



Flood Resilience Alliance

PROYECTO DE RESILIENCIA ANTE INUNDACIONES EN MÉXICO



SOLUTIONS BRIEF — AUGUST 2023



Community brigades

Equipment delivery to the Warrior Ants to the Rescue community brigade, Mexican Red Cross Archive, Flood Resilience Project

Summary

Flooding in Mexico's mountainous and wetland regions can be devastating, especially when flood water and sewage fill people's homes. The community brigades set up by the Mexican Red Cross bring individuals together to learn about flood preparedness and safe evacuation. Brigade members are taught search-and-rescue skills and first aid, and they also serve as a valuable contact point for local authorities, providing crucial information about the situation on the ground and requesting assistance as needed.

Our approach

Using the Flood Resilience Measurement for Communities and the Red Cross Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment, the Mexican Red Cross identified priorities for strengthening flood resilience in remote communities in the state of Tabasco. The process highlighted a lack of social capacity to organize action at the local level. By forming a volunteer community brigade and providing members with the skills and knowledge needed to prepare for and respond to floods, the project seeks to increase human and social capital, thereby enhancing resilience.

In numbers



Cost per brigade:
CHF7,000
US\$7,829



Time taken to set up:
150 hours over 15 months
per brigade



Easy to replicate?
Yes – one brigade per
community (8-10 volunteers)
meeting once a month



Mexico



Listen to the interview

Community members discuss how community brigades help to better prepare for floods

floodresilience.net
 @floodalliance



Official recognition of the Blue Sky Flood and Disaster Brigade as part of the state civil protection system, Mexican Red Cross Archive, Flood Resilience Project

What was the problem?

Flooding has always been a risk in remote communities living near rivers and wetlands in Tabasco. Heavy rain or rainfall upstream can cause rivers to burst their banks and flood people’s homes, damaging their belongings and causing injuries. Sewage from the drains mixing with floodwater increases the risk of disease.

Communities in these areas lacked the knowledge to anticipate heavy floods and the skills and social cohesion to deal with their aftermath. Weak or non-existent organizational structures at the community level also meant that they did not have the capacity to lead and manage flood preparedness and response activities.

What was the solution?

The project recruits diverse community volunteers, with the principal requisite being their willingness to commit to the brigade. During weekly sessions spread across 15 months, volunteers are trained in emergency prevention and response, including risk awareness, first aid, evacuation, search and rescue, and damage and needs assessment. Once trained, volunteers can help train newer volunteers.

Brigade members take responsibility for specific tasks, such as first aid or sounding the alarm when there is danger of imminent flooding. They help vulnerable

individuals in emergency situations, provide first aid where needed, and assist with recovery. They can mobilize extra support by informing the Red Cross and civil protection authorities about the situation on the ground.

Flood Resilience Measurement for Communities

The FRMC was created by the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance in 2013. It allows users and community members to understand and unpack their resilience and to generate evidence about the ways in which a given area or community is already resilient to floods. It also provides a guide to further develop this resilience.

The process involves working with communities to collect data to assess 44 indicators called ‘sources of resilience’, which have the capability of generating resilience. The data is analyzed through several different lenses (the ‘5C-4R framework’), which helps highlight interconnections and dependencies in the data.

This deep, systemic, and multi dimensional insight can help the community to identify and implement resilience-building interventions.

The FRMC process is supported by a web-based tool and an app for mobile devices, which allow for the effective design of studies and seamless data collection and analysis.



The Blue Sky Flood and Disaster Brigade picking up solid waste at a bus stop in the community, Mexican Red Cross Archive, Flood Resilience Project



Community brigades practising using fire extinguishers under the guidance of the civil protection of the municipality of Teapa, Mexican Red Cross Archive, Flood Resilience Project

Brigades sometimes play a preventative role, organizing litter picking and clearing drains to reduce the risk of flooding. They also act as a community resource, for example sharing information about clean water treatment or passing on how to minimize the spread of disease.

The brigades’ work enables a coordinated approach to disaster resilience within the wider civil protection system. This allows civil protection authorities to reach a larger part of the population in preparedness and response activities. Having civil protection representatives participate in the brigade formation process helps to develop links between actors.

✓ Success story

The *Blue Sky Flood and Disaster Brigade* was set up in Manuel Buelta y Rayón, a rural community in Tabasco that often floods after days of heavy rain. By learning new flood response skills as part of an organized group, brigade volunteers feel prepared to face whatever the rains bring before the clouds clear and the blue sky returns.

“Everyone has a role; I am in charge of first aid. Everyone has a responsibility, and we already know who is going to warn us and how we are going to make decisions and communicate information to the rest of the population”.

María Gloria Cruz Rivera, community brigade member.

How does it increase resilience?

The training gives brigade volunteers the knowledge and skills needed to prepare for floods and deal with their after-effects. It boosts individuals’ confidence, develops empathy for the needs of a diverse population, thereby increasing social and human capital, and improves community cohesion, with individuals working as a team to find the best ways to respond to the threat of floods.

Engaging the local population means that preparedness activities become part of people’s daily routines, which allows knowledge and skills to be replicated over time in the community. More volunteers have come forward to get involved after having seen the benefits of being better prepared.

Brigades play an essential role in local risk management. In addition to organizing flood preparedness and response activities, they act as a bridge between the local population and municipal authorities, relaying details about the situation on the ground, communicating the need for assistance, and sharing information with the wider community.

