Considerations on the Economic, Social, Political and Institutional Context and Challenges for Integrated Risk and Disaster Management in Latin America.

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In order to adequately consider and contextualise the key factors that must be taken into account when "thinking" a viable ingrated risk and disaster management structure for Latin American and Caribbean countries, it is necessary to clearly establish the nature of the problem we are facing. This we will attempt to do in a succinct and general manner linking on observations as regards the central social, economic, political and institutional issues. In a second part of our document we will summarize the issues identified.

Basically, we need to ask what is the nature of the risk and disaster problematic in the region? How has it evolved and where is it going?

The Risk and Disaster Context:

1. The vast majority of Latin American and Caribbean countries are subject to a wide range of hazard factors. This not only includes those associated with natural earth forming and transforming processes (natural hazards), but also an impressive range of what may be called socio or pseudo natural and anthropogenic hazards (here we are excluding social hazards such as violence, terrorism etc, although it is obvious that these can not be ignored as important sources of insecurity).

2. Socio-natural hazards refer to conditions where the inadequate relations between humans and their environment create new hazards, all of which appear to be natural. Flooding, drought, landslides and land submergence associated with deforestation, water basin destruction, slope and underground mining, and inadequately planned urban growth are examples of this. Many others exist and, in general, the overall increase in hazard factors is associated more with these types of process than with nature itself. Human participation in global climatic change is the more extreme manifestation of this hybrid hazard type. The recognition of this type of hazard inevitably leads to an inextricable relationship between risk reduction and risk reduction policy and environmental agencies and policy. These types of event are manifestations of environmental abuse and problems. As they are socially constructed they may also be socially deconstructed through sane and viable policies. That is to say, if it is true that natural hazards can not be got rid of or substantially modified as such, socio natural hazards are clearly subject to intervention and reduction. This requires a close association and coordination between environmental agencies and policies and risk reduction promoters and institutions. Unfortunately, to date this link between environment and risk and disaster is not sufficiently well established in the region, although things are moving in this direction. The creation of the new National

Territorial Studies Service at the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources in El Salvador is a move in the right direction. Also, the discussion on the role of the new municipal environmental units created in various countries with recent environmental legislation provides an interesting opportunity to incorporate the risk problem at the local level without creating new and parallel structures. However, a long way has to go before this is established as a general principle. Modern ideas on environment and environmental management in the context of sustainability is still required in many countries.

3. Anthropogenic hazards refer to those dangers or threats associated with modern processes of production, circulation and consumption. Urban populations are particularly exposed to these types of hazard. Urban planning, health and environmental agencies are the obvious institutions for dealing with such threats. However, this will require vast improvements in legislation , control mechanisms, and political commitment. Laisser faire, corruption, ignorance and insufficient human resources are major problems in establishing and enforcing controls.

4. Given the wide range of hazard types, a large number of countries, regions, zones and families live in multi-hazard situations, where concatenation and synergy may occur. Much has to be done to identify and dimension multihazard and concatenated risk scenarios and methodologies and coordination schemes able to deal with these contexts. Even today, most methodologies are single hazard based and there still exists a tendency to isolate one single type of hazard as being most significant and concentrate scarce resources on that problem. Institutional isolation and specialisation, scarce resources, the centralised nature of many geoscience monitoring institutions, and the as yet still ephimeral nature of descentralisation and municipal strengthening mechanisms contribute to this. Here it is clear that the local level is where it is most feasible and practical to dimension risk problems and coordinate and elicit action. But, municipalities are very weak in general and the scarce resources available to them are barely sufficient to cover basic services such as rubbish collection let alone provide real options for risk mapping and development of coherent and integrated intervention strategies. However, the examples of some large cities with reasonable budgets shows the importance of municipal action and control. This can be seen in various cities in Colombia, in particular.

5. The impact of physical events is potentiated by the extremely high levels of human vulnerability existing in the region. This is not only associated with the extreme levels of poverty that typify most countries, but is also a problem for the more affluent sectors, as Hurricane Mitch demonstrated with the destruction of advanced productive facilities and infrastructure in Central America. However, it is the poor who are more vulnerable given the difficulties they will face in recovering from loss. This dual (or even more complex) social nature of vulnerability requires careful consideration of basic causal factors. And, what is good for the goose is not necesarily good for the gander. Dealing with risk amongst poor populations, which should be an ethical and social imperative, is not the same as dealing with risk in more affluent sectors and societies, although there will be certain things in common.

