

## Sound Practice No.9

### “CONSTRUCTING WELL IS A SERIOUS MATTER”

#### THE MACRO-INTENTIONAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM OF THE CAJA DE LA VIVIENDA POPULAR

## 1. OVERVIEW

This practice consists of the design and implementation of a communication strategy in to further disseminate and make known the House Improvement Program of the Caja de la Vivienda Popular (Law Income Housing Bank). It promotes the knowledge and application of urbanism and architecture norms in the low strata communities through a process of awareness towards risk prevention and seismic vulnerability in houses. The main beneficiaries are the communities of strata 1 and 2 as prioritized in the District Development Plan “Bogotá with no Indifference” (Bogotá with no Indifference or Bogotá Cares).

The specific objective of the communication strategy component is to promote citizen’s consciousness as it instructs on how a city ought to be built under an integral perception of risk management and prevention. This practice aims at awareness raising towards seismic vulnerability. The practice includes not only technical procedures, but it also incorporates social processes that make it an integral approach to risk management. The whole strategy aims to provide high visibility and position among end users the House Improvement Program which provides technical assistance to low income constructors and introduces candidates for the house subsidies of the District.

One of the practices within this strategy is the workshop: Constructing Well is a Serious Matter. This workshop-seminar aims at transferring available knowledge regarding basic seismic codes and urban and architectural norms. It also looks into construction methods and financial alternatives. The overall goal is to reduce seismic vulnerability thus promoting respect and protection of life and nature.

## 2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

After the 6.2 M earthquake in Armenia, which seriously affected five Colombian departments, two factors resulted evident from the communication standpoint:

- 1) There was not a reliable, visible, and accessible public interlocutor for the affected communities that could answer their inquiries associated with reconstruction and the immediate future;
- 2) Rumors, disinformation, and unkind information, due to political misuse of the situation, characterized the post-earthquake scenario and reached alarming levels as it

obstructed the sense of collective construction that FOREC (Fund for the Reconstruction and Social Development of the Eje Cafetero) wanted to advise.<sup>1</sup>

Two organizations, the corporation Viva la Ciudadanía and the Fundación Social were asked to design a Community Project for the Reconstruction Program of the FOREC. This project should cover the 31 zonal boards in charge of directing the reconstruction process. The starting point of the community strategy was the participatory and local character of the reconstruction process and the need to follow an analysis of the particular conditions in each neighborhood. **The communication strategy starts by recognizing that a reconstruction process is not just a technical process but a community one with deep impact on people.** The project was designed in a participatory way and counted on the spontaneous participation of many experts in communication. This experience constitutes an important precedent for the strategy of the Caja de la Vivienda Popular.

### **The Social Mobilization Communication Model**

The bottom line of this communication strategy is that communication is understood as social mobilization. This means that senses are constructed collectively, that mass media mediates in this process, and social organizations should legitimize the process through their actions and reflections. The whole model promotes the participation of all the social actors to define common purposes in the construction and transformation of a community. In this context, communication is considered a social and political instrument: it intends to socialize legible contents, articulate achievable and pertinent purposes in a democratic way, meaning that it is done without sacrificing cultural and ideological values, and emphasizing political autonomy. In other words, it tries to mobilize the public agendas and technical agendas towards an inclusive process that articulates all the sectors and social actors.

To sum up, a social mobilization processes suppose the following components:

- Exchange of transparent and pertinent information.
- Construction and socialization of solid and suggestive collective imaginaries that may perpetuate a common goal.
- The inclusion of this information and imaginaries in public and common interest agendas.

### **The Macro-intentional Communication Model**

The communication proposal forwarded in the frame of the reconstruction of the Eje Cafetero is outlined in the Macro-Intentional Communication Model. It is the result of a ten year work lead by the communication researcher José Bernardo Toro and his team.

