



UNITED NATIONS



Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean

Expert Group Meeting on
Disaster Risk Reduction in the Education Sector
Kingston, Jamaica, 26-27 October 2009

Distr. LIMITED
LC/CAR/L.236
11 December 2009
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

REPORT ON THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

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REPORT ON THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Background

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, convened an expert group meeting on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in the Education Sector, in collaboration with the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) in Kingston, Jamaica, on 26 to 27 October 2009.

The meeting was attended by representatives from the Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Lucia; the University of the West Indies (UWI); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA); The Children's Advocate; Office of Disaster Preparedness Emergency Management (ODPEM); and PIOJ. The list of participants appears as an annex to this report.

The purpose of the meeting was to provide a forum in which the ministries of education, regional academic institutions and development partner organizations from the Caribbean would share information on, inter alia, the impact of natural disasters in the Caribbean on the education sector; the workings of emergency plans and programming at the national level for the education sector and recommendations for the strengthening of DRR in the education sector. It was the first time that experts from the subregion drawn from the education sector were meeting to discuss DRR.

Opening

The meeting was formally opened by the Director General (Ag.) of the PIOJ who expressed her pleasure at the collaboration between ECLAC and PIOJ to convene the expert group meeting. She agreed with those who held the view that natural hazards posed the single greatest potential threat to the sustainable development of Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS), particularly in light of climate variability and change. She highlighted the harsh reality of many Caribbean SIDS, which, in the aftermath of a natural disaster, had to fund rehabilitation efforts from loans, further adding to their debt burden. She called on governments in the subregion to factor DRR into their development plans and models and take a strategic and proactive approach to minimizing these risks.

She noted that Jamaica had begun to take that strategic approach across all sectors, and in that regard, hazard risk, resilience and climate change adaptation was noted as a priority national strategy in Vision 2030, Jamaica's National Development Plan. She called on participants to accelerate the mainstreaming of DRR in the education sector and proposed, among a number of measures, the construction of hazard-resilient new schools, the establishment of protocols for the use of schools as shelters; and establishing systems to document, analyze and respond to the experiences of children in disasters.

The Executive Director of CDEMA, in addressing the opening session, stated that the education sector was the critical bridge to the building of a culture of DRR. He expressed his

appreciation to ECLAC and PIOJ for convening the meeting, which, he thought would deepen the cooperation towards DRR integration in education. He outlined the outcome of the thrust to strengthen the links between DRR and the education sector, which included the development of a framework for a diploma in disaster management studies, a post graduate programme at UWI; and the development of interactive guidance and other resource materials for teachers and students at both the level of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE).

He shared with participants the key objectives of the Education Sector Sub-Committee of the Harmonization Council of the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM), which were to provide overall guidance at the education sector level to facilitate the mainstreaming of CDM at the national and regional levels; to identify challenges and gaps regarding the implementation of CDM at the sector level; and to articulate priority CDM results for the sector. He indicated that CDEMA viewed the meeting as another critical medium for informing and enriching the consultative stakeholder discourse, and noted discussions had been held with ECLAC to become a member of the Committee.

The Regional Adviser of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean welcomed participants to the meeting and thanked PIOJ for partnering with ECLAC to convene the meeting, and to undertake the macro socio-economic assessment in the subregion earlier in the year. She stated that one of the key lessons learned from undertaking damage and loss assessments over the years was that if Caribbean SIDS did not work to reduce risk and vulnerabilities, there would be little or no momentum for development, as much of the energy and resources were spent on reconstruction or getting back to where the societies were before a disaster.

