



2030 Agenda meets Urban Climate Action!

Guardians of the Hills (Portoviejo, Ecuador): Empowering Women Leaders for Urban Resilience

Background

Portoviejo, the capital of Ecuador's coastal province Manabí, suffers from heavy rainfalls during the rainy season, which cause landslides in surrounding hills and flooding of the urban centre. As climate change exacerbates the frequency and intensity of rainfalls, the risk of such natural hazards increases. One of the neighbourhoods located in Portoviejo's hills is San Pablo, with a population of around 12,000, of which 52 percent are women and 28 percent are children under the age of twelve. Apart from the increasing risk of landslides, San Pablo suffers from social and economic vulnerability and a high crime rate, which includes violence against women. Women head 62 percent of the households, the majority of have no secure employment.

Project Intervention

The project has been working on increasing climate resilience of vulnerable neighbourhoods in Portoviejo by empowering women in their role as climate actors. Through participatory design and implementation of ecosystem-based adaptation measures, sensibilisation on gender violence prevention and the establishment of a community warning system, the project initially aimed to reduce the risks of landslides and to make public spaces more liveable and safer for the communities. The health emergency generated by Covid-19 has brought global learning of the need to work and generate public policies focused on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. In this context, the project re-emphasized the need to strengthen community co-responsibility and multi-level articulation as key factors for the success of any action within risk management and climate adaptation.



Portoviejo,
Ecuador

Neighbourhood Risk and Emergency Committees (CREB)

As a response for the Covid-19 emergency, the Sustainable Intermediate Cities Programme, together with the Association of Risk Management Professionals of Ecuador expanded the intervention of this model measure to support the implementation of the so called "Neighbourhood Risk and Emergency Committees" (CREB) within the City of Portoviejo. This allowed a flow of information and direct communication between the neighbourhood leaders and the local government in order to identify Covid-19 alert cases and other risk factors which are being monitored in a Municipal Alert System Platform for the decision-making process. The "Guardians of the Hills" are part of four CREBs implemented in San Pablo. They have been part of a community strengthening process to be a functional system with responsibilities to plan actions and organise the attention of the emergencies presented.

Resilient and Safe Public Spaces

The adaptation measures have been designed by multidisciplinary groups from local universities and the municipality in collaboration with the 'Guardians of the Hills' – female leaders identified by their communities – and other community members. The involvement of the "Guardians" that are being part of a Capacity Building Strategy of Gender Violence Prevention has ensure a gender-oriented process during the design phase of the measures, which include relief wells for landslide risk reduction, ecological staircases that allow access and

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connectivity between sectors, and a communal area that provides public space for safe social and recreational activities for women and children.

The Association of Risk Management Professionals of Ecuador is implementing a capacity building strategy for participatory planning, construction and maintenance of the ecosystem-based solutions intended to increase social development, inclusion and resilience.

The next phase of the project is the construction and implementation of the adaptation measures, with the technical accompaniment to generate a Local Plan of Public Space Appropriation and Social Resilience.

Community Alert System

Experts from the Association of Risk Management Professionals of Ecuador have assisted the Municipality and the local community in the implementation of a community alert system. The objective is that the organised community can be directly involved in monitoring activities related with threats of landslides and fires, by applying technological tools and protocols to assist the community in prevention and response activities, in articulation with the local authorities. The community warning system includes community alarms installed in strategic sectors, a pilot plan to train local inhabitants on prevention and emergency plans when the alarms are activated, and the generation of joint actions between the Neighbourhood Risk and Emergency Committees, citizens and local government.

Gender-based violence prevention

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the gender-based violence prevention strategy was adapted to the conditions of virtuality and social isolation. A group of 20 women and men from San Pablo, are being part of this capacity building strategy. The expected results are: Generation of social awareness on crimes of violence and discrimination against women and girls as a Human Rights problem; the empowerment of women to advise, accompany and care for victims of violence; and the creation of a local network for the prevention of violence as a mechanism for social incidence.

In the Covid-19 context, which has increased the levels of violence against women, a “Neighbour’s recipe” with tips for nurturing ties between neighbours was developed, in cooperation with national and international institutions. This Recipe Book is been implemented in San Pablo as a pilot action to strengthen sisterhoods between neighbours and create secure and trusted networks.

Sharing the Experience

Before the Covid-19 emergency situation, a few workshops took place to train women in participatory production of communicational material that could help share their inspiring stories as ‘guardians’ and residents’ in combating the impacts of climate change. This included the construction and painting of a “Mural of dreams”, with the participation of children and the elaboration of a digital tale that recovers the cultural traditions and socio-environmental aspects of resilience of men and women in San Pablo. A generation of articles and interviews to assemble a book with the memoirs of San Pablo in the pandemic time is in progress.

Furthermore, the results and experiences in this project will be shared with the municipality of Portoviejo and spread among partner cities involved in GIZ’s Intermediate Sustainable Cities Programme by means of Landing Page and Webinars organized with our partner institutions, such as the Association, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, and national government agencies in charge of disaster risk and reduction management, in order to up-scale nationally the measures.

Expected Results

The integrated approach of the project works directly towards SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), since natural areas will be recovered and nature-based adaptation solutions for landslide-prone areas implemented. in case of landslides and to prepare preventive measures.





The participatory design of the measures ensures that climate risks are not only addressed from a gender-sensitive perspective, but that women are strengthened in their role as local actors for climate action and acknowledged as important decision makers for their communities, hence contributing to SDG 5 (Gender Equality). The project aims to empower women as change agents for their communities, supporting them to change the negative stigma of their neighbourhoods and to recognize the contributions of their communities for the city. With the help of the early-warning system, the community will be able to actively protect itself. It also strengthens female leaders to identify and guide procedures in cases of gender-based violence, thereby contributing to both SDG 5 (Gender Equity) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) through participatory, community-based services that promote social cohesion in their neighbourhoods. Through the IT-platform and information material, experiences and methodologies will be available for other communities and institutions interested in replicating them. The women can count on enhanced communication skills and are trained to tell inspiring stories of change in their own way. This will also include the connection of female leaders from vulnerable neighbourhoods with national gender organizations and movements.

The gained knowledge will contribute to policy creation at the national level (recommendations, planning documents, etc.) on participatory, community-based and gender-oriented planning approaches, infrastructure design processes and ecosystem-based adaptation measures in cities.

Implementation Partners

The parish committee of San Pablo will help in identifying female change agents from the neighbourhood. The Portoviejo Municipality supports the implementation with the aim of generating successful planning models and participatory management experience from the community. The experts of the Association of Risk Management Professionals of Ecuador (Asociación de Profesionales de Gestión de Riesgos del Ecuador) will provide technical support for the design of adaptation measures and the development of the integrated warning system as well as capacity building to the ‘guardians’.

The University of San Gregorio is interested in developing community-outreach projects and will provide support in the production of digital communication and information products. The GIZ Intermediate Sustainable Cities Programme coordinates the overall implementation of the model measure together with its local partners.

Funding

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