduction as part of a plan for civil protection in schools. All activities were widely covered by the media.

A private bank (DISA) financed the publication of a book, "Civil Protection: Manual for Disasters." A special set of national lottery tickets was printed to commemorate World Disaster Reduction Day, which was launched at an exhibition prepared by the Civil Protection. In October 1998 the Civil Protection hosted a conference on the role of the Media in Civil Protection.

PARAGUAY

The Day in 1998 was celebrated with no less than two weeks of events organised by the municipality of Asuncion, the universities, UNDP (supported by IDNDR) and the Union of Journalists.

The main activities were:

- Photo exhibit on "Emergency and Disaster situations in Paraguay".
- Seminar/Workshop over two days on Prevention Begins with Information.
- Roundtable on "the Role of Social Communication and Reduction of Disaster of Impact", hosted by UNDP.
- Public participation in the IDNDR Internet Conference. Open House at UNDP, as most people and institutions in Paraguay have no access to Internet. UNDP had open house so that people could review the Website of IDNDR/ Quipu.net.
- Public Conference Speech on "Citizen Participation in Emergencies".
- Discussion at the UN information centre on the topic of emergencies and disaster reduction.

Among the Participants:

Municipalities from the capital, Voluntary Firemen, Magazines, University Students, Various Institutions (Committee for National Emergency, DIBEN, Civil Defence of San Carlos – Brazil, Journalists Unions of Paraguay) local radios

(Trinidad and San Pablo, Pastoral Social) Hydrological and Meteorological Departments of the National Defence, Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Law, Economy and Political Studies Peace Corps, Local Emergencies Organisations, Local Committees of the most threatened zones.

Some conclusions:

- Creation of a single information system for the prevention of disasters and mass media.
- Creation of a follow up committee that will hold its first meeting after 14 October. The Municipality of Asuncion will organise this. The National Directorate for Charity has offered its human resources.
- Empowerment of concerned media and social agents, at the national and regional level.
- Introduction of a course in the Communication Sciences Degree curriculum dealing with the subject of prevention and mitigation of disasters.
- Promotion of knowledge and information exchange through seminars, workshops and access to Internet.

PERU

Seminars and roundtables were organised in different parts of the country in 1998. The recent impact of El Niño on Peru served as a case study to review how campaigns and media contributed to mitigate the disaster.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

An Emergency Planning and Management Workshop for Industrial Disasters was held from October 8-10, 1997, in Port of Spain. A book was produced illustrating how heavy industry can be a partner in natural disaster management.

This is an extract:

"Trinidad and Tobago, an island state, may not have a nuclear reactor but it does have world-scale heavy industry, inevitably near the sea, where gases, chemicals, minerals and ores are processed."

The workshop was convened by the National Emergency Management Agency and the Pan-American Health Organisation/World Health Organisation, with the University of the West Indies Centre for Environmental Studies, and the United Nations Development Programme. It produced a large, handy collection of the participants' own emergency planning documents and shop-floor emergency notices. Government can take a leading role in ensuring that industry invests in high safety standards and develops effective and rapid emergency response.

"Our way to deal with the situation is to bring the emergency plans out in the open and set up lines of communication between those in power, and those who hold the purse strings." Brig. Joseph Theodore, Minister of National Security, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Industry can reinforce its storage tanks and drill its fire brigades, but it cannot control nature, according to Col. Mahendra Mathur. "No matter how good a mitigation and response plan an industry has, there is always a possibility of a natural disaster or human error triggering technological disaster"

Disaster reduction does not end at the plant walls:

"The plan also provides for the co-ordination between the company and external agencies for the further protection of our employees and property, as well as that of the surrounding community and environment."

Extract from- Emergency Management Plan

UNITED STATES

In 1997, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) prepared and disseminated an information package and a press release on the theme of the Campaign. The US education effort was particularly focused on flooding, droughts, hurricanes, severe storms, landslides, mudflows, wildfires and tsunamis. The 1998 Campaign theme was targeted at schools. Also on 14 October 1998, the University of North Texas organized a roundtable on Media and Disaster Prevention.

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Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Internet page on International Disaster Reduction Day:

<http://www.fema.gov/nwz97/wdzday.htm>



European Floods in 1997

The following examples relate to the floods which took place in the summer of 1997 around the river Oder in Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany. They concentrate on the economic impact of the floods in the region and on the ensuing tripartite political initiative for cooperation regarding flood prevention in the future.

Flood Damages in Poland and the Czech Republic

Adapted from "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" 18.7.97

First estimates of the economic impacts of the floods of the century.

The consequences of the floods in the Czech Republic and Poland have significant economic impacts, even if they are not entirely quantifiable yet. In both countries the disaster is linked to the problematic issues of state finances and monetary policies, as additional credits have to be taken in a financial situation which is already tense.

The Czech Ministry for Industry estimates the damages for industry alone to be of around 1 billion German marks. The coal and steel producers have been especially hard hit in the area. The overall economic damages in the Czech Republic, which include damages to agriculture, transport and general production delays are roughly estimated to be between 2 and 4 billion German marks. In both countries, related costs in the telecommunications and insurance sectors are estimated to be even higher, even though many private homes and companies were not adequately insured.

Minor GDP impacts

According to first economic estimates and to Vladimír Krejčí of the Czech paper "Patria Finance", the net economic impact on the increase of this year's GDP in the Czech Republic will be slightly negative, but not substantial. The losses felt in industrial production and by the construction sector will be compensated by extra clean-up reconstruction work. Similar analyses are coming from Warsaw.

The biggest challenge remains the damages which private citizens have had to cope with. In both countries, there are not enough budget reserves to compensate the victims and both states have made changes to their domestic budget in emergency sessions.

The Polish parliament has amended a law which now allows the government to borrow up to the equivalent of 1 billion German marks from the National Bank.

As for the Czech Republic, the government has foreseen to unblock the equivalent of around 500 million German marks.

Conflicts with Monetary Policies

Both states base the financing these extra expenditures through "Additional Costs" and not through so-called flood taxes. But, this way, both countries are in conflict with their policies of stabilisation. Whereas the Czech national bank is following a policy of high interest rates, the Polish national bank had urged the Polish for severe restrictions to combat the increasing state deficit. In both countries, it is expected now that the measures adopted following the flood disaster will create even tighter monetary restrictions. Interest rates will most probably go further up, according to Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, President of the Polish national bank.

These restrictions have made the stocks and bonds market insecure and have made foreign investors very hesitant. This may have contributed to the recent setbacks at the stock exchanges in Prague and Warsaw and to the diminishing value of the Polish zloty and the Czech crown.