# Disasters



### Preparedness and Mitigation in the Americas

Issue No. 92

News and Information for the International Community

July 2003

#### **Local Emergency Health Plans: Building Blocks for Disaster Reduction**



ver the course of the last two decades, the health sector in the Americas has steadily pursued a process of decentralization—shifting both responsibilities and resources from the central level to the departmental or municipal level. In its quest to transform Nicaragua's health system, the Ministry of Health created local integrated health systems, called SILAIS, believing that health resources should be located in the communities that use them. This strategy of decentralization has allowed local authorities and health professionals to make fundamental decisions regarding individual and community health in their regions.

Likewise, disaster preparedness is most effective when conceived, planned for and executed at the local level—closest to the population at risk. In the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, Nicaragua used this framework to promote and develop a methodology for preparing local level emergency plans for the health sector.

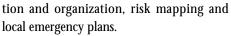
Two municipalities were initially selected to test the methodology: Telica, in the department of Leon and Moyogalpa in the department of Rivas. The process began by calling together the principal actors involved in disaster planning and response to begin the challenge of drafting plans for different disaster scenarios.

(continued on page 7)

#### **Read More About Community Organization** for Disasters

earn more about how communities are organizing to manage risk in a

**⊿**special edition of Biblio-des, a series of selected bibliographies produced by CRID, the Regional Disaster Information Center. This special English/ Spanish issue covers three related topics: community participa-



It contains essays and descriptions of reference documents, audiovisual materials and books on the subject, including the URL where you can download the full text.

A limited number of print copies of the selected bibliography is available from CRID (see page 8). View a PDF version on the web at www.crid.desastres.net/crid/eng/ tools/tools.htm (scroll down to the section on Biblio-des).





Pan American **Health Organization** Regional Office of the World Health Organization

## Contents

News from PAHO/WHO	<u>)</u>
Other Organizations	
Member Countries	1
Publications and Multimedia 6	Ć
Selected Bibliography	3
Supplement on CRID	

News from PAHO/WHO

INTERNATIONAL MEETING

### **HOSPITALS IN DISASTERS** HANDLE WITH CARE

he impact of major disasters in the Americas and their effects on critical facilities points to the need to examine more closely these

three issues.

These issues will be the focus of a major international meeting in El Salvador in July. More information in the next issue of this newsletter.

#### **Disaster Mitigation**

Approximately 50% of the hospitals in the Americas are located in high risk areas.

Is it inevitable that a disaster will put a hospital out of commission?

#### **Evacuation**

Unnecessary evacuation of hospitals in the aftermath of disasters can lead to serious problems.

Should we evacuate or not and when is evacuation counterproductive?

#### Field Hospitals

Some disaster-affected countries have accepted field hospitals as a temporary measure.

How useful are they in disaster situations?

#### News about the LEADERS Course

#### **Spanish**

Photos: PAHO/WHO

The fourth Spanish-language LIDERES course will be held in Cuernavaca, Mexico from 20-31 October 2003. LIDERES is an international course that focuses on the management aspects of disaster reduction and has been training professionals in the Americas since 2000. Deadline for application to the October course: **29 August 2003**. Write curso-lideres@paho.org.

#### **Portuguese**

For the first time, LIDERES will be offered in Portuguese from 22 September to 3 October 2003 in Ciudad de Bahia, Brazil. With support from the Secretary of Health of the state of Bahia and the Federal University of Bahia, the Portuguese-language couse will help to consolidate the regional capacity to manage risk, with emphasis on the health and social sector. Deadline for application: 1 September 2003. Write <a href="mailto:curso-lideres@bra.ops-oms.org">curso-lideres@bra.ops-oms.org</a>.

#### **English**

The World Health Organization and its Southeast Asia Regional Office will tailor the English-language Leaders course, given last February in Jamaica, to a global audience, primarily Asia, with support from the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center in Bangkok, Thailand. The course is tentatively scheduled for February 2004. Contact Dr. Luis Jorge Perez at perezl@ewhosea.org.



