

EARTHQUAKE IN ECUADOR: THE HANDS THAT SUPPORT, THE HEART THAT HEALTH AND THE BRAIN THAT IS FREE

(Summary)

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SITUATION DESCRIPTION

The earthquake that struck Ecuador, on April 16, 2016, of 7.8 on the scale of Richter with epicenter in the coastal provinces of Manabi, and severe affectation to Esmeraldas left 671 dead, 12,000 injured, 22,421 sheltered and the work of 57,674 volunteers. (PRESIDENCIA/ DINASED/ FGE, 2016). The deadliest in South America in two decades, left thousands of victims and displaced people; the country was devastated, and its people plunged into a great commotion, suffering many symptoms of post-trauma stress, due to direct affectation or vicarious trauma.

(MUNDO, REDACCION BBC, 2016)



Illustration 1: Effects of the earthquake, April 2016

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION AND ITS RESULTS

At CEFIS (Center for Training, and Systemic Research), an organization that trains Facilitators, Coaches and Systemic Therapists, and provides crisis intervention and emotional recovery services, we set ourselves the goal of training rescue workers, doctors, police, army and debris removal personnel, who had been the first-line controllers to help the earthquake population, in techniques of prevention and management of vicarious trauma.

We understand that a traumatic event that has not been overcome, affects lifelong physical and mental health, self-perception, social interaction; that its effects are short and long term, and that the consequences suffered by the survivors are systemic and chronic, and they are presented under the considerations of the post-trauma stress syndrome. This can be defined as "... the result of exposure to an inevitable stressful

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event, something that we cannot escape from and surpasses the natural coping mechanisms of attack or flight of the person ..." (Pierre Jeanet).

Additionally, the consequences (of the non-overcome trauma) on the survivors are perpetuated unchanged until they are resolved with therapeutic intervention. We also know from neuropsychological studies that early intervention prevents the post-trauma stress syndrome from arising, minimizing the effects of the physical and emotional exhaustion of the caregiver, and does not develop the syndrome of "help burned" or "vicarious trauma".

So, we decided to implement a facilitation intervention with a vulnerable group in disasters, "the helpers", of whom the intervention systems do not deal with in crises. To execute the objective of generating an effective contribution to the community, we decided to work on a "Rescue the Rescuers" model, with EMMOP-Q staff (Metropolitan Public Enterprise of Mobility and Public Works of Quito), of which 435 employees attended, who arrived at zone 0 in the first 12 hours, after the event.

To carry out the process, Dr. Gilberto Brenson-Lazan, Director of Amauta International LLC, and one of the founding members of Global Facilitators Serving Communities - GFSC, developed a model of psychological intervention and facilitation training designing workshops based on the following 5 techniques for managing of the vicarious trauma and elaborating thus the work proposal "To Rescue Rescuers":

1. My reactions (Management of catharsis)
2. My Strengths (Identification of Psychological Resources)
3. My Limits (Ability to Evaluate the Context)
4. My Energy (Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome Prevention)
5. My Relationships (Secure Attachment Construction)

(Source CEFIS 2016).



**Illustration 2. Intervention team:
Juan Ricardo Orduz, Parcia Sansary,
Mariana Falconi, Lorena Paredes,
Holger Benalcazar, Ximena
Combariza E. and Fernanda
Navarrete**

Parcia Sansary G. from Amauta International, Ximena Combariza E. and Juan Ricardo Orduz from GSFC, Mariana Falconí, Lorena Paredes from CEFIS, contributed and contextualized the model, that would be used in the training of a team of 48 Facilitators, Coaches and CEFIS therapists, in a first working day of 8 hours. This would

be the support team and co-facilitators of the groups of rescuers. On the other hand, Maria Luz Arellano coordinated the logistics of the places where the training would be offered, and made the contact with the management of the municipal company.



In addition, a team of fourteen people from CEFIS, created a crisis committee, to obtain donations of air tickets, accommodation, transfers and general logistics of refreshments, food, water, work materials, and symbolic presents (medals made by children), for the rescue heroes.

Illustration 3- Facilitators and co-facilitators (CEFIS 2016)

The execution of the work was in 4 intense days, from 8 to 10 hours each.

The first workshop was carried out with the CEFIS team, providing the guidelines to align them in the performance of facilitators of the conversations at the tables or work groups. They learned about the elements of the model that they would co-facilitate. The three following days, while elaborating their own reactions to the disaster, they showed commitment, academic preparation, and excellent human and professional quality all the time.

In the workshops with the rescuers, we worked in the following way: three rooms with groups of between 20 and 30 people, facilitated by Juan Ricardo, Mariana and Parcia. And a group of 70-80 people was facilitated by Ximena Combariza E., Lorena Paredes, Fernanda Navarrete, Luann Irigoyen and Holger Benalcazar. All the groups were supported by a large team of 48 CEFIS co-facilitators.



Illustration 4- Attendant Rescuers 1 (CEFIS 2016)

About the results: every day we had testimonies that indicated that the participants could reprocess the information, understood better some of the reactions they observed in the people in ground zero, understood better their own reactions and

created strategies for the management of their own grief, as well as strategies of self-care and prevention in taking risks. One of the adjustments made to the workshop on the fly, was to create and propose the material used for illiterate people with whom the co-facilitators fulfilled an individual work.



Illustration 5- Attendant Rescuers and Facilitators (CEFIS 2016)

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The wonderful work of co-creation, of solidarity concretions and challenges to solve along the way, was resolved each day with strength and creativity. The intervention model at the beginning with the co facilitator's team and later with the rescuers was productive and effective because, according to the participants, they got being "better" after the intervention. Likewise, the team of facilitators thanked the opportunity to perform an effective and efficient work during which they applied each of the tools learned in the courses and managed to put into practice the proposed model for the Rescue of Rescuers by Gilberto Brenson with the relevant and contextualized adjustments. The results obtained in the group of participants were positive and the words of appreciation only ratified the effective and timely work.

It is important to highlight that one of the greatest satisfactions, within this work, was the double-level training with 20 psychologists from the city of Manta, who live in the disaster area and attend people there. They requested to participate in this workshop, since many of them experienced the earthquake and said that they required emotional support because they showed some symptoms that corresponded to PTSD. They requested initially to carry out a workshop in the city of Manta, but seeing the immediate need for support, this group of psychologists were invited to participate in the workshop in Quito. The professionals in Psychology moved to the event only for the training event and returned the same day to their city with two main contributions:

- Having completed a personal process to overcome the vicarious trauma, and
- Having being trained in the intervention model, to reproduce it with the people with whom they work.

Finally, only celebration and gratitude and the certainty of being part of a giant network, of coherent, organized and functional support, and a myriad of possibilities to carry out other and more projects of effective and committed work as was done.

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