

## “Terra non Firma”--an Entertainment Tool for Raising Earthquake Awareness of Pre-and Primary-School Children in Armenia

### Armenia

Armenia is one of the most earthquake disaster-prone countries in the world. The disaster that struck Armenia in December 1988, when over 6,000 children died, is a tragic example of why more effort is needed to secure the safety of children before disasters strike. One of the most essential elements in disaster risk reduction strategies is education and awareness. Educated and aware children are active members of society who will be able to take effective action and help reduce casualties during a major earthquake. Knowledge about earthquakes should be acquired from childhood. Such knowledge will not only prevent panic among children, but it will also help them avoid a stress and to the right things in a time of crisis. Children must realize the fact that they live in a seismically active zone, though it shouldn't complicate their daily lives, since nowadays they can learn how to protect themselves from the deadly impact of a natural disaster.

Public education and preventive behavior are important parts of seismic risk reduction for the Armenian National Survey for Seismic Protection (Armenian NSSP). As part of its seismic risk reduction activities, the Armenian NSSP together with the Ministry of Science and Education and a preschool in the city of Yerevan has developed and staged a theatrical performance entitled “Terra non Firma,” in which children learn the basics of seismic behavior and protection techniques through interactive education-play. The performance is targeted at kindergarten and primary-school children and gives them information like what an earthquake is, how to prepare for an earthquake and what to do before, during and after an earthquake.

#### - Scenario

The Spirit of the Forest warns the forest animals about one of the devastating natural calamities--earthquakes. He tells them to fix and strengthen their shelters and nests. Noticing that the animals are not listening, he decides to teach them a lesson through Mother Terra by causing slight quake. The animals who ignored the Spirit's advice suffer various injuries and property losses. Panic sets in and injured animals cry for help. Hearing the cries for help, the sniffer cubs [sniffer dogs?] rush to the rescue with their stretchers and first-aid kits. Having been punished, the forest animals explain to each other the earthquake behavior rules and promise to follow the advice of the Spirit of the Forest. The performance finishes with a song dedicated to Planet Earth and the sun shining again in a blue sky.

In the writing of the scenario of the performance, animals typical of the fauna of Armenia were chosen and the cast involved children from the ages of 4 to 8.

After the scenario was prepared and then approved by the specialists of the NSSP, the most musically gifted children were chosen and the headmistress was appointed director of the performance, and nuns on the teaching staff began rehearsals with the children. During rehearsals, the children were very excited about the opportunity of learning about one of Earth's natural calamities, and earthquakes became less frightening to them.

They even taught their parents and friends what they had learnt at school. The rehearsals lasted more than 4 months, as there were so many questions that they wanted to know about.

A special song dedicated to Planet Earth was composed, and a musical arrangement and sound effects



“The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Sugoroku”  
Training in N 189 school, Yerevan

were added to the performance. The dressmaker made wonderful costumes for more than 8 animals, town criers, the Spirit of the Forest, Mother Terra and beautiful birds.

The premiere of the performance was attended by specially invited guests from the Ministry of Science and Education, local authorities, principals of kindergartens and primary schools as well as the representatives of mass media. All the invited persons showed a high interest in the project and expressed their willingness to cooperate in the field of seismic risk reduction.

When the film “Terra non Firma” was released, it was duplicated and given to the local authorities of the 12 Yerevan city districts for distribution among the pre-and primary schools. A video of the performance will be used as an educational tool for kids in special programs to teach them how to cope with natural disasters.

Because of the innovative nature of this project, there were no obstacles to the reproduction and dissemination of materials throughout the region. Meanwhile, the main goal for the future is to provide a video of the performance to all kindergartens and primary schools in all the marzes (prefectures) of the Republic of Armenia as educational material for disaster risk reduction.



Children are singing the song “Earth Planet”

<b>- Background</b>	Earthquake Disaster Children-centered Risk Reduction
<b>- Objective</b>	Empower kids with earthquake awareness
<b>- Term/ Time Frame</b>	9 months
<b>- Activities undertaken</b>	Development and implementation of an entertainment-type educational tool
<b>- Major achievements</b>	Raising of earthquake preparedness level
<b>- Total budget</b>	US\$5,000
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