For information on all LEADERS courses, visit www.disaster-info.net/LIDERES

# Other Organizations

Other Organizations



# Paul Bell: Disaster Community Remembers a Leader and Friend

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Paul Bell, a well-respected colleague and friend to the humanitarian community worldwide and an icon in the disaster field in Latin America and the Caribbean. For the last two decades Mr. Bell served as the senior regional adviser for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance.

Paul Bell was internationally known as a leader in humanitarian assistance and served as

Chair of several groups and events, including the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and the Summit of America's Hemispheric Risk Reduction Conference. In the Americas, he was a firm believer in strengthening the countries' capacity to mitigate and prepare for disasters. His team has trained more than 32,000 persons regionwide as disaster responders and has worked with governments to promote self-sufficiency in disaster response.

As an individual, Paul Bell touched and influenced all who met him. We at PAHO respected and admired his personal and professional integrity and commitment, and were grateful for his guidance. Thanks to his tireless efforts, he has left an indelible imprint on this Region. He was and will remain a role model, helping us to remember who it is we serve—the countries and people of Latin America and Caribbean. This is the legacy of this remarkable man.

#### **ALNAP Promotes Learning to Improve Practice**

In the mid-1990s, a multi-donor study on the response to the Rwanda crisis of 1994 identified many shortcomings in the humanitarian response, including the need to carry out more and better evaluations to improve performance and accountability. This led to the creation of the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP).

ALNAP has developed several web-based training modules for evaluators and evalua-

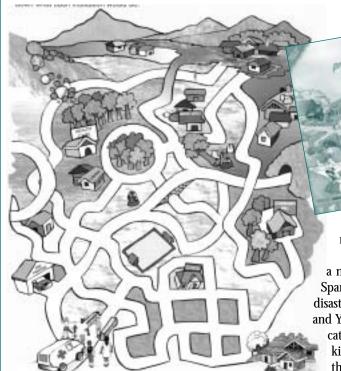
tion managers to improve the practice and effective use of evaluations: Introduction to Evaluation; Evaluating Humanitarian Action; and Managing and Facilitating the Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Process. Organizations can modify the materials to suit their needs and tips are provided to make the sessions more effective based on the audience and desired learning outcomes. For those wishing to run a course, ALNAP can help identify a facilitator to customize and provide the course as a stand

alone or as an add-on module within an existing course. Contact the ALNAP Secretariat at alnap@odi.org.uk.

Another feature of the website is the Evaluative Reports Database (ERD), a fully searchable Internet database with 450 evaluation reports. The collection of reports in the ERD makes it possible to learn from previous evaluations. Agencies are encouraged to share their evaluations and lessons learned studies with the network so they can be included in the database. The network provides a very active and useful forum for field workers as well as for decision makers. Visit <a href="https://www.alnap.org">www.alnap.org</a>.

# Member Countries

#### 2003 World Disaster Reduction Campaign: Turning the Tide on Disasters



he ISDR's 2003 campaign, Turning the Tide on Disasters, aims at changing perceptions of hydrometeorological disasters such as floods and drought by involving as many sectors as possible in education and prevention activities. The International Natural Disaster Reduction Day, 8 October 2003, will represent an opportunity for local and national organizations to draw attention to how to reduce vulnerability to water-related

hazards and raise awareness. The Campaign will extend beyond 2003 until World Water Day on 22 March 2004. Find out more about the campaign on <a href="http://www.unisdr.org">http://www.unisdr.org</a>.

