

Plan International's Work with Community Education in Central America  
 Children as active agents in community-based disaster risk reduction in El Salvador


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This talk is based on research for Plan International [www.plan-international.org](http://www.plan-international.org)

*"Developing Plan's capacity to assist communities and children to prepare for and respond to disasters"*  
 2004-2005




Country Context: El Salvador



- Population: 6.5million
- 1 million+ in USA
- 12 year civil war ended in 1992 after 75,000 deaths
- Plan works to enable children in developing countries to reach their full potential
- Children are 'development actors' not passive recipients of aid

Hazard & Risk Context




Children often portrayed as victims



Vulnerable, at risk, crying, passive ...

Children's vulnerability

- During certain developmental stages (most especially as babies) children are particularly vulnerable
- Dependency on adults leaves children prone to abuse and trafficking
- Children are made more dependent than they sometimes need to be
- Children are overlooked, not consulted, have less opportunities to participate in decision making and so may be ignorant of risks
- Girls are more often tied to domestic duties, more frequently taken out of school/education



## Achieved

- Youth groups (equal girls and boys) organized and trained in mitigation and preparation for emergencies
- Children and young people trained to carry



- Community emergency plans prepared in communities and schools
- Community emergency committees formed and trained



## Clearly, children can be vulnerable

- Dying in huge numbers in the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami; those that survived, at risk of trafficking and abuse
- Dying in the 2005 South Asian earthquake – school building collapses
  - In Pakistan, 500 children were crushed to death in one school when the building collapsed on them. \$1000 could have paid to make the school earthquake resistant: just \$2 per child.
- Dying in thousands in the Chinese earthquake – again from collapsed school buildings
- Becoming household heads of families as a result of massive HIV/AIDS related deaths in heavily poor countries

## committee and their risk map (2004)



The group members are active participants in the local warning chain



## San Isidro youth emergency committee, active in Hurricane Stan (2005)

Reynaldo holds the Risk Map that the Youth Emergency Committee has developed and which was used for Hurricane Stan



This was the prototype that they developed in 2004 when I first met the group (Reynaldo is on the right)

Plan communities in El Salvador: members of the Antonio Díaz School Emergency Risk Management Committee, Santo Tomás



## Youth actions in Hurricane Stan

- "When Hurricane Stan rains started we saw the community would have problems – especially houses in high risk areas for landslides. We got together, we checked house by house to see what families were most vulnerable to landslide" (Omar)
- "We organized the shelter. Others were surprised that the youth were organizing the shelter. We ran the shelter for one and a half months, 23 families and 30 children were sheltered here" (Cindy)
- Cindy, the President of the Committee, and two colleagues are credited with rescuing a woman and her child from a house where the husband/father refused to leave. "We saw a child was at risk. We begged them to leave the house."
- A landslide buried the 7 year old child to his shoulders but the committee members pulled him out. The house later collapsed.

In Chalatenango, children & young people did local community capacity and vulnerability analyses



And presented their findings to a meeting of community representatives (children, youth and adult)



engagement should lead to more resilience in children

- If no help is available, then these young people and adults can cope better
- They can recognize the risks and better prepare to reduce them
- They can respond better in an emergency, warning and protecting others
- The risk reduction training and active role in the community leads to greater self confidence and respect from other



Question:  
How relevant is this to the UK disaster education context?

