



Communication of geohazard risks by focus group discussions in the Mount Cameroon area, Cameroon.

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The inappropriate translation of scientific information of geohazard (volcanic, landslide and crater lake out-gassing) risks to any local population leaves people with incongruent views of the real dangers. Initial workshops organized under the supervision of the VLIR-OI (Flemish Interuniversity Council – Own Initiatives) members have led to the deployment of billboards as requested and drawn up by the locals. The VLIR-OI project has also organized focus group discussions (FGD) with the local stakeholders to find out in various cities, the state of preparedness, the response to emergency situations, the recovery from the emergency and the mitigation. Researchers have preferred open discussion with the local population and its representatives in order to elicit information that otherwise might not be found on a structured questionnaire. FGD provide a meaningful interactive opportunity to collect information and reflection on a wide range of input. The method provides an insight into problems that require a solution through a process of discovering the meaning attributed to certain events or issues. In this research four cardinal points as preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation (Fothergill, 1996) guided the FGD. The population (i.e. local town councils) were constituted by a mix of chiefs, engineers, technicians and civil servants and government officials. In all the three city councils concerned, the engineers in charge complained about the lack of strategic planning, and about the missing of an elaborated strategy for disasters. They are aware of the existence of an organigram in the “Département de l’Action Civile” in Yaounde but never received any “strategic” document. Therefore inappropriate actions might be taken by the municipalities themselves. Fortunately all people interrogated at the FDG always mentioned solidarity in any event. Fothergill, 1996, Gender, Risk, and Disasters, Intern. Jour. of Mass Emergencies and Disasters, vol.14, n° 1, 33-56