CASE STUDY

PLAN INTERNATIONAL EL SALVADOR

Strengthening inter-governmental coordination to improve early warning and early action

This case study shows how involving levels of government in community learning creates opportunities for influence.

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Key Alliance terminology

Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance (Alliance):

The Alliance is a multi-sector collaboration between the humanitarian sector, academia, and the private sector focusing on shifting from the traditional emphasis on post-event recovery to pre-event resilience. We are nine years into an eleven-year program that has been delivered in two Phases (Phase I from 2013-2018; Phase II from 2018-2024).

Flood Resilience Measurement for Communities (FRMC):

Created by the Alliance in 2013, the FRMC is a framework and associated web-based data tool/app which conceptualizes flood resilience as a function of social, human, natural, physical, and financial capitals. The FRMC is implemented at the beginning of Alliance work to assess resilience strengths and gaps. This information is used to shape community programs and advocacy.

The win

In the context of the El Salvadorian government's recent strides toward improving forecasting through the creation of an impact-based forecasting model, Plan International El Salvador (Plan) saw an opportunity to further improve understanding and uptake of forecasts by:

- Supporting national government to strengthen forecast dissemination by improving inter-institutional communication within the national civil protection system. Plan established a formal working agreement between the General Directorate of Civil Protection (DGPC) of the national civil protection system and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN). Through this agreement, Plan has joined forces with these two institutions to support communication during emergencies and to strengthen the generation and provision of forecast information.
- Encouraging national government to integrate into the national impact-based forecasting model information on community coping

Launch of a user-friendly guide on impact-based forecasting in San Salvador, June 2021 © Plan International

capacities and vulnerabilities beyond just exposure to hazards.

How the win was achieved

Plan's work as part of the Alliance centers on enhancing community flood resilience. Plan has leveraged its long-term credibility from working on women, children and youth issues and Alliance flood resilience community programming to influence national government on disaster risk management (DRM) issues. Plan has focused its advocacy efforts on identifying opportunities to influence the national government in ways that both supports community resilience for target populations in the four communities in which it is working — El Majahual, San Diego, Colima, and Santa Barbara — and national DRM more broadly.

Involving government in developing a strong community program

Initially, Plan involved the national government in its community programs to generate government buy-in and strengthen government awareness of disaster risk and resilience. It invited national government officials from the DGPC to join the Alliance's FRMC process, collect community flood resilience data, and share the results identifying resilience gaps and opportunities. National government officials found this process so useful that they requested to be included in future FRMC measurements and have since explored using the data to inform state systems and responses, signaling official buy-in.

The priorities identified via the FRMC included the need to improve the timeliness of disaster response, safeguard assets and protect livelihoods, and improve flood monitoring and early warnings. Plan realized that effectively addressing these priorities would require a spectrum of activities engaging both the communities and government institutions. Plan's action plans, co-designed with community representatives, include activities meant to strengthen the communal civil protection system, and strengthen preparedness and response by improving coordination between the civil protection system (at the municipal level) and these community-based groups. A key activity is

