

Laying the foundations for safer schools



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Situation analysis

Since 2011, Partners for Resilience (PFR)⁴ in Nicaragua has been promoting a safe schools model in the municipalities of Somoto, San Lucas, Las Sabanas and San José de Cusmapa in the department of Madriz. The objective was to help the Ministry of Education (MINED) develop disaster prevention, preparedness and response capacities within the educational community in those places covered by the PFR Program in Nicaragua.

As part of this model, the Program promoted an approach that integrates the issues of climate change adaptation (CCA), disaster risk reduction (RRD) and ecosystem management and restoration (EMR). The work was aimed at linking these issues promoted by PFR with the primary and secondary school curricula and activities and with the context of risks faced by the schools in the Program's areas of influence.

To start the process, in 2012 PFR conducted disaster risk assessments with the educational communities of schools covered by the Program, employing the climate capacity and vulnerability analysis (CVCA) and safe schools methodologies, and identified a need for the education sector to strengthen its capacities in the realization of this type of assessments.

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Educational event on disaster management and climate change at the Padre Rafael Maria Fabretto school in the Municipality of Las Sabanas. Photo: Nicaragua Red Cross.

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⁴ Partners for Resilience in Nicaragua involves the following organizations: CARE Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan Red Cross, the Human Promotion Institute (INPRHU), the Association of Municipalities of Madriz (AMMA), the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre and Wetlands International. Its sphere of action centers on the municipalities of Somoto, San Lucas, Las Sabanas and San José de Cusmapa in the department of Madriz and the municipality of Puerto Cabezas in the Northern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RACCN).



Children evacuation drill, simulation of landslide due to heavy rains, school of the rural community of El Chichicaste, San Lucas, Madriz. Photo: CARE-PfR.

Findings in two schools

The following are some of the main findings revealed by the assessments in the four municipalities:

- In the Cristo Rey public school in the municipality of San Lucas, department of Madriz, the water being drunk was making some students ill because it was not apt for human consumption.
- The schools in the communities of El Chichicaste in the municipality of San Lucas and El Castillito in the municipality of Las Sabanas, located in the Tepesomoto-La Patasta Nature Reserve, are at risk from the threat of landslides.

Seeking joint solutions

Once the problems and needs had been identified, a plan was implemented to strengthen the educational community's capacities on the issues of DRR, CCA and EMR. This was based on a process of dialogue and understanding with the Ministry of Education (MINED) that was formalized through the signing of letters of understanding to link the actions of the MINED and the PfR programme.

This coordination led to a series of results, two of which particularly stand out:

The first was Partners for Resilience's implementation of action plans in the municipality of San Lucas to respond to and mitigate the water, hygiene and sanitation problems in the Cristo Rey School, located in the municipality's urban area. The PfR Program, the student community and the municipal authorities arranged the rehabilitation and improvement of the school's drinking water and sanitation system and as a result the school children there are now drinking safe water.

"Today, we can drink safe water, do cleaning activities in the school and adorn the place," explained Josué Ramón Gutiérrez Inestroza, who is a fifth-year student at the Cristo Rey School. "We now have better conditions for relieving ourselves and I don't get stomach complaints any more, which guarantees my school attendance and permanence."

The second result was in the communities of El Chichicaste and El Castillito in the municipalities of San Lucas and Las Sabanas, respectively, where the PfR Program implemented actions that represent the first steps in training on school safety plans. This facilitated the activation of the school safety committees and the required linkage among the structures of the municipal preparedness, mitigation and response committees (COMUPREDS).

Other actions the Program promoted in the municipalities include school reforestation, environmental and recycling campaigns; ecological walks; micro-watershed clean-up campaigns; the development of games and competitions to reinforce learning such as "knowledge league" quizzes and drawing singing and poetry competitions; and awareness-raising plays.



Sensitization campaign: exhibition of drawings by children from different schools of San Lucas (Madriz) for the drawing competition "This is how I want the environment of my community to look like". Photo: CARE-PfR.

