

VIRTUAL DIALOGUE

Americas and the
Caribbean regarding the

COVID-19

**Pandemic: Towards the comprehensive
management of Disaster Risk Reduction**

Organized by



CEPREDENAC
CENTRO DE COORDINACIÓN PARA LA PREVENCIÓN DE LOS DESASTRES
EN AMÉRICA CENTRAL Y EL CARIBE



SICA
Sistema de la Integración
Centroamericana

Virtual Dialogue

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**Pandemic: Towards the comprehensive
management of Disaster Risk Reduction**



Aiming to promote the exchange of experiences and a coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic, representatives from governing bodies on disaster risk management (DRM) from different countries in the Americas and the Caribbean region met on 14 April. This initiative proposed and organized jointly by UNDRR Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean, CEPREDENAC¹, and the Central American Integration System (SICA), counted with the participation of different countries of the region, and sub regional intergovernmental organizations on disaster risk management. Over 80 participants interacted in this dialogue, including observers from other pertinent institutions, such as donors and other stakeholders.

The specific objectives of the dialogue were to:

- Promote regional and transboundary cooperation
- Identify good practices
- Promote a vision of systemic risk and a multisectoral approach to the COVID 19 response and recovery.

Background

As countries face the unprecedented spread of the COVID-19 outbreak, the benefits of collaborating and joining forces are becoming increasingly more evident. The mutual identification of the most recurring challenges of the current response, together with the pooling of knowledge and resources, can only lead to improving our regional and national capacities towards common solutions.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 incorporates, among other things, considerations of health, biological hazards and epidemics. In this regard, the Sendai Framework considers an all-hazards triggered disasters approach, being these natural or man-made, as well as environmental, technological and biological hazards. It refers to the Health sector, in terms of national health systems, health workers, health programmes in collaboration with other sectors, and in the implementation of International Health Regulations of the World Health Organization. [Sendai paragraphs 15, 30(i) and (f)]

1. The Central American Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Disasters (CEPREDENAC) is the regional and intergovernmental institution part of the Central American Integration System (SICA), specialized in the reduction of vulnerability, prevention and mitigation of risk reduction of disasters.

The Sendai Framework also calls for coherence across sectors and agendas with regards to normative frameworks and policies; such as those related to sustainable development and growth, food security, health and safety, climate change and variability, environmental management and disaster risk reduction agendas. It highlights the need to cooperate among States in order to prevent and reduce disaster risk through multisectoral coordination approach, which includes the health sector and others. [Sendai paragraph 19(h)]



Based on the premise that disasters know no borders, do not distinguish between sectors and generate cascading effects in all spheres of society; COVID-19 brings a scenario of systemic risk. In this context, what is required is a multisectoral, coherent, comprehensive and coordinated response among countries that would allow dealing with risk in an effective and timely manner, while benefitting from the capacities that each country may contribute. Therefore, a unified and collaborative approach to the current pandemic is a win-win strategy that will benefit all parties.

Results

Through the exchange of knowledge, challenges and experiences, this dialogue enabled national DRM authorities to share ideas about the role that each national and sub regional agency has been playing in the response to the pandemic, and on their added value for the efficient use of resources, and for coordination with other institutions involved in the response, notably those in the health and social protection sectors. Although many national DRM authorities are not directly responsible for overseeing the pandemic, they have, nonetheless, made their capacities available to the national response, particularly in terms of networks (institutional and community) and with regards to the use of their existing logistical capabilities.

Participants manifested the need for multisectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination to face this global crisis. They reiterated the multisector nature of the COVID-19 crisis and its unprecedented cascading effects at all levels, and in all the countries of the region. The underlying impacts of COVID-19 have gone far beyond the health sector. In all countries, the socio-economic impact of the crisis has been evident. While many people have been affected, its impact is most significant for those living in conditions of poverty, those with lower incomes and those working in informal sectors of the economy. Similarly, national industries have also been hardly affected, particularly those sectors dedicated to manufacturing and services such as tourism, which particularly in the Caribbean, may have catastrophic impacts as one of the major economic drivers for most of the economies in the region.

In order to accelerate activities to reduce risk, participants underlined the urgent need for concerted global and regional efforts towards reducing the vulnerabilities inherent to each country and their exposure to this biological hazard as well as to other multi-hazard scenarios that could occur in the context of COVID-19, such as hurricanes or earthquakes. In the same vein, they reiterated the need to understand the multi-dimensional nature of risk; increase accountability for the creation and propagation of disaster risk; collectively identify inter-dependent solutions enabling the prevention of new risks; reduce existing risk; building back better through risk-informed decision making; and strengthen resilience at all levels.



