

International Day for Disaster Reduction

13 October 2004

"Learning by playing"

Press Release

Which of the following is a great wave caused by an earthquake under the sea? Tiramisu ? Tsunami ? Timbaktu? Answer: Tsunami. When there is an earthquake, why do some houses collapse while others don't? Answer: Because they were poorly built with poor materials, or they were built in hazardous places ...

These are some of the 48 questions asked in Riskland game, an educational game board, for kids aged 8 to 12, created two years ago by the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction regional bureau of Costa Rica and the United Nations Children's Fund regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The game has been so successful in Latin America that three organisations: ISDR, UNICEF and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are taking the opportunity of the International Day for Disaster Reduction to stress the importance of education to prepare children and communities to reduce the impact of natural hazards.

In 2003, 254 million people have been affected by natural hazards most of them were women and children.

"Riskland is fun and you really learn useful stuff like what you have to do when there is an earthquake or a hurricane. With the game I have learnt a lot about how I can take care of myself when there is a natural disaster," said Juan, 9, from Costa Rica. "We know which places are dangerous. We know where the risks are."

Young people represent the future; if we are to ensure that they live in disaster-resilient societies, they need to be aware of those hazards that threaten them and be familiar with what can be done to reduce their negative consequences. Juan knows a lot about disasters. He learnt through playing.

"When young people learn about disaster reduction at school, they are in the powerful position of sharing what they are taught in class with their families and friends. As a result, the entire community can learn and benefit from the knowledge of how they can best reduce disaster impacts, potentially saving lives and property," says UN/ISDR Director Salvano Briceño.

"We have learnt from experience that getting the message of disaster reduction across in informal ways helps families to become more resilient. The Red Cross Red Crescent carries out many activities with schools and communities to help people prepare better for hazardous situations. We support the awareness building objectives of 'Riskland' and will work with our partners to spread the word of preparedness at community level" says Eva von Oelreich, Head of Disaster Preparedness & Response, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

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"Children are among the most vulnerable in an emergency, and have the most to gain from being prepared. They also have an enormous potential for learning - and teaching. They carry the lessons of Riskland, learned in school, back into their homes to the benefit of their families." says Daniel Toole Director, Emergency Programmes, UNICEF.

The UN World Conference on Disaster reduction that will take place in Kobe, Hyogo (Japan) from 18 to 22 January 2005 will be another opportunity to make a strong point on how education, learning and awareness on disaster reduction are essential to save lives.

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'Riskland' can be viewed at; http://www.unisdr.org/eng/public_aware/world_camp/2004/pa-camp04-announc-eng.htm