The ISDR has especially reached out to children via the Internet with a new set of materials published on the ISDR website in English and in Spanish. Children can browse the site for information on making a family disaster plan, read a glossary of disaster terms, and play games at the "Kids and Youth" section at <a href="http://www.eird.org/ing/ninos/inicio.htm">http://www.eird.org/ing/ninos/inicio.htm</a>. A new educational kit is also available with the game "Riskland"—an active way for kids ages 8-12 to learn about disaster preparedness. Request a copy of the kit from eird@eird.org.



aribbean health professionals and government officials have long recognized that all too often, hospitals do not perform satisfactorily during natural disasters. Unfortunately, new hospitals continue to be designed and constructed without careful consideration of natural hazards and risk. Attempts have been made to further an agenda of damage mitigation in health facilities. In 1996, a major conference led to the creation of an Expert

#### **Caribbean Disaster Mitigation Advisory Group Created**

Committee on Hospital Design. The Committee, formed in 1997-98, met only twice and soon became inactive.

PAHO considers it important to revive this initiative and during an April meeting in St. Martin, the terms of reference for a Caribbean Disaster Mitigation Advisory Group were drawn up. The Group, called DiMAG, will advise ministries of health (through PAHO) on design criteria and standards and on quality assurance mechanisms for construction projects (new facilities, extensions to or renovations or retrofitting of existing facilities). The DiMAG will also provide advisory services on the terms of reference for vulnerability analyses—structural, non-structural and func-

tional—and the implementation of recommendations from the analyses.

PAHO will serve as the Secretariat for the DiMAG, which will have a multi-disciplinary membership (by invitation) of not more than 12 members. PAHO has committed to organizing and sponsoring annual meetings, although special meetings may be called to address specific issues. DiMAG members must be committed to furthering this agenda. The tenure of individual members of the Group will overlap, fostering continuity and a sustainable future.

The Group will meet in 2004 to discuss activities during the previous 12 months and evaluate the usefulness of its mandate. See http://www.disaster-info.net/carib/.



#### Member Countries

#### WINDS OF CHANGE

#### Meeting Focuses on Building Codes and their Enforcement

seminar called "Winds of Change" was held in Barbados 24-25 April 2003. The seminar focused on disaster mitigation issues, including the need to enforce building codes, the gaps in research that exist on these topics and the need for a regional approach to studying the effects of natural hazards. The aim of the seminar was to provide knowledge of hazards affecting hospital design and create a research agenda.

During the seminar, the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of enforcement of design and construction standards, especially in new hospitals, were discussed. A manual on the subject (pre-

pared as part of a PAHO-ECHO project on hospital design in the Caribbean) was introduced. One of the main conclusions of the seminar was that scientists and practitioners (engineers) need a forum to improve communication and exchange information, as practitioners often are not familiar with assumptions made by scientists in their hazard mapping. Complete seminar proceedings can be found at <a href="http://disaster-info.net/carib/WindsofChange/">http://disaster-info.net/carib/WindsofChange/</a>.



High winds produced by hurricanes cause heavy damage and often hospitals are among the worst affected. Enforcing current building codes will help ensure that hospitals continue functioning when they are most needed.

#### Hurricane Season Underway

The names for this year's Atlantic storms are: Ana, Bill, Claudette, Danny, Erika, Fabian, Grace, Henri, Isabel, Juan, Kate, Larry, Mindy, Nicholas, Odette, Peter, Rose, Sam, Teresa, Victor, and Wanda.

#### Floods in Argentina Affect the Health Sector



Argentina and surrounding areas resulted in damage to health systems and caused chronic emergency health and sanitary conditions. Cooperation among the Ministry of Health and national and international agencies in setting up equipment and providing expert assistance helped to improve the organization of the response. SUMA, the humanitarian supply management system, was officially adopted by the Provincial Government in Santa Fe in May and trained experts used the system to manage donations. SUMA is now in use in a dozen locations in the province as well as in Buenos Aires. At a critical period following the floods, an estimated 50,000 people were living in shelters and received donated food and humanitarian supplies.

Primary immediate health sector concerns were the increase in incidence of Hepatitis (174 cases as of 10 June), hemorrhagic diarrhea (35 cases as of 10 June) and leptospirosis (113 cases as of 10 June). Vaccination efforts continue to be a priority to combat the spread of communicable diseases. Proper waste disposal is a continuing challenge in the area. For more information (in Spanish) visit Santa Fe's website at <a href="https://www.santafe.gov.ar">www.santafe.gov.ar</a>.