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<sup>1</sup> Pedro Santana's briefing in the publication Viva la Ciudadanía, 2000

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This Model may be applied to different action scenarios but requires at least the following components:

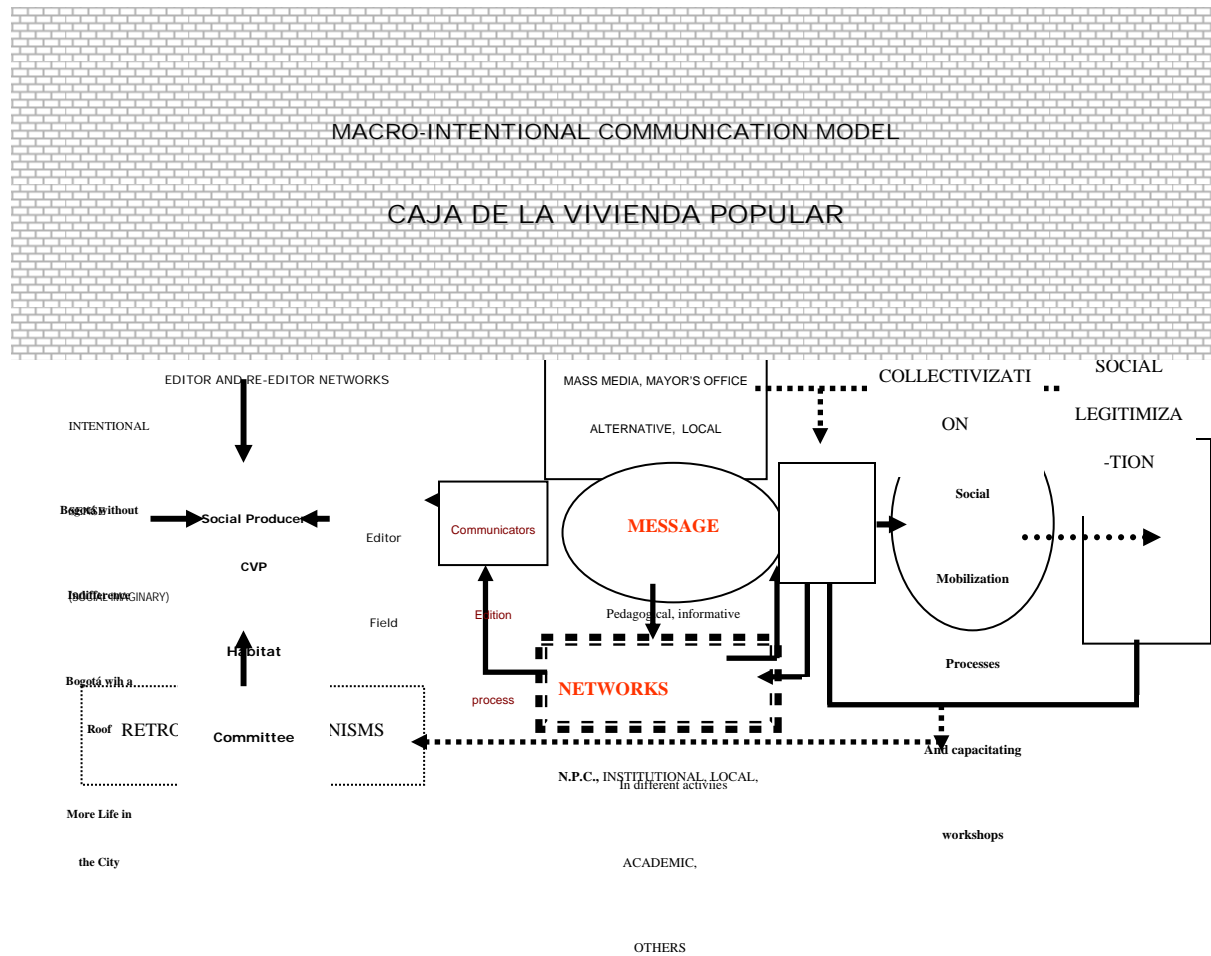
- **Social Producer:** This unity is in charge of keeping a global sense of the process and provides the necessary resources for its development. (In the specific case of the Eje Cafetero two entities act as social producers: FOREC and Fundación Social)
- **Social Editor:** This unity has the technical capacity to design and develop the communication materials and advertisements, to make the media production and network management. (In the specific case of the Eje Cafetero this work was done by the Communication Manager of the Reconstruction Project)
- **Social Actors Network (Re-editors):** This unit mobilizes specific audiences and public, and is formed by communicators, local mayors, priests, communitarian leaders, teachers, and artists, among others.

