ONLINE RISKLAND® GAME IN SPANISH FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN

INCLUDING ANIMALS

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Background

The education kit entitled "Riskland: the fun way to learn how to prevent disasters" was created in 2002 by the Latin American and the Caribbean Offices of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), and the United Nations Children´s Fund (UNICEF). It was designed for children between 8 and 12 years of age. The kit includes a brochure with basic information on natural hazards and risk reduction in addition to the "Riskland" educational board game, which deals with disaster prevention through a number of educational messages that help understand good practices for reducing the impact of disasters, as well as those actions that contribute to an increased vulnerability to disasters.[1]
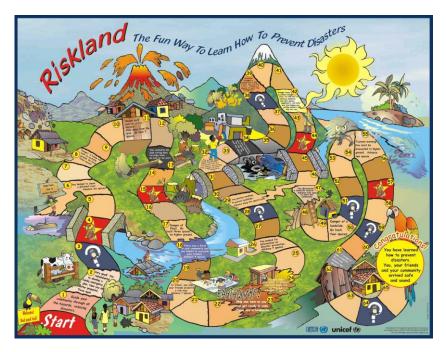

Figure 1: Riskland Original Board Game

The game has been translated to over 30 languages and the tool was designed so it can be reproduced and adapted to local environments.

This submission paper was developed by the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) as a contribution to the 2015 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (GAR 2015), as part of the assessment conducted by UNICEF and UNESCO of the progress towards achieving the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) Core Indicator 2 of Priority for Action 3: School curricula, education material and relevant training include disaster risk reduction and recovery concepts and practices. The guiding principle of this indicator is that incorporating disaster risk-related issues into existing education curricula reinforces learning and knowledge about disaster risk reduction[2].

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[1] www.unisdr.org/2004/campaign/pa-camp04-riskland-eng.htm
[2] www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/networks/private/hfa-thematic-review/#ra3

Online Riskland

In 2011, the Education, Communications and Disaster Management Departments of WSPA created an online version of the Riskland game with an innovative feature: it included animals as part of the community, so children learnt how to protect them from disasters[3]. WSPA and the Latin America Office of UNISDR determined that Riskland® needed to evolve with the times, and thus the WSPA set to renovate it and make it digital and online, for Spanish-speaking children in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The new version of the game included pets and backyard animals, as an important element of every household and every child's universe, with the aim to protect the family nuclei, their savings and their livelihoods. Therefore, this tool aims to strengthen the construction of family plans for livelihood protection in the region.

School children have an important role in building a culture of preparedness in their families. By including pets and backyard animals, WSPA not only provides an incentive for the growing number of people who consider their animals as part of their families, but also helps ensure the livelihood protection of communities that depend on their livestock.

An increasing number of people depend of their animals for survival or companionship. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (2009) one billion of the world´s population are reliant on animals for their livelihoods, and 70% of the world´s poor own livestock (Campbell, R. & Knowles, T., 2011). In addition, research conducted by WSPA has determined that over 80% of pet owners would wish to take their pets in an evacuation (Hesterberg, U., Huertas, G. & Appleby, M., 2012). A recent investigation conducted by the Autonomous University of Mexico (2013) determined an increase up to 94% of pet owners that would evacuate with them. These figures show the high level of importance of animals and how including them into the online game would prove an attractive feature.

In addition to including the animal component, this online version incorporated another important feature, a multiplayer version that allows children in different locations to play online simultaneously, hence promoting international interaction.

The Omar Dengo Foundation[4], a Costa Rican organisation, supported WSPA in the development of this virtual version. The game was developed to be played online and is also available on DVD for distribution to local schools that do not have access to the Internet. The game was designed for children between 7 and 10 years old.

This case study about the online version of the Riskland game is a good example of a "different approach of integrating disaster risk reduction into education" (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2013).

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[3] www.wspa-latinoamerica.org/riesgolandia/
[4] www.fod.ac.cr/

Validation of the Game

WSPA organised two events to test this online version of the game with school children and documented the results. The first event consisted of an Online Contest between children of Costa Rica and Mexico. During the second occasion, the game was used during the National Civil Defence Fair in Mexico City.

Online Contest

As part of the celebration of the International Risk Reduction Day on 13th October 2011, WSPA organised an online Riskland® contest for 25 Mexican and Costa Rican nine-year-old children, from the School Líder Barrio Limoncito in Costa Rica and the School Solidaridad in Mexico City.

Figure 2 Children from Limoncito School in Costa Rica speak about disasters

All participants deeply enjoyed playing the game, in particular knowing that they were spending time with kids from another country. Before starting the game, the children and their teachers held a discussion about disasters and their implications for their families and their animals. Children were asked some questions about disasters and provided the following answers:

How can we reduce disasters?

- *"Placing things in high places, such as food and furniture*
- *Having storage shelves for food*
- *Building our houses away from rivers, mountains and dangerous places"*

What is a disaster?

- *"When there is a natural event like a volcanic eruption, and there are houses below, it is a disaster because a lot of people and animals die.*
- *When houses are built next to the river, like mine.*
- *Like in Sixaola (town in Costa Rica) where the river takes down houses and people have to swim and cats have to get on the roof"*

What happens with animals when your neighbourhood floods?

- *"They drown*
- *Then get sick*
- *They die wet"*

The activity evidenced that the game is a very useful tool for teachers to share with their students and discuss about disasters. In Mexico, the children mentioned that they really enjoyed the game, especially the opportunity of being connected with other kids from Costa Rica. They also stated that the game was easy to use, they were very attentive to what they learned in the programme.

National Civil Defence Fair

In September 2012, WSPA participated with a stand in the National Civil Defence Fair, organised in the Technology Museum in Mexico City. This fair, organised by the National Coordination of Civil Defence, is meant to promote among the general public a culture of preparedness. Over 17 thousand people attended this two-day Fair.

The main feature of the WSPA stand was the Riskland Online game, and children that participated in the fair had the opportunity of playing the game with one another.

Figure 3 Children Playing Riskland during National Fair

Feedback received from the children playing the game and their parents was very positive. During the event WSPA learned that children 6 years old up to 12 years old were able to enjoy the game. It was also evident during these two days that the game should be used as a teaching tool, under the guidance of teacher or guardian, and is it not so useful for children to play on his or her own.

In addition, the CD version of the game was distributed to other participating organisations that work in disaster risk reduction, as well as schoolteachers that visited the stand. This allowed WSPA to promote the use of the game as an education tool

Figure 4 Children Playing Online Riskland during National Fair

Conclusion

The online version of the Riskland game has proven to be an innovative way to include disaster risk reduction into the education system, by promoting among school children the need not only to protect themselves but also to protect their animals from disasters.

In the two events that WSPA organised to validate this online version, the children were very attentive to the teachings of the game, and really enjoyed the opportunity of playing with other kids, particularly from a different country.

These events also showed that the game should be used as a teaching tool under the guidance of an educator, and could be linked with other activities that promote a culture of preparedness. In the next stage of development, WSPA will seek to collaborate with UNISDR to promote this tool with schoolteachers in Latin America.

References

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