# Publications and Multimedia



Publications and Multimedia



### Health Library for Disasters 2003 Edition

he 2003 Edition of the Health Library for Disasters—the most complete electronic collection of information resources on public health in disasters and complex emergencies— has just been published.

The selection of material in this third edition is the result of a long process of consultation and exchange between WHO and PAHO, with participation from other UN agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF, and the ISDR; the Red Cross movement; the SPHERE project; non-governmental organizations and national organizations. Thanks to this joint effort, more than 500 technical and scientific documents on disaster reduction and public health related to emergencies and humanitarian assistance form

the basis for this electronic collection.

The virtual library features:

- A powerful and easy-to-use search engine to locate information by topic, titles, organizations or key words.
  - The option to download the complete collection to a hard drive or to download individual publications.
    - A CD-ROM version, which is also available on the Internet.
      - All documents available in HTML and most in PDF format.

For more information, contact WHO at <a href="mailto:eha@who.int">eha@who.int</a> or PAHO at <a href="mailto:disaster-publications@paho.org">disaster-publications@paho.org</a>. Visit this collection on the Internet: <a href="mailto:www.helid.desastres.net">www.helid.desastres.net</a>.

HEALTH LURARY FOR DISASTES

HEALTH LURARY FOR DISASTES

TOUR TO THE DISASTES

THE DISA

The 2003 edition of the Health Library for Disasters contains publications on a wide variety of topics:
• Public health in emergencies and disasters, principles and

- guidelines
- Preparedness and response to emergencies and disasters
- Disaster mitigation
- Human rights and humanitarian legislation
- Health of refugees and displaced populations
- Environmental health and chemical products
- Communicable diseases
- Parasites and vector-borne diseases
- Food and nutrition
- Reproductive health, child health and immunization
- Mental health
- Supply management and essential drugs
- · Management of injuries caused by war
- Safe blood and laboratory services
- HIV and AIDS

www.who.int/eha/disasters/ www.paho.org/disasters/

#### Local Emergency Health Plans

(from page 1)

#### The Strategy

Nicaragua's Ministry of Health prepared a methodology guide, which it field tested in 10 municipalities in Rivas. Bolstered by the success of this first round, the Ministry, through its health disaster office, assigned responsibility for preparing the plans to the municipal level health directors. PAHO/WHO collaborated by recruiting three field officers to plan and coordinate activities. One of their major tasks was to conduct two-day training workshops on how to develop local level emergency health plans. An average of 20 persons from a variety of organizations attended the workshops in each municipality. Through the training of municipal health directors, the preparation and implementation of local emergency health plans have become a priority for the health sector. Once the workshops were completed, field staff provided guidance during the actual preparation of the plan and helped to organize a drill to test effectiveness. When all municipalities had finalized their plans, epidemiologists used them to produce a departmental level plan. Departmental level plans, in turn, fed into the national health emergency plan.

#### The Impact

Between November 2000 and June 2003, the initiative reached 120 of Nicaragua's 153 municipalities and proved successful when put to the test in emergency situations such as the fires in the north of the country in 2002: the population and authorities knew the role they played and what to do during the different stages of the emergency; agreements that had been previously drawn up were quickly put into practice and there was little confusion among the different health committees.

The success of this strategy attracted the interest of other organizations working in Nicaragua such as the Red Cross and the European Union, who helped to promote the development of local level emergency health plans. Strategic alliances such as these will help guarantee sustainability and

ricaragua is made up of 14 departments, which among them have 153 municipalities that act as key responders in emer-



gency situations and are strategic components of local level emergency health plans.

In the department of Rivas, 10 municipalities have developed excellent local health plans. The plans call for coordinated disaster preparedness measures for the health sector and strengthen coordination among all local actors.