A similar practice has already been developed by the FENAVIP (National Federation for Popular Housing) in the reconstruction of Calarcá after the same seismic event following the model constructed by the FOREC. **The strength of this model resides in its social component and the retrofitting mechanisms it procures.** As a matter of fact, the model has three social dimensions: communication, teaching and social and psychological assistance. Plus it incorporates retrofitting mechanisms such as: practices to discover lessons learned, behavior changes, citizen participation, and ways to legitimate the public messages. In regards to the educational dimension, it follows the generative criteria such as the recognition of the experience of people, the formation of beginner communicators and criteria to identify possible intervention lines and formulate political action plans.

This kind of communication strategy is also interested in a political formation that promotes democracy, a community construction of analysis and dialogues plus citizen participation. On the other hand, it inserts sociological and psychological reflections about co-living, cooperation and organization strategies.

### **The Macro-Intentional Model as Applied in Bogotá**

The communication model that the Eje Cafetero Earthquake inaugurated was adapted by the Caja de la Vivienda Popular in team work lead by Maria Consuelo Morantes. The model may be sketched as follows:



It is important to notice the interaction that underlies the components in the model. This interaction guarantees feedback and response channels between the personal, public, and massive dimensions. One of the fundamental elements to notice is the importance of editors and re-editors since they are the contact between the institution and the community. The editing work is probably what makes the difference with other communication strategies since it implies a deep language research in order to translate institutional policies to a common and popular language without trivializing the message. It is also outstanding because the network of editors and re-editors is formed by local leaders, which means it is constituted by people already renowned within the community.

Some examples of the types of messages used by the Caja de la Vivienda Popular's House Improvement Program are the following: More City for Living (Más ciudad para la vida), Constructing Well is a Serious Matter, Are we ready for earthquakes? Are we prepared for earthquakes?

The **core or internal dimension** is formed by the technical committee of the House Improvement Program and the Habitat Communication Sub-Committee. This dimension is for decision making, policy discussion, adjustments, and selection of messages

according to the projects, problem solving, and process evaluation.

The **editor** is the person with the capacity to design and make the communications material. This position is in charge of translating the project to communication material and events.

The **re-editors** network is formed by the Communications Committee and the Citizen Participation Nucleus in the field of emergencies (NPC) which is a local network already established in Bogotá. They are in charge of facilitating organization processes within the communities. Local leaders, members of the Community Action Boards, priests, pastors, and teachers also form part of this group.

The **public dimension** is the area that legitimizes the social sense of the communication products. All the events which take place and communication channels chosen validate and certify the project. The public dimension is the actual realization of forums, fairs, festivals, workshops, seminars, capacitating seminars, media campaigns, and direct transmission to the community of the House Improvement Program. Each activity counts with a feedback channel which mobilizes the other sectors involved.

The **massive dimension** is the area where the whole process is democratized and socialized. This level aims to reach all the public and awareness and explore the imaginaries and needs of the communities. This level consists of a series of practices that stimulate an appropriation of the message and the emission and transmission of personal messages. The activities tend to be creative and even involve artistic activities. The results are considered important input for the social agents since people are actually given a space to give ideas and messages to be included in the public agendas. It also stimulates an image of credibility, reliance, and trustworthiness of the social agents and this facilitates their job.

### **3. Sound Practice Details**

On one hand, Colombia is a country located in a seismic risk area. On the other, Bogotá has had an irregular urban development. This factor greatly increases seismic risk in this city. In addition, many settlements are located in zones threatened by landslides. Intervention with mitigation works and structural reinforcement of houses is primary in order to improve living conditions in existing constructions. Nevertheless, this process would be incomplete without the awareness of the families towards the possibility that a natural event may put their life and patrimony at risk.

The Economic, Social, and Public Works Development Plan (2004-2008) named “Bogotá without Indifference: A Social Commitment against Poverty and Exclusion” establishes a Regional Urban Axis to execute the program Habitat in Neighborhoods and UPZ zones. This program promotes risk prevention actions and illegal development control in single locations. In this context, the Caja de la Vivienda Popular develops the House Improvement Program that has three operative components: dissemination and divulgation, capacity, and technical assistance.

