

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND DISASTER PREVENTION IN THE CARIBBEAN BASIN

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THE REGIONAL DISASTER SYSTEM AND ITS FUNCTION

The Caribbean Regional Disaster Management system which includes all Caribbean Economic Community countries (CARICOM), was formally established following a Heads of Agreement in August 1990, and it is aimed at providing a Regional response mechanism for rapid onset disasters. The ultimate goal is the implementation of a regional response unit which will be responsible for planning, coordinating, training and response following the completion of the Pan Caribbean Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Project (PCDPPP) in Antigua on or about December 1990.

The PCDPPP which has operated since 1981, has been the instrument through which national disaster preparation, coordination and relief arrangements have been established and assisted. This project, however, has not ventured into the establishment of any regional coordinating mechanism although it maintained close liaison with regional entities.

The ratification of the CARICOM heads of agreement was further influenced by two major factors since hurricane Gilbert, namely:

Hurricane Hugo which occurred in 1989 and devastated that Eastern Caribbean and, the coup attempt and hostage incident in Trinidad in August 1990 when the Parliament building was seized while the Cabinet was in session.

THE ECONOMIC LOSSES TO THE REGION FOLLOWING THE PASSAGE OF HURRICANE GILBERT AND HUGO.

Both hurricanes caused severe

dislocation to all sectors of the economies of affected CARICOM and non-CARICOM states which has now highlighted a need for a response system to include all countries in the Caribbean Basin; however, the present arrangements are specific to CARICOM member states, but does not prevent mutual aid agreements between countries which are closely located to each other.

In order to highlight the level of losses following Gilbert, a summary of some of the affected sectors are listed at Table 1 below:

TABLE 1

<u>Sector</u>	<u>Loss</u>
<i>ALL SECTORS</i>	J\$7 billion
Tourism Revenue	J\$90 Million
Manufacturing	J\$50 Million
Housing (low income)	J\$550 Million
Housing (other)	J\$1.4 billion
Public construction	J\$202.06 Mil.
Roads & Bridges	J\$57 Million
Electricity	J\$579.8 Mill
Water	J\$63.04 Mill.
Ports	J\$16.39 Mill.
Schools	J\$387.50 Mill.
Aviation	J\$25.6 Mill.
Health	J\$156.8 Mill.

NB: (i) J\$7 equivalent US\$1
(ii) Total deaths - 45

As is illustrated the sectors to receive the most damage due to a major hurricane are, housing, agriculture and Government capital Stock which is usually not covered by insurance.

THE CARIBBEAN RESPONSE MECHANISM

Although a regional unit has not yet been established a preliminary assessment of the ability of member states to re-

spond to a major event and recognizing geographic location and vulnerability, it has been decided to establish three (3) focal points or staging areas in Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad from which sector response will be coordinated once a request for assistance is made.

PRESENT STATUS OF PLANNING AND MITIGATION PROGRAMMES.

Although each country is at various stages of Disaster Prevention and Management, the islands which are smaller in size are the least prepared, given the nature of their economies, hence the need for a cooperative approach. Most if not all of the present loss prevention programmes have been initiated and monitored by PCDDPP and they include, flood plans, hazard and sensitivity mapping, urban planning, revised building codes. Emergency Management training for key agency personnel, establishment of permanent disaster coordination agencies in each member state, enactment of appropriate legislation in support of preparedness mitigation and response, flood warning system, establishment of disaster plans and appointment of national coordinators, Government capital stock inventory, improved communication system, public education programmes and registration of key resource personnel, who are qualified and experienced in support of technical assessment and training.

Jamaica more recently has commenced a landslide loss reduction programme and the National agency is now working in collaboration with the National Resources and Conservation Division on related Environmental Management Programmes aimed at reducing the level of losses following floods, hurricanes land slides and earthquakes.

TECHNICAL COOPERATION

Given the limited resources of the region significant assistance has

been received from donor countries through programmes coordinated by PCDDPP to include training and equipment grants.

The ability of CARICOM member states to recover from recent disasters was heavily dependent on outside assistance primarily in the area of damage assessment and relief coordination and emergency repair programmes for life line services.

Donor agencies have enhanced the level of expertise by way of Regional and Interational seminars, resulting in an improved response to countries affected by Hugo. The dependence on international assistance is even greater in the absence of natural response and recovery plans..

RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve the desired mitigation and response strategies at the Regional level the following is recommended:
1) Immediate implementation of a permanent Regional Disaster Management Agency with three (3) supporting focal points.

2) Assignment of key resource personnel to man the facility drawn from member countries to maximize the existing human resources.

3) Establishment of a Regional Disaster Management Training Institution with the assistance of Regional Tertiary Institutions.

4) Enactment of appropriate legislation mandating the development and implementation of plans, affording access to key resources at critical periods and affording legal status to the Disaster Management Agency.

5) Technical cooperation aimed at improving assessment and warning systems, hazard mapping, construction monitoring systems, automated information systems (EIS) with updated records.

6) Multi agency approach in the assessment and implementation of development projects in housing, industry, agriculture and infra-structure.

7) Establishment of I.D.N.D.R committees to address Regional Programmes of mutual interest to member states.

8) Disaster Management Training for local and national elected Public officials to improve policy direction and prioritizing of development objectives.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Disaster Management programmes in the past have tended to focus heavily on the Emergency response and relief phase, with very little emphasis on medium and long term mitigation strategies resulting in high level of losses in all sectors and an inability to recover on a timely basis due to inadequate resources, with significant economic set back.

One of the main reasons naturally, centers around activities which appear to gain political support or which immediately capture the attention of the media.

Every effort must be made to involve Local Government and community based organizations in all loss reduction programmes, supported by national and regional programmes, as over centralization has created a number of inefficiencies at the implementation and enforcement stage.

REFERENCES

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