Above, Nicaragua's former Minister of Health, Lucia Salvo, personally presented the health sector plan to the mayors of the municipalities in the department of Rivas. Her presence and participation were a demonstration of the Ministry's commitment, critical to ensuring implementation and sustainability of the plans.

contribute to generating a critical mass throughout Nicaragua.

#### **Contributing to the Success**

It certainly helps that Nicaragua has a legal framework in place that supports the development of emergency and disaster plans. In 2000, the National Disaster System was created by law, giving credibility to the topic of disaster reduction and helping to clearly define who is responsible for what. This legal framework improved the strategy's chances for success because disaster planning responded to a recognized need in Nicaragua. What also helped was focusing on the actual process of developing local emergency health plans rather than on the final product—which, after all, is just a paper document.

#### Sustainability

Once the strategy proved successful at the municipal level, it received backing from the higher levels of government. Today, different areas and agencies have clearly earmarked resources for the development of local emergency health plans in their budgets and work plans. Disaster preparedness is officially recognized as one of the Ministry of Health's priorities, and the Minister frequently expresses support. However, to keep plans as up-to-date and operational as possible and to contribute to a culture of risk management, the plans must be reviewed annually.

#### **Lessons Learned**

- The health sector's limited financial and human resources and a heavy workload made it imperative to develop a methodology that was practical and easy to manage. The concrete results of this initiative heightened commitment to a culture of risk reduction.
- Real inroads were achieved by fostering a team spirit among many institutions who shared a common objective.
- The creation of a national network involving all municipalities in Nicaragua made it possible for the least vulnerable to support the most vulnerable.
- The involvement of the Minister of Health in the strategy opened the door to many other divisions in the Ministry and was instrumental in adding disaster preparedness to the list of priorities in the Ministry's five-year plan. This designation is projected to have an impact on all plans and budgetary allocations.
- When training on preparing and implementing emergency plans has been completed in the remaining departments, local health service personnel in all of Nicaragua's municipalities will be ready to confront emergencies effectively—notable in a country that four years ago did not even have a Disaster Unit in its Ministry of Health, much less a comprehensive and coherent methodology for creating awareness of disaster prevention at the municipal level.

# Selected Bibliography



Selected Bibliography

The articles listed in this section may be of interest to health professionals and others responsible for disaster preparedness, mitigation and relief. They have been reproduced and recently added to the collection of articles available from the CRID. A complete list of reprints is available upon request. Please quote the reference code listed to the left of the publication title when requesting articles.

- Romero Vargas, Lorena. "Las municipalidades y el sector salud local en la gestión del riesgo por desastres." *Una mirada a algunas tendencias temáticas para la reducción del riesgo*. Estrategia Internacional para la Reducción de Desastres. Organización Panamericana de la Salud, Nov. 2000. pp. 105-25.
- H.2 Smith Wiltshire, David A. "La gestión local del riesgo en el contexto del Huracán Mitch." *Del desastre al desarrollo humano sostenible en Centroamérica*. Centro Internacional para el Desarrollo Humano Sostenible. Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, March 2000, pp. 83-104.
- Sánchez del Valle, Rosa. "Dimensión de género en la gestión local de riesgo: Participación de mujeres en el proyecto Fortalecimiento de Estructuras Locales para la Mitigación de Desastres (FEMID)." Oct. 2001.
- Villegas Mejía, Nora E. "La preparación de la comunidad una estrategia fundamental para la prevención y mitigación de desastres, incorporada a través de la red social." May 1999.
- H.5 ISDR. "Natural disasters and sustainable development: Understanding the links between development, environment and natural disasters" Background paper No. 5, New York, 2002.
- University College London et al. "Communication during volcanic emergencies: An operations manual for the Caribbean," United Kingdom.

