*Disasters*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 93–97 (1981)

# *Nutritional status of hospitalised pre-school children in Dominica, before and after Hurricane David*

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## INTRODUCTION

On 29th August 1979, Hurricane David swept through the Commonwealth of Dominica, subjecting the country to sustained 160 miles/hr winds gusting to 200 miles/hr. It left in its wake 42 deaths and widespread destruction to property. About a week later a wet but less fierce Hurricane Frederic drenched northern Dominica, flooded certain areas, and caused erosion on many exposed slopes.

Dominica has a total land area of 289.5 square miles and is part of the Windward Islands Group in the Caribbean. The island is rugged and mountainous with peaks up to 4,450 ft above sea level. The mid 1979 population was approximately 83,300, of which 39.5% were under 15 years of age (Statistical Office, 1980).

Hurricane David wrought extensive damage to the capital stock of Dominica and brought heavy (in many cases total) production losses for the remainder of the year. It is estimated that 38% of the buildings were left roofless and 13% were totally destroyed. The entire electrical power system was disrupted, as well as the whole telephone network.

Agriculture is the leading economic sector, contributing 37% of total Gross Domestic Product in 1977. The agricultural output is mainly bananas, grapefruit and copra. The greatest devastation occurred in the banana industry where almost 100% of cultivation was affected either through matt fall or breakage. Estimated losses were 90% of grapefruit, 80% of coconuts, and 100% of limes (Caribbean Development Bank, 1979).

With regard to the health facilities, the Princess Margaret Hospital (the only referral hospital in Dominica) and most rural health centres were seriously damaged. The water supply was affected by disruption of 19 of the 33 local water systems. Sewage disposal was hampered by the destruction of many public and private latrines.

The major consequences of a disaster include an immediate reduction in food availability and a maldistribution of available food. The major expected nutritional