

8. Disaster Management

→ MANDATE

The Heads of State and Government of the Americas, at the Quebec City Summit, recognized the need to develop, implement, and sustain programs for dealing with natural and man-made disasters. They set the goal of reducing the vulnerability of the Hemisphere's population and economies, and to maintain or quickly restore minimum levels of consumption, income, and production following a disaster of any kind.

The Heads of State and Government also pledged to develop the capacity to forecast, prepare for, and mitigate the potential impacts of natural and man-made disasters, as well as promote vulnerability reduction, adopt and enforce better building codes and standards, and ensure appropriate land-use practices. The objective was to establish the requisite legal framework and cooperative mechanisms to access and share advances in science and technology, including their application in the "early warning", preparedness for, and mitigation of, hazards. They also agreed to establish information networks—with the involvement of the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR), and other relevant regional and international organizations—to exchange scientific and technological knowledge, encourage further regional and sub-regional action to reduce risks and, improve response to natural disasters.

The natural disasters that have struck Central America and the Caribbean exemplify the perpetual threat faced by regions with limited resources for coping with them, which lead to the establishment of programs for disaster cooperation, mitigation, relief, and recovery. Bilateral cooperation with multilateral agencies and nongovernmental organizations has strengthened the Hemisphere's ability to reduce, and cope with, the

countries' vulnerability to natural disasters. The OAS and PAHO support Hemisphere-wide efforts to reduce vulnerability to natural disasters. The activities include technical assistance, training, and transfer of technology for policies, planning, design, and execution of actions in the context of development.

Among these activities are vulnerability assessment and risk management. Early



warning for floods and climate changes in coastal areas, reduction of vulnerability of school buildings and transportation corridors are supported by the the actions of member States, with assistance from international agencies, including: the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, as well as bilateral programs with such countries as Canada, the Netherlands, Ireland, Turkey, and the United States.

Major regional actions underway to implement the mandates of the Third Summit of the Americas include:

- Projects addressing the full range of hazards, such as the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR), the primary hemispheric forum for reviewing policies and strategies for disaster management, in the context of development, of the OAS Member States. It is designed to reduce the impact of natural disasters and to respond to emergencies in three work areas: 1) Evaluation and Elaboration of Vulnerability Indicators, led by the OAS; 2) Financing Natural Disaster Reduction, led by the IDB; and 3) Emergency Preparedness and Response, led by the Pan American Health Organization, (PAHO). The Member States have approved for implementation the Strategic Plan for Policies for Risk Management, Vulnerability Reduction, and Emergency Response (IASP), which was prepared by the IACNDR and reviewed by the Committee on Hemispheric Security and the OAS General Assembly.
- The Program for Research and Training on Trade Corridors (PROCORREDOR) is comprised of 14 Cooperating Centers in nine countries. The program involves the study and training of vulnerability reduction in transportation corridors affected by natural risks. The Cooperating Centers are in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Paraguay, the

United States, and Uruguay.

- The Hemispheric Action Plan for Vulnerability Reduction in the Education Sector to Socio-Natural Disasters (EDUPLAN-hemisferico) is a hemispheric action plan to diminish vulnerability of socio-natural disasters. It is maintained through technical secretariats in various Member States, and includes support from the academic sector, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international development assistance agencies, private sector groups such as teachers' associations and for-profit corporations. EDUPLAN hemisferico identifies and enhances national, regional, and hemispheric mechanisms to facilitate the commitment to and execution of programs for advisory services, training, technology transfer, and investment. The plan's eight technical secretariats include institutions in Argentina, Costa Rica, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, and Venezuela.
- The Hemispheric Plan for the Guide for Environmental Management of Highway Transportation Corridors was developed by the OAS with support from the IDB, the Andean Development Corporation, the World Bank and the Pan American Institute of Highways (PIH) of the Latin American Society of Environmental Transportation Units (SLUAT) in order to disseminate information on environmental management of highway transportation corridors.
- The Coral Health and Monitoring Program (CHAMP): In June 2002 the OAS and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) signed an agreement with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) that includes this program, which is intended to train members of the Caribbean Community to reduce the risk of natural threats.
- The Program for Early Warning and Vulnerability Reduction for Floods in Small Central American Valleys (SVP): In cooperation with the Federation of Municipalities of the Central American Isthmus (FEMICA), the Central American Disaster Prevention Coordination Center (CEPRE-



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DENAC), and the Regional Committee on Hydraulic Resources of the Central American Isthmus (CRRH), as well as the support of the Dutch government plans have been created to establish the SVP Regional Platform, through which a group of nongovernmental organizations offers technical assistance services and training to local, national, and regional groups on vulnerability to floods.

SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES

The Caribbean Disaster Management Program (CDMP) has been carried out successfully for nearly five years with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development. It has undertaken the Post-Georges Disaster Mitigation Project (PGDM) in St. Kitts and Nevis, and in Antigua and Barbuda. This project—funded with resources from USAID and the OAS General Secretariat—seeks to develop national plans and policies to mitigate threats from tides, storms, high winds, coastal erosion, drought, insular flooding, and volcanic dangers.

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USAID also financed the project for the Water Level Observation Network for Latin America (RONMAC), through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), in response to the effects of Hurricane Mitch in four Central American countries.

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), with experts in the region, has developed tools to help governments strengthen their reaction ability in case of natural disasters. This is an ongoing strategy implemented with the philosophy that it is possible to mitigate, and even prevent, the devastating impact of these natural disasters. This program has gained world renown for its comprehensive concept of risk reduction. In affected countries, it works with all sectors of society to deal with urgent problems, such as restoration of water and sewer services, primary health care, and other medium and long-term impacts.

The most successful aid programs

strengthen their operations when international interest wanes and needs become more pressing.

CHALLENGES

Policies and programs of international humanitarian assistance and development finance institutions help countries to meet their needs for vulnerability reduction and emergency response. However, public and private sectors could assume more technical responsibility for decisions that damage the economic infrastructure and thus make it more vulnerable to natural disasters. The countries of the Americas need to more efficiently undertake repair, restoration, and reconstruction of the infrastructure when it is affected, damaged, or destroyed.

The specific challenges to implementing the Strategic Plan for Policies for Risk Management, Vulnerability Reduction, and

Emergency Response (IASP), and to vulnerability reduction in the population as well as their economic and social infrastructure in general, include:

- Integrating disaster mitigation, in the context of development, and the role of governmental decentralization and civil society participation
- Effective channeling of humanitarian assistance in case of disaster
- Managing the role of military institutions in disaster relief
- Incorporating risk management in the planning and execution of development
- Improving the infrastructure of trade corridors and vulnerability reduction
- Recognizing the impossibility of sustainable development in conditions of vulnerability.

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