

Reducing Vulnerability to Natural Hazards

Background

Uruguay is affected by floods more than by any other adverse natural events. In the last decade, floods corresponded to about 50 percent of all the extreme events registered by the National Emergency System (SNE). Since 2000, more than 67,000 people were evacuated across the country due to floods. The 2007 floods, the worst recorded in the last 50 years, affected more than 100,000 people, public infrastructure, and the agricultural sector with losses estimated at US\$20 million. In addition to an increase in rainfall intensity, floods have intensified as a result of poor storm-water systems in cities. According to a recent assessment, 60 Uruguayan cities have drainage deficiencies, of which 70 percent are considered significant.

In 2005, the National Directorate of Water (DINAGUA), a policy-making institution in the Ministry of Housing, Land Management and Environment (MVOTMA), was created with a mandate to develop national policies concerning water supply and sanitation, water resources management, and water-related risk management issues. In 2007, DINAGUA created a multidisciplinary team to begin working on this issue using a disaster risk management (DRM) approach. Between 2007 and 2009, this team, through a World Bank technical assistance loan, was able to increase awareness among policy-makers, local government officials, and community leaders. In parallel, Congress was reviewing three bills with disaster risk management elements that were later approved: (i) the National Water Law (2009), (ii) Land Use and Sustainable Development Law (2008), and (iii) National Emergency Law (2009).

Although these three laws represented a significant step in the right direction, much work was still required, especially in the development of the regulatory framework and the incorporation of disaster risk in national policies. Furthermore, DRM was still new in Uruguay, thus requiring support on knowledge base activities to deepen DRM understanding among all stakeholders and create instruments to help local governments with the implementation of mitigation measures included in the new laws. DINAGUA was a new agency with limited resources. The GFDRR grant enabled DINAGUA to

Quick Facts

- Grant Amount: US\$100,000
- Grant Duration: 2009-2010
- Bills Submitted for Congress Review: 3
- National Policy Plans with DRM: 3
- Capacity-Building Events Organized: 8
- Floods are the most significant adverse natural events affecting Uruguay.

support these activities, and at the same time it was able to strengthen DINAGUA's institutional capacity to support DRM at the national and local levels.

Approach

The objective of the grant was to strengthen the response of DINAGUA to extreme flooding events by (i) introducing disaster risk reduction into legal and national policy frameworks, (ii) assisting in the establishment of a disaster risk reduction unit, and (iii) providing knowledge and capacity enhancement opportunities at the national and local levels. The grant financed advisory work, training, and workshops. DINAGUA housed consultants, coordinated workshops and interagency meetings, and executed the studies.

The core approach was to support DINAGUA's policy-maker role in the water sector in order to move forward the DRM agenda focusing on flood prevention and mitigation. The project was designed with strong multi-institutional and cross-sectoral participation, as the introduction of new regulations and their implementation depended on several national agencies and local governments. In addition, through the development of a pilot project in the City of Artigas, DINAGUA demonstrated the application and importance of risk maps in land use planning, facilitating the dialogue with other local governments and national agencies. The knowledge base activities focused on several technical and policy workshops to increase DRM awareness and create local capacity.

Results

The project contributed significantly to mainstreaming flood risk reduction across institutions, policies, and legislation, and to raising awareness of DRM:

- A Flood Risk Management regulation is to be included in the land use and emergency response

