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DEV research briefing

Moving with Risk: Forced Displacement and Vulnerability to Hazards in Colombia

The project Moving with Risk (MwR) analysed the processes through which people forced from their homes due to armed conflict became exposed to heightened risk from environmental hazards in the places where they resettled. An innovative combination of arts and social science formed the base of our methodology, employed not just within the methodology for data collection but as a channel for



engagement of people and communities in managing disaster risk in their places of resettlement. The work took place in four case study sites in Colombia: the city of Manizales in Caldas, the settlements of Caimalito and Las Colonias in Risaralda, and the municipality of Soacha in Cundinamarca.

This research briefing reviews some of the research outcomes, methodological aspects and part of the impact of the project. This project was funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council and the Universidad de Manizales, Colombia. It was a collaboration between the University of East Anglia, the Universidad de Manizales, the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management (UNGRD) of the government of Colombia, and the Colombian Red Cross.

Trajectories of Risk

The causes of forced displacement represented in the four case studies were: the murder of a member of the family; occupation of the home by guerrillas as a place to keep weapons, sleep and eat; verbal threats; combat between armed groups for the control of certain areas; forced recruitment of relatives; sexual violence; and pressure to carry out illicit activities, such as coca cultivation. Displacement became the only way to survive and seek greater security for all family members.

Consequently, families needed to decide which place would be safer. In the case of the indigenous communities we worked with, they decided to move as a group and reach the major cities or their peripheries. They appropriated a piece of land there, but always remained together, to help cope with new risks and challenge actions by the authorities to dispossess them of these areas. In the case of the mestizo and Afro-Colombian families with whom we worked, the pattern was different. The choice of where to go after forced displacement was based on having relatives or friends in the area, having lived in nearby locations and knowing about the



costs of living and possibilities of appropriating land, or knowing of places through previous visits from their territories of origin (often to seek work). Even though the mestizo and Afro-Colombian families did not arrive in groups or communities, they began to generate spaces in the new territories and decide which lands could be settled by each households. This decision was one of the most significant moments for many participants because it reduced their sense of isolation and vulnerability. The decision to occupy vacant land also relieved economic stresses to some extent because it meant that they could avoid paying rent, a situation not experienced before by many of those originating from rural areas.

'Land invasion' became to be a collective project which fostered community organization in the new places that people resettled. After many of the families figured out how to build their shelter, the next step would be to bring water and lighting to their new homes. These transitions also provoked a change in gender roles, because many women had to use their knowledge and skills to bring in economic resources and to learn new work activities.

The most representative findings of MwR were:

1. **Moving away from the sources of violence created by the context of armed conflict was the overwhelming focus for families and communities who experienced the forced displacement. A perception of risk dominated by the experience of violence meant that avoiding other types of risks associated with natural hazards was seldom factored into the decision on where to resettle.**
2. **Although there are currently some actions undertaken by the communities to mitigate the risk associated with natural hazards, and new ideas emerging for risk reduction, many people do not prioritise moving to another place as an option. Creating a home in the houses they inhabit has the symbolic meaning of both a 'struggle' and a 'collective effort', building a stronger sense of belonging to the place where they live.**



Methodological Experience

The ethical responsibility called for by working with people who in their life trajectory had been repeatedly violated by institutions, armed groups and poverty itself, required us to be much more careful with the design of research methodologies. Therefore, we created a methodology that included conversations from music, life stories using drawing and community workshops based on theatre, dance and mural painting.

In the beginning, our methodology was inspired by some published works related to art-based activities (Clark-Ibañez, 2004; Croghan, Griffin, Hunter and Phoenix, 2008), and elicitation methodology (Allet, 2010). The social sciences and the arts achieved a powerful articulation for memory: memories were recalled that were told from other levels of experience ((Bagnoli, 2009), telling what is not normally narrated in everyday life.

Thus, the focus of our methodology was based on the Capability approach (Nussbaum, 2000), with three action research guidelines, which were not only considered for the communities and institutional representatives, but also for the researchers: 'political ethical', 'knowledge mobilisation' and 'communication'.

Our methodology had four phases. The first focused on sharing the research proposal with the community and the institutions in order to know and hear the relevance of the project in each locality. In the second phase, the songs and photographs were the stimuli to evoke narrations about the trajectories of life on a personal level. Through this, we could understand more about their trajectories of risks and individual and family capacities.

