

COSTA RICA

WORKING SESSION

**Accelerating Efforts in Building Community Resilience to Disasters**

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***Background***

Costa Rica is a country located in the intertropical zone of Central America, it is internationally recognized, as a country rich in biodiversity and also a possessor of a beautiful nature. However, due to its geographical and geological conditions, this is a country of great exposure to natural hazards. The country is ranked number seven worldwide among countries with the highest exposure to natural hazards. It is estimated that about 80% of the population is living in risk areas. The economic damages and losses due to incidents related to geological and meteorological incidents, have been significant in the past years.

Volcanic activity, earthquakes and hydro meteorological incidents have been reiterated throughout the history of Costa Rica. In addition, during recent years we have witnessed a resurgence in the impacts of climate phenomena such as the ‘El Niño’ phenomenon, regional threats such as the zika virus, complex migratory flows and even the passing of Hurricane Otto in 2016, the first meteorological phenomenon of this type which did impact Costa Rica directly.

Costa Rica has committed itself to advance in the implementation of national DRR strategies align with different international instruments, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which state that it is necessary for States and other stakeholders to work together to **reduce risk and increase the resilience of communities**.

***Community Resilience: best practices from Costa Rica and challenges ahead***

Resilience is only possible when community organizations and the participation of organized civil society are understood and integrated into risk reduction processes. In Costa Rica, recent efforts to incorporate multiple stake holders into local DRR strategies have shown significant progress. **This includes education, preparedness and prevention to natural hazard such Tsunamis, Volcanic eruptions, landslides, Hurricanes (the recent experience of Hurricane Otto in 2016)**

The recent emergency caused by the passing of Hurricane Otto in November 2016, showed the importance of having **communities prepared and trained** to be part of formal and official communication channels to properly follow the evolution of the threats. One example was the community of ‘Barra del Colorado’ in Pococí town, where the **Local Community Emergency Committee** actively collaborated with first responders **to evacuate more than four thousand** people exposed to the direct impact of this hurricane.

The Costa Rican Government has advanced in the implementation of an approach that seeks disaster risk reduction, empowering the resilience and the decision making at the communal level, through an institutional strategy which recently created the **Office of Community Management in 2015.**

Other actions are being developed through the implementation of strategic alliances with JICA (Japanese cooperation), USAID / OFDA, UNESCO, and the Red Cross, which have made possible to **implement preventive actions in nearly four hundred communities** in different regions of the Costa Rican territory.

The **Office of Community Management** has managed in coordination with **Local Governments**, to strengthen local capacities of more than 250 communities, **with a preventive approach.**

Ninety-three Costa Rican communities have improved their **Surveillance and Warning Systems (SIVAS),** through education programs on active and frequent natural hazards, all of this jointly coordinated by the Costa Rican Government and JICA, USAID / OFDA. As a result, **communities are prepared and have a better response to disasters.**

Moreover, through a project by USAID / OFDA, along with the CNE, Word Vision and the Costa Rican Red Cross titled "Building Resilient Communities" (implemented in ten local governments), has strengthened **eighty new Community Emergency Committees** with **community emergency plans** and have trained more than four hundred **community leaders** on capacity analysis and vulnerabilities.

Another example of **‘community empowerment’** are the efforts made by CNE together with the **National Tsunami Monitoring System (National University)** and the **Ostional Community Emergency Committee** in the city of Santa Cruz towards the development of a major preventive process that made possible for this Costa Rican Pacific North community to be **recognized by UNESCO as the second "Tsunami Ready" community in the entire Pacific Ocean.**

This is one example of how Governments can actually support local communities, with the involvement of local and national authorities, to **develop community-based disaster risk mapping tools, early-warning systems and response plans.** In this sense, it is relevant to notice that through awareness-raising, education and consultation, **prepare communities at high risk of displacement for the possibility that they may have to move.**

One key challenge remains how we can ensure that **communities at risk of displacement have access to funding and technical assistance** from local and national authorities for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation so that they can move safely in case of need.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the country has the challenge of making these **efforts remain in time**, to ensure that the most vulnerable population is served, especially that population located in the 75 districts with the lowest social development index, under the current Government Social Program ‘Tejiendo Desarrollo’. This would mean that **over the next 12 years,** more than 750 communities should have been trained in disaster prevention and disaster risk reduction.