6. In the case of the poor or socially excluded, it is clear that disaster vulnerability is constructed on "daily life" vulnerability. No clear conceptual separation may be made between every day vulnerability, expressed in such things as family and social violence, hunger, unemployment, lack of subsistence incomes, malnutrition, ill health and drug addiction, and disaster vulnerability, expressed in terms of inadequate resources, exclusion from building in safer locations, lack of access to adequate building techniques, social disorganisation etc. In this sense, global or total risk is far more interesting as a concept than disaster risk itself. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this is that risk can not be separated either causally or in terms of management practices, from development, economic policy and planning. Although this is more obvious when dealing with risk reduction and control concerns, and rehabilitation and reconstruction, it is also highly relevant when dealing with disaster preparedness and response. Risk is not a residual factor but rather a major component in the lives of the poor and socially excluded. The question is how do we get risk reduction into development practice at a sectorial and territorial level ? And, how do we establish adequate links and coordination between national level agencies and policies, and local level needs and organisations in countries that are still essentially highly centralised, and with incipient experience in integrated territorial and sectorial planning

7. As regards the more affluent or middle class groups, the variety of causes of risk is potentially very large, ranging from corruption through to ignorance. But, it will probably be shown that the search for short term economic gain as opposed to sustainable medium and long term objectives is behind a good part of the risk generated by advanced production sectors. The problem is that the risk these sectors create is socially distributed amongst the poor. Deforestation for short term economic gain may have impacts in terms of flooding and landslides that affect poorer populations. The lack of controls on pollution will have effects in the poorer communities located around factories. Whilst insurance schemes and risk transfer mechanisms may be a way of safeguarding investment and financial loss for those able to afford it, this does not reduce, but rather transfers the risk. And this does not help the poor who are victims of others risk. A banana company may loose its assets during a severe hurricane but have financial protection that makes recovery emminently feasible. But, this does not help those unemployed by the loss nor does it impede them migrating to even higher risk areas and contexts afterwards. Insurance of hospitals does not ensure the provision of services if the hospital falls down in some moderate level earthquake.

8. Risk problems for the poor and more affluent exist in contexts of economic restriction and competing goals for scarce economic resources. Risk reduction, disaster prevention and mitigation, are difficult to get into public, private and family "policy" formats. Somewhat ironically disaster appears as a continuation of the every day disaster led by millions of people and a cause for conjunctural lamentation that inevitably quickly disappears as people need to take up the reigns of their ongoing daily lives. This is complicated further because disaster is often seen, and in fact is, a

source of opportunity. Governments get an opportunity for improving their images with response and access to fresh reconstruction resources. Negotiation of external debts is also on the books in crisis situations. Insured private sector groups suffer short term inconvenience but get rennovated capital as a reward. And, the poorer population may get food subsidies, new housing and economic incentives out of reponse activities and reconstruction funds.

9. Getting risk reduction on the policy format is not very easy given the still overwhelming attraction of disaster preparedness and response. Moreover, the search to promote a paradigmatic change in favor of risk reduction is also hindered by institutional inertia and the status quo. Whilst development agencies are still not fully imbued with their risk reduction role, existing disaster response organisations do not look very kindly on the idea that prevention and mitigation be dealt with by some other organization, structure or system. The tendency has been to operate in a syncretic fashion expanding the legal prerrogatives of existing agencies to promote risk reduction, but at the same time denying them the resources and political hierarchy to do this. Undoubtedly, the transition in favor of civil headed disaster response agencies may help in eroding this anachronism, but this is a long way off being reality. Moreover, with the present state of "unemployment" of the armed forces in the region, combined with the role of organisations like the US Southern Command, the armed forces are being thrown back into the disaster (and also environmental) arena with unforeseen consequences in terms of hierarchy and control in the future. Status quo, images of traditional roles and images of what disasters are all about don't help in changing existing contexts. Experience reveals many real but maybe anamolous situations as regards disaster response. In general, with a big disaster the established coordinating organisation is normally pushed into a secondary position and the President or a Ministerial Committee takes over. In the recent case of El Salvador control was placed in the Armed Forces and in a private sector grouping whilst the already weather beaten national disaster organisation, COEN, all but heard the death knoll. In the end the established agencies are generally marginalised in large disasters, and are too centralised and unwieldy to efficiently operate in the context of the myriad of small and medium level events that affect numerous areas every year.

10. Returning to the risk reduction front, we are faced with two contrasting and complimentary types of approach. The first relates to activities that attempt to change existing contexts and reduce already existing risk, product of historical "errors". The approaches to this are still highly technocratic and structural in conception. Risk management is seen as an addition to something and not an intimate part of that something. Relocation of communities, dams and dykes, dragging rivers are the major ways prevention is seen. But social transformation and the use of development projects to reduce risk is relatively absent. This signifies that the dominant caucus in compensatory risk reduction is still made up of engineers and the like. This is the type of approach most likely to be promoted by the State and the national disaster organisations, as it does not require a critical analysis of the way development, or rather skewed development, causes risk and disaster. At the same time, few development agencies have taken up on the idea of development as a risk reducing

strategy. Here it is interesting to note that it is in general the NGO sector and international agencies that are more progressive and diverse in their approaches. In fact it may not be unfair to say that these sectors are the dominant sectors in risk reduction initiatives in many countries, and the State has tended to let them get on with it whilst they keep on with disaster response and preparedness, and attempt to "coordinate" these civil society initiatives. One way or another, under conditions where fiscal deficit, external debt, slowly growing economies, withdrawal of the State from many sectors , privatisation and reduction of social compensation mechanisms are the rule, it is difficult to see government expending the resources to attack existing risk. The problem is just too large to grope with. Selective pilot type schemes are more likely to be developed but with no real idea of how or with what to generalise the experiences.

