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“Countries and Bilateral Agreements in the Frontier Zones”



*Organizing Agency:*  
**Pan American Health Organization**  
**Regional Office of the World Health Organization**

LATIN AMERICAN PANEL

**COOPERATION BETWEEN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES AND  
BILATERAL AGREEMENTS  
IN BORDER AREAS**

**SUMMARY**

In the past, Latin America has taken important steps toward achieving real integration among the countries of the Region. In most cases, these efforts were economic in nature; unfortunately, in practice, they did not reach the objective hoped for.

Nevertheless, in the field of disaster management the Region shows important progress in relation to cooperation, assistance, mutual help and solidarity. This is a large region, its geography presents many difficulties, and it is permanently affected by phenomena that many times are catastrophic. Agreements and pacts between neighboring countries have proved to be the most appropriate means of facing disasters that affect common borders.

This reality can be clearly observed beginning in the 1980s, when bilateral and subregional agreements were consolidated, especially those concerning border areas, where cities could be affected by similar phenomena.

At present, agreement and cooperation pacts in the field of disaster prevention, mitigation and assistance are operating at different levels of development. These agreements include the exchange of experiences and information, monitoring, training, emergency stock piling, etc. Even in the absence of signed formal agreements, several countries are working together at the local level on these matters.

Agreements made between Mexico and the U.S.A, Mexico and Guatemala, among the countries of Central America, agreements between Colombia and Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela, and Chile and Peru, just to name a few, are in the process of being applied. Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay have carried out joint activities in cities on shared national borders that are affected by river flooding.

While the Amazon Pact and the Hipolito Unanue Agreement are comprehensive instruments that encompass different areas of cooperation, they also incorporate the problem of disasters.

In synthesis, it can be pointed out that Latin America has moved ahead in these areas during the last decade. This is also the result of the efforts of international organizations working in the region, and of others who have supported and encouraged this type of relationship.

Conscious of the fact that it is still necessary to consolidate and increase the work that is being done, Latin America has shown that it is possible to reach an understanding and consensus among the countries facing this problem. The years remaining until the close of the IDNDR, and the years following, will provide an excellent opportunity to intensify this type of cooperation. The assistance of international agencies and donor countries will be extremely important in reaching these objectives.

It is important that all future agreements and pacts signed in the region or at the country level, whether they are economic, cultural, scientific, etc., incorporate the variable of disasters as a way of attaining sustainable development, which all nations long for.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, Latin America has made important efforts to achieve regional and subregional integration, having reached agreements particularly in the economic field. These

have not normally produced the expected results. Cultural, historical, geographic, economic and political factors have contributed to delaying the desired integration.

Nevertheless, the phenomena of natural disasters, which do not respect borders and which affect everyone—regions as well as a group of countries—is always present. It is in this field that Latin America can satisfactorily show solidarity, cooperation, and mutual help which normally emerge spontaneously, planned and systematized in all countries when one is hit by catastrophe.

From the first moment the tragedy is made known, relief and assistance flows into the affected neighboring country. This is one of the main strengths of the region, and one that should be directed and stimulated.

## **REGIONAL AND BORDER COOPERATION**

Since this is a vast and geographically challenging region, communication has and will continue to make it difficult to successfully conclude regional agreements that consider all the realities and local differences in the areas of disaster prevention, mitigation, and response.

In the past, and especially beginning in the 1980s, border or subregional agreements, subscribed to by neighboring countries at risk of similar hazards have been shown to be the most appropriate means of carrying out strategies and actions in disaster preparedness and response.

## **EXISTING AGREEMENTS**

The list of pacts and formal and informal agreements that are in operation at the present time in the region is too long to present, but we can say that there is real cooperation and integration at different levels of development in practically the entire continent, which makes Latin America a noteworthy example. Some of these pacts or agreements are the following:

⇒ **Mexico and the U.S.A**

There is close cooperation in border areas related to prevention of emergencies caused by hazardous chemical substances; a program has been in operation for several years that will be expanded in 1994, with involvement of federal and state levels.

⇒ **Central America**

The presidents of the countries of this subregion have subscribed to an agreement of cooperation with the support of CEPREDENAC, which will promote a series of measures, among them the Regional Plan for Disaster Reduction in Central America.

⇒ **Colombia - Ecuador**

Since 1990, agreements have been signed by both countries in cooperation, research, exchange of information, communications, and early warning in border zones, especially in the areas of volcanology and seismology.

⇒ **Colombia - Venezuela**

An agreement on cooperation and mutual assistance for risk mitigation and disaster response during seismic emergencies was signed in 1993. That same year, another cooperation pact was signed to control oil spills originating from petroleum processing and tankers in the marine environment.

⇒ **Chile - Peru**

In 1992, both countries signed a cooperation agreement, especially for the border zone of Arica and Tacna, where numerous activities such as exchange of information, drills, training, emergency, stockpiling, etc., have taken place in the face of seismic threat and tsunamis in that region.

⇒ **Argentina - Uruguay - Paraguay**

These countries work actively at the national level and especially at the border level on matters related to prevention, monitoring, warning, etc., as a consequence of the periodic flooding of the Paraguay and Parana rivers.

⇒ **Amazon Pact**

This very extensive agreement among the countries of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela also has a component on cooperation in case of disaster.

⇒ **The Hipolito Unanue Pact**

This Pact between the countries of the Andean Region is also very extensive, and includes a disaster component with special emphasis on border areas.

It is appropriate to mention the role of the Pan American Health Organization in advancing the consolidation of many of these agreements and/or pacts in order to promote and support this type of initiative.

As you have seen, binational or subregional cooperation at the border level has been an effective tool in disaster prevention, mitigation and response. We are aware that much remains to be done, but it is very important to point out that a solid foundation exists upon which to base future activities.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

⇒ Prior to the 1980s, the countries of the Region were especially concerned with providing aid and solidarity as soon as a disaster struck. This tendency has been changing, and without overlooking the importance of response, presently emphasis has been on disaster prevention. International agencies, the scientific community, and others

have been essential in creating awareness in the countries regarding the problem of disasters and the importance of preparedness, prevention and mitigation.

- ⇒ Without overlooking the value of the activities developed by regional agencies, we believe that any continued efforts to implement activities will improve and reinforce the binational and subregional cooperation at the border level, and will provide a real guarantee for the work that remains to be done in the field of disasters.
  
- ⇒ Latin America has come a long way, but we are conscious that much needs to be done. The international community can cooperate and give support to strengthen the ties already established among the countries, especially those where border cooperation is in place and whose experiences can be applied and multiplied throughout the region, and extended to other continents.
  
- ⇒ Finally, it is necessary to create awareness at the international level as well as at the regional level, so that all agreements subscribed to in the future, whether economic, scientific, cultural or political, include the disaster variable, since this is the only way to reach the level sustainable development that all the nations of the continent are striving for.

To achieve this, it is essential that all the political, scientific and administrative levels and the community in general work closely together in a coordinated manner and with the future in mind. The years remaining before the close of the IDNDR offer an excellent opportunity to achieve this.

Latin America is headed in the right direction; to invest in it and in the area of prevention and mitigation is, and will continue to be profitable.