

Case study n°2

Managing spontaneous volunteers in the response and recovery to natural disasters

Country: Chile, Argentina, South Korea, UK

Level: National, Subnational, Local

SDG Addressed: SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities



Summary

The objective of this case study is to enhance disaster management practices by involving spontaneous volunteers following a natural disaster in Chile and Argentina, using lessons from implementing ISO22319 in the UK.

Presentation objectives:

- To show the role of national, sub-national and local governments in the UK in the development of the initial policy and plans for implementing ISO22319 on spontaneous volunteers.
- To show how we used the UK policy and plans and translated those into local governments in Chile and then into Argentina – constantly enhancing the policy and making it more transferable to new countries.
- To show how the policy and plans for local government will translate into a national policy in Chile and Argentina.
- To show how the content of the policy and plans have differed (and how they were the same) for UK, Chile and Argentina.
- To share policy makers' experiences and lessons learned from developing a policy on spontaneous volunteers using ISO22319.

- To show how the content of the policy and plans may differ when we implement them in South Korea and other new countries we aim to work in (e.g. Kenya).

Background

Spontaneous volunteers (SV) are individuals who are unaffiliated with existing official response organisations but who are motivated to provide unpaid support to disaster response and/or recovery. SVs can reduce the impact of disasters, particularly where the capacity of official responders is insufficient. Given the difficulties encountered in the management of SVs in past disasters, authorities in the UK, Chile, Argentina and South Korea have expressed a wish for a formalised approach to managing these volunteers. ISO22319 (Guidelines for planning the involvement of spontaneous volunteers in disasters) provides clear guidance on the topic, and thus, governments have worked to implement it.

Strategy

The new International Standard, ISO22319: Guidelines for planning the involvement of spontaneous volunteers in disasters, was published in 2017 after being developed within Working Group 5 (Community resilience) of ISO Technical Committee 292 (Security and Resilience). This standard was initiated following a project for the UK Government department, which found that the UK civil protection community were in need of guidance on what to do with SVs who offer their support to emergency

responders. Many other countries have experienced difficulties in knowing what to do when SVs offered their help during past disasters.

ISO22319 is available in Spanish, French and English, and has been adopted by IRAM (Argentina), BSI (UK), and other countries.

Results and Impact

To better understand the impact of ISO22319 and the SV policy, interviews were held with local government officials from different countries. Below are a number of quotes from these government officials:

- Increased capacity and speed to respond to disaster: *“we have been able to increase capacity to deal with spontaneous volunteers by training Rotary international and Civil Service representatives ... has led to quicker response times, as we now have people on call to deal with the influx of spontaneous volunteers ... helped to reduce risk for the volunteers ... now accepted by a small group of spontaneous volunteers who previously worked in the floods and found it difficult to work with the Local Authority – and made a commitment to working with us”* Barbara Sharratt, Emergency Planning Officer, Somerset County Council, UK
- New confidence from exercising the policy and plans: *“We have carried out two live play exercises involving members of the community role playing as ‘spontaneous volunteers’ - one scenario around an evacuation and one scenario regarding spontaneous volunteers presenting to volunteer for oil pollution clean-up”* Laura Edlington, Emergency Planning Officer, Lincolnshire County Council, UK
- Raised awareness in the public of how to respond and have good practices: *“The project has impacted positively our region and it has consistently attracted media attention. Our region is quite exposed to natural hazards. Developing a plan on spontaneous volunteers is making us more aware of all the stages and actions we need to take to manage properly spontaneous volunteers in times of disaster. This will help us avoid several issues we had in the past because we didn’t know how to include spontaneous volunteers in our emergency plans.”* Alex Tardón, Director of Emergency Planning, Biobio Regional Government, Chile.

- Strengthen the partnership working of our stakeholders: *“This [policy] is the result of the effort and dedication of our Department of Civil Protection and Emergencies and 24 institutions in the Concepcion area which has involved several stakeholders ... The project has impacted positively our region”* Robert Contreras, Governor, Concepcion region, Chile.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

To effectively implement ISO 22319 in different countries requires slight changes which reflect the distinct characteristics inherent to each country/region, and fully respect the social, cultural and political differences. Further, the role of local government and strong local leadership are key factors in encouraging the sustainability of the SVs plans.

The need for bottom up implementation was crucial and bureaucratic centralism is a fundamental challenge to the successful implementation of ISO22319. Instances of bureaucratic centralism were mitigated through the use of running workshops and events to design the SVs policies (i.e. the bottom-up approach). The involvement of stakeholders from local and national government (and from the public) has been very successful.

ISO22319 has been successfully implemented in countries and regions that have a “real need” for managing SVs. Developing local and national plans on SVs gave a practical and simple approach to solve a difficult issue in times of disaster.

Potential for Replication

Initially, the policy and plans were developed in two regions in the UK (Somerset & Lincolnshire) and then later reproduced in Chile and Argentina. Going forward, the policy and plans will be replicated in South Korea and Kenya.

Potential exists for this work to be replicated in NGOs, which take responsibility for working with spontaneous volunteers. Replication into NGOs has been done in the UK and there is scope for this in Chile.

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