

COSTA RICA

Floods

December 4-14, 1970

... result in 1 death and the immediate evacuation of 5,200 persons—many by helicopter. Estimated damage and losses—to infrastructure \$15 million, to banana crops \$6 to \$9 million.

Value of U.S. Assistance	\$78,911
Value of Assistance by Other Nations	5,010
	<u>\$83,921</u>

DETAILS

Severe rains flooded the eastern slopes and coastal plains of Costa Rica in an 85 square mile area from Siquirres to the Panamanian border. The Estrella Valley and the towns of Martina, Estrada, Sixaola and Siquirres and the province of Turrialba were principally affected. Much of this same area had suffered extensively from floods in April of 1970.

The flooded region is lightly populated except for small scattered communities, twelve of which became isolated during the disaster.

744 people were air evacuated; others left the disaster area by their own means. The displaced were temporarily housed in Siquirres until it was possible for them to return to their homes. However, the inhabitants of San Alberto de Siquirres could not return to their village and were resettled in other towns.

In contrast to the April 1970 floods, most of the rain fell in the lowlands rather than on the slopes, thus avoiding the ram-

ping floods of 1970, with its large toll of human lives and related damage. However, the affected zone is Costa Rica's banana growing region and the losses to this crop were a serious blow to the country's economy. It was estimated that exports for 1971 would be 4 million boxes less than had been anticipated. A total of 48,000 acres of bananas were either damaged or destroyed.

The Northern Railway mainline and the RECOPE oil pipeline linking Limon with the Central Plateau were both cut. The San Jose-Limon railway link was out of operation for three months. Because of the break in the RECOPE pipeline, it was necessary to transport refined products via Puntarenas and to utilize a truck-rail combination for shipments from Limon. It was impossible to assess the economic loss caused by shortage of gasoline and diesel oil.

Bridges and highways sustained severe damage, and the Government of Costa Rica estimated overall damage to the infrastructure at \$15 million.

ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT OF COSTA RICA AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS:

The Government Civil Defense Office worked with diligence and efficiency, mobilizing personnel to go to the affected areas and to set up relief centers for displaced people. It also conducted a very successful public campaign to collect clothes for the victims. The Ministry of Health obtained 50,000 pounds of locally produced powdered milk for the emergency with an estimated value of \$12,500.

As soon as the extent of infrastructure damage became known, the Government passed an extraordinary budget of \$900,000 for repairs and the rebuilding of highways, bridges, pipelines and other public facilities.

Helicopter support was requested from the U.S. to assist in the evacuation of flood victims and to deliver disaster relief supplies to isolated areas.

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT:

At the request of the Government of Costa Rica (GOCR) the American Ambassador and AID/DRC authorized the U.S. Military in Panama to deploy helicopters and cargo aircraft to the flooded areas. One CH-3 and two UH-1 helicopters flew relief missions throughout the Atlantic Zone; a C-123 made four re-supply airlifts between San Jose and Puerto Limon; and U-21, C-123 and C-130 aircraft operated between the Canal Zone and Costa Rica transporting equipment and passengers.

Helicopter operations were placed under the supervision of the U.S. Military Mission in Costa Rica, which enabled the USAID Disaster Relief Officer to devote his time to overall coordination of relief operations and liaison with Costa Rican authorities.

The helicopters flew 314 sorties, evacuated 744 people and airlifted 160,200 pounds of food and clothing.

USG P.L. 480 Food for Peace, Title II commodities were made available from CARE and Catholic Relief Services in-country stocks.

After the floods, USAID obligated funds for the services of an engineering consulting firm to advise the GOCR on protective works to be constructed and to pay for rental of road repair equipment on an interim basis until the GOCR obtained its special extraordinary appropriation of funds.

Recap of USG Assistance

AID Contingency Funds

U.S. Military airlift and helicopter support	\$46,478	
Per Diem U.S. Military crews	3,838	
Rental of road repair equipment	12,121	\$62,437
Engineering Consulting firm	7,500	

USAID Mission Funds

P.L. 480 Food for Peace

63,000 pounds of rolled oats, flour, bulgur, vegetable oil and non-fat dry milk, valued at	3,974
Total USG Assistance	\$73,911

The U.S. Mission made the following comments in its report on this disaster:

"The only kind of effective assistance in a disaster of this kind is the use of helicopters to airlift supplies and evacuate victims from areas which cannot be reached by land. Thus U.S. helicopters proved to be the most important aspect of the overall relief operation.

Our assistance was greatly appreciated by the Costa Rican Government and people as a sign of true friendship on the part of the United States. As in previous floods, the U.S. helicopters and crews were the subject of praise by the Costa Rican press, and the people in the affected areas showed their deep appreciation and gratitude for these efforts."

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY U.S. VOLUNTARY AGENCIES:

CARE and Catholic Relief Services released the above mentioned P.L. 480 food for flood relief.

CARE—cash donation for local purchase of 900 blankets, 144 baby bottles, special pump and equipment and medicines	\$2,000
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Church World Service—cash donation for local purchase of blankets and other disaster supplies for victims in the Limon area	3,000
	<u>\$5,000</u>

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY OTHER NATIONS AND
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Israel—supplies valued at \$5,010