The dissemination and information component together with the capacity component are currently developing a series of awareness seminars which aim at spreading general information about the different legal, normative, technical, and financial factors that must be considered in the construction of houses. These seminars are directed to landlords with licenses to construct, local constructors, community organizations, and all the other actors in the sector of legal and illegal house construction. The objective is to make them understand the consequences of constructing without following the seismic resistance code. The idea is to subscribe these actors in formal capacitating programs and programs of technical assistance in order to improve construction processes and the vulnerability and inhabitability of houses.

### **The House Improvement Program**

This program consists of a series of processes and actions that facilitate technical and social assistance to families interested in a house improvement project or in the construction of a one floor house. The idea is to reduce seismic vulnerability, to guarantee the right to live, to respect environmental conditions, and, in this way, to integrate the new house in the productive offer of the city.

Lines of action:

- Reduce Seismic Vulnerability
- Improve inhabitability
- Improve house construction in the city.

Objectives:

- To procure life and patrimony protection
- To improve houses
- To reinforce structures
- To legalize construction
- To postulate candidates for subsidies
- To consolidate the Caja de la Vivienda Popular

### **Communication Strategy of the Information Component of the House Improvement Program**

The general objective of the strategy is to coordinate the necessary actions to consolidate a sound communication model, implement the model, and control it as required by the dissemination and divulgation component of the House Improvement Program. The end is to socially position the program by making all the low strata communities understand the importance of this District program. The specific objectives would be the following:

- Consolidate a social and education communication strategy

- Elaborate and divulge the communication linings for the operative teams in the program.
- Establish and strengthen inter-institutional relationships with other public, private, and social entities in order to develop agreements that facilitate the capacitating, awareness, and diffusion processes required by the program (Habitat and Pact Committee).
- Organize informative, promotional, and educative events for specific or massive receptors such as academic agendas, community meetings, fairs, press conferences, and expositions that represent in a significant way the Program and entity.
- Consolidate an appropriate textual and visual language to address the receptor population and strengthen the institutional image of the House Improvement Program, the Caja de la Vivienda Popular and the Mayor's Office.

### **The communication, education and social dimensions in the strategy**

1) With regards to the **communication dimension** the basic components to be taken into account are the following:

- Develop a profile of the receptor population of the program.
- Identify a basic language between the Caja de la Vivienda Popular and the communities.
- Design and produce graphic, audiovisual, and game-type material that responds effectively to the different communication strategies within the House Improvement Program.

The activities carried out under this communication component are the following:

- Field research, accompaniment of local agents of the House Improvement Program, Resettlement Program, and PMIB.
- Visual and audiovisual summaries of the experiences and diagnostics.
- Design and definition of the image of the House Improvement Program.
- Design of the pedagogical and communication material.
- Distribute and archive the produced material in the Districtal Archive, Libraries, Virtual Libraries, and others.

The main campaigns within the strategy are the following:

- Awareness towards seismic vulnerability and promotion of structural reinforcement.
- Awareness towards the need of a Programmed Savings and diligence of Programmed Savings accounts.
- Promotion of the micro-credit opportunities.
- Promotion and postulation of candidates for the National and District house subsidies.

- Promotion of a low financial and fiscal vulnerability.

The events of the communication component are the following:

- House Festival: promotion of the programs of the Caja de la Vivienda Popular, agreements with the construction sector, distribution of material, project presentations, promotion of subsidies, subscription to financial entities, academic agenda conferences, explanation of seismic risk, and promotion of seismic resistant construction.
- Habitat Festival: game-type activities addressed to children and financed by the Habitat Committee.
- National Forum: an encounter to evaluate the soundness of the National Housing Policy, to discuss the experience of the different local committees and Local Administration Boards, to other resources required by the House Improvement Program.
- Districtal Forum: Staging of the Districtal Habitat Policy, definition of challenges, actions, and agreements.

