

Organization of American States

Topic 1: Natural Disaster Recovery

Every year, the OAS faces numerous natural disasters ranging from hurricanes and landslides, to more recently, earthquakes. Natural disasters repeatedly affect so many countries in the OAS from the coast of the USA to Haiti, and to Chile. The aftermath of these disasters have been devastating. Because much of the population of the countries in this region is plagued by poverty, it takes a very long time to remedy the economic and social damage caused by these natural disasters.

After a disaster strikes, affected countries need to rebuild what has been destroyed. There is usually damage to infrastructure, such as bridges and roadways, which is very costly and time consuming to repair. The impact on agriculture requires farmers to start anew with their crops, which not only has economic effects, but disrupts the food supply in nations that may not be able to import enough food to feed an already malnourished population.

The economic effects of natural disasters directly impact the lives of the people living in these countries, diminishing access to food and clean water. These and other social and humanitarian consequences are even more devastating to the people in this region, because so many of them live in poor conditions. These disasters threaten the health of the people because of either debris or flooding. Damage to schools and government means the people cannot rely on the help they might normally receive to live their everyday lives. Many of the nations impacted by natural disasters, including Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquake in early 2010, are forced to start over with nothing after having very little infrastructure in place before the disaster struck.

Developing nations look to countries that are well developed to continuously send aid, even though more developed countries may have other priorities. International coordination of response and recovery in the aftermath of natural disasters is crucial to the populations affected by these events. The OAS must consider responses to natural disasters in the region before yet another crisis cripples another nation. Resolutions on this topic can pertain to assessing the way these countries handle dealing with these disasters, safety precautions to teach in schools, ways to prevent major damage in the preparation for the new ones to come, and contingency plans for funding to deal with recovery from natural disasters.

Questions:

1. How should member nations of the OAS coordinate to prepare for and respond to the effects of natural disasters in their region? In other parts of the world?
2. What should the OAS do to coordinate with other regional and international organizations, to gain assistance for the people of the Americas suffering in the aftermath of natural disasters?
3. Despite the fact that natural disasters cannot be predicted, what can be done to prevent such events and decrease risk for countries in the region?

Resources:

1. <http://www.fao.org/sd/wpdirect/wpan0042.htm>
This article describes major natural disasters in the Caribbean and South America, including graphs and charts regarding the economic and social effects the disasters had on their areas.
2. <http://www.oas.org/dsd/Nat-Dis-Proj/Natdesproject/InterCommit.htm>
The Inter-American Strategic Plan for Policy on Vulnerability Reduction, Risk Management and Disaster Response (IASP)
3. <http://www.undp.org/cpr/disred/english/regions/latinam.htm>
This website analyzes the disaster prevention methods along with many disasters in the OAS nations.
4. <http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/resources/web/statistics.html>
This organization provides links that leads to easily understood information: statistics, tables, maps of disaster occurrences, etc.
5. http://www.preventionweb.net/english/countries/statistics/index_region.php?rid=2
This website provides organized charts regarding various types of natural disasters and the effects they had on many different regions.
6. <http://www.oas.org/csh/english/NDR.asp>
OAS Committee on Hemispheric Security resources on natural disaster reduction
7. http://www.oas.org/en/news/in-depth_article.asp?df_sCodigo=4035
Article on the OAS response and disaster relief efforts in Haiti
8. <http://www.eird.org/index-eng.htm>
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, a UN body that looks at disaster risk and reduction
9. <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/publications/v.php?id=2544>
An overview of the risk of natural disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean
10. <http://www.ifrc.org/what/disasters/idrl/>
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies International Disaster Response Laws, Rules and Principles (IDRL) Programme

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Topic 2: Literacy

Across the nations of the OAS, literacy in people of all ages is shockingly limited. Numerous people cannot read or write. Recognizing this problem, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched the UN Literacy Decade in 2003. Because improving literacy rates all over the world is of vital importance, the UN Literacy Decade set a goal of increasing literacy rates 50% by 2015. In 2005, UNESCO realized that current literacy improvement efforts would not meet the goal, and established the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), a global strategic framework focusing on adult literacy and children not enrolled in educational programs or schools. LIFE targets 35 countries with especially low literacy rates and large populations that cannot read or write. However, only Haiti and Brazil are listed as countries of priority. The OAS must take steps to focus on the issue of literacy across the Americas.

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy defines literacy as "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." An inability to read hinders the ability of people of all ages to participate in everyday activities. Literacy starts when people are young. If an individual does not have education, there is little chance that they will make the effort outside of the educational system to seek help and become literate. In many developing nations, there is only a small percentage of people who can actually help teach others to read.

Literacy is connected to poverty and crime as well. The nations with the highest rates of illiteracy are those with the greatest poverty. Low literacy rates have also linked to violence and crime. Without literacy, people are unable to apply for and obtain work, which many believe leads them to crime. Some nations have had success with crime prevention through the funding of literacy programs and education.

