



# Generation Connect Podcast

## Episode 5: Empowering youth in times of digital changes

With Antonio Deterville and Jennifer Gutiérrez Yáñez.

Hosted by Darica Egorova

## Transcript

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**Disclaimer:** *The following transcript is machine-generated and has been slightly edited for clarity and readability.*

**Intro:** Hi Everyone! Welcome to the Generation Connect podcast co-designed with youth for youth. The ITU Generation Connect initiative aims to engage global youth alongside the leaders of today's digital change by empowering youth voices in the digital development dialogue. Tune in every month to listen to inspiring stories of youth all across the world on the power of technology for sustainable development. Get involved by joining our global community of future leaders shaping the world of tomorrow.

**Darica Egorova:** Hi everyone and welcome to the 5th episode of the Generation Connect Podcast, co-designed with youth and for youth.

I'm Darica - I'm part of the Generation Connect Team from ITU, and I will be your host for today. In this episode, we are going to talk about the role of Emergency Telecommunications, and especially ICTs, in disaster risk mitigation in the event of natural hazards.

Indeed, worsen by climate change, the world is continuously facing different types of hazards, from extreme weather events, to tsunamis, earthquakes, vast pandemics, and other geological and human-made related hazards, that pose persistent global challenges to countries and communities, too often with humanitarian consequences. These are even worse for those living in remote areas with no or poor access to basic information and communication facilities. So what's the best way to go about it? What to do in case of a natural hazards like these? And more importantly, what more can be done to prevent these situations using ICTs?

That's why Emergency Telecommunications are so important and are a key area of research here in ITU!

To talk about this today, I am joined by 2 incredible guests, Jennifer and Antonio, two Generation Connect AMS Youth Envoys from Mexico and St. Lucia in the Caribbean. Welcome everyone and thank you for joining me today to discuss this important topic.

In today's episode, we would love to hear about your personal experiences of natural hazards and the whole process you've been through, from the early warning signs to the outbreak of the disaster and to its relief and recovery phase. Your personal experiences and advice could be of great help and support to all the young people tuning in today to listen to our stories.

So, to start off, it would be nice if you could introduce yourself in a few words for all our listeners. Who are you and what do you do?

**Antonio Deterville:** So good afternoon. My name is Antonio Deterville. I'm from Saint Lucia and I'm also part of the Generation Connect America's Youth Group. I have a bachelor's degree in electrical and computer engineering, and I'm currently working full time as an assistant registrar at my local community college.

**Darica Egorova:** Great! Nice to meet you, Antonio.

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** Hi, everybody! I'm Jennifer. I'm from Mexico City and I'm studying political science and public administration. And I joined Generation Connect America's group six months ago.

**Darica Egorova:** Welcome Jennifer. Thank you so much, and it's a great pleasure to meet both of you.

So, both of you have been through different types of natural hazards in your life and agreed to talk about this today with us. So, first of all, thank you very much for that. We understand it's a sensitive topic, so feel free to express yourself in the most comfortable way for you.

So, to begin, would it be possible for you to start by sharing a short overview of the emergency situation you were in. What kind of natural hazards did you experience?

Jennifer, would you like to share your story first?

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** Yeah, in Mexico City in 2017 happens an earthquake that kind of destroyed Mexico City. The epicenter was Puebla that is a city near to Mexico City, and it was of 7.1 magnitude in Puebla.

**Darica Egorova:** Oh, wow! It must have been a very strong earthquake. Right?

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** Yeah, I'm not expert in earthquakes, but I'm living in Mexico. I know that there are two types. One is like up and down, and the other type is like to the left and to the right. And depending on the type of move it is, it decides if we in Mexico City feel it. Usually, we have a lot of tiny earthquakes, and we don't feel it. It's like normal.

**Darica Egorova:** I see.

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** Yeah, but that day, it was 1pm I think. I was at high school in English class, and I remember that day it was my presentation. And I stood up, and I felt like the floor was shaking, and I was like "it's me?". But then I saw my teacher looking at me, and we were like what is happening?

Then we heard like the people running, and it's the first earthquake I have ever felt and we were super scared because of that.

**Darica Egorova:** Oh my God, yeah, it must have been terrible! Thank you for sharing. What about you Antonio? What was your experience?

