

The Road to Cartagena: Hemispheric Cooperation to Combat Natural Disasters

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The main challenge of disasters

- Disasters, by definition, overwhelm the response capacity of the local community
- Sometimes, even with assistance from neighboring countries and the international community, it has not been possible to meet all basic humanitarian needs. (Haiti, Tsunami, etc)
- We have to accept collectively that responding to disasters requires more than just money

How to combat disasters?

1. Prevention: *take necessary measures to avoid the occurrence of disasters (risk reduction)*
2. Response: *save as many lives as possible and avoid disability and suffering*

What can be reasonably done in: Prevention?

- The Western hemisphere is highly exposed:
 - 24% of world disasters occur in the Western Hemisphere (CRED 2011)
 - 33% of LAC population live under poverty line. In some countries it reaches 55%. (ECLAC 2010)
 - The number of persons exposed to floods each year doubled in three decades in LAC (600,000 to 1.3 million- ISDR)

What can be reasonably done in: Prevention? (2)

- Establish priority on something possible and visible:
 - Ensure that at least critical services will remain functioning after disaster
- Example of what is feasible:
 - Ensure that all new hospitals and schools remain functioning after disaster (LAC has 20 years of experience in making hospital safer, national experts have proven it can be done, cost is built into projects, technology and codes exist)

How to combat disasters?

1. Prevention: *take necessary measures to avoid the occurrence of disasters (risk reduction)*
2. Response: *save as many lives as possible and avoid disability and suffering*

What can reasonably be done in: Response?

- LAC has strengths:
 - Decades of expertise in Pan-American response
 - National experts
 - Sub-regional intergovernmental response mechanisms
- Limitations:
 - Tendency to repeat same successes and mistakes
- The most effective part of response management is information management

What can reasonably be done in: Response?

- Prioritize one feasible and visible task at improving donation by making them known to everybody (transparent) and avoid duplication
- Example what is feasible:
 - Ensure that countries have a standardized process of exchanging information on humanitarian supplies common to all institutions and national and local levels (Many countries have information systems to track inventory donations for decades . Technology allow them to be compatible among institutions)

Conclusions

- Combating disaster is possible by collectively addressing a few feasible and visible priorities
 - Target in prevention could be: ensuring at least some critical facilities remain functioning after disaster
 - Target in response could be: ensure good donations by making a transparent inter-institutional management of humanitarian supply at all level in a country