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ECHO/ISDR good practices for resilient communities

SUBMISSION OF CASE STUDY OF BEST PRACTICES Regional Disaster Information Center for Latin America and the Caribbean (CRID) Costa Rica, October 2004.

TITLE

Enhancing regional and local capacities through the development of a Central American network for disaster and health information (CANDHI).

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

In 2001, CRID launched a project to improve access to disaster and health information in Central America, with the financial and technical support of the U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR). In the aftermath of hurricane Mitch and the devastating earthquakes in El Salvador, it was apparent that radical changes were needed to improve national capacities in disaster preparedness, mitigation and response. Access to relevant and reliable (technical) information was a must for any and all of these activities.

One of the results after three years of work is that the project has made it possible to create a growing network of disaster information centers in several Central American countries. In the longer term, the establishment of disaster information centers will facilitate the development of improved disaster prevention and mitigation policy and planning in both countries. In short, the project has played an essential role as the main facilitator of the Central American Network for Disaster and Health Information (CANDHI), which at the time of writing consists of 9 information centers in Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

This project is executed by NGO FundaCRID, based in Costa Rica that has the expertise, experience and institutional network that is required for the successful implementation of this complex endeavor. FundaCRID carries out its activities through the Regional Disaster Information Center (CRID). CRID's main mission is to contribute to reducing the impact of disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean by gathering and disseminating disaster-related information. However, CRID goes far beyond simply compiling and supplying technical information; it promotes collective efforts among information centers, fosters alliances and champions the use of information technologies and networks to enhance best practices in disaster reduction.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Main objective is to contribute to disaster reduction in the region, particularly in Central America, through capacity building activities in the area of disaster and

health-related information management. Strategy is to provide selected information centers with the required knowledge, training and technology resources in order to have sufficient capacities to act as reliable information providers to a host of other users in these countries.

The project also promotes the use of (new) technological tools for the development of information services and products, and builds institutional capacities as a way to guarantee a satisfactory response to the demand for disaster related information. Training is a part of this process and centers its focus on acquiring additional capacities in the development of information products and services.

Project target groups include all those people and organizations that can benefit from disaster-related information such as community leaders, health workers, educators, scientists, politicians, NGOs, government organizations and UN agencies, and others. The project has been extended twice and has a duration of five years.

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

The project has engaged in providing the necessary technical infrastructure to the participating centers in order to start providing information services to their local and regional information clients. The setup of technological infrastructure includes the implementation of physical networks, servers, connectivity and internet access. Monitoring and assessment are also part of the technical assistance scheme.

Furthermore, the formation of competent and motivated human resources is an essential part of the CANDHI project as the project supports national and local disaster information centers with training. The following areas are covered: Information management, website development, creation, maintenance and (internet) publication of databases, digitization of documents and training for trainers in order to create a self-sustaining training effort in the region.

Another important area of work relates to the production and dissemination of information products to institutional and individual end users. A large number of useful information products have been produced through this project and they include but are not limited to web services that offer thousand of digitized documents online; web-based databases; training materials; as well as thematic CDs containing relevant documents, contacts, internet references and multimedia.

Inter-institutional cooperation and the provision of ad-hoc services –as needed during emergencies- have been other clusters of activities.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

Centers are acting as reliable information providers	A variety of regional and local training activities implemented
Centers are training other actors locally	Useful training materials developed and on the internet for free
Thousands of digitized documents on the internet at no cost	Sustainable working methods developed
A great variety of information products being developed	Indirect benefits go beyond initially planned effects (multiplier effect)

LESSONS LEARNED & FUTURE CHALLENGES, SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

1. Information management is vital to disaster prevention and mitigation. 2. Increased (institutional) capacities in the area of disaster information management and in the promotion of a disaster prevention culture may help to reduce the negative effects of disasters. 3. Knowledge engineering, training, and the use of current and emerging technological resources are important factors in making information more meaningful for different kinds of users and sectors. 4. Information management is an important ingredient in the sustainable development process in the region. 5. Regional coordination can be of great help in the disaster prevention and mitigation planning process. It can also be an instrument to improve policymaking and facilitate decision procedures.

The development of a regional disaster information network is a formidable task that is expected to take many years. However, with above-mentioned training efforts and other activities, we are already witnessing the emergence of a real network of disaster information centers that is well on its way to improving access to and availability of disaster information sources in Central America. Furthermore, in some south American countries, conditions are now good to start work in building, piece by piece, a regional information network

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