**Antonio Deterville:** So actually, I have been in three different disasters. So, the first one would have been hurricane Thomas, which was a powerful hurricane that affected in St. Lucia in October of 2010. I was only fourteen at the time, and it was one of my first major hurricane experience. And at that time, I was living with myself, my two brothers and my parents. And for most of the hurricane, we just get in the living room together, so that, you know, we could just weather out the storm.

But it brought torrential rainfall to St. Lucia. And there was also lots of wind, and due to all of that rain falling, it really did a number on St. Lucia's infrastructure. So, we were without electricity for several days. Several of our roads collapsed completely. Some communities are completely isolated. It was just one of the worst hurricanes that had hit St. Lucia in a long time. I think that the estimated damages after the hurricane was US 463 million dollars or something like that. And thankfully, since we were together in that situation, it was not as scary per say? But it took several weeks to restore power to the entire island, and it took several months to actually repair all the roadways that were connecting the island. And even to this day, when I drive by, even if the grass has grown back, I still remember the entire mountain just collapsed on the family house and it just washed everything away.

**Darica Egorova:** Wow, yeah, that's a lot of damages. And unfortunately, that's very typical of natural hazards, especially hurricanes. But I'm glad to hear that most of it has been restored.

Jennifer, do you happen to know what were the consequences of your earthquake?

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** Yes, the day it happened, the whole city, all the county just stopped. And Mexico City is a huge, huge city. Obviously, a lot of people died here, but the real consequences are in the rural zones. because they are disconnected. Like they don't have internet, so the access with the humanitarian help was super difficult, because you don't have any chance to go there. And until today, people are living in the streets because they don't have house.

**Darica Egorova:** Yeah, I see. It is indeed even more difficult for those living in remote areas with no or poor access to Internet, and that's why ICTs are so important in this matter.

So, what did you do when you, your teacher and your classmates, when you all realized that an earthquake is happening right now? What did you do, do you remember?

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** Well, I did not present, so that's a good point. But we have a protocol, but obviously we never do the protocol. So, in my high school we used to have like a huge garden like the safe place. And I don't remember a lot, but I remember people running, crying in crisis. Because usually when an earthquake happens, you can never contact your family, because the system failed. I don't know it was just a huge, huge crisis.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you, Jennifer. How was it for you Antonio during hurricane Elsa last year in 2021? If I'm not mistaken, it is one of the other natural hazards that you have experience, besides hurricane Thomas, right? Was there any protocol?

**Antonio Deterville:** So, with hurricane Elsa, I wouldn't say there was a protocol per say. They just really advised, like the Government and the National Emergency management organization, NEMO. They're responsible for like emergency management in St. Lucia. They just advised everybody to remain at home. To please stock up on different food items, especially water, non-perishable stuff like that. And they also encourage you have medicines in case anybody needs it, etc.

And these are things like every time the hurricane season starts in St. Lucia, they actually advise everybody to do things ahead of time, because we are St. Lucia and we have a nasty habit of doing things last minute, like everybody is just rushing to the supermarket. All the supermarkets are closed. Everybody is rushing to buy gas, etc.

Right now, St. Lucia is actually experiencing the effects of a tropical wave. So, it's almost like a St. Lucian's tradition. You know people don't really think about going and doing things ahead of time, only when there is pending disaster. Especially for hurricanes, that they finally rush to do things.

So that day the hurricane Elsa hit, I was just at home. Thankfully we had water and food. And once they give the okay life kind of just went back to normal. So that's what we really did.

**Darica Egorova:** So as you know, the ICTs which are the information and communication technologies, are one of the major pillars to monitor the environment in order to prevent these types of events. It is also very helpful in delivering early warnings and alerts, and ensure a smooth flow of information in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. So, what are your thoughts on that regarding your personal experience? And were there any specific challenges that you had to face?

So, Antonio, since you have already started talking about it, maybe you would like to go a little bit more in depth about topic of early warnings, especially because, as you mentioned before the podcast, you have received one today also, isn't it?