The House Improvement Program counts with a series of agreements with mass media enterprises and alternative communication media:

- Reports in press media, advertising in Canal Capital.
- Promotion of the program and information through a 30 minute/month program in radio.
- Agreements with the National Television Commission.
- Press conferences in City TV.
- News bulletin and press releases in institutional, massive, and alternative free press in every locality.

The program also uses networks to disseminate information and activities about the Program:

- The District government press web page “Bogotá without Indifference”: [www.luchoinforma.com](http://www.luchoinforma.com)
- Home page: [www.cvp.gov.co](http://www.cvp.gov.co)
- Re-editors network: This network is formed by the Citizen Participation Nucleus and is in charge of translating technical information about the problems of the sector, neighborhood, UPZ, or locality to a common language.

2) On the **education dimension**, there are informal education programs directed to raise awareness in the communities and formal education programs that teach technical procedures and provide a formal degree in seismic construction. Including the following activities and programs:

- *Informal Education Capacity Building Workshops*

- 1) Prevention and seismic risk reduction
- 2) Comprehension and applicability of urban and architectural norms.
- 3) Recognition of the concept of Sound Habitat conditions, shelter quality, urban improvement in the frame of the Sound Habitat Pact.

Receptor population: heads of families, landowners, tenants, social, and fiscal vulnerable houses in strata 1 and 2.

Methodology: Conferences with game-type activities, distribution of didactic and informative material. Visual and audiovisual registration of the process is done in order to diffuse in massive and alternative media.

Actors: Local agents, specialists, and District institutional actors.

- *Technical Courses:*

Construction Supervisor (Maestro de Construcción): A 120 hour workshop for 28 participants. It is directed to official constructors or people interested in knowing and applying the seismic code NSR/98. The course uses material designed by the Caja de la Vivienda Popular in association with SENA.

Public Press Seminars: These seminars are directed to the personnel of the Habitat Committee and intend to educate in public information management.

*Formal Education:*

City Constructors: This course is currently being discussed with universities. It is basically an amplification and formalization of the Construction Master Seminar. The objective is to legally certify a technical level of construction for construction workers and helpers with the SENA. This course would become a superior education level for construction technicians.

- 3) Regarding the **Social dimension** we may point out the following priorities of the House Improvement Program:
  - Articulate and coordinate dissemination processes, Knowledge transfer, capacity building activities, and technical assistance. The purpose is to stimulate a cordial and interested attitude towards the social programs of the District and the Caja de la Vivienda Popular.
  - Generate an amiable and calm environment for the Program users.

### **Communication Products in the Diffusion and Divulgateion Component**

- 1) Printed Material:
  - Program Portfolio with informative material

- Programmed Savings leaflet
- Programmed Savings poster
- Promotion Package for the House Festival and EXPOSOCIAL
- Charts to establish agendas with the local and social agents
- Institutional banners
- Banner exposition to use outdoors

## 2) Audiovisual Material

- Institutional Video in Capital Channel and in District offices for citizen assistance
- Registered, edited and transmitted videos about the events held by the program
- Twenty second TV commercial about Bogotá's seismic vulnerability

## 3) Educational and Game-Type Material

- Construction Masters informative story books
- Structural reinforcement dummy model
- Outdoors Photograph Exposition about earthquakes in Colombia

**Constructing Well is a Serious Matter** is an afternoon seminar that informs different interested groups on seismic codes and financial alternatives in construction. This seminar has been taught in different low income localities with the participation of recognized speakers. Approximately 793 citizen's agreements have been signed by the participants, in which assistants commit to construct safely and ask for technical assistance when they intend to construct a new house or make any kind of reinforcement works. Local agents are constantly asking for more seminars in their areas. Following is an example an agenda of this program in the SUBA locality.

### CONSTRUCTING WELL IS A SERIOUS MATTER

#### OBJETIVE:

To teach the basic concepts about seismic resistance, urban and architecture norms, construction and financial alternatives in order to reduce seismic risk and promote respect towards life and nature.

