

Disaster Response in Haiti – an important and fundamental lesson¹

The striking thing about disaster handbooks is not the detail of what to do in the relief phase but the absence of any information on how to move on from relief.

This stage is particularly important as communities in post-disaster situations risk becoming dependent on short term aid activities in the absence of a transition to long-term planning. A reason advanced for problems in making the transition is the changing conceptual frameworks on part of donors and beneficiaries and the inadequately linked and different timetables (Dabelstein 2001; Hines et al 1998).

Among the ideas suggested to enhance success of relief-development transitions include:

- integration of short and long term plans should be at the initial planning stages
- a shared vision of end goals between the donor community and key local actors
- a joint needs assessment that prioritizes the essential elements of basic needs and reconstruction and peace-building efforts
- clear schedules and assigned responsibilities for hand-over from emergency agencies to their successors undertaking rehabilitation and development programs
- the ongoing participation of community based organizations from the needs assessment through to long-term planning
- performance and utilization-focused monitoring integrated into planning
- the development of an exit strategy at the planning stage of the relief operation (Dabelstein 2001; CIAT, CRS, ICRISAT 2001; O'Keefe and Kirby 1997; Pratten 1997; WFP 1998)

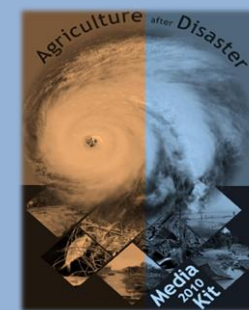
Development objectives should not be set aside during emergencies.

In preparing agriculture to make the transition from short to long term planning, short-term and long-term strategies must be integrated from the outset. Development objectives need to be maintained throughout the emergency. They should incorporate elements of prevention and preparedness which reduce susceptibility to disasters (FAO 2002). Despite strong arguments that an integrated approach will better address farmer systems' changing needs, there is a large gap both in practice and in the literature (Remington 2001; WFP 1998).

The bottom line!

- There are several situations where vulnerability to hazards will result in disasters!
- Disasters will result in significant damages to agricultural crops, livestock and farm assets!
- To find the 'silver lining' after a disaster, there must be a well planned and executed relief, recovery and reconstruction stimulus package that acts as a catalyst for a new agriculture after disaster!
- Relief-Recovery packages must include build-in strategies to enable agriculture to make the transition into long-term growth and development!
- Disasters can be the trigger for the much-needed agricultural revolution in the Caribbean!
- A post-disaster agricultural revolution should be driven by interventions that foster good practices, innovative enterprises and market driven products that provide a platform for sustainable development.

¹ Questioning Seeds and Tools: Emerging Strategies in Post-Disaster Seed Relief and Rehabilitation by Caroline Eberdt



3. Fast-tracking Recovery; Prioritizing Agriculture

"There's no disaster that can't become a blessing, and no blessing that can't become a disaster."

Richard Bach

Key Messages:

- Restoring order and reducing human suffering are essential first steps after a disaster!
- Agriculture is the only productive sector that can be reactivated with the least delay!
- Development objectives should not be set aside during crises and after disasters.
- There must be a clear plan to move agriculture from relief to recovery!
- The private sector has a critical role to play in rehabilitating agriculture after disaster!
- Financial institutions, including Credit Unions, are important to the recovery process!

Starting over again...

Disasters could provide an opportunity to rebuild a country's economic structure and infrastructure in a manner that engenders productivity, innovation and sustainability.

Caribbean economic structures in the 21st century are still relatively undiversified, characterized by considerable dependence on a narrow range of commodities – bananas, sugar, tourism, bauxite, petroleum, citrus, coffee and cocoa. Although Caribbean countries embarked on sovereign independence in the 1960's this was buoyed by the belief that even though British foreign investment might decline as a result, American investment in tourism, industrial development and in services would move in to fill the gap. This has made them highly dependent, open and vulnerable to shocks, whether internally or externally generated. External markets and overseas capital constitute critically important factors in the pace of growth of Caribbean countries. Disasters, which provide the opportunity for increased international support, could be used to re-orient the agriculture economy in such a way that over time, it will systematically reduce its dependence on external sources.

The stone that the builder rejected....

Agriculture is a competitive business that will yield employment opportunities, high earnings and make positive contributions to social development goals.

Caribbean countries, no doubt stung by the recent upheavals in the global environment, identified agriculture as one of the engines of growth for the economy of the region. The regional leaders adopted the "Single Development Vision" in 2007, which together with the 2004 'Jagdeo Initiative' (led by Guyana President Bharrat Jagdeo, lead CARICOM Head of Government for agriculture), call for a paradigm shift that defines agriculture as spanning all activities in the value chain from production of inputs to primary production, transformation and sale of value added products. Among the many objectives of regional action towards agricultural competitiveness include upgrading facilities and transportation for intra-regional trade in agricultural products, strengthening regional collaboration in agricultural Research and Development, promoting a wide portfolio of agricultural investment opportunities and improving market intelligence.