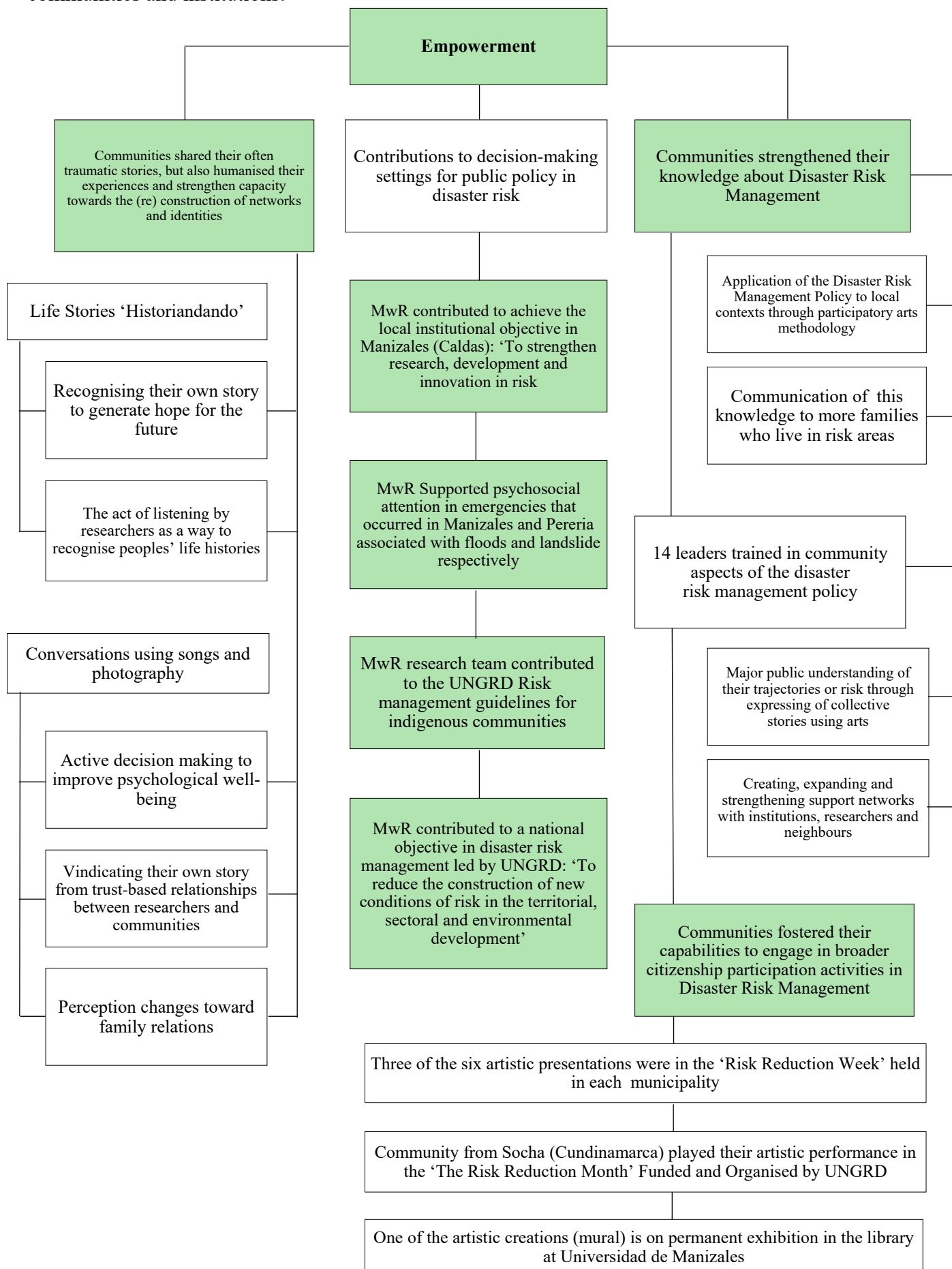


For the next phase, theatre, photography and drawings of the territory in a 'museum' opened the feedback spaces for the conversations and reflections about how people faced new risks in their life trajectories. This was complemented by a strategy called Historiando (life stories). A sequence of drawings of a life story allowed us to deepen engagement with some people about the capacities for risk management. Simultaneously, the leaders of each sector were trained in the psychosocial field within disaster risk management to have a role as facilitators in the workshops. Community members thereby created their own artistic interpretations, using theatre, dance or murals, with the aim of expressing their stories of risk and coping strategies.

In the fourth phase, community members co-arranged total of 6 final artistic presentations for institutions, neighbours and people from other communities. Participants expressed a collective history related to the trajectory of risks and the resources in each case study. Additionally, this moment focused on assessing the social impact of the project with the leaders and systematizing the methodological experience. In the final meeting, the communities appropriated part of the methodology from the arts to share some research findings and discuss the impact of participating in this project with institutional representatives at the national level and in each case study area.

Social Impact

The following diagrams synthesise the social impact methodology employed in working with communities and institutions:



References

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