1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report resulted from a study to determine the potential application of *State-of-the-Art* communications technology to disaster preparedness and response. Four specific objectives were identified for this exercise. They were;

a. *To determine the extent to which modern communications technology is used for disaster management in the region.*

b. *To identify the main factors preventing more widespread use of such technology for disaster management.*

c. *To identify the benefits that will be derived from increased use of such technology in disaster management in the region.*

d. *To propose a strategy to increase the use of such technology with a view to achieving the identified benefits. This strategy will incorporate where relevant, recommendations for making more efficient use of equipment, facilities and services already available in the region.*

Discussions were held with persons with varied levels of involvement in disaster preparedness and response. Included in the discussions were representatives from the various telecommunication services providers. The countries visited included Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica and St. Lucia. The consultant also held discussions with a number of key persons in Antigua.

1.1 Summary of the Findings

This study has revealed a number of interesting issues. They include:

1. In general, equipment considered as *State-of-the-Art* are not used extensively in disaster preparedness and response by the various institutions.

2. The telecommunications service providers have invested substantial capital in the installation of *State-of-the-Art* communications systems and in so doing have strategically strengthened their position as the sole providers of telecommunications services in the region.

3. The consensus among the various telecommunications service users is that the costs for communications services are too high in the region.

4. The high cost of telecommunications services in the region have forced some of the international agencies in particular to seek other means of getting these services. Thus, a number of initiatives are being planned and implemented using the telecommunications infrastructure of organisations such as the United Nations (UN).

5. Although no costing information was disclosed, it was felt that should the cost of the new services provided by the telecommunications companies be reasonable, the regional and international agencies would not have to resort to their own sources, thereby resulting in the higher utilization of existing modern telecommunications facilities.

6. The governments of the region may be placed in a very compromising position should the costs of the modern services be perceived as being too high. On one hand the governments *must* support initiatives that are in the

national interest and thus, support the efforts of the international community. On the other hand, because of the governments' vested interest in the service providers they must deny support for any initiatives that would result in the lower utilization of the facilities.

A number of factors impede the further utilization of modern telecommunications equipment. They were identified as:

1. The cost associated with the acquisition and use of such equipment.
2. Existing Telecommunication legislation.
3. Governments' inability to recognise the importance of telecommunications; and
4. The Lack of financial resources.

The costs for the acquisition and use of modern equipment was recognised by most of the persons interviewed as the biggest factor affecting the widespread use of these facilities. Should these factors be overcome, a number of benefits would be derived from the use of these services. They include:

1. Necessitating a faster means of communication.
2. Higher quality of information.
3. Better informed decision making.
4. Reduced cost.
5. Greater reliability of the system.

1.2 Strategies and Recommendations

In order to derive the identified benefits of using *state-of-the-art* communications technology in disaster preparedness the following strategies have been recommended:

1. Increase dialogue between the telecommunications services providers and the several users of the services for disaster management. This would serve to consolidate the requirements of all users, seek some compromise on the cost of the services and provide a means of coordinating the several regional projects seeking funding.
2. Harmonize telecommunications policies and regulations in the region.
3. Sensitizing the government leaders and decision makers to the importance of telecommunications to the development of the region.
4. Forge linkages with the other Caribbean states for purposes of exchanging information. In particular, the more developed members of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS). Use this opportunity to exploit the possibility of using any excess transponder capacity available from these members.

This report recommended that:

1 The governments in the region should re-examine their role in the telecommunications industry. They should see themselves as telecommunications policy formulators; and

2 The governments should take the necessary steps to ensure that the telecommunications services are provided at reasonable cost.