

Case Study
Project “From Vulnerability to Resilience”
Bajo Lujan Community and the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina
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In the department of Luján de Cuyo, Province of Mendoza, Argentina, a poor community of very limited resources lives within the Mendoza riverbed(Río Mendoza)in a slum called Lower Lujan (Barrio Bajo Luján). The charitable institution of Caritas in Lujan de Cuyo provides assistance to a portion of this community by giving children snacks during an hour in the afternoon. During that time, the children’s mothersparticipate in workshops that are organized within the context of this project.

The problem

The community of Lower Lujan is highly vulnerable at the physical, economic, cultural, andorganizational level.The community consists of a group of families that live in poverty in shacks that have been erected on public land.

The neighborhood arose with no prior planning, and it lacks basic services. It is located within the river bed of the Río Mendoza, in the city of Luján, and so its location is in a potential flood zone. Moreover, this area is subject to seismic activity, which poses another hazard, while water and air pollution deriving from the nearby landfills further aggravate the situation.

The women of this community are the nucleus that provides a cohesive core to each family, and some of these women participate in weekly literacy programs. Although invisible, their role in the community is crucial, and so this project focuses specifically on working with the women.

The Rationale

The current conditions at Barrio Bajo Luján constitute a risk scenario against which the community is not prepared. Currently, there are no prevention or response strategies in place should a contingency or disaster occur, the impact of which could be disastrous to a quality of life that is already impaired.

The project “From Vulnerability to Resilience” is driven by an interdisciplinary university team that collaborates with approximately 25 mothers who assist Caritas. The initiative receives support from the Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Gustavo Kent Program, from the Universidad de Cuyo, and from the Municipality of Luján de Cuyo.

The project’s objective is to strengthen women’s capabilities while enhancing their resilience in confronting risks. This paper aims at the following: a) identifying the risks of disaster to which the community is exposed, b) implementing prevention strategies and mitigating the impact of such disasters, and c) empowering the target population by enhancing social and gender rights.

Practice andImplementation of Policy

The project’s duration is of 12 months, during which the university team will coordinate weekly one-hour workshops. Each meeting focuses on presenting a theme and completing relevant and concrete tasks with the mothers. So far, the main achievements have included the following: reconstructing the neighborhood’s history, identifying problems that occur throughout the year, recognizing dangerous and safe areas, and having the mothers create an interactive (mock-up model) map that identifies the location of critical facilities within the city.

The university team consists of faculty, alumni, and students of the Professional Geographersdiscipline, as well as theBachelors in Social Studies discipline at the UNCuyo (there are approximately ten staff members who receive additional support from students and specialists, as

needed). Tasks associated with the project have required in-depth work relating to the topics at hand, as well as research into the methodologies that are appropriate to work with the group of mothers, particularly as regards vocabulary and the tools used in completing the tasks. Noteworthy in this effort is the high level of availability and goodwill that the different members of the university team have displayed in their rendering of a service that is simple, yet extremely meaningful and educational for all of the project's participants.

Is there a difference?

The experience has resulted in a huge impact, both on the university team and on the mothers. The latter are driven and increasingly involved in the process. The current goal is to reach a level of awareness and training that will enable the women to improve their behavioral patterns, both individually and as a community, while incorporating models of self-protection, prevention, and organization to confront poverty and lack of security.

Figures:



Figure 1. Barrio Bajo Luján in the riverbed of Río Mendoza.
Source: Google Earth, September 2014



Figure 2. Method of Access to Barrio Bajo Luján
Photographer: Lourdes N. Cicconi, September 2014



Figure 3: Workshop
Photographer: Lourdes N. Cicconi, September 2014



Figure 4: Collective Risk Map (under construction)
Photographer: Lourdes N. Cicconi, September 2014

Bibliography of Web sites:

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