



# Let's be prepared

Photo: Save the children

## An educational project about disasters in Cuba

### Introduction

Cuba is heavily exposed to natural hazards such as tropical cyclones, floods, intense rains and strong winds. During an average season up to ten hurricanes are formed, however awareness of these natural hazard risks have increased in recent years and the Cuban Government has implemented strategies to significantly reduce the population's vulnerability to disasters which have decreased loss of life, agriculture, and livestock.

Cuba has incorporated disaster risk awareness into different school programmes through cultural training, extracurricular and non-teacher-centered activities. These activities draw on cross-cutting issues such as disaster prevention and preparedness. Despite these efforts, the links between disaster education and communities still require strengthening with students as the leading actors in this process.

The project entitled "A Prepararnos" was implemented in the province of Holguin to develop environmental education through formal, non-formal and informal means with the active participation of children and the community at large. The project focused on the relationship between schools and communities. It also established follow-up mechanisms for specific results, and adapted a number of methodologies based upon the local environment, existing problems and natural and human disasters and their prevention. The project was implemented in pilot schools and communities throughout the 14 municipalities of Holguin.

### Project brief

The project was initially implemented during the 2000-2001 school year but was extended through 2003. A total of 400 people from 47 pilot schools in Holguin participated in this project. Some 150 training sessions were held in these schools and communities, involving more than 1,000 teachers, students and community members.

The project began with an assessment that revealed there was a general lack of knowledge about the concept of disaster, as well as weak participation on the part of children. For this reason, it was essential to initiate a training process for school staff. The project activities generated the interest and enthusiasm of children, teachers, parents and community members because the activities were adapted to the local environment, and were not carried out during the time allocated to develop regular school activities.

The project aims to engage the active participation of the communities, students and teachers in solving local environmental problems, and in activities for disaster prevention and mitigation. In addition, the project helps to build capacities to reduce disaster risk and to deal with emergency situations.

## Sequence of activities

- Assessment of existing knowledge about disaster prevention and preparedness in 30 pilot schools
- Training workshops: material design, development, organization, testing and assessment
- Municipal workshops: material design, development, organization and assessment
- Development of risk and vulnerability maps in different schools
- Communication campaigns in order to address disaster related issues
- Reforestation, environmental protection, and water management activities
- Creation of school brigades
- Dissemination of and support for activities scheduled by the Civil Defense Agency and/or the Ministry of Education
- Activities with parents and round tables with community members
- Evacuation drills and exercises, as well as training sessions on what to do before, during and after a disaster
- Development of educational videos and games

## Lessons learned

The results of this project were obtained because Cuba already has policies and strategies in place. In addition, the national authority carries out activities aimed at preserving human life, which enables the population to have integrated alternatives in case of disaster.

The involvement of students as major actors in disaster prevention and emergency preparedness, along with teachers, professors and communities, and the fact that these activities were not carried out during regular school hours yielded great results. Children and communities became involved and addressed disaster related issues in the context of new and innovative strategies.

Throughout this process, it was recognized that nature is less and less responsible for generating disasters and that environmental protection was a key aspect of development planning.

The project showed that disaster and prevention related issues stimulate the virtues, feelings and values of those who have been affected by disasters. Through this project, it was also possible to raise awareness among children regarding their pivotal role within their respective communities.

## Major results and achievements

- A specific methodology has been developed to assess the progress of this project and the knowledge instilled in teachers and students
- Students and teachers have been able to build their capacities for disaster prevention and preparedness
- Communities have been motivated by a number of educational and participatory campaigns in the field of disaster prevention. This has led to increased response capacities
- The contributions of the project have been incorporated into institutional policies

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