



To protect or abandon: a participatory process on landslide risk mitigation

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With escalating costs of landslide risk mitigation and relief, a challenge for local authorities is to develop landslide risk mitigation measures that are viewed as efficient, feasible and fair by the many stakeholders involved. Innovative measures and the participation of stakeholders in the decision making process are essential elements in developing effective strategies to deal with the ever-changing spatial and temporal patterns of landslide risk. A stakeholder-led policy process, however, can face many social and economic challenges. One of the most difficult is deciding between costly protection measures or relocating homes. Particularly in areas with high population density, protection works are often not built because of economic/environmental constraints or private interests of the local residents. At the same time it is not always possible to relocate households even if the costs are deemed less than protecting them.

These issues turned out to be crucial in a recent participatory process for selecting risk mitigation measures in the town of Nocera Inferiore, Southern Italy, which experienced a landslide in 2005 causing three fatalities. The paper reports on this process which was structured in a series of meetings with a group of selected residents and several parallel activities open to the public. The preparatory work included semi-structured interviews carried out with key local stakeholders and a public survey eliciting residents' views on landslide risk mitigation.

After describing the background of the landslide risk management problem in Nocera Inferiore, the paper focuses on three packages of risk mitigation measures (each of them not exceeding a total cost of 7 million Euro, namely the available funds) and the key trade-offs that emerged during the meetings with the residents. The participants reached a unanimous consensus on fundamental priorities, i.e. the improvement of the warning system, the implementation of an integrated system of monitoring and territorial survey and the stabilization of the open slopes with naturalistic engineering works. Much more debate was devoted to the relocation of residents from the most endangered areas and/or the need to build passive structural works, especially on private properties. Notwithstanding the difficulties in reaching a shared "compromise solution" for risk mitigation, the results demonstrate the value of citizen participation in landslide risk mitigation decisions and highlight the role that participation can play in risk management more generally.