Disasters: Preparedness and Mitigation in the Americas is the Newsletter of the Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief Coordination Program of the Pan American Health Organization, Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization. The reported events, activities and programs do not imply endorsement by PAHO/WHO, nor do the statements made necessarily represent the policy of the Organization. The publication of this Newsletter has been made possible through the financial support of the International Humanitarian Assistance Division of the Canadian International Development Agency (IHA/CIDA), the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance of the U.S. Agency for International Development (OFDA/AID), and the Department for International Development of the

Correspondence and inquiries should be addressed to:

The Editor
Disasters: Preparedness and Mitigation
in the Americas
Pan American Health Organization
525 Twenty-third Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037, U.S.A.
Tel: 202-974-3522 • Fax: 202-775-4578
E-mail: disaster-newsletter@paho.org
www.paho.org/disasters/

#### = CRID

Regional Disaster Information Center Apdo. 3745-1000, San José, Costa Rica Fax: (506) 231-5973 E-mail: crid@crid.or.cr www.crid.or.cr

**July 2003** 

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use \$300

Disasters: Preparedness and Mitigation in the Americas Pan American Health Organization 525 Twenty-third Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20037-2895

FIRST CLASS

Postage and Fees Paid PAHO Permit Number G-61



#### Bringing information closer to the needs of its users

Special Supplement to the newsletter **Disasters: Preparedness and Mitigation in the Americas**Quarterly Newsletter of PAHO/WHO

July 2003

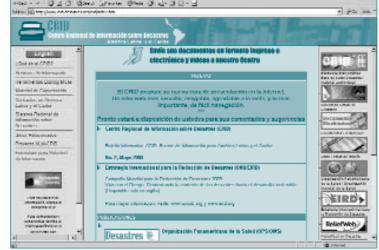
# News, challenges and future perspectives

ew people question the link between information management and risk reduction. Today's disaster managers find it difficult to take decisive action without the solid information resources and tools to make decisions on any and all facets of disaster preparedness, prevention, mitigation or response.

The "information universe" we face today is growing at a rate that far exceeds the time we have to find and use all that is available. Who can help to ensure that targeted quality information is there when we need it? Who can close the gap between information sources and decision-making? There are many ways to this, but very few actors who are actually doing it. In Latin America and the Caribbean-where such needs are obvious in all disaster-related fields-an information center has been performing these services for several years: The Regional Disaster Information Center, CRID, with headquarters in Costa Rica and supported by six organizations.<sup>1</sup>

Many of this newsletter's regular readers may be familiar with CRID and may even have requested information or visited its web page. Yet today's CRID is a distant relative of the original PAHO/WHO center created in 1990. Its work, information services, new products, current activities and strategic alliances are part of a dynamic working environment that has opened up new possibilities for its users and posed new challenges for the Center and its partners. Prompt and efficient communica-

tion with users remains one of CRID's



Visit CRID AT: www.crid.or.cr

www.crid.desastres.net

main objectives. The intention of this supplement is to contribute to this goal by inviting readers to get to know the new CRID, to use its services, and whenever they can, help to enrich and improve its information sources and services.

CRID's main mission remains unchanged: 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.

<sup>1</sup> CRID benefits from the direct support of: The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) and the Costa Rican National Commission for Risk Prevention and Emergency Response (CNE). Other CRID partners are: the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRCS), the Coordination Center for Natural Disaster Prevention in Central America (CEPREDENAC) and the Médecins sans Frontiéres Regional Office (MSF).

# THE CENTRAL AMERICAN HEALTH AND DISASTER INFORMATION NETWORK now a reality

wo years ago, CRID launched a project to improve access to health and disaster information in Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, with the financial and technical support of the U.S. National Library of Medicine, the Pan American Health Organization and the United Nations International Strategy for Disasters Reduction. In the aftermath of hurricane Mitch and the devastating earthquakes in El Salvador, it was apparent that radical changes were needed to improve national capacity in disaster preparedness, mitigation and response. Access to relevant and reliable technical information was a must for any and all of these activities.

Seven libraries in the three target countries were chosen; six belonged to national university centers and a seventh to an NGO in El Salvador. The policy of creating alliances, together with the commitment and dedication of the national centers, has made it possible to achieve significant results in three key areas: (1) strengthening the IT infrastructure and increasing Internet access, (2) human resources training in critical areas such as information management and the use of new technologies and (3) new products and information services.