Luckily, there are some international organizations in existence to aid the promotion of literacy; one of them being UNICEF. The charter of the OAS mentions, as one of the body's goals, "rapid eradication of illiteracy and expansion of educational opportunities for all." Action must be taken by the member nations of the OAS to address this problem and begin to improve literacy rates across the region.

Questions:

1. How can the OAS prevent any increases in illiteracy in young children? How can nations financially support schools to teach kids how to read at an early age?
2. What programs can be developed to promote adult literacy in OAS member nations?
3. How could other problems in your country, such as economic development or health improvement, be impacted by the improvement of literacy?

Resources:

1. <http://www.begintoread.com/research/literacystatistics.html>
A summary including literary statistics regarding the illiteracy in the world.
2. http://www.readfaster.com/education_stats.asp
Information regarding the education level of children and students.
3. <http://www.mapsofworld.com/thematic-maps/world-illiteracy-map.htm>
A map displaying literacy rates in the world.
4. http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/edu_sci_lit-education-scientific-literacy
Recent statistics concerning the rate of literacy in various countries.
5. <http://portal.oas.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1631&language=en-US>
OAS resources on literacy and adult education
6. http://www.dvv-international.de/index.php?article_id=808&clang=1
Latin America: International Literacy Benchmarks
7. http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/273893/the_role_literacy_plays_in_crime.html
This article discusses links between literacy and crime
8. <http://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/>
UNESCO page on literacy
9. <http://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/un-literacy-decade/literacy-initiative-life/>
UNESCO's LIFE initiative to improve literacy
10. http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F63%2F172&Submit=Search&Lang=E
Mid-Decade review of UNESCO progress in improving literacy

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Topic 3: Alternative Energy Sources

Global warming is a major concern to all OAS member nations. It negatively affects weather patterns, health conditions of people and animals, and natural resources that are key in various nations' economies. Recently, scientists discovered one of the main causes of global warming is the overuse of fossil fuels, which ultimately deteriorates much of the ozone layer, leaving the earth dangerously vulnerable to harmful UV rays. However, scientists are taking full advantage of today's modern technology.

The use of alternative energy sources to create fuel is clearly the way forward. The UN Development Programme has warned that none of the Millennium Development Goals can be achieved without improvements in energy use around the world. Energy impacts all aspects of development, including access to clean water, development of agriculture, and improvement of health and education.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) is an intergovernmental organization that was founded in the 1970s. The IEA conducts energy research and disseminates information on energy policies and recommendations across the world. The Renewable Energy in the Americas Initiative (REIA) was established in 1992. In 1994, sixteen countries signed the REIA Declaration and in 1998, the project came under the auspices of the OAS Department of Sustainable Development. Although the IEA and REIA have been operating for quite some time, the use of renewable energy sources is not widespread in the region.

Implementation of alternative energy sources will not be an easy process. Use of these natural resources requires a lot of space to build the power plants that turn the source into a usable fuel. It also can be a costly process. The use of some renewable energy sources prevents a tradeoff: use the resource for energy, or use it for other purposes. For instance, water is a valuable resource, access to which many people in the developing nations have a limited supply – and its use as an energy source could diminish the access of citizens who already have little access to water. Finally, the OAS must be mindful of the effects that alternative energy and other forms of sustainable development may have on the health of the people in the Americas. Sanitation, as well as the quality of the water and air, is a huge consideration in deciding on alternative energy innovations.

Questions:

1. How should OAS member nations use alternative energy sources? How should decisions be made on alternative sources to use? Which ones are best for the region?
2. How can these nations make more efficient use of fossil fuels, while the use of alternative energy sources develops?
3. How can the OAS help developing nations integrate the use of alternative energy sources?

Resources:

1. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/>
An analysis regarding various energy sources.
2. <http://www.iea.org/Textbase/stats/index.asp>
This website provides energy usage statistics and graphs for various countries.
3. http://www.oecd.org/topicstatsportal/0,3398,en_2825_495616_1_1_1_1_1,00.html
A report including energy indicators, statistics, and data.
4. <http://www.undp.org/energy/>
United Nations development program for energy.
5. <http://www.oas.org/dsd/reia/default.htm>
Homepage of the Renewable Energy in the Americas Initiative
6. <http://www.iea.org/index.asp>
Homepage of the International Energy Agency
7. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/new-math-alternative-energy>
An article on the costs of using alternative energy
8. http://content.undp.org/go/cms-service/download/asset/?asset_id=2521394
A report and recommendations from the UN Secretary General's Advisory Group on Energy and Climate Change
9. <http://www.iea.org/work/2003/budapest/mexico.pdf>
An overview of renewable energy sources in Latin America
10. http://www.paho.org/english/mdg/cpo_meta7_panama.asp
The Pan-American Health Organization's website on the health impacts of sustainable development.