She drew the attention of the meeting to the fact that risk was a social construct and, as such, it was defined by the social positions, relationships and roles played by the different actors - individuals, households, communities and institutions in the society. She reminded participants that what was considered unacceptable risk for some was considered acceptable risk for others. Therefore, risk reduction was a complex, social process which must engage diverse and frequently antagonistic social actors in the risk analysis scenario. It was not purely a technocratic problem with a technocratic solution. In regard to the education subsector, she reminded participants that formal certification was a key factor in explaining the difference between poverty and wealth and that education was critical in the creation of a flexible society, which was adaptable to change

Agenda item 1: Adoption of agenda and procedures of work

The agenda was reviewed and adopted without change. The procedures of work were also discussed and agreed upon.

Agenda item 2: Explore the impact of natural disasters on the education sector in the Caribbean

A presentation of preliminary findings of a study on the impact of natural disasters on the education sector in selected Caribbean States was presented by the Regional Adviser of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean. The study highlighted the general vulnerability of Caribbean SIDS to extreme events and the negative impact on the education sector. It noted that although the social impact on the education sector had not been fully valued for the period 2000-2008, rough estimates suggested that approximately US\$ 3 billion in damage had been caused to school infrastructure, and over a half million children had been disrupted from school attendance.

The study indicated that there were limitations to the valuation of the total effects on the education sector as many external costs were not fully captured. However, it suggested that disasters could present an opportunity to impact the education sector positively if safer schools were built in the aftermath of disasters and the inherited structural inequalities in the education system, which often favoured students from the higher income households over those from lower income households, could be corrected.

Among the recommendations made by the study were that more information regarding vulnerabilities, hazards and risk be generated and used in informing the DRR policy in the education sector, and that a scaling up of the inclusion of DRR in the school curricula through teacher training was required. It was emphasized that better management and use of educational statistics were necessary in order to ascertain the impact of disasters on the educational performance of students.

A round-table discussion followed the presentation, where participants identified issues that were of particular concern. There was agreement on the call for the conduct of vulnerability studies so that informed decisions could be made regarding rehabilitation programmes to critical infrastructure in the education sector. Participants also concurred with the notion of using a multi-hazard approach. The view was expressed that more assistance was needed to design adequate planning on the part of school administrators to accommodate students during periods of emergency. Some participants expressed the view that there was a need for more references to local situations in the various textbooks and/or workbooks, so as to arouse and maintain students' interests. The meeting agreed with the position that technical teams from the ministries of education should be integrally involved in the plans for design, development and maintenance of school infrastructure.

Agenda item 3: Exploration of countries' experiences of DRR in the education sector

Experts from six countries shared their DRR experiences. The representative from the Commonwealth of the Bahamas informed participants that, like its Caribbean neighbours, the country had experienced the devastating impact of hurricanes. He recalled that in 2004, when Hurricane Jeanne and Frances devastated some of the islands of the Bahamas, it had left some 14,000 students in the public schools system without full days of formal education for some two to three weeks. In response the ministries of education had developed a programme which focused on mental, physical and practical awareness. There was also an action plan which was

managed by the disaster preparedness and recovery committees. A prevention maintenance schedule for physical plant ensured its soundness in regard to roofing systems, electrical systems and plumbing. Repairs to the education sector infrastructure were dealt with by the local government bodies. In order to address the transfer of DRR knowledge to the student population, the Ministry of Education had published a Primary School Supplementary Workbook, and a Teachers Manual. A comic book had also been prepared for dissemination to the general population. Information was widely disseminated by the Ministry of Education on its learning channel on television, which aired weekly.

The representative of Belize, noted that the Ministry of Education had no national disaster policy but each school sought to develop its own risk reduction plan and, to date, six districts had schools in which such plans had been developed. More efforts were necessary to ensure that the existing plans were operational. She apprised participants of the best practice of one District, Corozal, in which the plans were operational. In that district, effective mitigation efforts were established so that schools had been relocated from less vulnerable zones and were built in accordance with hurricane standards. She reported that retrofitting was taking place, although not always at the desired pace, but this was constrained by available resources. In addition, protocols were well established for the use and management of shelters.

