

**The UNESCO Schools Project**  
**An Educational Component of the UNESCO Cross-Cutting Theme Initiative:**  
**Reduction of Natural Disasters in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean**

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**BACKGROUND**

UNESCO's Cross-Cutting Theme (CCT) Initiative: Reduction of Natural Disasters in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean is an international, multi-disciplinary project that aims to preserve sustainable development and reduce poverty through the reduction of the impact of natural disasters, and it aims to do so by incorporating risk management as an integral part of public policy as well as city development plans. The pilot project was implemented in close collaboration with local authorities and institutions in Tijuana in Mexico, Antofagasta in Chile, Kathmandu in Nepal, and Dehradun in India.

In addition to analyzing and improving development plans in the participant cities to keep the risk associated with fast urban growth under control, the UNESCO CCT Initiative implemented demonstration projects with schools in three of these four cities. Two types of demonstration projects utilizing two different educational tools were implemented. The first utilized the **Riskland** educational board game developed by UNICEF-ISDR and was implemented at the primary school level. The second utilized the **Building for the Big One** curriculum developed by the San Jose Tech Museum of Innovation and was implemented with students at the junior high and high school level.

**OBJECTIVES**

The aim of these demonstration projects was two-fold. In the short-term, the objective was to promote the introduction of risk reduction in the educational system of the participating cities, and, in this way, contribute to the long-term objective of creating of a culture of prevention. Both objectives were set with the necessary consequential goal of ensuring the sustainability of risk reduction programs.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Riskland** is an educational board game developed by UNICEF-ISDR that was used in The Schools Project to teach elementary school-aged children how to prepare for and react during and after a disaster. The **Building for The Big One** exercise is part of the Design Challenge Curriculum of The San Jose Tech Museum of Innovation and was used to encourage junior high and high school students to build and test model structures in order to learn about the importance of proper construction, the need to consider characteristics of soils being constructed on, and the value of prevention and preparedness in reducing human and material losses caused by earthquakes.

The project was carried out with the assistance of the local city representatives and school officials, under the guidance of the project coordinators. Besides working in their own schools, students from each of the participating cities communicated and interacted with each other and students of Downtown College Prep of San Jose, California through an internet discussion group that was created exclusively for the project. Through this interaction, students learned not only about the importance of disaster prevention, but also about the culture and way of life of their peers in other cities. Recent earthquakes in California and Iran also motivated discussion and facilitated the understanding of seismic disasters.

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*English and Spanish version of Riskland*



*San Jose students test their model structures*

## **FINAL SYMPOSIUM AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In association with the Secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the Municipality of Tijuana, B.C., Mexico, UNESCO convened a final symposium to review the results of this initiative in Tijuana, Mexico and San Jose, California on January 19-22, 2004. The purpose of the meeting was to allow city representatives and school children to report on the results of the project and share experiences, and to provide a forum for project participants and the broader international community to draw lessons from the project, generate ideas for potential collaboration opportunities and prepare for a potential longer-term initiative to promote the creation of a culture of prevention.

The Final Symposium event produced specific recommendations on ways to incorporate risk reduction considerations into the city development plans and on necessary actions to establish a culture of prevention and long-term planning, especially in developing countries. Specifically, in order to achieve the vision of a true culture of prevention, the group recommended the implementation of several initiatives in order to build a concept of prevention. Their aim would be to do so in a manner such that, in 20 years, tangible results could begin to be seen, and that, in 10 years, the public's mentality will have changed to reflect a culture of prevention at all levels. Specific recommendations included:

- Creating programs of public awareness directed at public officials and the general public
- Incorporating themes of prevention as an integral part of the official education curriculum
- Designing formal and informal educational programs to teach the topic of prevention
- Training and teaching the media regarding topics of prevention

## **SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE ACTIONS**

1- In the project's participating cities, the demonstration projects are being extended to the entire educational system in each city. The goal is to have the disaster mitigation related educational programs as permanent components of the school curricula. International and local support should be given for these efforts to succeed.

2- The experience of this project should be applied to more cities. In collaboration with the Tech Museum of San Jose, UNESCO, and the ISDR, proposals are already being prepared to apply this methodology in several cities of Asia and Latin America. International coordination is required to increase the impact and effectiveness of these efforts.