11. This context with regard to what we call compensatory risk management, must be considered along side the other dimension of risk reduction or control. Here the question is not what do we do with existing risk, but rather how do we help avoid future newly constructed risk? That is to say, how can we help to guarantee that new development, new housing schemes, hospitals, roads and electricity generating facilities have acceptable levels of risk. This is the prospective side of risk management and a side that needs far more consideration than is at present being given. It is a completely different ball game to compensatory management, not only in financial, social and political terms but also as regards the institutions that must come into play to guarantee this, although these may at times coincide.

12 Moving on to another set of questions, although we are always drawn towards large disasters and there is a clear bent to see these as "typifying" the risk and disaster problematic, new information sources and data bases are showing that the problem goes well beyond these types of events. Data for ten Latin American and Caribbean counties collected by LA RED using its DESINVENTAR soft ware shows that for every large disaster that attracts world or national level attention, hundreds if not thousands of smaller and medium scale events occur with varying levels of loss and damage. These events probably have as great, or an even greater accumulative impact on economic and social progress as do the large events, particularly as regards the poor. They are recurrent, predominantly local in their impacts, given little attention by national and international organisations, have to be dealt with by local population and governments, and are in many cases precursors of future large disasters, given the rapid growth in vulnerability in the areas affected.

11. The importance of a local view of disaster can not be overemphasised. At the same time, we must also recognize that localities can not resolve the problem of risk without integration with regional, national and even international policy making levels. Risk is manifested at a local, family or individual level in many instances. The sum of the small and medium scale events clearly illustrates this. But, even with large disasters we should recognise that the idea of a single disaster can only be substantiated from the social perspective of national or international level actors. As far as the population goes, a large regional disaster, or four national disasters like that

associated with Mitch, is in fact an infinite number of small disasters. It is the particular charateristics of risk at a local level which determines loss and damage levels and also the opportunities and needs during recovery. This contrasts with the centralised nature of post disaster assistance and the overall lack of popular participation in decision making processes as regards priorities and resource allocations. It is for this reason that NGOs tend to hive off parts of the territory for attention as opposed to central government decisions which are taken according to supposed national priorities. This process leads to many being left out of response and reconstruction activies and priorities.

12. Although it is clear, as we have stated above, that risk is best expressed at micro social and territorial levels, the construction of risk is a far more complex problem. Thus, the risk suffered by local populations, productive facilities, infrastructure etc. can not be explained in many cases by local processes. Rather, national and international economic, social and environmental policies and practices have a direct impact on risk construction at the local level. This implies that the territorial base for risk reduction is highly complex and requires concatenation, integration and complimentarity between different decision making and policy levels.

13. The territorial complexity associated with risk construction and risk reduction is increasing. It is not solely or essentially a national problem any more. Internationalisation and globalisation are leading to new risk contexts and the internationalisation of risk it self. This has always existed to a certain extent, but today modern economic and social processes are pushing the problem to new heights. In Latin America, for example, globalisation is being expressed territorially in terms of the development of the so called Logistical or Commercial Corridors, and development "clusters". From Puebla to Panama, or from southern Brasil to Santiago, Chile, the demand for competitivity and efficiency is resulting in the consolidation of these new development regions. This means that the risk faced by vital life lines or electric generating facilites in one country is a risk faced by a more extensive group of countries. Interruption of highways or electricity generation in one country, for example, will lead to an interruption of economic flows between countries. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that risk management has to broach a very wide range of territorial levels, ranging from the emminently local to the international and hemispheric. Local and national risk management policies and strategies are only one part of the problem. We now need regional approaches to decision and management. The case of CEPREDENAC in Central America may require careful study and a widening of its basic principles and international applicability

14. Finally, Latin America is now on average 75 %urban, with a wide array of levels in different countries. However, the tendency is irreversible and urban population and economy will continue to grow on an absolute and relative basis. This means that even today risk and disaster are predominantly urban problems. This will be even more so in the future. The complexity of the urban system, with problems of interconnectivity, density and concentration, synergy, social exclusion and disaster vulnerability, poses an immense problem for risk management. Integration with

national and city level urban planning and sectorial development is one of these. City governance and administrative structures impede city wide planning even today. Questions as to the development of the national urban system and as to the form and funcionality of the city are critical questions. The recent tragic happenings in New York lead to numerous questions as regards urban vulnerability which have been posed before in conditions of war, but not so often in conditions of peace and natural or non natural hazards. How viable are highly concentrated, high density cities? How do we ensure low vulnerability cities? Are descentralisation and extensive building patterns a realistic way of dealing with the problems or is the economic imperative for concentration and density too strong? What is an acceptable level of risk in a city given its economic rationale and its social composition? How do we deal with the challenges of rising sea levels, when many of the major cities in Latina America and the Caribbean are on the seaboard? Finally, how do institutions deal with these problems and come to cordinated and concerted solutions.