**Antonio Deterville:** Yeah. So, in terms of early warning, since three or four days ago they actually started putting out warnings, especially through the news outlets on television. But most of my information actually is coming from the social media, especially Facebook. So, the Government of St. Lucia's has their FB page. They put out alerts there. There's also another page that I follow called like Eastern Caribbean weather updates and they basically output like weather maps and advisories from the different meteorological offices in the different Caribbean islands. So, in terms of early warnings, we have been actually getting a lot of information.

I guess due to the nature of hurricanes and thanks to ICTs, we get information and get warnings a lot of faster. That's so. Yeah. Now I will say that going back to my experiences with hurricane Elsa and hurricane Thomas. During the hurricane, first of all, there's no electricity. So television is out. My phone in terms of mobile Internet, it also went down as well. So, our main means of communication solution in hurricanes is by our radios. I will say that it is absolutely integral in terms of getting

information, because during the hurricane, most power would be out, because to avoid, like, you know, person getting electrocuted, and for the damage. So most people would have like battery power radios or some their phones, so that we, the radio stations keep playing throughout the hurricane. So, I would say that in terms of radio communication during the events, especially hurricane, radio FM communication is paramount. So that's how we more or less get information before, during and after a hurricane in St. Lucia.

**Darica Egorova:** Oh, that's very interesting. So basically radios are the main way for the population of Saint Lucia to access information in times of crisis.

**Antonio Deterville:** Yeah, I would say that just like Jennifer said, you know, persons don't follow protocol, they don't tuck under the desk. People just started running. And, like Jennifer was saying, cellphones didn't work, because this affected the telecommunication network, especially the antennas. So, even going back to another of that experience, when I was studying, that would have been, I think, in 2016 in there about, and I actually remember that one because I am on my desk doing mathematics and all of a sudden, my desk started shaking, and I'm like with what's happening. And then this shaking increased, and I realized it is an earthquake. One thing they always told to do is if you are in the earthquakes, you have to stay in the middle of the doorway. There were my doors right next me, so I was stayed and you can see through the windows as a whole, and you can see buildings moving like up and down like It's a liquid, and that's not something that you can really put into with.

**Darica Egorova:** Wow, that must have been a sight to see, especially for the first time.

**Antonio Deterville:** Yeah. And I'm sure Jennifer kind of believe. That was just so crazy.

**Darica Egorova:** Did you see that as well, Jennifer? You met a building moving?

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** Yeah. It was horrendous. Because when the people started seeing it, they were like, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no." It's horrible.

**Darica Egorova:** Were you also taught to stay in the middle of the doorway to protect yourself from the earthquake?

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** I don't remember if it's recommended in the articles. Because when you're seeing the building moving, you obviously don't say I what the practical thing. You need to run for your life.

**Darica Egorova:** Yeah, that's for sure. So how exactly do you know what to do in this situation? Do you receive any early warnings for the earthquake?

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** Yes. So here in Mexico City every year we commemorate that earthquake was the most horrible ever in Mexican history. But also in all Mexican cities, we have alarms. But, the alarms, they don't work. So sometimes you start hearing the alarm and just around them, and it's not an earthquake. You need to know if it's an earthquake or not. In that day, we start at first. Then it was another commemoration of the older earthquake, so it's supposed that the alarm is going to save your life. But the alarm doesn't work.

**Darica Egorova:** Wow, that is very inconvenience. That's for sure. So how did you get the information about what's happening.

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** I think here at Mexico, what happened is that we just didn't know anything. We don't have an idea what is happening. Obviously we knew that the epicenter was not here, so updates on, I think it's social media as Antonio said before, saved a lot of lives, because there are humans to help. When we go to the places, and the people start talking by Twitter and Facebook. The first help that people got was from their neighbors, from social media, and then any of us. But definitely the social media save a lot of lives.

And actually well, here is very common to have in your phone an app. They send you a notification, so you can know if it's an earthquake, or if not. But it was the Commemoration Day. But usually when I was in the earthquakes, the telecommunications like WhatsApp, they were out. You cannot communicate with your family. For me, Twitter was the only app still working during that whole crisis.

**Darica Egorova:** Oh, I see. So, if not for Tweet, you would be very limited in ways to communicate with your family in the aftermath of the disaster. What about you, Antonio? We like to say something more.

