

# **LESSONS LEARNED AFTER HURRICANES GEORGES AND MITCH: THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLECTING AND DISSEMINATING INFORMATION**

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## **1. Introduction:**

Disasters caused by natural phenomena are well known events in the Americas, earthquakes, floods, landslides, volcanic eruptions, and hurricanes have caused serious loss of lives, health, and major damages in the infrastructure and the productive apparatus of the Region for many years. Referring to hurricanes only, of the 10 that caused greatest mortality since 1492, six occurred in this century. Of the 216 hurricanes registered since 1492 that resulted in over 25 deaths, 90 (42%) were registered in this century.

Clearly, records have greatly improved over the years, and we now deal with more complete and accurate information. It is also obvious that population growth and its greater concentration in dangerous and vulnerable places has been equally large. This growth has not necessarily been accompanied by measures that reduce the population's vulnerability to these natural phenomena.

It is also interesting to note that, despite current modern and updated surveillance and monitoring systems for tropical storms, as well as the sophisticated communications media and dissemination of information, there are still a high number of deaths and damage in the countries.

A brief analysis of this situation leads us to conclude that there are many reasons why these damages still occur. On the one hand, the ever-increasing social vulnerability of populations; that is, there are broad groups living in a state of poverty and located in poorly constructed dwellings in dangerous or insecure areas, and who do not have access to health and education systems or early warning systems. Invariably, it is this population which suffers the most damage incurred by the natural phenomena. On the other hand, few governments give priority to nationally organized natural disaster reduction programs.

## **2. Preparedness:**

Many efforts have been made at the national as well as the international level in order to develop multisectoral disaster preparedness programs. From the 1970s, the national systems of Civil Defense were strengthened and the Pan American

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