The representative of the Commonwealth of Dominica informed the meeting of a number of effective responses to previous catastrophes which the Ministry of Education spearheaded or was involved as an active partner. These included the hosting of Disaster Preparedness Day and the conduct, within the school system, of frequent drills in response to different potential disasters. He explained the significance of employing a maintenance officer in the Ministry who was a civil engineer as key to retrofitting educational facilities and implementation of successful mitigation initiatives regarding the Ministry's infrastructure. He proposed a number of areas on which ministries of education could focus to strengthen DRR in the sector, including disaster retrofitting of school buildings prior to the hurricane season; the insuring of new school structures; and greater involvement of school personnel in the development of consistent and detailed planning and mitigation policies and programmes.

The representatives of Jamaica presented an overview on the Jamaican experience in DRR. Hurricane Gilbert in 1988 was the wake-up call for Jamaica. Since then, programmes were introduced into the education sector to address mitigation, prevention, risk reduction, preparedness and vulnerability reduction. There was concern that although these programmes had been initiated, there still existed problems of delayed start of school through their use as shelters, vandalism of property, and the high incidence of absenteeism among the student population following disasters. Consistent increases in government expenditures were recorded as hundreds of schools were often affected and temporary measures had to be taken to support the resumption of classes. The representative of Jamaica reiterated the importance of having a national policy governing DRR in the education sector as much was being done but it was neither coherent nor consistent. They also expressed the view that it was important to formalize the relationship between the Ministry of Education and ODPEM in regard to the use of schools as shelters so that necessary protocols could be developed and implemented.

The representative of Saint Kitts and Nevis presented a broad description of the structure of education and policy of the government towards education. He outlined the multi hazard

environment of Saint Kitts and Nevis and noted that the use of schools as shelters had been discontinued so as to shorten the length of time which children had to spend without schooling. He also pointed to the construction of educational buildings in compliance with the building codes which had resulted in less damage to the infrastructure from the impact of hurricanes. He informed participants that there was, as yet, no DRR plan and urged them to undertake the important research which could assess the impact of disasters on the performance of students.

The representative of Saint Lucia informed participants that schools were the only main shelters available to the population a disaster so much had to be done to ensure that they were safe structures. DRR strategies were being developed and a number of policy documents were highlighted, which would be shared with ministries of education across the subregion once they were finalized. He raised the challenges posed by management of the A H1N1 pandemic and its impact on the operations of the schools.

Following the country presentations a round table discussion took place. A number of issues were raised by participants, key among them were the necessity for a DRR framework to guide initiatives taken by the ministries of education across the subregion. Participants expressed the view that schools would then shape the initiatives to their specific needs. The meeting agreed that across the subregion, there was a need for detailed maintenance manuals for educational plants that were being retrofitted to meet the new Caribbean standards. A call was made for strengthening the partnership between the ministries of education and the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) so as to foster consistency in their operations. It was agreed that ministries could make more use of available Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology to assist in vulnerability assessments and to inform DRR decisions. There was agreement that greater focus should be placed on violence in schools as a hazard, across the subregion. On the issue of use of schools as shelter, it was felt that best practices should be shared so as to protect schools that were used as shelters, particularly in cases where facilities were not built to accommodate such.

Agenda item 4: Key issues in DRR in the education sector

The first presentation was by the representative of CDEMA who drew the attention of the meeting to a number of strategic issues. Among them were concerns of migration as a possible outcome of disasters and climate variability, budgets for maintenance of education facilities and assessments of vulnerable environments and the location of schools. He called for better relations between national disaster organizations and ministries of education.

