

Disaster Response in Haiti – a most important and fundamental lesson

Building and coordinating strong multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral teams, is perhaps the most important lesson to learn from disaster relief and recovery generally, and from the recent experiences in earthquake ravaged Haiti.

It is essential that disaster relief and recovery teams are led by national authorities, with a clearly designated leader and well defined roles and responsibilities. To enhance coordination, there needs to be clearly defined operating strategies and communication mechanisms within, among and between government agencies, national groups and international organizations. This is important to properly manage receipt, use and accountability of the unprecedented generosity in the form of pledges, material and human resources to Haiti.

Attention to good governance is a fundamental building block of post-disaster relief and recovery efforts.

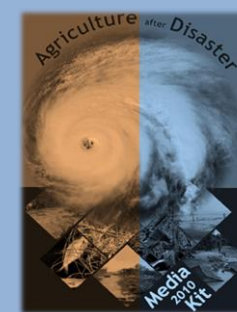
Integrating public participation, transparency and accountability into both the relief and recovery phases pays off in terms of better planning, improved implementation and reduced corruption. Disasters attract non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of all kinds, from all over the world, some operating within a very thin line of legitimacy. In fact, the experience in Haiti has coined a new phrase of 'mercenary NGOs'⁵ that refer to some international NGOs that descended on Haiti, competing for access to the 'monies or services made available to individuals and communities' to ostensibly aid with the disaster recovery effort.

In post-disaster situations, most established and legitimate organizations that provide disaster relief already have well defined response systems that include their own experienced staff (paid or volunteer). They also generally incorporate local persons who are already in the area, familiar with the socio-economic systems and who can be quickly trained to support disaster relief and recovery efforts. Experiences from around the world provide indisputable evidence that relief and recovery efforts will be more effective if they identify, use, and strengthen existing social capital, i.e., community-based skills, programs, and networks. The community-driven approach to post-disaster recovery, which builds on this social capital, requires significant investments of time and human resources but has results in greater client satisfaction, more rapid disbursement, and local empowerment.

The bottom line!

- Disasters have put development in the region at risk!
- If managed properly, relief and recovery efforts provide opportunities to rebuild!
- Relief and recovery are temporary and supportive mechanisms for disaster management.
- Relief focuses on reducing factors that predispose harm from hazards!
- Recovery focuses on reducing human suffering as the basis for rehabilitation and reconstruction!
- Relief and recovery efforts must provide a firm base for the rebuilding process!
- Relief and recovery will be more effective if they identify, use, and strengthen existing social capital!

⁵ 'A phrase used by IICA staff in Haiti to describe some NGOs that descended in Haiti only to appropriate part of the monies for the relief efforts to their own advantage.



2. Managing Development amidst Natural Hazards

If agriculture in the Caribbean is to achieve and sustain development, it must counteract these hazards through good forward planning and good practices. Widespread failure must not be tolerated (USAID-OAS, 1999).¹

Key Messages:

- Agriculture is important from socio-economic, environmental and cultural perspectives!
- Unlike other sectors, agricultural development has operated in a high risk environment!
- Unmitigated natural hazards have led to frequent disruptions agriculture's development!
- Hazard and disaster management is essential to agriculture's development process!
- Well planned and managed post-disaster relief and recovery are also critical.

Agriculture for Development

Agriculture is important for job creation, industrialization and value adding industries and export revenue in the Caribbean. Consequently, agriculture is one five economic drivers of the CARICOM Single Development Vision (SDV) that will drive growth and transformation in the Single Market and Economy.

Natural events and their resulting disasters can have profound and prolonged effects on agriculture's capacity to contribute to the development process.

30 years of experiences in the Caribbean provide sufficient evidence that disasters from natural hazards have stymied agriculture's growth performance and put its development at risk. Unfortunately agriculture and rural life are often the least prepared to cope with such events. For example, unmitigated impacts of natural hazards, as in the case of Dominica (hurricane David, 1979) Grenada (Hurricane Ivan, 2004) and Montserrat (periodic volcanic eruptions since 1995), have stunted the thrust towards a modernization and challenged attempts to sustain competitiveness in the region's agricultural sector. However, despite interventions from international, national and local organizations, due to the lack of preparation and the complexity related to emergency operations, many relief interventions have been unsuccessful in restoring the full agricultural capacity of farming systems (Bushamuka 1999; Hines et al 1998). Longley, who has been echoed by other writers, argues that a more detailed understanding of agricultural rehabilitation and relief is required (Longley 2001).¹

In 2010, agricultural development is still at risk from natural hazards, and more vulnerable due to projected climate change impacts.

Also still, agriculture and rural life continue to be unprepared to cope. Deficient and uncoordinated risk management system was recognized in 2004 by regional stakeholders, as a major key binding constraint to agriculture and in 2010 remains a fundamental challenge that is yet to be addressed in a concerted and coordinated manner in the Caribbean.