**Antonio Deterville:** Yeah. So for hurricane Thomas, I remember our telephones, they still work. However, they made a request by the radio that persons might not call too much as to free up the lines that emergency personnel could communicate with each other. I would say that once electricity came back three days later, we were able to like watch television. But the thing is that definitely with radios even to be, given that power in the hurricanes, it would reduce us the main needs of communications. And you know, you're not alone. They played music to talk about what's happening, so at least you know you are not just by yourself. And, as you know, the technology to the FM Radio is a kind of stuff that is a significant for older generation. They still listen to their radios. So I hope that answers your question.

**Darica Egorova:** Yeah, definitely. Thank you very much. I think you mentioned that a little bit earlier. But you said that there isn't really any protocol to follow in St. Lucia. So how would you call it? And how do you know what to do in this situation?

**Antonio Deterville:** Okay, So I would say they give recommendations. So basically, you know, from the start of the hurricane seasons in St. Lucia, they tell you from then start clearing any overhang branches across your house. As you know, strong winds may damage them and fall on your house. And they also tell you to stock your emergency supplies, batteries, non-perishable foods, your water. They usually recommend that you should keep all your documents in water-proof bags, in case you have to go into the storm. They don't get damaged or get. They also tell you to have an emergency point where the family is supposed to gather. So if, for example, your house is destroyed, then your family go to a general meeting point as emergency shelters. I would say that there's a lot done even before hurricane hits. It's a kind of know ahead of time.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you very much, Antonio. It is indeed very interesting. And to bounce back of what it just said, I would like to something Jennifer mentioned earlier. Jennifer highlighted how difficult it is to follow up protocol in a time of crisis. But if the entire protocol relies the alarms like in Mexico, and they don't work. Why have a protocol then? It's not sustainable, is it? And not really helpful for the population?

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** Yes, and actually now, after the last earthquake, a lot of people have a trauma. People start crying when they hear the alarm. So we don't have the alarms, and the government can use it because the people gets scared.

**Darica Egorova:** Yeah, it makes things indeed very complicated. So, as we mentioned earlier, some regions of the world are naturally more prone to certain types of disaster due to various reasons, such as geolocation. Whether this is to shore or to an earthquake plate like Mexico. And because of that, because of these potential risks, it is only reasonable to think that there must be something planned in the case of such events, like a National Emergency Telecommunication plan. So I have a question to you about that. Let me know your thoughts.

So, according to ITU's data, published in 2021, only 29 percent of countries out of the ninety countries covered by ITU's Emergency Telecommunication Baseline Assessments, which presents around thirty countries, have an NETP which is the National Emergency Telecommunication Plan. This plan is basically a guideline of what to do for all the stakeholders of ICTs as a key of an emergency situation like the ones you mentioned. And as part of its work on emergency telecommunications and disaster relief, ITU Strategic plan includes Target 3.5, which is by 2023 all countries should have a National Emergency Telecommunication Plan as part of their national and local disaster risk reduction strategies.

So first question: what are your thoughts on the percentage of 29 percent of countries having an NETP? And second question, what are your thoughts on the Target 3.5, which is having all countries have a National Emergency Telecommunication Plan by 2023, since it is indeed next year already.

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** I think it's incredible that it's only twenty-nine percent. Why? If something like this happened before, why the Government didn't have? I don't know whatever you need to have a specific plan and then a specific team for that.

**Darica Egorova:** Yes, and you would think that after the disaster, the earthquake that you experience in 2017, the country would make a plan for the upcoming earthquakes. But as far as I know as of today, Mexico doesn't have a plan, or at least not yet.

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** Yeah, we don't have a plan yet. And actually, the news after the earthquake said three things we supposedly learn about the telecommunication and earthquakes here in Mexico. One of those things we're having a plan, but it's not the first huge earthquake. Why, in three years, we don't get a plan.

**Darica Egorova:** That's a very good question. What about you, Antonio, what do you think?

**Antonio Deterville:** I think that, honestly speaking, for something as important as that, the percentage to be so low is a bit concerning, because that shows that if there ever is a disaster in that particular country, a lot of countries would quite frankly not have an action game plan to actually deal with a disaster effectively. And because of that lack of response, that could mean more lives lost, more damage done, and the situation being worse than it needs to be. And in terms of the Target of one hundred by next year, I honestly think that somewhat unrealistic. Given how detailed and sophisticated such a plan actually has to be, because not every country is affected by the same disasters, they might have to deal with intense flooding or heavy rains, depending on their location in the world. So every NETP, I think, has something to do with the geographical situation, and not only taking into probably the geographical situation, but also the socioeconomic factors as well. So what is this social structure like? What the economy is like? How much money do they have to spend in terms of providing relief efforts because different countries have access to different amounts of resources.