It would be fair to say that most of these libraries have radically changed their approach to work, their capacity to provide services and their community outreach, mostly through their own initiative, but also stimulated and guided by the project and its supporting partners.

In Honduras, the project was the driving force behind the modernization of the National Library of Medicine at the National Autonomous University and the University Center of the Northern Region. Two

years earlier, neither of these libraries had Internet access; today they each have a network of fifteen computers, a dedicated Internet connection at 128 kb/s and, more importantly, they are able to offer improved quality of services to a greater number of users. The National Library of Medicine of the National Autonomous University is now incorporated in the World Health Organization's HINARI Network (Health Internet Access

Research Initiative), which provides free access to more than 2,000 full text scientific journals. These two libraries, with the

#### Going Digital: the best way to decentralize information

RID's most valuable asset is its collection of documents, which has grown over its 12-year history. It includes thousands of publications, technical documents and educational material that together form the most extensive technical and historical archive of disaster work in recent decades in Latin America and the Caribbean. Today, with the widespread use and low cost of new technologies, it has become imperative to transform this valuable, but largely print collection into digital format. This is one of the most significant benefits of the NLM/PAHO project. Instead of outsourcing this task, the technical capacity was developed within CRID. Already more than 3,000 documents have been converted into full-text digital format (and the number grows at a rate of 150 documents per month), following a simple and practical methodology to guarantee quality. There are many advantages associated with a virtual library:

- CRID has gained excellent experience in the process of converting documents to digital format and is transferring this experience to national centers.
- Documents and information are available by different means and in different formats (Internet and on CD-ROM).
- Greater flexibility to use and manage information and the ability to produce information products with a unique value added (CD collections organized around a special topic, for example), and enhanced ability to share information among a large number of organizations. The centralization of information in a single site is a thing of the past!
- The information itself has been preserved in a format that is less perishable than paper.
- Service to clients can be provided more quickly and less expensively (there is no need to photocopy and mail information in large quantities).





support of the local PAHO Office in Honduras, have organized training workshops to create a countrywide disaster information network and have developed an excellent promotional campaign geared toward organizations working in disaster reduction.

In Nicaragua, the Autonomous University Center for Research and Health Studies in Managua and the Leon National University Library of Medicine have improved their technical capacity, infrastructure and Internet connection, and are currently providing improved quality services to their users, within and outside the university campus.

In El Salvador, three centers have been incorporated into the network and have new services and web pages with information on disasters: the Center for Protection against Disasters, the Ministry of Health/PAHO Reference Center and the El Salvador University Library of Medicine. The three centers have signed an agreement to develop a National Virtual Library on Disasters with the participation of more than twelve libraries with information on disasters.

### Achievements to Date Help Expand the Project

he above-mentioned achievements, acknowledged by national centers, donors and supporting agencies, have provided the basis upon which to expand the geographical scope and the duration of the project. New resources have been obtained to build on the work carried out by participating libraries, consolidate a technical model which can be made available to other Regions and ensure sustainability.

• Libraries in Guatemala are now being incorporated into the project through specially earmarked funds from PAHO. The Library of the School of Medicine Library of the University of San Carlos will be the local partner and university authorities have pledged their commitment to this initiative. The University will pay for an Internet connection and PAHO/CRID will provide IT equipment, training and technical support for electronic information services.