Seven steps for safer schools

Partners for Resilience's experiences in the municipalities of Somoto, San Lucas, Las Sabanas and San José de Cusmapa in the department of Madriz can be summed up in the following seven steps:

Step 1: Developing a closer relationship with authorities and institutions

Partners for Resilience established the foundations for communication by generating spaces for negotiation, discussion and dialogue with the MINED authorities in the municipalities of influence. This allowed greater complementarity with the other institutions advocating and working on the issues of DRR, CCA and EMR. PfR also trained the local and municipal actors on its three lines of action and accompanied the execution of the micro-projects.

This was stressed by MINED's delegate in the municipality of San Lucas, Marvin Enrique Gómez Casco:

"Our municipality is vulnerable to disasters, which is why the educational community needs to be prepared to face such events. Activities have been carried out in a coordinated way with the other institutions in order to work in the same direction. All of these allow us to coexist harmoniously in the present with our environment and for the future generations to be prepared for disasters and committed to the environment, as they will replace us and be the ones who lead this municipality."

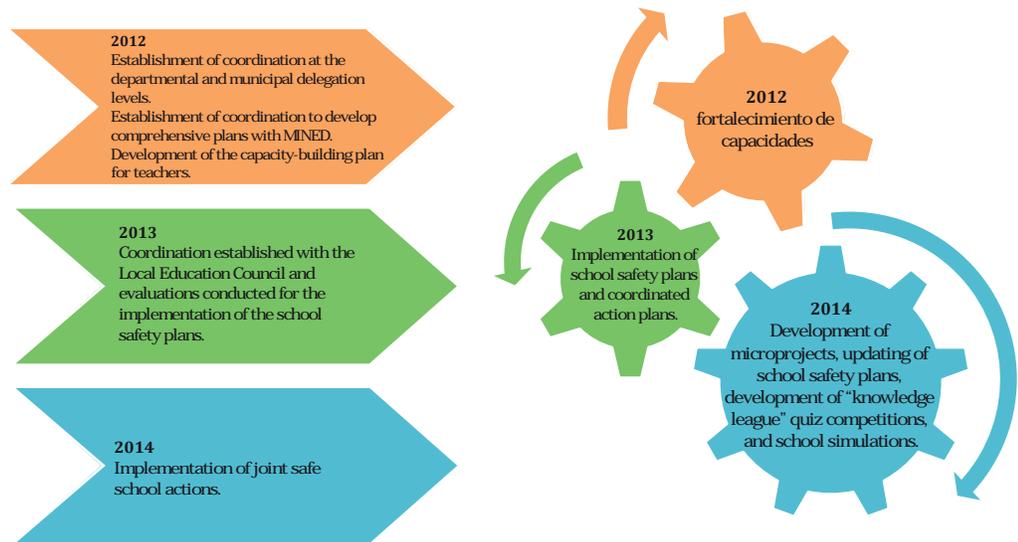


Step 2: Teacher training

One of the best joint actions with MINED was the holding of awareness-building workshops for 197 technical officers and pedagogical advisors responsible for risk management. Through workshops, technical criteria were agreed upon and educational materials selected to enable teachers and technical officers to promote DRR, CCA and EMR actions.

Also, with the aim of having a trained education team, training workshops were held for all teachers in the department of Madriz, particularly those in the municipalities of San José de Cusmapa, San Lucas, Las Sabanas and Somoto. These workshops employed the school safety course (CUSE) methodology and the Methodological Guide for the Production of School Safety Plans agreed on with the MINED delegates. As a result, 468 teachers were trained on topics related to the DRR, CCA and EMR integration approach.

Process for Strengthening Safe School Capacities



Step 3: Education and awareness-raising

To reinforce the knowledge obtained and in search of new forms of learning, entertaining educational activities were planned and implemented, including three “knowledge league” quiz competitions with teachers and students in San Lucas and one in Las Sabanas, with the participation of 500 students. Other entertaining educational activities included plays and recycling, clean-up and reforestation campaigns in the schools of Somoto, San Lucas, Las Sabanas and San José de Cusmapa, with the participation of students, parents and teachers.

Step 4: Preparing ourselves for the response

Following on from the training process with the educational community, 48 comprehensive school safety plans were drawn up to strengthen the schools, providing the teachers and directors with a tool for DRR, CCA and EMR.

