

Zurich Flood Resilience Program

Enhancing community resilience to flooding



At a glance

- At Zurich, corporate responsibility means taking an active role in society to help people better understand and protect themselves from risk.
- By sharing our knowledge and expertise in risk management, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to increase resilience to disasters.
- Floods affect more people globally than any other type of natural hazard and cause some of the largest economic, social and humanitarian losses.
- Our flood resilience program comprises of a five-year commitment and an initial investment of 33 million CHF, alongside contributions of time, expertise and resources of Zurich employees around the world.
- We take an innovative approach that links academic insights, humanitarian sector capabilities and our own skills and knowledge to enhance community resilience to flooding.

The alarming impact of recent floods

“On average, some 250 million people have been affected annually by floods over the last ten years and they are the single most widespread and increasing disaster risk to urban settlements of all sizes. Flooding is an extensive recurring risk which causes enormous damage to critical infrastructure including transport systems, roads, schools and health facilities.” Source: UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 25 June 2013

“Drowning, landslides and flood-related electrocutions killed at least 19 people and more than 41,000 people were forced from their homes by flooding across the greater Jakarta metropolitan area since heavy rains began a week ago.” Source: reuters.com, January 2013

“The most severe flooding in Central Europe in more than a decade has killed at least nine people, forced thousands from their homes and disrupted transport around the region.” Source: online.wsj.com, June 2013

Why focus on flood resilience?

We focus on floods because they affect more people globally than any other type of natural disaster and cause some of the largest economic, social and humanitarian losses. We can use our risk expertise as a global insurer to help customers and communities reduce the devastating impacts of flooding.

Much of the work in disaster management today goes toward post-event relief, rather than mitigation. But a great deal can be achieved through helping communities to prepare for and minimize the humanitarian and financial impact before disasters strike. This is particularly important as traditional insurance solutions are often not appropriate to manage flood risk. There is a real need to pursue pre-event mitigation and build resilience from the ground up.



What is the Zurich flood resilience program?

The program brings to life one key aspect of Zurich's corporate responsibility strategy: helping people to understand and protect themselves from flood risk. It represents a new approach to cross-sector collaboration, linking flood research, community-based programs and risk expertise to generate a comprehensive framework to how community flood resilience can be improved. We view this collaboration model as a true alliance where every organization brings complementary skills and expertise.

Two academic institutions are part of our flood resilience program, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and the Wharton Risk Management and Decision Processes Center at the University of Pennsylvania. These research collaborations allow us to better understand, measure and reduce flood risk, and make the case for pre-event mitigation. Research in conjunction with these institutions will generate new ideas to enable more effective decision-making, while examining the role of government and insurance related to floods. In sum, it will shape the thinking about flood risk management in the future.

Humanitarian organizations are also part of the flood resilience alliance to ensure that new knowledge and ideas fit the needs of the local communities and can be put into practice on the ground. Together with Practical Action, a UK-based international non-governmental organization, we will field test innovative tools and approaches to improve the resilience of vulnerable communities. We will also take what we have learned and share it with other organizations, governments and communities. We are developing early-warning systems in Nepal that can improve preparedness to flash floods. In Peru we are looking at ways to build flood resilience in an urban environment and at how the El Niño phenomenon affects flood risk.

With the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and their network of 187 national societies, we are implementing innovative community solutions across the globe. Through the IFRC and the Red Cross national societies, we are developing and putting in place community flood resilience programs in both urban and rural settings. In our first country programs in Mexico and Indonesia we are testing ways to measure community flood resilience against key indicators. In these two countries, we will also integrate the insights generated through our research and pilot activities

Within the alliance, we will work together to advocate new ways to improve flood resilience and provide fresh perspectives on the role of government and the insurance sector. These efforts will be led by the insights and best practices from our research and community work in flood risk management.

Q&A

Q: How does the collaboration between a private sector company and humanitarian organizations add value to vulnerable communities?

A: Both organizations approach the problem of flood risk from different angles but share the same objective of reducing the humanitarian crisis caused by natural disasters. This shared mission is the beauty of our collaborative approach; looking at things from different perspectives leads to better, more robust solutions.

Q: Why are you collaborating with the IFRC, IIASA, Practical Action and Wharton?

A: To be truly innovative and global in our approach, we want to work with organizations that are complementary in nature and bring different skills, expertise and reach to the alliance.

Q: How will you share what you learn from the flood resilience program?

A: We are working closely within the alliance to ensure that the knowledge and expertise that we learn are shared with different stakeholders through internal and external platforms and communication channels.

Q: Why did you choose Mexico and Indonesia as priority countries to implement your community flood resilience programs with the IFRC and Red Cross national societies?

A: Zurich and the Red Cross have a strong presence in these countries which are both exposed to severe flood hazards and will benefit from our support.

Q: How can I learn more about the flood resilience program?

A: The flood resilience program is a key part of Zurich's corporate responsibility strategy. To find out more about our strategy and the program, please visit <http://www.zurich.com/aboutus/corporateresponsibility/> or contact us at corporate.responsibility@zurich.com