



BUILDING BETTER: Project C.A.R.E. in Trinidad

On the northeast coast of Trinidad, the small fishing community of Cumana is hosting Project C.A.R.E. (Community Awareness through Responsible Preparedness and Empowerment) to brace itself against the threat of storms like the one in September, 2010, which blew off 9 roofs and damaged 18 other homes. Demonstrating BRACED's mission to work together to get the job done, C.A.R.E. is a partnership between the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Trinidad & Tobago Red Cross Society, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management of Trinidad & Tobago (ODPM) and Habitat Trinidad & Tobago (HFHTT).

HFHTT will work to repair roofs and construct homes benefiting 35 families. The University of the West Indies campus chapter will plant trees and grasses to stabilize the hillsides. But truly bracing a community takes much more than roofs and trees. Project C.A.R.E. will also build capacity in Cumana.

The Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA), in which the community evaluated itself for its ability to cope with a disaster, has already served to bring the people of Cumana together, heighten their awareness and increase their capacity to be a resilient community. The community VCA team finished the assessment with a new willingness to act as first responders in the event of a disaster.

To further build capacity, construction trainings are being conducted, transferring life skills residents can use to protect their own homes and also to find gainful employment. On November 26th masons, labourers, truck drivers and contractors came together to partake in the first of several construction trainings designed for residents of Cumana and other members of HFHTT's construction workforce.

Sharmila Maharaj stressed the importance of following building codes, and pointed to the vast difference in the death tolls of the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile: 1/4 million vs. a few hundred. She used the Jamaican saying, "Long cuts bring sweat, short cuts bring blood", to emphasise her point, and suggested a "Tool Box Meeting" every morning to discuss the day's work and its potential hazards. The room full of builders stayed riveted as Wayne Benjamin of Trinidad Cement Limited quizzed them on proportions of cement /sand/gravel/water, and proper curing methods of concrete. He showed slide after slide of concrete works gone bad. Don't do the job just "anyhow", he said. "Finish the job well." Elliot Chaumette, HFHTT Construction Coordinator agreed. "Poor people have pride, too," he said. "They deserve a well-built product." HFHTT National Director Jennifer Massiah added, "We must build each house as if it were our own."

"Go forward and know that you are doing a good thing in the world," Irvin Adonis of HFHI LAC BRACED advised the group in closing. Through Project C.A.R.E. and the hard work of the community of Cumana, one coastal village will be better BRACED to face the next tropical storm.

AN ORGANIZED AND PREPARED COMMUNITY RECOVERS MORE EASILY FROM DISASTER

Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Latin America, second to Haiti. This situation is compounded by its environmental degradation and the fact that is one of the countries most prone to threats such as torrential rainfall, floods, hurricanes, tropical storms, landslides, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, fires and tsunamis. In the past 30 years there have been 56 disasters affecting more than 3 million people and causing four thousand deaths. We have learned through the most recent disasters that have hit the world that a well-organized and prepared community is more resilient when faced by disasters. This is why one of our objectives at Habitat for Humanity Nicaragua (HFHN) is to support capacity building among communities where we work in order to improve the prevention and mitigation of disasters, and the reconstruction following events.

Safe Houses and Communities

Just as is the case in many Latin American countries, most people build their own homes, and do it progressively. HPHN works within this context, aiming to improve the quality of construction by providing technical assistance to construction workers and to the families who participate in the construction of their homes.



After Hurricane Felix battered Nicaragua's Atlantic coast in 2007, damaging nearly 8,000 houses, killing 159 people and affecting 600,000, HPHN built 150 homes in the community of Auhya Pihni, benefitting 900 people. An integral part of this effort was organizing the community and training families in order for them to participate in the construction. Two international teams of volunteers from Costa Rica and the United States also participated.

Emergency Response in Nicaragua

The recent rains that came with Tropical Depression E12 affected all of Central America. In Nicaragua, thousands of homes as well as many roads, schools and health centers were damaged by floods. HFHN used funds designated for disasters to provide tool kits to aid in the mud removal and cleaning process in the seven most affected communities in the district of *San Rafael del Sur*. 140 families benefitted from access to these tools in order to make minor repairs to their roofs and walls, as well as being able to patch damaged areas with plastic in order to keep water out.

Partnerships

HFHN maintains ties with local authorities and other strategic partners in each region in order to be able to coordinate efforts and optimize resources. There is a disaster prevention project underway in a community in the district of *San Rafael del Sur* on the Pacific coast affected by a tsunami that hit 19 years ago, that is training three local communities as well as local government authorities.

HFHN partnered with Plan Nicaragua to organize a Climate Change and Disaster Prevention Camp for 70 children, school teachers and community volunteers. Along the same lines, a contest is currently underway for students to design disaster prevention projects for their schools.

At HFHN, we have taken the healthy approach of investing in organizing and providing training on risk identification and reduction as well as how to transform situations that cause vulnerability to events, for stakeholders such as students, teachers, community members, construction workers, local officials, and civil society organizations at a grassroots level.



Christmas Wishes

We would like to take this opportunity to wish you a very Merry Christmas and to thank you for your interest in BRACED. Because of your support, a number of families are living safer in Latin America and the Caribbean. Together we are working each day to make communities more resilient. This Christmas season, be at peace with the knowledge that you are doing something good for someone else in the world. We look forward to working with you in the New Year!

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name **Immanuel**,” which is translated, “God with us.”

Matthew 1:23

Building Readiness And Capacities for Emerging Disasters

BRACED. A good strong name for Habitat for Humanity's Latin American and Caribbean disaster response program. Our aim is to not only repair damage, but to help prevent it in the first place.

To that end, BRACED is working hard to strap roofs down, weatherize homes, construct strong rooms, build safe facilities and train communities – all to prepare families to resist disasters.

But when disaster strikes, as it often will in the Caribbean, there is inevitably damage. In conjunction with its local partner organizations – who are on the ground ready to go – BRACED aims to help as many people as possible. Emergency shelter kits are distributed, roofs are fixed and homes are repaired. BRACED has assisted 101 people thus far in Jamaica, Haiti and Trinidad & Tobago, and conducted 4 community disaster risk reduction trainings.

Would you like to join us? When you donate to BRACED (Project Code 8209002), you designate how you'd like your funds used. Would you like to help out pre-disaster by funding ongoing construction and repair projects? Do you want to support community training? Or, should your money go toward the Disaster Fund that facilitates rapid response when disaster strikes? And, it's not all about money, either. Habitat is happy to accept your generous offer of in-kind donations – or your donated time and skills.

Let us know how you'd like to help keep a community BRACED.

Would you like to support one of the countries highlighted in this issue?

Visit us at www.habitat.org where you can select your country of choice.

Or email us at LacDRR@habitat.org to find out how to donate to BRACED.