Twenty-six comprehensive school safety brigades were also formed, trained on first aid, psychosocial support, search and rescue, evacuation, and fire prevention and control. In addition, 32 schools were provided with school safety equipment and prevention and mitigation actions (reinforcement works like retaining walls, reforestation, the replacement of a community preschool) were implemented in those schools that required them.



Teacher of the Institute Cristo Rey presenting their 2014 action plan to be implemented in coordination with the Local Education Council of San Lucas. Photo: CARE- PFR.



5 See video of the play “Nature doesn’t talk, it just acts” (in Spanish).

https://www.youtube.com/edit?action_reinstate=1



Step 5: Reinforcing knowledge

The educational community of the Cristo Rey School in the municipality of San Lucas now feels dedicated to this issue, as fifth-year student Yerlin Suyén Dávila Méndez explained: *“I’m committed to serving people and I’m willing to get involved in everything that helps improve and protect our environment. We’ve learned how to behave in a disaster situation and the simulations have helped us know how to act when a disaster hits.”*

As a way of evaluating the knowledge acquired during the project, 32 demonstration evacuation simulations were held in the four municipalities.

Step 6: Involvement of the academic sector

Academic-level activities such as diploma courses and end-of-course projects were also implemented. The end-of-course projects included the formulation of school safety plans for the community of El Chichicaste in San Lucas by two diploma course students from the Ministry of Education.

Children and youths from primary and secondary schools in the municipalities covered also showed an interest in gaining more in-depth knowledge about the Program’s lines of action. They decided to do projects and essays on these issues and PfR responded by providing them with the information they needed.

Step 7: Community microprojects

During PfR's intervention, we have implemented 28 microprojects that have responded to some of the population's needs, three of which were carried out in schools:

The construction of a retaining wall as part of the school infrastructure in the community of Cuyas to ensure the children's safety.

The improvement of water quality, hygiene and environmental health in the Cristo Rey School in the urban area of San Lucas.

The construction of a community preschool, which also functions as a temporary shelter, and community centers in the community of El Coyolito.



Knowledge competition on DRR, CCA and MRE with primary and secondary students of the Cristo Rey Institute of the municipality of San Lucas, Madriz. Photo: CARE-PfR.



Municipal authorities inaugurate Cristo Rey Institute's microproject of the urban centre of the municipality of San Lucas. Photo: CARE-PfR.

Lessons learned

Inter-institutional coordination and the integration of disaster risk reduction actions into a joint plan guarantee the participants' learning and its replicability.

Strengthening school brigade members on DRR knowledge and methodologies guarantees the better performance of their functions during situations of risk and disaster.

The development of awareness-raising campaigns in coordination with teachers, the local government, government institutions and parents guarantees the effective attainment of the objectives.

The promotion and integration of the DRR approach at the different levels of the educational community contribute to the management of information about the safe places that should be used to protect the population during an adverse event.

The production of school safety plans in the different schools, with the involvement of the key actors, makes the processes to raise awareness of the threats facing the schools more efficient, which in turn facilitates the prevention and response actions.

The periodic updating of the school safety plans guarantees a greater level of awareness in the educational community on both the hazards and the levels of damage they can cause.

Better results can be obtained and the feedback process with key actors facilitated by exploiting spaces of institutional interest on the issues of climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and ecosystem management and restoration and by making ongoing readjustments to the joint planning.

Knowledge competition on DRR, CCA and MRE with primary and secondary students of the Cristo Rey Institute of the municipality of San Lucas, Madrid. Photo: CARE-PfR.





Girls participating in the celebration of the International Disaster Reduction Day, Somoto, October 2012. Photo: Nicaraguan Red Cross.

Conclusions

Building the capacities of the educational community based on promoting a comprehensive DRR, CCA and EMR approach broadened the foundations for the development of knowledge and/or skills aimed at the analysis and management of the causal factors of disasters.

The generation of alliances, consensus and complementarity among the population, government institutions, nongovernmental organizations and the municipal governments strengthened the foundations for a sustainable environment for safe schools.

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