KEY MESSAGES OF
THE THEMATIC GROUP ON
URBAN PREPARATIONS AND RESILIENT CITIES (PUCR)
February, June and September 2022
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Meetings: February, June and September 2022

Objectives:

• Identify key aspects to be incorporated for community-level management of disaster preparedness and resilience in urban spaces
• Contribute to the generation of knowledge at the regional level and the exchange of good practices related to the theme of disaster preparedness in urban environments and resilient cities
• Strengthen regional networks, harmonization and coordination to avoid duplication of efforts and improve the implementation of initiatives in urban areas
• Support the implementation of plans and strategies at the regional level aimed at generating systemic changes for preparations in urban environments and resilient cities (PUCR)

Key Points

Highlights of presentations and dialogues:

Disaster risks are the result of inadequate development processes, intimately linked to conditions of poverty and exclusion of (broad, in the case of our region) sectors of the population. The concentrated model (economically, socially and environmentally) translates into differences in access to land, housing, the market and services, generating the expansion of informal settlements.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, this dynamic has led to a concentration of risks and disasters in urban areas, predominantly in small and medium-sized cities and in the expansion areas of larger cities, spaces that concentrate 80% of disaster records (RAR 2021).

Particularly in informal settlements, disaster risk is linked to several other challenges; e.g. employment deficits, low and unstable incomes, social cohesion, population displacement (migration, return, emigration) and security. This creates additional challenges for response preparedness and resilience-building interventions.

In addition to the limited presence of the Central Government in areas of informal urban expansion, local governments have not developed sufficient capacities to face these complex challenges. In many cases, it is grassroots organizations that lead urban land use, provision of basic services, and conflict resolution. However, these organizations are also highly vulnerable to criminal operations with alternative mechanisms of social and territorial control.

In response to these challenges, it is necessary to intervene under a systemic approach that implies a high level of inter-institutional, interterritorial, multilevel coordination, and citizen participation.
From the experiences presented, some key points can be extracted to consider:

At the municipal level, the role of mayors must be reinforced through the generation of urban management instruments with a long-term vision, which recognizes the processes of risk construction, and that adapt to the differentiated conditions of the inhabitants of the city. For them, it is key to generate coordination mechanisms and intervention protocols (adopted institutionally); e.g., land habilitation, access to safe housing, construction and business operation permits, provision of services, action protocols for response (earthquakes, rains, fires, fires, etc.).

At the community level, and given that interventions of all types of actors are reflected at the local level, even more emphasis should be placed on coordinated intervention (including the private sector), the strengthening of local leadership, and the promotion of citizen participation. In peri-urban areas and informal settlements, the following should be considered:

- Preparedness for the response can serve as a gateway to addressing urban issues in their entirety. Urban resilience requires addressing the underlying factors, e.g., urban land markets, informal employment patterns, provision of sustainable infrastructure and services, migration, security, and limited participation of the population in decision-making.

Preparedness for response and the search for resilience should promote the active participation of people and their leaders; particularly considering their knowledge of the community, families and environment. The empowerment of communities and their leaders favors a proactive attitude for change.

**Challenges**

The search for resilience and disaster preparedness requires combining two perspectives of intervention, a vision and long-term objectives, in which short-term results and products are inscribed. This challenge is especially relevant today, due to the active dynamics of environmental, social, economic and political-institutional factors.

To be efficient, preparedness for response must not be done in isolation, with individual actions and partners. Instead, it must connect the intervention with other initiatives that address the other urgent problems of the community. This multi-stakeholder action must consider the involvement of civil society organizations and the private sector.

Response preparedness actions could contribute to generating a false sense of security in the community, which fuels the generation of new risk conditions. In this sense, the community must be integrated in the evaluation of risk conditions and the identification of generating causes, in order to promote its active role in controlling expansion in unsafe and risk prone areas.

Disaster response must be connected as quickly as possible with recovery processes, as a link to development processes. Stabilizing the affected area and reviving its social and economic dynamics requires linking response preparedness and recovery preparedness tools.
Governments at the central and local levels have not developed sufficient capacities to intervene in the complexity of the problem of informal settlements, still maintaining a welfare and non-inclusive vision. It is important to support the definition of policy instruments, programs and instruments necessary to intervene in these areas, and generate spaces for capacity building in officials for the integration of preparedness and resilience measures in their institutional work, recognizing the capacities of the community, under an inclusive approach.

The participation of the population in community-based organizations is initially concentrated on the provision of basic services but weakens as settlements consolidate. In this process, the risk conditions are configured. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate communication strategies and citizen participation in all interventions in urban areas.

In the area of response preparedness, emergency committees and the formation of community brigades, contributed to making the intervention for COVID 19 more efficient. However, these committees often face sustainability problems and, in many cases, rely on technical and financial support from international cooperation projects.

Information management is disconnected from decision-making processes, both at the national, municipal, and community levels. Research centers, threat monitoring institutes, sectoral information units, have deficiencies in coordination and do not provide the information that the decision maker requires at different territorial levels. It is necessary to bring information management closer to the community, making it less dependent and linking the capacities developed at the local level with the national level.

The short execution time of response preparedness and resilience interventions, and even more so the urgency of emergency actions, leads to the use of uniform instruments that do not recognize the complexity of the underlying causes, and the differences in risk conditions (even within the same settlement). Emphasis on the design and implementation of actions that promote gender equity, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups is essential.

Popular settlements are at the epicenter of urban crises; e.g. social outbreaks, economic crises, disaster. Intervening them requires a systemic approach that leads to multi-scalar, multilevel, intersectoral and intertemporal action.

To ensure conditions of resilience in informal settlements, it is essential to intervene on the conditions of exclusion that are generating the conditions of risk. This implies building – including through response preparation projects – a humanistic social ethic, in which priority is given to the sectors of the population with the highest level of vulnerability.

Preparedness for response and resilience, under a risk management approach, must be internalized in all government actions, and promoted and encouraged in the actions of civil society organizations and the private sector.

Social cohesion is the basis for risk reduction and the main asset for crisis response. Strengthening social cohesion implies involving the community in the assessment of its present and future risks, the

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Conclusions

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Preparedness for response and resilience, under a risk management approach, must be internalized in all government actions, and promoted and encouraged in the actions of civil society organizations and the private sector.

Social cohesion is the basis for risk reduction and the main asset for crisis response. Strengthening social cohesion implies involving the community in the assessment of its present and future risks, the
implementation of transformative strategies, monitoring and evaluation, and the relationship with external actors.

The sustainability of local emergency and risk management committees requires the definition of clear roles and responsibilities (with follow-up mechanisms), development of technical capacities for compliance, coordination mechanisms with municipalities and alliances with other initiatives underway in the locality, active social participation and assured financing for their operation.

Risk governance must go beyond coordination for response preparedness and must be focused on the interaction of actions and actors for a participatory, transparent and equitable intervention, which recognizes the risk determinants and complex and interrelated challenges of informal settlements.