So I will think that, taking all of that into account now, it would take a lot longer for countries to come up with a reliable plan that would work for them. And I guess if by now all the countries have not done it, then it may suggest that maybe it's just not a priority for them. And that itself is concerning, because if you don't have a plan for disaster strikes, when disaster strikes, what do you do? So I really think that by next year, I think that's unrealistic. I guess countries have to decide that it's a priority for them to actually get that part of running for the sake of their citizens. But at the end of the day, it has to be a priority for them.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you very much, Antonio. So as Jennifer mentioned previously, Mexico doesn't have an NETP for now, but Saint Lucia in the Caribbean, on the other hand, does have an NETP. What do you think So?

**Antonio Deterville:** I will say that Saint Lucia has added fair share of disaster. And I think that the presence of the authorities whose main focus is that, because the more the national emergency organization in Saint Lucia. Their focus... they are heavily focused on emergency response, emergency preparations. I think the presence of that organization is a big factor as to why we do actually have a plan.

And prior to this podcast, actually, did I have a look at the balance quite detailed. But I do notice that I don't think it's been updated since I think 2009. I could be wrong, but it shows that maybe it might be some review, but the fact is that it's there, and it's fairly detailed from what I could see.

**Darica Egorova:** Thank you very much, Antonio. I think we can all agree that having an NETP is a very important part of our country's disaster risk strategies. And we all hope that ITU can achieve its Target 3.5 in the near future.

Also, it is unfortunately almost the end of today's podcast. I sincerely thank you both for joining today's episode and sharing your power and stories with us. To conclude, I have one less question for you. So, in regards to your personal experiences and everything that has been discussed here today, what do you think can be done better with the help of the ICTs? And in retrospective, what are the potential solutions that can be developed at the local, regional and national levels that you can think of.

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** The most vulnerable people in regions are the ones that get affected every time by earthquakes and also by hurricanes. Now like a month ago, rural community struggle with our hurricane, and they are unconnected. So probably we need to connect the unconnected. At the end, the most vulnerable people is the unconnected, because they can get information, and even they can get humanitarian help. And obviously connecting people is not only having social media and TV.

So, probably even before having a plan, we need to connect to people.

**Antonio Deterville:** Also, I would say that one thing I think that really help is to actually implement like more localized radio infrastructure, because I think it was during hurricane Elsa, several times the radio station just stopped broadcasting. And I've already highlighted the importance of communication during the hurricane. A several times they went down, either due to interference or due to them losing power or to the storm, because hurricane Elsa was more of a wind generating hurricane. So I think that one thing can definitely do better is to reinforce our radio communication infrastructure.

Also, I think that a disaster telecommunication map would help a lot to show where the damaged infrastructure is, so they can be more effective in their response to start repairs and reconnecting people.

One last thing I would say at even during hurricane Thomas, even though our house did not have electricity, the telephones themselves are still in power which allow us to communicate. However, unfortunately, the local telecommunications company is facing out those phones, so it now has to be connected through your router for the Internet. So when you lose power, you don't have a means of communication, and some people afford that staff. I would say that maybe it might be, of course, the company itself, but it would be important to have at least one line of communication or emergency communication through the hurricane. I think those are the recommendations I would give of the top of my head, but I think that did go along with me to ensure people connected and be able to communicate especially during the hurricane.

**Jennifer Gutiérrez:** And I add something, basically what I think is that it's a long way. But we need infrastructure and regulations, so we can all be connected, and then a plan can work.

**Outro:** Thank you for listening to our podcast! You can find all the podcast episodes on the ITU Generation Connect website. And if you don't want to miss an episode, subscribe to us on Soundcloud, Spotify, and Apple Podcasts. Thanks again and see you next month for a brand-new episode of the Generation Connect Podcast.