¹ Natural Hazards & Economic Development: Policy Considerations. Organization of American States & United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Caribbean Disaster Mitigation Project April 1999.

² Questioning Seeds and Tools: Emerging Strategies in Post-Disaster Seed Relief and Rehabilitation by Caroline Eberdt

Shared Hazards – Shared Responsibility

In a region prone to natural hazards that impose high risks on the agriculture sector, risk management has become central part of the agricultural development process.

Regional leaders agree that disasters induced by natural hazards, with their associated economic, environmental and social impacts, are among the main risks to development and to making progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Organisation of American States (OAS) Caribbean Disaster Mitigation Project (1999) recognized that since most hazards are shared by all the countries in the region, a coordinated effort to map prevalent hazards and develop regional expertise in risk management can reduce the cost and increase the accuracy of the information necessary for proper decision-making.

The mutually supporting strategies identified in their two-fold approach should form an important component in overall policy and strategy to manage the development process in the context of expected periodic disasters that will be triggered by natural hazards. This two-fold strategy is built around (i) Political strategy and (ii) Technical and Institutional Strategy, of which the need to develop a disaster mitigation plan is key. While natural hazards are a common part of society and economic activity in the Caribbean, proponents of disaster mitigation admit that it is difficult to sell.

Managing disasters for development

Amidst such risks of frequent disasters and the resulting disruptions to economic activity, development requires a strategy that goes beyond just responding to emergencies when and as they arise.

Development, rather than disaster response must become the priority to act as a 'beacon' for ensuring that the recovery process stays on track in post-disaster situations. In this context, hazard and disaster management has replaced disaster response. The concept of disaster management has expanded to encompass the longer-term issues of hazard assessment, risk reduction and rehabilitation. To further reduce the long-term risk of natural hazards, the Caribbean states should develop a comprehensive policy to manage hazards, through, *inter alia*, hazard vulnerability mapping, preparation and mitigation will help to decrease their long-term effects on agriculture and the environment.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USAD-EPA) recognized that even though natural events and disasters can be devastating to agricultural production, it does not excuse noncompliance with state and federal environmental laws. The USDA-EPA provides agricultural compliance assistance information on how to plan and prepare for a natural disaster, what to do during a natural disaster eruption, and how to respond and recover from a natural disaster for all categories of natural disaster impacting agriculture categorized by agricultural type: 1) farmstead, farm equipment, and machinery; 2) livestock; and 3) crops. This should hold lessons for developing and managing the process in the Caribbean.

Disaster Relief - a building block to Recovery

Relief and recovery are two essential, mutually reinforcing response mechanisms after disaster, each with different types of interventions and concerns. However, both relief and recovery efforts must pay special attention to the needs of vulnerable groups.

A simple explanation of disaster relief is '*monies or services made available to individuals and communities that have experienced losses due to disasters such as floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, drought, tornadoes, and riots*'³ usually coordinated by national authorities.

Recovery is viewed by international development agencies and national government as an opportunity to rebuild the economy and to revitalize growth sectors to drive development.

Lessons from other developing regions suggest that '*recovery should not merely restore the previous level of development but promote activities that will lead to reducing the vulnerability of the population and infrastructure to future disasters*'⁴, validating the importance of the need to manage development amidst disasters through well articulated and long-term development policies.

The focus of the disaster management efforts will differ between the relief (emergency) and recovery (reconstruction) phases of post-disaster response. Priorities in the relief phase would tend to focus on reducing factors that would further compromise human health and life, such as environmental health efforts on disease surveillance, water quality, safe food, shelter, sanitation and waste management. Reducing human suffering is an essential first base on which recovery efforts of rehabilitation and reconstruction can be built, guided by appropriate strategies.

An agricultural strategy, which must critically include risk management, should feature prominently during the recovery phase. Such as strategy should also ensure that there are critical linkages between the initial response, relief phase and the recovery phase. Efficient restoration of infrastructure and telecommunications in rural communities and immediate restoration of crop production capacity are among the primary ways of establishing such linkages and fast-tracking the transition from relief to recovery.

However, disaster recovery is still essentially reactive, focusing on 'picking up the pieces' and restoring order so that social systems and economic activity can return to business after a risk occurs. Hopefully the experiences and lessons from the disaster should ensure that it does not become 'business as usual' and that full advantage is taken of the opportunity to rebuild the foundations of development according to forward planning and good practices.

³ Disaster Relief, West's Encyclopedia of American Law

⁴ Learning Lessons from Disaster Recovery: The Case of Mozambique' Authors: Peter Wiles, Kerry Selvester and Lourdes Fidalgo. The World Bank Hazard Management Unit, Working Paper Series No.12. April 2005.