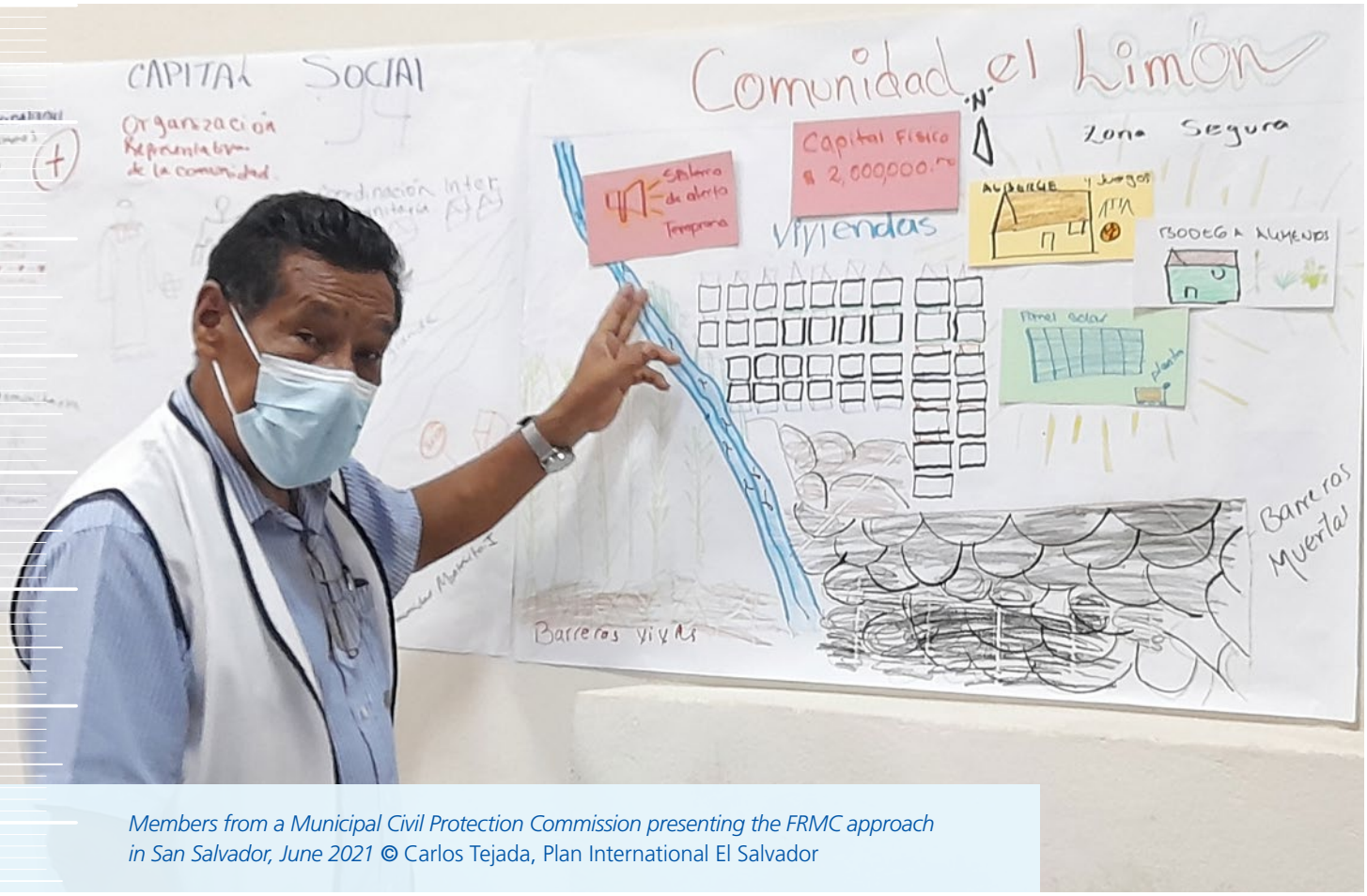
to improve the generation and provision of flood information.

Based on these action plans, Plan strengthened the Communal Civil Protection Commissions (CCPC) — community-based groups responsible for DRM and response — in all four of its program communities by providing them with training, resources, and equipment, and linking them to the wider civil protection system. Plan also built and strengthened community-based early warning systems — operated and managed by the CCPCs — and developed evacuation routes. The CCPCs supported the national government with managing the COVID-19 pandemic in their communities, which helped to strengthen community-government relationships.

Strengthening relationships with government for advocacy

To support the government to generate and disseminate forecasts and early warnings and coordinate response, Plan built strong relationships with and between the DGPC as the head of the national civil protection system, and the MARN Observatory of Natural Hazards and Resources (DOA), which has a mandate to develop scientific technical reports and transfer information to the DGPC. Plan provided these agencies with knowledge pertinent to community information needs, and packaged this knowledge in creative and user-friendly multimedia formats to incentivize uptake and understanding.