#### ADDRESSED TO:

Landowners, constructors, construction workers and helpers, citizens interested in the Districtal subsidy in the SUBA locality

<b>PROGRAM</b>			
<b>Tour</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	
1:00 p.m.	<b>Participants Registration</b>		
1:10 p.m.	Presentation of the Workshop	Dr. Carlos Alberto Lovera R.	Director of the House Improvement Program
1:20 p.m.	Sustainable Habitat	Arq. Carlos Ramírez	Spanish International Cooperation Agency
<b>1:50 p.m. Video Earthquake in the Eje Cafetero</b>			
2:00 p.m.	Eje Cafetero: More than just a Story	Arq. Juan Manuel Bojacá	Districtal Planning Department Adviser
2:30 p.m.	Seismic Risk and Emergency Preparedness	Lic. Alexandra Bedoya	Education Department Adviser in DPAE
<b>3:00 p.m. Snack</b>			
3:10 p.m.	Seismic Resistance Theory	Ing. Nelsón Franky	Caja de la Vivienda Popular Expert
3:40 p.m.	Presentation of the House Improvement Program	Ing. Diego Orozco	Local Agent in Suba
4:30 p.m.	Evaluation	Ma. Consuelo Morantes	Communication Coordinator Caja de la Vivienda Popular
4:45 p.m.	<b>Signature of the Citizen Pact</b>		
5:00 p.m.	<b>CLOSING OF THE WORKSHOP</b>		
<p><b>The House Improvement Program of the District expects to:</b></p> <p>Generate a responsible attitude and a citizen consciousness about how to construct in a city with an integral perception of risk management and prevention of seismic risk.</p>			

## Results and Resources

COMPONENTS HOUSE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM	INDICATOR	2004		2005	
		AMOUNT	VALUE	AMOUNT	VALUE
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	1,018	444,840,550	1,321	765,272,473
CAPACITATION	CAPACITATED PERSONS	323	111,572,275	470	158,830,390
DIFFUSION AND SENSIBILIZATION	EVENTS	7	117,771,732	8	65,011,485
	SENSIBILIZED CITIZENS	1,404		903	
<b>TOTAL INVESTMENT</b>			<b>674,184,557</b>		<b>989,114,348</b>

COMPONENTS HOUSE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM	INDICATOR	2006	
		AMOUNT	VALUE
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	53	1,064,764,291
CAPACITATION	CAPACITATED PERSONS	-	80,000,000
DIFFUSION AND SENSIBILIZATION	EVENTS	16	65,066,089
	SENSIBILIZED CITIZENS	611	
<b>TOTAL INVESTMENT</b>			<b>1,209,830,380</b>

According to the charts above, which are the official consolidated results that may be found in the District Treasury Secretariat and District Planning Office, it is clear that the activities held by the communication component (diffusion and awareness) are considerably low, as a matter of fact, they have gradually decreased in the last three years. This has implied a gradual reduction on the number of persons aware and informed about the House Improvement Program. Nevertheless, it also indicates that the positioning of the entire program of the Caja de la Vivienda Popular has been possible in a very important one year investment and kept throughout the years with half its initial investment.

## **Lessons learned and obstacles**

According to Maria Consuelo Morantes, the most interesting lesson in this communication strategy is that the contents are by themselves appealing and important, which makes the social process much easier. Risk prevention is a task that goes back to an integral conception of life, a respect for the territory and a respect for others. It is a theme that awakens a democratic and sensible social interaction and that overcomes mere technical questions. Therefore, the experience for communicators is very challenging but, at the same time, rewarding.

Something to be mentioned is that the activities that have taken place always lead to new activities. The bottom line is that many things can be done to promote a risk prevention culture. The Caja de la Vivienda Popular is currently designing a series of workshops addressed to children and pursuing agreements with universities (engineering and architecture faculties) in order to promote an integral perception of risk management and seismic risk in the youngest communities.

The main obstacles are largely economic: insufficient technological equipment; the number of persons integrated to the communication team is not the adequate, and the guest speakers can no longer be paid but work voluntarily. The communication component has positioned the whole House Improvement Program but it still has a very marginal economical and institutional place within the organization.

Cities like Bogotá have had great advances in promoting a new prevention culture as a way to reduce risk. A great part of it is due to the communication programs that accompany their technical interventions. Nevertheless, decision makers tend to sacrifice the social and communication components when budget problems arise. This is probably due to the fact that the results they have are neither seen in a short term nor easy to follow up. All in all, the communication program has managed to survive principally because of the commitment of the actors involved.