The representative of the UWI, Jamaica, highlighted the challenges faced by the Ministry of Education in Jamaica due to the wide distribution of school types across the island, and the effects of disasters to reduce the capacity of schools to meet the demands of the student population. He introduced participants to the Interagency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) and the Minimum Standards produced by them. He called on ministries to strengthen the consensus on what to mitigate, understand vulnerabilities and the short- and long-term impacts of natural hazards, which all had implications on the country meeting its own Vision 2030 and the Millennium Development Goals. He also called on ministries of education to develop a site specification mechanism to protect schools in fragile or vulnerable areas. In closing, he made a number of recommendations, including the need for intense and diversified research on the

vulnerability of education, the need to encourage collection of data so that long-term effects could be adequately measured and encouragement of a holistic approach to DRR. Lastly, the ministries needed to examine the relationship between education and poverty and absenteeism and achievements, in the light of natural disasters.

The representative of UNESCO reminded participants that the global initiative for DRR in education involved the promotion of educational awareness; the building of a safe culture in schools; and the promotion of integration of DRR into the curriculum. He also stressed that education must be given priority in humanitarian responses and must go beyond the provision of supplies and physical reconstruction.

The representative of the Children's Advocate presented a case study on the need for proper identification, assessment and treatment of children who were affected by traumatic stress following a disaster. She called for more effective measures to be implemented that would deal with children affected by psychological trauma caused by natural disasters, as trauma manifested itself in many forms. She called for more training for teachers and other care givers in the education system so that they could provide assistance to children and their parents affected by post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), in the aftermath of natural disasters.

The representative of UNDP encouraged participants to build a culture of resilience across the subregion and called for regional governments to engage in training that would promote sustainable development and DRR. He congratulated the organizers of the meeting as various strategies were needed to engage in knowledge acquisition and dissemination about DRR in the education sector.

The representative of CDEMA highlighted the need for standardized educational and training materials throughout the subregion. The work of the organization was featured in the establishment of a mechanism for stakeholder dialogue for DRR in the education sector, through its Education Sub-committee of the CDM Coordination and Harmonization Council.

The representative of ECLAC asked participants to reflect on the notion that in the Caribbean, within DRR analysis, there were two key differentials which ought to be taken into consideration, that of the income and gender differentials of the population at risk. Examples were presented to explore how an understanding of these differentials could assist in shaping policy and programmes.

A presentation was made available to participants, detailing UNICEF's approaches to DRR in the education sector.

Agenda item 5: National policies and programmes for DRR in the education sector

Discussion following the panels focused on research approaches to advance DRR in the education sector and administrative processes. The view was expressed that increased coordination of DRR activities in education throughout the subregion would be an effective way of achieving the desired objectives at the national level. It was also felt that there was need for a direct connection to be formed between the education ministries and partners in technical

agencies. One participant expressed the view that administering of a cost benefit analysis might be helpful in identifying the cohabiting factors of DRR at the national level. Another suggested that a gap analysis could be effective in establishing the types of goals per risk level, and their related impact. This might assist in the designing of strategies to reduce or implement measures in the future. An examination of the constraints faced or possible risks would be useful in comparing the existing management processes and budget expenditures.

Agenda item 6: Working group discussion

The meeting broke into three working groups. Each group addressed the efficiency and effectiveness of DRR planning and programming at the national level and explored possible recommendations for strengthening DRR in the education sector in the Caribbean.

Agenda item 7: Presentation of working groups

There was general agreement that a draft subregional DRR policy should be developed which could then be adapted at the national level for application across all schools. Such a policy should address the multi hazard environment of Caribbean SIDS and seek to reduce the ‘spill over’ effects of one disaster triggering another.

With regard to the issue of how DRR knowledge should be disseminated, it was suggested that it be integrated in the curriculum for infusion throughout the primary and secondary levels, and as a stand alone course at the tertiary level. It was also recommended that DRR be taught in teacher training institutions as a core course.

With regard to safer schools, working groups expressed the view that there should be consistent maintenance of all schools and their equipment. This process could follow the pattern as that of a safety audit. There was a call for greater compliance with the Caribbean building code specifications regarding both construction of schools and building materials. It was also felt that ministries of education should encourage preventative maintenance and effectively solicit technical views in selecting locations for building schools to reduce vulnerability to multi hazards.