Maintaining relationships with government staff can be a challenge because of staff turnover following elections. Plan tried to address this by developing a working agreement with the DGPC and MARN, formalizing the collaboration with these agencies over time. Plan was able to develop this agreement due to consistent relationship building, the credibility and buy-in it had established by involving the DGPC in the FRMC process, joint planning and program



Members from a Municipal Civil Protection Commission presenting the FRMC approach in San Salvador, June 2021 © Carlos Tejada, Plan International El Salvador

Technicians from the General Directorate of Civil Protection discussing the impact-based forecasting approach during a joint workshop in San Salvador, June 2022 © Carlos Tejada, Plan International El Salvador

implementation, and the proven success of the work Plan had shared with the respective government staff via community visits.

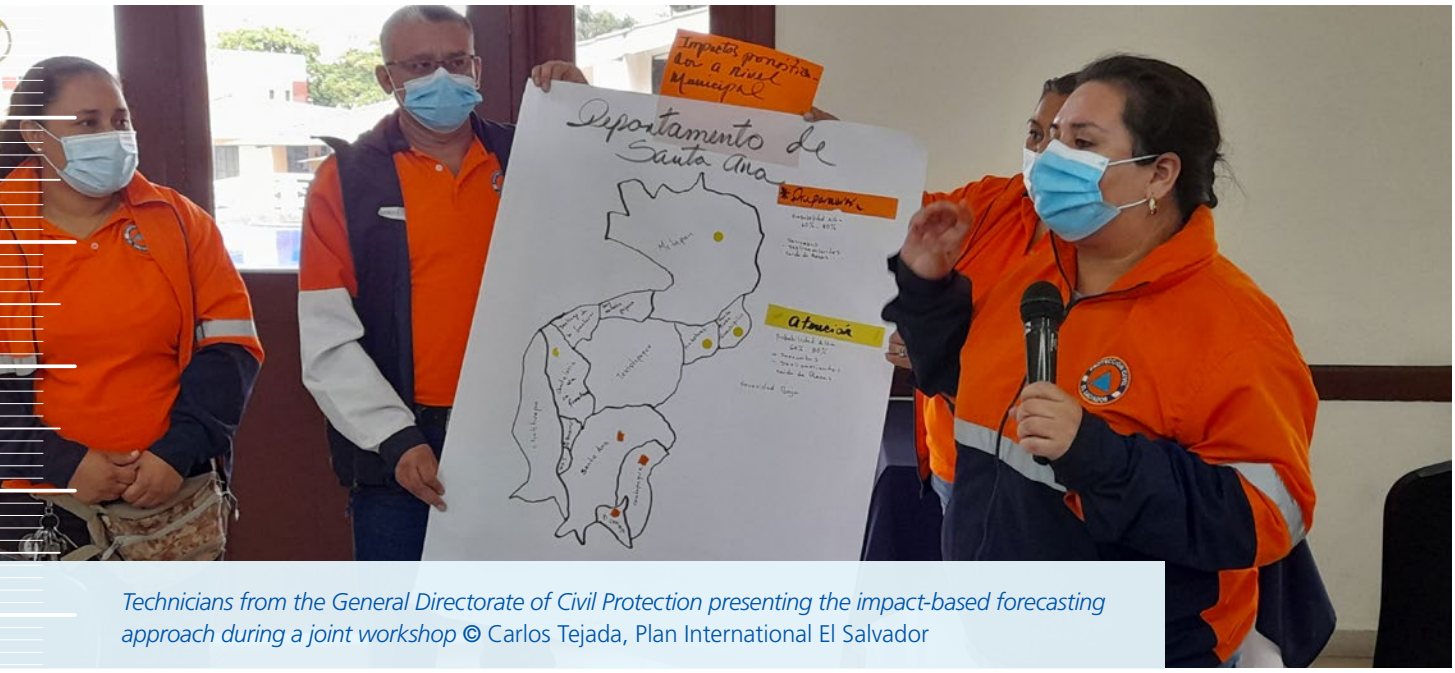
Using knowledge to influence change

In 2020, MARN, via the DOA, released a new impact-based forecasting model. Previously, DOA had collected and used data to describe the hazard. DOA is now moving toward understanding and communicating the impacts of potential hazards. The model has enabled DOA to conduct a detailed analysis of the characteristics of a hazard (e.g., location, intensity, frequency, and probability) and potential exposure. The resulting information has been used to create and disseminate more targeted forecasts that the civil protection system and communities can act on.