Prioritizing agriculture in post-disaster relief

After disaster, agriculture is perhaps the only productive sector that can be reactivated with the least delay.

Clearly, the task before the Caribbean in the aftermath of a disaster is to continue the process of transformation of agricultural to advance the development of the processed food industry to supply consumers with quality and affordable foods and ensure reasonable profits and improved quality of life to producers. Prioritizing agriculture recovery is particularly critical since scarce resources already allocated for development programs are diverted to crisis relief and rehabilitation. Two immediate and critical actions that need to be taken to set the stage and pace for relief and recovery efforts should be:

- *Coordinating the relief phase is an essential first action in the aftermath of a disaster.*

Disasters attract everyone – those with and without resources to support the relief and recovery process. But no single institution, NGO or philanthropic group can do relief and recovery alone!

Such coordination should comprise a multi-disciplinary of regional and international experts, matched with local stakeholders in the affected countries, to assess the nature and scope of the disaster in agricultural production at the time of impact, and to develop and coordinate relief and recovery. That team will also be critical as a mechanism to make the transition from recovery to development planning, particularly with respect to building research and innovation technologies capabilities of the region, since in many instances the initial outpouring of support after a disaster is not sustained. The need for coordination is imperative. There is no substitute for strong leadership from Governments authorities to identify the most appropriate actions to take, as well as who is best equipped to implement.

- *Adequate and readily accessible funding is also essential to drive the recovery effort.*

The Government of Dominica re-directed EC\$ 4 Mn from input provision schemes, livestock and eco-tourism facilities rehabilitation and support to horticulture crops and fisheries groups to create a relief fund for Hurricane Dean in 2007.

The rapid mobilization of a relief package is a critical base for recovery and should match the urgency and comprehensive cover with which 'stimulus packages' were provided to 'bail out' financial institutions after the disaster of the financial crisis. The relief package should address crop disaster losses and replanting, access to improved seeds, plant stock and their associated improved technologies and practices from planting to harvesting to inculcate a new culture of innovation and productivity in farm operations, and in that context as well, restoration of agriculture health and food safety systems. It should also embed the requirement to adopt good practices as a complement to the risk mitigation tools that should be provided, such as insurance.

The need to rapidly reactive productive capacity is important, not only from a food security perspective, but also to avert any possibilities of appropriating destroyed agricultural lands for non-agriculture purposes.

A well defined, well resourced strategy, supported and implemented by appropriately skilled personnel from both the public and private sector, will expedite the delivery of assistance in a manner most beneficial to producers, whether as individuals or as part of a rural, commodity or producer group. Having such a strategy is an important aspect of moving agriculture from recovery to sustainable growth.

Mitigating risk, rebuilding confidence in agriculture

Unmitigated risks make agriculture a very risky investment option!

The issue of unmitigated risk presented by natural hazards and hence the attractiveness of agriculture must receive priority in planning recovery strategies after disaster.

'Deficient and uncoordinated risk management measures' as well as 'Lack of financing and new investments' are two of the nine key binding constraints to agricultural development in CARICOM prioritized in 2004 for collective regional action. Issues of agricultural insurance and innovative micro-financing are re-emerging as areas of interest for risk mitigation in the Caribbean.

• Insurance

After disasters, the private sector is a critical partner to government in offering much needed relief and fast tracking the recovery process. Insurance companies are critical, since they provide farmers with immediate cash to replant, clear lands, hire workers and seek loans from commercial banks in the form of collateral following the natural disaster.

The United States Department of Agriculture has provisions in place that allow farmers affected by disaster to be able to apply for an emergency loan equal to 100% of their projected losses. In many Caribbean economies, this level of assistance is difficult to replicate. Far too many farmers still do not have crop insurance at all or only but the bare minimum that is not enough to withstand a really devastating year.

There is an ongoing debate that public subsidies for premiums are necessary to make premiums more affordable to farmers, particularly those growing crops that provide a quick turn over and could become vital in securing food supplies and fuelling recovery after disaster.

Present data show that in Latin America and the Caribbean, the volume of agricultural insurance premiums is a miniscule share of total insurance premiums. Some have advocated the need for governments to have a vital role to play in providing the necessary information needed to measure, evaluate, and monitor risk, in maintaining an auspicious but sound regulatory and supervisory framework, in helping with reinsurance and catastrophic disaster relief, and supporting private insurance providers with technical assistance and training.

• Credit Unions

Credit unions, present in most Caribbean countries play a pivotal role in reviving the economy after a natural disaster. Many farmers have themselves formed co-operatives that provide the basis for finances to cultivate their farms. The loans by these credit unions provide for replacement or repairs to property and infrastructure not covered by insurance, including damage to crops and pasture. There are 580,000 cooperatives in India with a total membership of nearly 380 million individual members. Around 65% of the cooperatives are agriculture-related. Each and every village in the country is linked to cooperatives. A majority of the farmers obtain credit, input supply and marketing services from their cooperatives. Cooperatives in India are broad-based and thus can influence the members and community to take measures for mitigating risks.