When seeking to address the methodology for arriving at a DRR strategy for the sector, groups agreed that DRR was a social construct and, thus, it was necessary to encourage dialogue with all stakeholders and to encourage public awareness campaigns using a variety of strategies. Information-sharing of existing materials and other documents pertaining to policies and strategies were called for, which could assist the ministries to be more proactive. Teachers’ Unions should be brought fully on board as allies of DRR in the education sector. Another recommendation was that ministries of education should seek to strengthen partnerships with existing disaster committees, agencies and other stakeholders, and efforts should be made to initiate such linkages where they were absent.

The issue of data management received wide support. Groups called on ministries of education to collate data and make them accessible to researchers and policymakers so as to foster informed decision-making. Benefits could be derived by the ministries themselves as this information was used to strengthen their advocacy role in DRR.

With regard to the use of schools as shelters, it was suggested that DRR, shelter management and first aid training should be made available to administrators at the senior level. There was strong agreement among working groups that schools that were used as shelters should be upgraded with facilities to accommodate such. The view was also expressed that the involvement of counsellors to treat with the psychosocial trauma of children and their parents in the shelters would help to minimize further trauma and the integration of the children back in the school system.

In bringing the meeting to a close, the representative of PIOJ expressed satisfaction with the high level of participation and the strong interest in developing national policies to govern DRR in the education sector. The ECLAC representative thanked participants for focusing on aspects of DRR which were pertinent to challenges faced in the subregion, particularly those of measuring the impact of disasters on the performance of students. She expressed the view that the recommendations arising out of the meeting should contribute to ensuring more resilience in the education sector in the future. The meeting closed with the usual exchange of courtesies.

Annex I**REGIONAL EXPERT MEETING ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION
IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR**

*PIOJ Conference Facility, Kingston Jamaica
26 – 27 October 2009*

PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME**DAY 1: MONDAY 26 OCTOBER 2009**

9 00 - 10 00 a.m.	Opening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome remarks: Dr. Pauline Knight, Ag. Director General, PIOJ • Remarks by Mr. Jeremy Colleymore, Executive Director, CDEMA • Remarks by Ms. Asha Kambon , Regional Adviser ECLAC
10 00 – 10 30 a.m.	COFFEE BREAK
10 30 – 10 45 a.m.	Agenda item 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of agenda and procedures of work
10 45 – 11 15 a.m.	Agenda item 2: Explore the Impact of Natural Disasters on the Education Sector in the Caribbean Presentation of preliminary findings on the Impact of Natural Disasters on the Education Sector in selected Caribbean States - ECLAC
11 15 – 12 15 p.m.	Discussion
12 15 – 1 45 p.m.	LUNCH
1 45 - 4 30p.m.	Agenda item 3: Country experiences of DRR in the Education Sector – Presentations followed by roundtable discussions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bahamas • Belize • Dominica • Jamaica • Saint Kitts/Nevis • Saint Lucia

DAY 2: TUESDAY 27 OCTOBER 2009

9 00 - 11 00 a.m.	Agenda Item 4: Key Issues in DRR in the Education Sector: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDEMA • UNESCO • UNICEF • Children’s Advocate • UNDP • ECLAC
	COFFEE BREAK

11 00 – 12 30 p.m.	Agenda item 5: National policies and programmes for DRR in the education sector <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country-led discussions and roundtable
12 30 – 2 00 p.m.	LUNCH
2 00 – 4 00 p.m.	Agenda item 6: Working Group Discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency and Effectiveness of DRR planning and programming at the national level for the education sector; and Recommendations for strengthened DRR in the education sector in the Caribbean
4 00 – 4 30 p.m.	Agenda item 7: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of Working Groups regarding Recommendations for strengthening DRR in the education sector and arrival of consensus on Key Recommendations of Meeting
	Closing The meeting will be brought to a close

Annex II

List of Participants

Member countries

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