Summary of Significant Social, Economic, Political and Economic Contexts.

Basing our analysis on the risk and disaster contexts dealt with above, the following factors and contexts would seem to be of critical importance:

1) Institutionally the risk and disaster mangement theme faces, on the one hand, a problem of historical inertia and, on the other, a process of innovation and change. Whilst the traditional disaster management organisations have in many places widened their prerrogatives to include certain risk reduction functions, this is many times an unholy alliance. Traditional actors take on new roles without an adequate human and financial resource base, or the necessary political and hierarchical position to advance much in the required direction. But, at the same time, particularly in Central America, dozens of new actors have come on the scene in the aftermath of Mitch and the earthquakes in El Salvador who are working particularly on the topic of risk reduction and local level risk management. This includes many national NGOs, international agencies such as IADB, World Bank, UNDP and ECHO and community based groups. This will require the development of adequate coordinating mechanisms in order to avoid competition and duplication. Moreover, innovative opportunities are in process of consolidation at a government level where alternative, if complimentary institutions have been created. The case of the new National Territorial Studies Service in the Ministry of the Environment in El Salvador is one outstanding case. Probably, the Ministries of Environment in Latin America offer a singular opportunity for the risk reduction problematic given the increasing links that are being made between risk and the environmental problem, and the opportunities that the Environmental laws provide for taking up on the risk topic. In addition, the creation of Environmental Units at a sectorial and municipal level offers an opportunity ro integrate the risk with the environmental problem, avoiding the creation of ever more specialised units at the national and local levels.
2) During the last years, many national disaster organisations have made the transition between military run and civil control. This is consonant with the strengthening of

democracy and the ascendency of civil society and authority. However, it is clear that the armed forces are still in there as significant actors not only as regards resources for response but also in terms of control and command. It is probably true that their opportunity to assume a more prominent leadership and decision role is very much related to the level of success with which civil run organisations function.

3) Descentralisation is a must as far as risk and disaster management goes. Tendencies in favor of municipal strengthening are under way but slow to get off the ground. But, all evidence available suggests that when municipalities take up on the topic seriously, major advances can be made in risk reduction as well as response.
4) The range of institutions and organisations that must be welded into a working system is very large. Moreover, these include local, regional, national and international level actors. One key to getting a working system off the ground will be the political authority and hierarchy the coordinating or lead organisation has. In this sense Ministries of the Presidency, or some Planning and Environmental Minisitries may offer the best bet when it comes to risk reduction and control considerations. But, in each country different Ministries have different hierarchies. This is particularly the case with Environmental ministries where in some countries such as Dominicana they are fairly well up the hierarchy, whilst in others they have no priviliged political position.
5) Seen from the economic perspective, the chances for significant risk reduction are extremely limited. The nature of demands on scarce resources in a context of millions of persons and tens of thousands of communities living in conditions of high risk signifies that very little can be done as regards resolving problems. This tends to make disaster preparedness very attractive but does not resolve the problem as such. People will be evacuated and later probably return to worse conditions or migrate to more vulnerable locations. Neither are we seeing really sufficient advances in the problems of vulnerability in key social and economic infrastructure—hospitals, schools, highways and bridges, for example. The cost benefit advantage of mitigation is outweighed by the opportunity cost of the investment. It is still probably more politically expedient and wise to invest in five new rural clinics than in retrofitting two hospitals. Especially when governments and the parties they represent don't last for more than one four to five year term in office. The overall disillusionment with politics in the region means that change of political parties in power is almost guaranteed every election.
6) On the other hand, not sufficient has been done as regards prospective risk control. This is economically less onerous, but not necessarily politically viable as yet. What it requires amngst other things is the decision to make risk analysis and avaluation obligatory in any new investment, whether it be governmental, private sector or international agency led. That is to say, put it on an equal status with environmental impact analysis or gender considerations. This would seem obvious. But as yet little advance has been made. One problem with such a demand would undoubtedly be the lack of specialists able to undertake risk avaluation. Bottleknecks would undoubtedely be formed as regards lack of human resources. This points to the need for far more professionalisation and training in risk and disaster reduction matters in the region.