

## **Library Frontiers: Disasters, Emergency Preparedness and Emerging Diseases IFLA conference side event 18 Aug 2007**

### **Title**

**The Latin American Network for disaster information: building local capacities in information management for disaster reduction**

### **Authors**

**Isabel Lopez, Pan American Health Organization, Costa Rica, Stacey Arnesen, National Library of Medicine, USA, et al.**

Latin American and the Caribbean countries have the greatest exposure to disasters of all regions in the world. Their long history of disasters has caused, and continues to cause, enormous suffering in terms of human loss, as well as a having a considerable impact on economic development.

Despite the recognition that access to information is essential to disaster preparedness, inadequate information technology, lack of training in how to find and manage information and lack of awareness about what information is available often prevents or delays access to vital information before, during and after crises.

For more than 15 years, international cooperation has helped improve access to information in these countries. This access to information has assisted them to be better prepared to reduce the impact of disasters. As a part of this effort, the Regional Disaster Information Center for Latin America and the Caribbean (Spanish acronym CRID) was created by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in 1994 and based in Costa Rica. Today CRID has one of the most important digital libraries on disasters with over 12.000 full-text, searchable documents online for free.

The need support the development of a disaster information system in Central America was emphasized by the devastation caused by hurricane Mitch in 1998, the worst disaster suffered by this region in recent years. The efforts to collect, disseminate and share information related to health and disasters throughout the region, led to the creation of the Central American Network for Disaster and Health Information (CANDHI). Several organizations, including the U.S. National Library of Medicine, PAHO, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, and the European Community Humanitarian Office, provide technical and/or financial support for CANDHI.

Today, building upon the original CANDHI network, a greater network of disaster-related information centers continues to develop at the regional level of Latin America, the BiVa-PaD network (Virtual Libraries in the Andean Region for Prevention and Attention of Disasters).

These projects and initiatives contribute not only to the improvement of the capacities of these countries in the area of disaster-related information management, but also to develop collaboration between institutions, international agencies and countries to share knowledge. This experience has also contributed to modernization of medical and disaster management libraries in Central and South America, and provides a useful model for disseminating information in underserved, disaster prone environments and for managing nontraditional literature regarding risk reduction and disasters.

#### Authors' Affiliations:

Stacey Arnesen, Advisor for Special Projects, US National Library of Medicine, [Stacey\\_arnesen@nlm.nih.gov](mailto:Stacey_arnesen@nlm.nih.gov)

Victor Cid, Senior Computer Scientist, US National Library of Medicine, [victor\\_cid@nlm.nih.gov](mailto:victor_cid@nlm.nih.gov)

John Scott, President, Center for Public Service Communications, [jscott@cpsc.com](mailto:jscott@cpsc.com)

Ricardo Perez, Regional Information Advisor, Pan American Health Organization, [perezric@pan.ops-oms.org](mailto:perezric@pan.ops-oms.org)

Dave Zervaas, Regional Coordinator for the Americas, United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, [dzervaas@eird.org](mailto:dzervaas@eird.org)

Isabel Lopez, Special Consultant, Pan American Health Organization, [isabel.lopez@crid.or.cr](mailto:isabel.lopez@crid.or.cr)

Irene Cespedes, Librarian, Latin-American Regional Center for Disaster Reduction, [Irene.cespedes@crid.or.cr](mailto:Irene.cespedes@crid.or.cr)

Patricia Solano, Librarian, Latin-American Regional Center for Disaster Reduction,

[Patricia.solano@crid.or.cr](mailto:Patricia.solano@crid.or.cr)