## **4. Relevance to Megacities**

### **Universality/transferability**

The role of communications within the theme of risk management and attention of emergencies is unquestionable. The Macro-Intentional perspective adopted by the Caja de la Vivienda Popular may serve as a sound example of a communication campaign that has effective short and long term results. The practice is very complete and covers the risk management issues in a comprehensive way since it deals with psychological, social, technical, environmental, and financial matters. The model may be adopted by other megacities interested in mitigating seismic vulnerability in their territories. One of the most original elements of this practice is the way it explores the inhabitants' imaginaries and the flexibility that is granted by the retrofitting mechanisms. It is a model that is open to permanent reevaluation and may be considered cross-cutting since it

does not impose actions but generates them through dialogues and promotion activities.

### **Applicability**

The practice relies greatly on the identification of a common language and the integration of local agents or editors that translate the institutional messages to the community. A sound implementation of this kind of practice must count with a strong network with a large capacity to settle agreements with beneficiaries and persuade the community of the importance of reinforcement works and seismic resistant constructions. Bogotá has consolidated throughout the years the Citizen Participation Nucleus which are local committees formed by local agents dedicated to certain problems. The Caja de la Vivienda Popular works together with these local networks.

On the other hand, the applicability of this strategy does not depend only on local processes but also in the willingness of the institutional structure to promote them. This practice indicates that risk mitigation requires a solid social process and institutional drive.

### **Expandability**

We may consider that even if the practice concentrates on low income strata, it may also be extended to sectors with higher economical conditions that are equally threatened by seismic vulnerability. The social process in this case is different since the imaginaries and actors involved are different. The important factor is to understand that the receptor is the starting point and that the communication strategy intends to incorporate their needs in the public agendas.

On the other hand, this practice may be implemented in other Latin American municipalities and megacities that have similar social and economic conditions due to its relatively low cost. It is important to construct a network of local agents that have credibility and are highly regarded within the community and to identify the democratizing activities that may be held.

### **Orientation/ Focus**

The specific objective of the communication strategy component is to promote a responsible citizen consciousness as it instructs how a city ought to be built under an integral perception of risk management and prevention. The main concept which is addressed and alleviated by this practice is seismic vulnerability in houses. The practice is not only a technical process but incorporates social processes that make it an integral approach to risk management.

### **Assimilation**

Part of the success of this practice is due to the creative and imaginative languages it promotes and the sense of reality it communicates. The fact that it capacitates in

seismic construction makes of each assistant to the seminar a person capable of multiplying his experience and generating a risk consciousness within his community.

According to the evaluation of the seminar Constructing Well is a Serious Matter, the message has been transmitted in a clear and simple way guaranteeing an assimilation of contents and a new perception of living conditions. Another symptom of the assimilation of this communication strategy is the permanent requests of seminars, conferences, workshops, and other events. The agendas are all full.

### **Impact/Effectiveness**

The impact of this practice may be seen through the number of people subscribed to the House Improvement Program: 2,392 people have received technical assistance, 793 have assisted to capacitating workshops and 2,918 have assisted to awareness activities. We may also mention that 31 workshops have been taught in different localities. An interesting factor is that all these results have been met with low resources. This is an indicator of the effectiveness of the communication component. Nevertheless, the whole House Improvement Program is still insufficient for the real demand in the city because Bogotá is a very expensive city.

### **5. Supporting Documentation**

- Documents and charts facilitated by the Caja de la Vivienda Popular.
- Interviews with María Consuelo Morantes.

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### **Knowledge Base Coding Reference:**

Name of the Practice: Constructing Well is a Serious Matter”.

The macro-intentional communication strategy of the housing improvement program of the Caja de la Vivienda Popular

Contact Person(s): Catalina Vargas, Diana González

Contact Address: [cvgastovar@gmail.com](mailto:cvgastovar@gmail.com) [dgonzalez@fopae.gov.co](mailto:dgonzalez@fopae.gov.co)

Written by: Catalina Vargas Tovar, Earthquakes and Megacities Initiative, 3cd Local Intern Program, Bogotá-Colombia