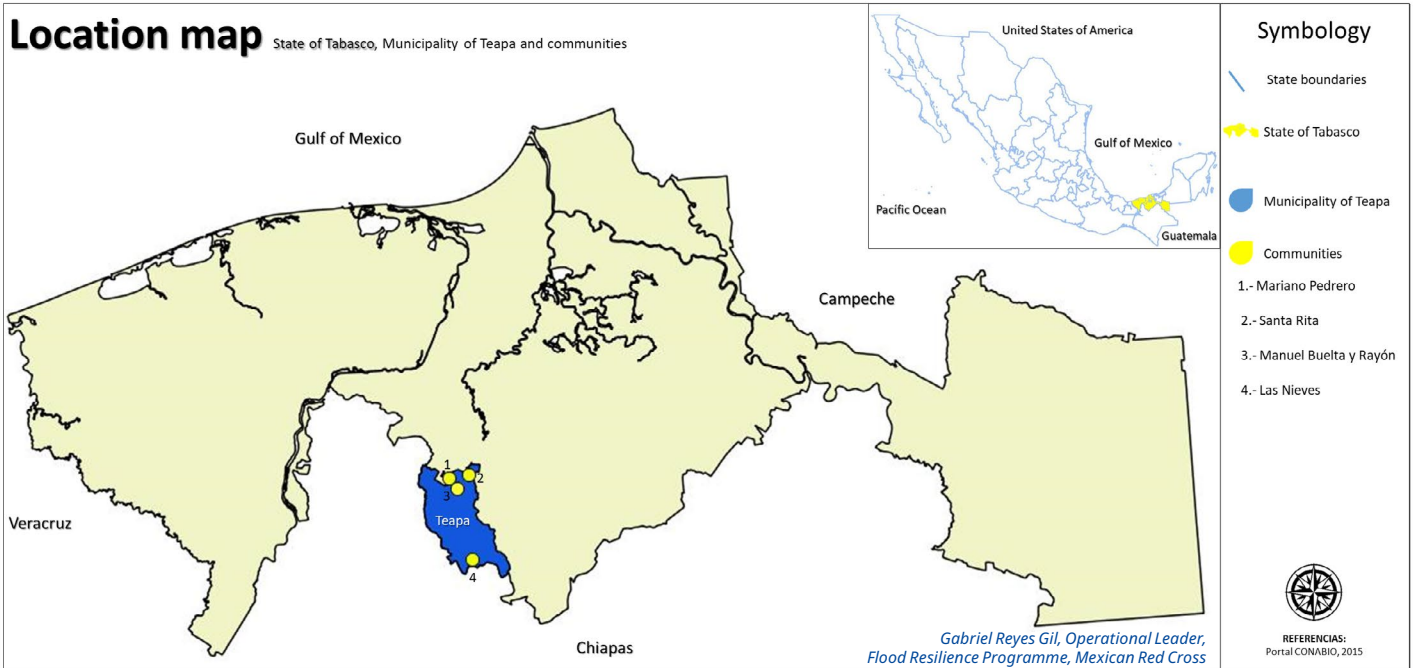
Expert view

Brigades are an important source of support for local communities who are exposed to floods. They strengthen communication in remote areas so that preparedness actions can be taken and response and recovery be implemented in a timely manner.

Forming brigades not only helps to develop social capacities for reducing risk but also enhances integration within the community and at the intercommunity level. Following formation, brigades continue to train independently in order to increase their capacities and improve flood preparedness measures in their communities.

Listen to the interview ▶

Community members discuss how community brigades help to better prepare for floods



! Lessons learnt

- Community brigades can link the community with key authorities and institutions involved in risk management. Authorities formally recognizing a brigade is one of the most significant goals for community action.
- Seeing the work brigades do when faced with a flood encourages others to get involved.
- Mutual support between brigades from different communities motivates them to continue taking action to reduce the impact of flooding.

Get in touch

If you have any questions, contact:

- Gabriel Reyes Gil, Operational Leader (fgreyes@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx)
- Brenda Ávila Flores, Programme Leader (bavila@cruzrojamexicana.org.mx)

For more resilience solutions visit www.floodresilience.net/solutions

Follow us on social or sign up to our newsletter



Further reading:

- Cuevas, J., Enriquez, M F, Norton, R., Ianni, F. (2022). *2020 floods in Tabasco: Lessons learned for strengthening social capital.* <https://floodresilience.net/resources/item/2020-floods-in-tabasco-lessons-learned-for-strengthening-social-capital/>
- Mexican Red Cross. (2022). *What's the name of our brigade? Shaping the identity of community brigades.* <https://infoinundaciones.com/recursos/item/whats-the-name-of-our-brigade-shaping-the-identity-of-community-brigades/>
- Cruz Roja Mexicana. (2016). *Fomento de la cohesión y participación social a partir de las Brigadas Comunitarias.* <https://infoinundaciones.com/recursos/item/fomento-de-la-cohesion-y-participacion-social-a-partir-de-las-brigadas-comunitarias/>

The Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance is a multi-sectoral partnership which brings together community programmes, new research, shared knowledge, and evidence-based influencing to build community flood resilience in developed and developing countries.

We help people measure their resilience to floods and identify appropriate solutions before disaster strikes.

Our vision is that floods should have no negative impact on people's ability to thrive. To achieve this we are working to increase funding for flood resilience, strengthen global, national, and subnational policies, and improve flood resilience practice.

Find out more: www.floodresilience.net

In partnership with:

