

Climate change and disaster preparedness in Nicaragua

The climate change and disaster preparedness project (Project) achieved to improve the capacities of vulnerable communities to disasters caused by climate change and extreme weather events along the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, specifically in the Municipalities of Bluefields (El Bluff) and Puerto Cabezas (Betania and Wawabom).

The Project has four strategic points:

Awareness regarding the effects of climate change and disasters:

This was the key objective of the Project. Raising awareness about climate change was a very important first step. An increase of awareness of the problem could be achieved at discussions, forums and seminars with different stakeholders from the national to the local level: from municipality to community. Through analysis and reflection the Nicaraguan Red Cross and stakeholders jointly developed proposals for concrete adaptation activities to reduce the level of vulnerability of the communities affected mostly by the negative impacts of climate change and extreme weather events.

Impact on the educational and scientific sector:

Education is an excellent way to coordinate activities with the Ministry of Education. Through the Program for School Emergencies and with the BICU University in Bluefields and Puerto Cabezas it was possible to disseminate information on climate change to teachers and students by integrating the issue in the curricula and in research programmes.

Reinforcement of Community capacity:

Awareness raising about the negative impacts of climate change among leaders and members of the communities should lead to a change of attitude regarding the environment and, even more importantly, regarding the Community's capacity to prepare itself for future disasters.

Institutional strengthening:

Building the Red Cross' capacities to better execute disaster preparedness and response projects, as member of the National System for disasters, the main emphasis was put on the impacts of climate change for people in the pilot regions and on risk management. Capacities were built through the training of volunteers and authorities of the local Red Cross branches and also through arranging equipment that enabled the trainees to provide a better service to their communities.

Overall goal and project objective:

Reduction of the vulnerability of the Nicaraguan people regarding disasters related to climate change. The objective of the Project is to strengthen local capacities to face events related to climate change.

Target groups:

Communities vulnerable to disasters, to which the Nicaraguan Red Cross focuses its efforts on; Ethnic and indigenous communities, reinforcing their capacities for disaster preparedness and response.

The project was executed in the communities of Betania and Wawabom (Puerto Cabezas) assisting a total population of 626 inhabitants (101 families) and in the community of El Bluff (Bluefields) with 3600 inhabitants and a total of 460 families.

At the educational level at both municipalities 1633 students were reached directly together with 6 technicians of MECD, about 37 principals and 42 teachers.

At municipal level 40 members of the Municipal Committee for Preparedness, Prevention and Assistance to Disasters (COMUPRED) and 70 volunteers of the Red Cross branch were trained.

Mutual agreed changes of the Project:

- 1) Modifying of the budget regarding expenses of certain items.
- 2) Extension of the project until 31 December 2004. Extra time was needed to finalize some activities that had not been carried out in time, such as the National Forum and the small scale projects.
- 3) Changes in the planning of the National Forum.

4) Change of the date of the National Forum on Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness to November 2004.

5) The initial project proposal contained a scientific study on climate change in Nicaragua. However, the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA) and the National Institute of Territorial studies (INETER) already conducted several of these studies. Therefore, we decided to use the available information instead of starting a new costly study.