# good reasons to get to know, use and promote CRID's work

- CRID has the largest collection of technical and scientific information on disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean. CRID's value added is its institutional memory and accumulated practical experience.
- These information sources and resources are available to all organizations and individuals working in disaster-related fields in the Region.
- The Internet enables easy access to this accumulated knowledge, with no space or time constraints. CRID provides free Internet access to more than 3,000 technical documents on disasters.
- CRID offers technical advice and training in disaster information management.
- CRID uses and promotes information and communication technologies adapted to the needs and realities in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- 6 CRID directly assists users to search for and locate disaster information.
- 7 CRID has forged strategic alliances with leading organizations and institutions in information-related fields such as the U.S. National Library of Medicine, the Regional Health Sciences Information Center (BIREME), the Pan American Center for Environmental Health and Sanitary Engineering (CEPIS) and others to expand its information resources and training capacity.
- 8 CRID promotes the creation of decentralized national information centers and networks in an attempt to bring information services closer to local needs and to strengthen national capacities.
- 9 FUNDACRID, CRID's financial arm, has provided greater flexibility and improved project management capacity.
- And last but not least, disaster vulnerability remains a significant challenge to development in the Region and it is an undisputed fact that timely and adequate access to information improves the way governments and communities handle risk and fosters a true culture of disaster preparedness and prevention.

- The project's main donor, NLM, has pledged additional financial support to enhance technical areas where weaknesses have been identified. These resources will be mainly invested in the design and development of a training kit, in multimedia format, with the components to set up a disaster information center; increased technical support to participating centers in the areas of technology and computer networks; and project promotion and evaluation.
- Additional funding has been requested from the European Union Humanitarian Office, ECHO, to develop new activities geared towards the creation of a network that, besides existing participating centers, will include Panama and Costa Rica.

Thanks to these coordinated 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.

## Centers Participating in the NLM/CRID/PAHO-WHO Project

#### **HONDURAS**

- Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), National Library of Medicine, http://cidbimena.desastres.hn/
- Northern Regional University Center, Disaster Documentation Center (CIDCURN) http://cidcurn.desastres.hn/

#### **EL SALVADOR**

- Documentation and Health Information Center of El Salvador's PAHO Office, http://desastres.ops.org.sv/
- Disaster Protection Center (CEPRODE) http://desastres.ceprode.org.sv/
- University of El Salvador, Dr. Luis Edmundo Vasquez Library, http://www.ues.edu.sv/desastres/

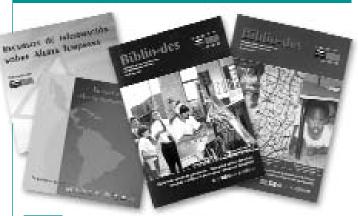
#### **GUATEMALA**

• University of San Carlos, Library of the School of Medicine

#### **NICARAGUA**

- National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN), Health Studies Investigation Center http://desastres.cies.edu.ni/
- National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN), Disaster Information Center, http://desastres.unanl.edu.ni/

#### CRID's new and improved services



he planning, execution and follow-up of the activities mentioned in these pages has certainly improved the technical and managerial capacity of the CRID. At the same time, however, the many new demands generated by the enthusiasm of the countries have brought CRID to the brink of its capacity.

- CRID has improved its IT infrastructure and its Internet connectivity and can provide faster and more reliable on-line services
- Its web page is now the Center's main showcase, with thousands of on-line documents and many reference sources.
   Search options and browsers have been improved and the entire site is currently being revamped to make it more efficient and user-friendly.
- The recent availability of many documents in electronic format has allowed CRID to produce new information products on CD-ROM specifically targeted for individual sectors or actors.
- CRID has not lost sight of its regional mandate and perspective. Taking into account its available resources, it supports requests from any country in the Region. In 2002, an international workshop was held in Bolivia for information experts from the Andean Region. As a follow-up, Bolivia has begun the creation of a Virtual Library on Disasters and Venezuela is setting up a national network with technical assistance from CRID in the form of a training workshop for 15 national institutions.
- FUNDACRID, an NGO created in 2000 to provide greater autonomy and sustainability to CRID's work, has become a project management and administration tool that has made CRID more flexible and operational. Donors and partners can channel their support through this new NGO.

#### Get to know CRID:

#### **Regional Disaster Information Center CRID**

P.O. Box 3745-1000, San José, Costa Rica Tel: (506) 296-3952 • Fax: (506) 231-5973

E-mail: crid@crid.or.cr

Web site: www.crid.or.cr - www.crid.desastres.net