

Experts Round Table

Community-centered Flood Early Warning Systems (EWS): The Central American Experience

When: Wednesday, March 10, 2010
9:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Where: Washington, DC

Venue: OAS Headquarters, **Guerrero Room**, Main Building
17th and Constitution, N.W.
Washington DC 20006

Chair: Ambassador Alfonso Quiñonez, Executive Secretary, Integral Development and Director General of the Inter-American Agency for Cooperation and Development (IACD)

Moderator: Pablo Gonzalez, Chief, Risk Management and Adaptation to Climate Change (RISK-MACC), Department of Sustainable Development, General Secretariat of the Organization of American States

Panelists: Javier Lopez Medina, Senior Hydrologist, Project Manager of the Central America Small Valleys Flood Alert and Vulnerability Reduction Program (SVP): Regional Platform Development

Sergio Lacambra, Infrastructure and Environment Sector, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)

Walter Wintzer, Coordinator Preparedness and Response, Coordination Center for Natural Disaster Prevention in Central America (CEPREDENAC)

Miguel Angel Franco Sánchez, Senior Hydrologist, Area of hydro-meteorological instruments, National Center of Disaster Prevention of Mexico (CENAPRED)

Audience: OAS Permanent Missions and Observers delegates, program officers and specialists with international cooperation agencies, international NGOs, development banks and Disaster Risk Reduction practitioners in general, based in the DC area.

Note: the round table will be broadcast via OAS Web services.

Basis for discussion

After almost two decades of technical cooperation in community-centered flood EWS in Central America (C.A.), a lack of harmonized methodology for the design and implementation of these systems is evident.

The vast number of organizations supporting such design and implementation has resulted in a multiplicity of methodologies and manuals being used nationally and regionally. This in turn

hampers the ability of national institutions to coordinate efforts among communities, municipalities and regional governments, as well as NGOs and cooperation agencies.

The GS/OAS-DSD has been providing technical advice on flood EWS in several small valleys in C.A. First, in 1995 with support from ECHO and governments of Ireland and Turkey, the Small Valley Program (SVP) was implemented in over 20 valleys in Honduras, with similar numbers in Guatemala and Nicaragua. In 2008, with the support of the Government of Germany, SVP extended its efforts to the remaining continental countries and the Dominican Republic.

The following are conclusions from the last intervention:

- Lack of public policies, strategies and guidelines regarding EWS;
- Sustainability of EWS relies mainly on international aid, which when discontinued results in the interruption of their operation;
- Most EWS lacks basic hydrological studies, resulting in inadequate warning times;
- Overlap of competences in the operation of the different components of EWS, particularly in communication and preparedness for the contingency components;
- Lack of coordination among NGOs, which challenges the system's effectiveness; and
- Limitations in the use of state-of-the-art technologies that may help to provide forecast and watch advisories, which, in a region where flash-floods are predominant with flood times of less than an hour, may increase early warning times and improve preparedness for a more efficient response.

In the end, the sustainability and successful implementation of community-centered flood EWS will depend on the formulation and execution of sound public policy –good governance that ensures accountability of government and all segments of the society, as well as effective coordination.

Expected Outcomes

This round table brings an opportunity for information sharing and exchange among expert panelists, who will share their experience in the implementation of community-centered flood EWS, their views on the challenges ahead, as well as their expert knowledge on how to address them.

Some of the outcomes expected out of the round table are:

- Increased awareness of the state of implementation of community-centered flood EWS, and the challenges and opportunities ahead;
- Policy recommendations for institutional capacity building and good governance at all level, from regional, to national and local; and
- Recommendations for inter-institutional cooperation among bilateral and multilateral donors, NGOs, and international cooperation agencies.

In the weeks following the round table a policy paper will be drafted and published by GS/OAS-DSD.

The **GS/OAS** is a public international organization comprising of 35 Member States, and with headquarters in Washington D.C. Member States have issued mandates to the GS/OAS Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) and its corresponding networks such as the Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation, to among other things, ‘deal with matters related to natural disasters, especially their mitigation, through reduction of vulnerability and risk management, monitoring and warning’ and develop and implement ‘cost-effect and robust early warning systems’. Further, from a governance perspective, the DSD received mandates from Member States, through the Inter-American Program for Sustainable Development (PIDS) to conduct strategic priority activities in areas including: climate change (mitigation) and energy, environmental law, policy and good governance, and natural disaster risk reduction.

The secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) is the UN interagency secretariat with the mandate to coordinate, promote and strengthen DRR on a global, regional, national and local level. UNISDR secretariat is working towards a world without needless losses from disaster – following a guiding mission to catalyze, facilitate, and advocate for action that will protect lives and livelihoods from the impact of natural hazards. The UNISDR headquarters is based in Geneva, Switzerland. It works through regional offices in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe. UNISDR builds and supports partnerships and networks with development and humanitarian groups worldwide, to build disaster resilience and promote DRR. Partners include UN agencies, governments, international organizations, regional actors, NGOs, civil society and the private sector. UNISDR, among other things, advocates for increased government action on DRR; promotes the integration of disaster reduction policies and legislation into sustainable development planning, for example by supporting multi-stakeholder national, regional and thematic platforms on DRR; informs people by producing information and education materials, and promoting scientific and technical research, including guidance on DRR strategies, protection and preparedness measures; and promotes the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) – a set of guidelines, adopted by 168 countries worldwide, on how to integrate DRR policies into national development agendas.

The Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning (PPEW), which started operations in 2004, supports the development of early warning and preparedness systems by advocating for better early warning systems, especially in development assistance policy and programs, collecting and disseminating information on best practices, and stimulating cooperation among early warning actors and the development of new ways to improve early warning systems. PPEW support international action necessary to more systematically integration of technical early warning capacities into policy and practice, and improve early warning systems worldwide in order to facilitate the development of effective, people centered early warning and preparedness systems. The Platform is advocating for better early warning systems, especially in development assistance policy and programs, collecting and disseminating information on

best practices, and stimulating cooperation among early warning actors and the development of new ways to advance early warning systems. PPEW strongly supports the concept of people centered early warning systems which comprises four key elements of (i) risk knowledge, (ii) monitoring and warning service, (iii) dissemination and communication, and (iv) response capability.