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*'Understanding volcanoes and society: the key for risk mitigation'*



## **Volcano Hazard Education in the Eastern Caribbean – Learning through the Arts**

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Volcanoes have been a part of human history for millennia (De Boer et al 2002), from the earliest cave drawings, to 17th century artistic paintings and poetic renderings. Long before science could explain subsurface earth processes, legends such as the Fire Goddess, Pele, in the Hawaiian Islands helped the indigenous populations to cope with the naturally occurring phenomena (Swanson, 2008). Contrary to the popular belief that the arts and the sciences are incompatible, this 'gulf' between the two can be attributed to misinterpretation and lack of understanding on both sides (De Boer et al 2002). The arts for example, can be used along with participatory social science methods to validate scientific knowledge in communities, helping to build trust and engender a sense of ownership with respect to the hazards (Barclay et al. 2008). The UWI Seismic Research Centre (UWI-SRC) and the Montserrat Volcano Observatory (MVO) have been engaged in volcanic hazard education in the English speaking Eastern Caribbean for over 20 years. During this period a number of initiatives that utilized creative expression as educational tools were developed and implemented. These include photo displays, art competitions, volcano picture books, calendars, theatre and most recently a creative writing competition for children, whose winning stories are being published in an illustrated short story book. In addition to these projects, a number of tools that incorporate the creative arts have been integrated into the ongoing education and outreach campaign at the UWI-SRC. Tools such as the 'Tales of Disaster Series' produced by No Strings International have proven to be very effective at engaging younger students and communicating the dangers posed by volcanoes. In this presentation we share our collective experience with some of these tools.