Participants noted that the current pandemic demonstrates how poverty, inequality and limited investment in critical services can increase our vulnerability to all types of hazards. Similarly, participants also emphasized that multi-hazard communication must not only provide relevant information, but also lead to discussion and facilitate decision-making through specific scenarios and options, increasing resources and investment, and taking actions to



reduce risk at all levels. In this line, participants highlighted the benefits of national and sub regional information systems that are being used to monitor the current crisis and welcomed the fact that they incorporate information about other hazards to which each country and subregion is exposed.

In order to transition from the current pandemic's immediate response towards more medium- and long-term recovery and rehabilitation, emphasis was placed on the importance of ensuring that Disaster Risk Reduction policies, strategies and plans focus not only on natural hazards but also on man-made and biological hazards. The importance of eliminating the existing silos between disaster managers and health authorities was highlighted, as well as the need to shift from a response-oriented approach towards a multisectoral approach aimed at mitigation, preparedness, monitoring and overall disaster risk management.

Participants furthermore emphasized the importance of promoting and supporting community involvement, notably of those most vulnerable, in all phases of disaster risk management, from response and recovery, but also on the design and development of activities and programmes aimed at mitigation and prevention.

The different national authorities concluded by highlighting the value of this first dialogue, inviting UNDRR and the other sub regional bodies (CEPREDENAC, CDEMA, etc.) to continue promoting initiatives such as this that aim to promote the exchange of experiences and challenges while seeking innovative solutions for common implementation. It is expected that during the next dialogue each national authority proposes mechanisms for multisector and multi-country coordination response, aiming to identify, combine and assign resources in a more effective manner - whether

in terms of human talent, research and development or protocols for more effective decision-making and performance.

To conclude, an invitation was made by different representatives to rethink our cooperation relationships and the concept of humanity that is required in order to implement collective actions in the current context. This reflection should transcend aspects related to the health sector and should lead to new ways of thinking about our societies -progressively interdependent and globalized but also increasingly vulnerable and exposed. This reflection should also serve to review our existing risk governance structures, as well as to strengthen the coordination role of National Disaster Risk Management Systems in each of the countries and in the subregions to effectively address the current challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic and its implications in the short, medium and long term, make evident the importance of building channels of cooperation and common understanding based on humanity and solidarity. These considerations are particularly crucial in a context of increasing complexity, interdependence and systemic nature of risk, with an increased recurrence and duration of hazards as we can observe in the case of the current pandemic.

Recommendations

- Promote regional and transboundary cooperation

The systemic nature of the COVID-19 crisis and its unprecedented cascading effects has an impact in all sectors and levels, and in all the countries of the region. Effectively addressing COVID-19 requires, thus, concerted global and regional efforts towards reducing the vulnerabilities inherent to each country and their exposure to this biological hazard as well as to other **multi-hazard scenarios** that **could occur** in the context of COVID-19. A multisectoral, coherent, comprehensive and coordinated response among countries would allow dealing with risk in an effective and timely manner, while benefitting from the **capacities** that each country may contribute. In this regard, **sharing information** on national risk analyses and collaborating in producing sub-regional information systems can facilitate the coordination of responses (particularly in the cases of expected transboundary effects). A **learning agenda** should be fostered by identifying, documenting and sharing good practices at national, regional and global levels.

- Promote a vision of systemic risk and a multisectoral approach to the preparedness, response and recovery plans.

Countries must revisit how the increasingly complex and cascade systemic risks are effectively being addressed in order to protect development gains and promote growth. The result of this considerations should lead to **risk governance structures** ready to prepare and respond to increasingly complex and interconnected hazards, as well as, on the strengthening of global, regional and national disaster risk management systems' coordination role.

Plans and strategies must promote the understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of risk; increase accountability for the creation and propagation of disaster risk; collectively identify inter-dependent solutions enabling the prevention of new risks; reduce existing risk; building back better through risk-informed decision making; and strengthen resilience at all levels. Countries must ensure that Disaster

Risk Reduction policies, strategies and plans focus not only on natural hazards but also on man-made and biological hazards.

- Promote the participation of multiple stakeholders in response and recovery plans.

The COVID-19 response requires a multisectoral and multi-stakeholder participation and coordination. To ensure the **needs of the most vulnerable** are fully accounted for, community involvement must be promoted in all phases of disaster risk management, from response and recovery, but also on the design and development of activities and programmes aimed at mitigation and prevention. To mitigate the economic impacts of the pandemic and to foster an effective recovery, greater involvement of the private sector in the response is required. Recovery plans should be designed in coordination with the **private sector**, and particularly address the support requirements of SMEs.



COVID-19 RESPONSE



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