Plan saw this model as an opportunity for improving inter-institutional communication to enable better forecast dissemination and associated preparedness and response. Lacking a direct entry point into what is otherwise a very technical process, Plan created an opportunity to engage by working with MARN to co-produce an animated video for intended users explaining the model and how it can be used for planning preparedness and response.

At the same time, Plan conducted an FRMC Post-Event Study in the aftermath of Tropical Storm "Amanda-Cristobal", which provided strong evidence that forecast information was not reaching people and that people lacked the knowledge to act on forecasts. To Plan, this proved that mechanisms needed to be strengthened at the national level to disseminate and communicate forecasts effectively. To reinforce its initiative for inter-institutional communication during emergencies, Plan released a series of knowledge products based on the Post-Event Study results, including infographics and an animated video, targeted at both the communities it was working in and government agencies involved in DRM.

Upon seeing the evidence presented by Plan, both DOA and DGPC understood that they needed to address gaps in forecast dissemination and uptake to ensure that both communities and government institutions are able to use the information to better prepare for and respond to hazards.



Technicians from the General Directorate of Civil Protection presenting the impact-based forecasting approach during a joint workshop © Carlos Tejada, Plan International El Salvador

Subsequently, Plan worked toward improving inter-institutional communication and coordination through the creation of a joint protocol that enables DGPC and MARN to maintain close communication when hazards are forecasted. Plan conducted workshops and meetings with officials and technical experts from both institutions to improve communication processes and successfully negotiate a working agreement between MARN and the DGPC to expand dialogue and define lines of joint work for improving forecast communication and supporting community-based resilience efforts. In particular, MARN and DGPC will explore the potential of overlaying the information in the model with an analysis, not just of community exposure, but of physical, social, health, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities and coping capacities that exist in communities. Such information would enable the DGPC to issue warnings, advisories, and alerts according to the expected impact of the hazard, guiding communities and institutions of the national civil protection system in determining the most effective and efficient way to prepare and respond.

In support of this effort, Plan conducted a research study on the impacts of climate change, differentiated by age and gender, and presented the results to representatives from the DGPC, MARN, DOA, and select local governments. The study was covered by the local media on TV and online newspapers. Plan will use these results to continue to influence MARN and DGPC.

- Influenced change in national DRM by leveraging an emergent policy opportunity — development of the impact-based forecasting model — that was aligned with its program

"Why not create an inter-institutional strategy, it is the first work that is being done between both institutions to formalize a document that allows us to have articulated, standardised actions between both institutions."

– Jaquelin Rivera, impact-based forecasting specialist, Hazards and Natural Resources Observatory Directorate, Ministry of Environment

Why Alliance advocacy was successful

ESTABLISHED RELEVANCE

goals of improving access to and use of forecasting information.

- Influenced more grounded national DRM by sharing evidence of community needs that should be considered in the development of new risk management approaches, including more community-centered forecasting and early warning.
- Built community-government relationships by establishing community-based groups that work with the government on DRM.
- Strengthened relationships with national government (i.e., MARN) by supporting them to communicate their government services to communities (via video).
- Improved forecasting communication processes by simultaneously engaging with and convening (via workshops and meetings) key government stakeholders to develop a working agreement.

BUILT RELATIONSHIPS

- Built government knowledge of community resilience needs and issues by engaging them in community resilience data gathering and analysis (via the FRMC process), sharing post-disaster learning on DRM gaps, and by improving community-government collaboration in DRM.
- Continuing to influence key government stakeholders (MARN and DGPC) by conducting research to fill knowledge gaps and sharing results directly and via local media.

PROVIDED EVIDENCE-BASED KNOWLEDGE

Additional resources

- What is an impact-based forecast? (source in Spanish)